

# THREE TO WATCH

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

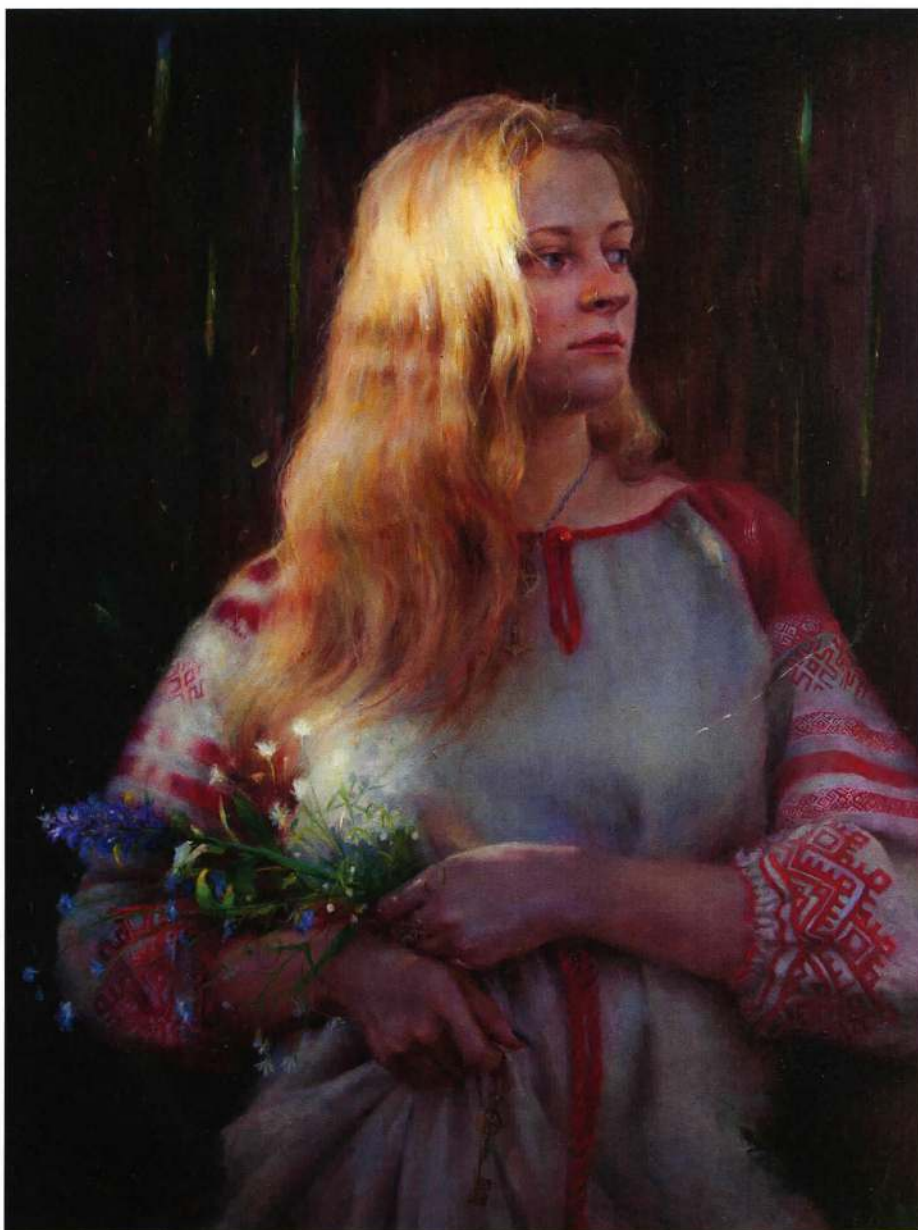
NIKITA BUDKOV (b. 1995), *East of the Sun*, 2019, oil on panel, 40 x 30 in., available from the artist

**NIKITA BUDKOV** (b. 1995), a Russian-American painter currently residing in California, works in a style he calls “contemporary traditional and magical realism,” motivated by his pursuit of the mystical and beautiful. He is also inspired by music, so his paintings are titled after songs that have significant meaning to him. Last year Budkov presented an exhibition called *The Songbook*, which showcased a range of paintings inspired by his favorite genres of music. “Music is an eternal companion on my career journey,” the artist says of this passion that rivals his love for fine art.

Growing up in Zvenigorod, a suburb of Moscow, young Budkov found himself drawn to classic fairy tales, science fiction novels, and comics, all of which helped develop his creative imagination and illustrative abilities. Drawing in pencil became a constant in his life, and he eventually made his way to the Moscow Architecture Institute with the intention of becoming an architect. A trip to the U.S. as an exchange student, however, shifted Budkov’s path toward traditional fine art. He enrolled at the Los Angeles Academy of Figurative Art, studying there with the Repin Academy-trained painter Leon Okun and eventually graduating with top honors. Budkov subsequently became a member of the California Art Club, where he has been guided and counseled by established artists, primarily club president Peter Adams through its mentor program.

Like some of his compatriots who trained at the great academies in St. Petersburg and Moscow, Budkov makes paintings that demonstrate his abilities in classical drawing and form construction, and also in more expressive and impressionistic approaches to color and light. His work reveals a sensitivity to his surroundings and to people’s situations, similar to the sensitivity found in the best storytelling and songwriting.

Budkov’s painting *East of the Sun* is a portrait of a young woman holding a simple arrangement of flowers in one hand and a key in the other. There are subtle nuances in both the technical execution of this scene — the colorful variations of light in the hair are worth a close look — and in the symbolist usage of sunlight, flowers, and key. Having titled it after an obscure song based on the Norwegian fairy tale *East of the Sun*, Budkov explains that the painting is loosely based on a story about a beautiful girl



in love with a white bear, who is actually an enchanted prince. “Later in the narrative, the woman goes on a quest to find and save the bear from a troll-witch residing in a castle that is located ‘East of the Sun, West of the Moon.’ As the sun sets in the west, her hair catches the last beam of light,” exactly what we see here.

**BUDKOV** is represented by American Legacy Fine Arts (Pasadena) and Hillside Fine Art (Claremont, CA).



**TERRY TRAMBAUER NORRIS** (b. 1960) is a still life painter from South Carolina who creates highly finished works in the spirit of the Old Masters. Her artistic abilities were recognized from childhood and in 1985 she earned a B.F.A. from Atlanta College of Art after studying design, painting, printmaking, and photography. As Norris began to gravitate toward fine art in a traditional realist style, she took a close look at several key painters from the past, then supplemented her education with a month's study at the Art Students League of New York, as well as workshops with David A. Leffel and Gregg Kreutz and critiques and classes with Ralph Bagley.

Although known primarily for still lifes, Norris also paints landscapes and seascapes. Capturing mood, atmosphere, and light are essential to her practice, which requires not only patience but also planning, particularly for the still lifes. While admiring the variety of perfectly arranged objects — be they pots, jugs, fruit, jars, cauldrons, or cookies — we might assume these arrangements happen relatively naturally. Yet as much as nature plays a role in these visions, Norris spends considerable time composing her subjects, carefully harmonizing shapes, patterns, light, and shadow until the elements sing.

Norris's painting *Iron Cauldron with Meat* reflects this compositional attentiveness while sustaining the dramatic light and shadow (*chiaroscuro*) championed by still life masters of the past. This 24 x 30-inch scene also represents a milestone for Norris, as it is the largest still life she has attempted to date. "There was something about the cauldron and the sense of history it represents that drew me to it," the artist says. "The painting went through some unexpected twists and turns during its creation. The meat was actually not in the original set-up, but it was a subject I've been wanting to try for years, mainly inspired by J.-B.-S Chardin and Raphaelle Peale."

The 18th-century French painter Chardin is just one of the masters who have inspired Norris. Other influences include Rembrandt Vermeer, Whistler, Robert Henri, and Charles W. Hawthorne, all known for their expertise with light and composition. The time Norris has devoted to studying these artists has clearly served her well: theirs are the foundational shoulders upon which she and so many painters continue to stand.

**NORRIS** is represented by Sloane Merrill Gallery (Boston).



**TERRY TRAMBAUER NORRIS** (b. 1960), *Iron Cauldron with Meat*, 2015, oil on linen, 24 x 30 in., private collection





**DELFIN FINLEY** (b. 1994), *Undefined Horizon*, 2018, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in., private collection

**DELFIN FINLEY** (b. 1994) is keeping realism real. The Los Angeles artist paints representational portraits of his peers that focus on the pervasive racial issues of our time. Emerging on the scene in 2014 as a participant in several group shows, Finley was offered his first solo exhibition at Lora Schlesinger Gallery (Santa Monica) in 2017. Titled *Some Things Never Change*, that project highlighted experiences that people of color continue to encounter and sold out completely.

Finley's portraits often take a close look into the eyes and expressions of black people carrying the weight of circumstances past, present, and future. Several of his works examine the angst and anxieties his generation wrestles with, painted in unflinching detail. *Some Things Never Change*, for instance, is a sobering scene of a young black man in a defeated position with a rope hanging not far from him. *Dead Man Walking* illustrates the probability of a young black man's violent or premature death, while a portrait of Finley's father, *It's Only a Matter of Time*, represents men of color and the danger they face on a daily basis.

While several of Finley's portraits convey a frank sense of despondency, discouragement, and despair, ultimately they are intended to offer hope through awareness and change. *Undefined Horizon* is a painting that seems to carry glimmers of that hope. The artist has intentionally introduced some ambiguity here: a black man is seen only from behind, wearing a shirt with the number six on its back and a headcloth made of fine silk. Is he a present-day athlete? An ancient pharaoh? One of a numbered lot? Whoever he is or was, Finley seems to suggest that he will have to determine his own future.

As Finley continues to grow in popularity in Los Angeles and nationally, he is being noticed not only by realists but also other sectors of the contemporary art community. The issues into which his art delves — and the manner in which he addresses them — speak powerfully to our times.

**FINLEY** is self-represented.