

# THREE<sup>TO</sup> WATCH

There is a lot of superb art being made these days; this column shines light on a trio of gifted individuals.

**KRISTA EUBANKS** (b. 1960) is fascinated with nature, especially with animals. Though she paints in oils, the bulk of her work is made with watercolors and pen and ink on paper. Her sheets are generally large, enriched with scattered writings that are her personal expressions and daily reflections. Most viewers find it hard, however, to take their eyes off the extraordinarily palpable creatures she conjures in sepia tones, each with his or her own personality. Be they goats, hares, sheep, cows, birds, deer, horses, bees, or caterpillars, these are beings as sentient as we are, never cute or sentimental. Most are presented up close or tightly cropped, eschewing scientific descriptiveness in order to bring us nearer the individual's psyche. Though most suggest no particular narrative, a few have been magically equipped with bullets or rifles, which may well give us pause before we plan our next hunting weekend.

A native of Chattanooga, Tennessee, Eubanks spent many years utilizing her formal education in graphic design before shifting to fine art. Her latest series has been inspired by the ideas of the French naturalist and natural history dealer Emile Deyrolle (1838–1917), whose family opened a shop on Paris's Left Bank that still draws collectors to admire and buy its taxidermied creatures, including those placed under tabletop-sized glass domes in lifelike poses. Originally intended to educate viewers who might not otherwise know how the animals appeared in nature, these tableaux fascinate Eubanks, who perceives in them — if you will — less “still” than “life.”

Eubanks is represented by Gallery 1401 in Chattanooga.



KRISTA EUBANKS (b. 1960), *Pendant Necklace*, 2012, watercolor, pen and ink on paper, 36 x 24 in., private collection

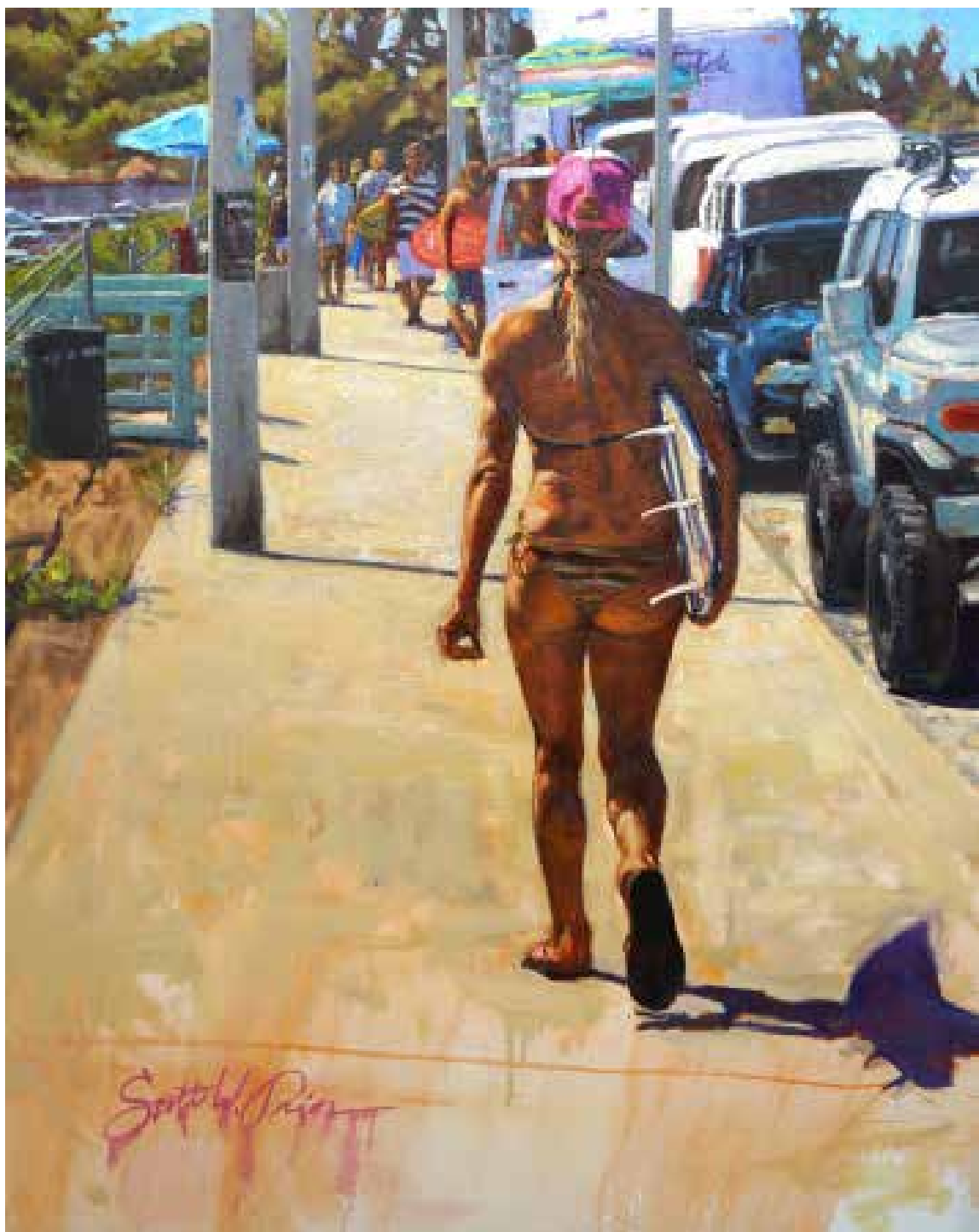
**SCOTT W. PRIOR** (b. 1968) calls himself “a contemporary representational painter with archaic ways,” one who thinks of his paintings as “tight drawings with loose paint application.” These inherent contradictions are intriguing and among the reasons why studying his oil paintings on canvas can be such a pleasure.

Born in Anaheim, California, Prior earned an associate degree in illustration from Orange Coast College in nearby Costa Mesa before moving to San Francisco to begin a four-year stay at what is now the Academy of Art University. He thrived there while studying with Craig Nelson, Bill Maughan, Hui Han Lui, and others, ultimately earning a B.F.A. in illustration and painting that gave him “a solid foundation in the basics — like values, shapes, and proportions.” The bonds formed at AAU endure, as Prior still teaches several of its online courses from his current home in Oceanside, north of San Diego.

When he returned to Southern California in 1997, Prior launched a freelance career specializing in illustrations, storyboards, layouts, and background paintings for animated and live-action TV shows and movies. He shifted to fine art full-time in 2002, and has been painting outdoors in California’s brilliant sunshine ever since. Emerging from his easel is an array of landscapes, cityscapes, and scenes of modern people going about their lives, as well as still lifes and portraits. Prior has absorbed the technical lessons of such early California impressionists as Guy Rose, William Wendt, and Edgar Payne, sharing their passion for “building up texture.” He says, “Sometimes, one of the first layers I paint will come out thick in places, and then I’ll build up even more on top of that, often leaving drip marks to impart a sense of movement.”

Early on, Prior grew bored with conventionally pretty views of California’s rocky coasts and twisted cypress trees, applying his energies instead toward the beauty he discerns in the mundane and the everyday. We are more likely to find him painting a weathered pickup truck jacked up on blocks than a sparkling harbor filled with bobbing sailboats, though aspects of the latter can interest him, too. By expertly capturing that truck’s glinting reflections and powerful contrasts of light and shade, Prior slows us down to relish what we otherwise would rush past.

Prior is represented by American Legacy Fine Arts (Pasadena) and Helena Fox Fine Art (Charleston).



SCOTT W. PRIOR (b. 1968), *Surfer Girl*, 2015, 40 x 32 in., available from the artist



**IAN MARION** (b. 1983) paints unspoiled American nature, which first captivated him growing up in southern Vermont and during cross-country trips with his family. He proceeded to earn a B.F.A. in illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design, and so his compositions possess a graphic clarity and firmness of line that remind some viewers of the great illustrator Maxfield Parrish. Marion went on to take an M.F.A. in painting at the New York Academy of Art, where students are steeped in the figure and draftsmanship. While there, Marion grew more interested in the Hudson River School artists who lived and worked north of the city. Thus his Arcadian scenes — even when set in the Rocky Mountains — readily tap into our collective memory of Cole, Church, and Bierstadt, and of their Romantic contemporaries in Europe like Caspar David Friedrich and Théodore Rousseau. But then, as if to remind us he is no revivalist, Marion cranks up the temperature with more intense coloring and an extra blast of the proto-psychedelic radiance at which Parrish excelled.

Marion calls them Imaginary Sublime Landscapes because he paints from his memory of transcendent observations, and because he is fascinated by the 19th-century ideology of the sublime, which perceived the subtle presence of a Creator in every aspect of nature. Faithfulness to a real site was not the overriding goal then, nor is it for Marion, who is now spending more time on landscapes after winning applause for his Cloudscapes series, a recent example of which is illustrated here.

Marion never fails to be impressed by the “spectacular, yet often overlooked, beauty of our skies.” In his large canvases, he records how cloud formations actually look while, in his own words, “integrating non-traditional spatial relationships and a sensitivity to color that allow viewers to appreciate clouds’ ephemerality.” These, then, have a bit less in common with John Constable’s astonishingly accurate renditions of clouds than with Abstract Expressionism, combining, as they do, brilliant color with strong lights and shadows to convey energy and stimulate our sense of wonder.

Now shuttling between studios in New York City and northwestern Vermont, Marion says he “seeks a romanticized vision of nature that challenges viewers to rethink not only their conception of the natural world, but also their connection to it.” We’d say he is hitting his goal.

Marion is represented by Quidley & Company (Boston; Nantucket; Naples, FL) and Tilting at Windmills Gallery (Manchester, VT).

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IAN MARION (b. 1983), *Monument Valley*, 2015, oil on canvas, 38 x 52 in., Quidley & Company (Boston; Nantucket; Naples, FL)

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