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# Reflecting *the Real*

This October Rehs Contemporary Galleries will host 18 artists connected with the Grand Central Atelier in a new group exhibition. BY JOHN O'HERN





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The Grand Central Atelier was established as “a collaborative workspace for artists pursuing the methodology of historic ateliers to create drawing, painting and sculpture from life. To ensure a deep understanding of classical form, design, practice and discipline, artists-in-training work in a structured, organized studio with the hands-on guidance of the studio’s principle artists. To educate the public about classically-inspired art, the studio sponsors lectures, artistic competitions, exhibitions and public discussions.”

It is fitting the exhibition venue for 18 artists connected in one way or another with the atelier is Rehs Contemporary Galleries in New York City. *Reflecting the Real* opens there October 3 and runs

through the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Rehs Galleries has its roots in 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century academic painting. Rehs Contemporary promotes artists continuing the tradition.

The vitality and variety of contemporary realism is evident in the exhibition. The art is “classically inspired,” but also reflects the movements and changes that have occurred since atelier training was the norm. Gabriel Weisberg, professor of 19th-century art and decorative and graphic arts at the University of Minnesota, has written a preface for the exhibition catalog. He observes, “With a training to paint what is visible, these avid admirers of painters from the past have made contemporary realism a powerful force. Finding many ways to paint reality has given these artists an opportunity to reactivate tradition with new

1  
**Carol Broman**, *Abeyance*,  
oil on linen, 28 x 34"

2  
**Anthony Mastromatteo**,  
*Where Art Often Starts*,  
oil on panel, 12 x 12"  
overall

life, thereby making their works fervent examples of the ways in which the past can be reflexive and motivating for a new era.”

Anthony Mastromatteo is an explorer. He delves into the world of Trompe l’Oeil. Although the illusion of space was used in murals in Greek and Roman times and to great effect in the Renaissance, the term itself comes from the Baroque period. His series of paintings of tape and fragments of comic books are in the meticulously painted tradition. Yet, as he says, “The things depicted do not show themselves, plain and simple, for what they are, but act as guideposts along a conceptual journey leading to some sense of coherence.” He takes the viewer on psychological, literary and philosophical journeys.

His assemblage of paintings *Where Art Often Starts* is 12 inches square. Within the frame are nine framed 1-inch paintings of common objects, from crayons to heart-shaped candies. As he began his exploration of scale he wrote, “This experiment is taking shape...doing on a larger scale what I have been accustomed to doing at actual size. Required: bolder brushwork, more paint, confident decision-making and me running ahead of myself so that I don’t fall back into old habits and tendencies. I am finding myself where I did not reside before.” The painterly quality of these



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**3**  
Nancy Fletcher, *Self Portrait with Butterflies*, oil on linen with gold leaf, 20 x 16"

**4**  
Sarah Lamb, *Camellias*, oil on linen, 11 x 17"

**5**  
Angela Cunningham, *Dried Roses*, oil on panel, 18 x 12"

tiny explorations is amplified when he enlarges the tip of a crayon, for instance, to a 12-inch panel.

Camellias have long figured in literature and music: *La Dame aux camélias* by Alexandre Dumas; a play and film, *Camille*, starring Greta Garbo; Verdi’s *La Traviata*; and even a scene in *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. It has been a symbol of admiration as well as humanity. They

have appeared in the woodblock prints of Hiroshige, Audubon’s bird paintings and the lush still lifes of the Dutch.

Sarah Lamb’s freshly cut camellias lie on a polished tabletop. Lamb’s bold composition and sensitive use of color emphasize the sensual beauty of the blossoms and their leaves as well as their ephemeral nature. She paints quickly partly because her subjects tend to rot and partly because it forces her to “nail it” without reworking too much. The hard, glossy leaves and the delicate blossoms vibrate with reflected light and color. Lamb paints the things that are around, from birds her husband brings home from a hunting trip to edibles and utensils in the kitchen



4







7

where she loves to cook.

Carlos Madrid's painting *Lacrime d'Amore* was created in memory of his wife, Elizabeth Roberts. He says, "Her blind faith in me helped me through difficult times of struggle in becoming the artist that I am now. I could not have done it without her, and for that I am eternally grateful. I leave it up to the viewer to interpret the symbols in *Lacrime d'Amore* and hopefully they will see and feel the huge amount of love that I put in that little painting."

He comments on growing up in Peru, "My early exposure to Catholic, Andean and Incan traditions was an enormous influence on my developing artistic imagination." His talent and teachers have helped him become a consummate draughtsman and painter, as well as a highly praised teacher.

The immediately apparent symbol in *Lacrime d'Amore* is the skull, placing it in the category of *vanitas* paintings, reminding us that life is short. The

five petals of the wild rose often represented the Five Joys of the Virgin Mary. White pearls often represent purity and new beginnings.

Todd M. Casey praises Madrid's way of teaching color theory and being able "to break down color theory into a clear concise and understandable way." Casey's *The Great Escape* is in the exhibition. He creates narratives with the ancient artifacts he combines in his own crisply rendered still lifes.

The act of passing on a tradition can remove the core of the original and leave an empty shell. These artists show the spirit survives when it is nurtured. ●

**6**  
**Todd M. Casey,**  
*The Great Escape,*  
 oil on linen, 48 x 36"

**7**  
**Carlos Madrid,**  
*Lacrime d'Amore,*  
 oil on linen, 13 x 17"

## REFLECTING THE REAL

**When:** October 3-23, 2015

**Where:** Rehs Contemporary Galleries, 5 E. 57<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10022

**Information:** (212) 355-5710, [www.rehs.com](http://www.rehs.com)