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SURPASSING LEGACY | EMBRACING PIRACY

CARRIE ANN BAADE & THE NEW SURREALISTS

Portraits, Mika Fowler. Painting Photography, Jon Nalon.



Zymbol: How do you feel about the identifier “surreal”? The term gets used very loosely nowadays, but in fine art, most people associate it with a bygone movement. Is there a danger in continuing to identify with that label, or do you think it helps to locate oneself as an heir to such an impressive legacy?

Carrie Ann Baade: When I started graduate school, the word “surreal” was so passé as to be laughed at. Now it’s practically ubiquitous and very few are shy about proclaiming their love of it. I am personally interested in what makes an artistic legacy. How Picasso uses visual quotes from Ingres and Goya in order to link himself to the dynasty of established masters, now, that was genius. However, I never meant to refer to myself as a “surrealist” in any way but the conventionally descriptive sense. Sometimes we use a term merely to be understood quickly. I am not literally seeking to link my work to the term coined by Apollinaire or the movement launched by Breton. To the layperson, my work may look like Dalí or Picasso and I think it’s better to say “thank you” than get too defensive about what term they used or what they think they meant. “Surreal” is used as shorthand for understanding that this is narrative art, which uses imagination to distort reality. It may recall a “bygone” era but there is such an immense amount of work being done currently that embraces the return of imagination and narrative, forcing the artists and industry to search for definitions. I have been fascinated by this phenomenon. Whether it is called fantastic realism, magical realism, visionary, pop surrealism, the reality is, narrative paintings that celebrate imagination are gaining force, and artists are using fantastic imagery to illustrate the inner world of the mind. Changing artistic tastes have decimated the stringent and elitist trends of the 20th century and allowed for the phantasmagorical, the celebration of kitsch, and a return of technical painting. Whether it is a paradigm shift, zeitgeist, or merely fashion, there has been a tremendous shift in the art world in the last 15 years that I

would partially attribute to the Internet and the accessibility and visibility of art and artists. Impressive legacy it may be but I think there are more amazing artists creating work right now than have ever existed in total. This is a great time to be alive and I really am less interested in sorting out the genre of my work than just getting time to put the paint on the canvas.



Z: You've exhibited with the Pop Surrealists and the Visionary Surrealists. What are the characteristics that you think best define these two groups?

C: Even if labels can be dangerous, it is fascinating to watch these two groups evolve and seek to define themselves. The origins of both terms are recent. “Pop Surrealism” was coined in the 80’s by Kenny Sharf and was later used by Kirsten Anderson in her book published in 2004. However, it was spawned from L.A.’s Lowbrow Art Movement and is therefore a subset. There is dreamlike imagery and unusual juxtapositions in it as one might see in surrealism; however, the source of the imagery is based in popular culture. The West Coast culture of tattoo, tiki, memorabilia, cartoons, and hotrods all join in the celebration of kitsch, which is prevalent in the art of this movement. The California art schools that produced many of these artists were known for their focus on illustration. Having been a more commercial discipline in the 20th century, illustration locates the roots of this movement in the technical facility and makes it quote heavily from popular visual culture and nostalgia (toys, comics, advertisements, monsters, animation, etc).

The term “visionary” simply means “someone who sees the future.” Rather than creating a neologism, this movement has turned visionary into Visionary. The term “visionary” was widely used in the 90’s to mean something more akin to “outsider” artists who did not have formal training (and thus we have the Visionary Museum in Baltimore). Adhering to “foreseeing” in the movement we are talking about, it also retroactively refers to many historical painters including Hildegard of Bingen, William Blake, and Gustave Moreau. Both Laurence Caruana’s Visionary Manifesto and Alex Grey’s essay “What is Visionary Art?” are essential reading for further discussion. As movements, both of these start as seeds in the early 90’s, and become well established by 2005, and, interestingly, both share the struggle for acceptance and recognition in the larger art world, which goes on to this day, and which is why I suppose the need to define becomes so important.

While the Pop Surrealists are more American, I find Visionaries to be more European with roots in the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism and the artist, Ernst Fuchs, who taught many students. However, as it evolved through the end of the 20th century, this movement now encompasses a wide variety of artists to include the psychedelic Robert Venosa, one of the greatest influences on H.R. Giger, and the entheogenic Alex Grey. All of these form a major part of counter culture, working with the music or film industries to influence young people all over the world at the close of the 20th century. While nearly all these artists owe a debt to Dalí, there are some interesting lineages that made passing of the technique possible through a non-academic workshop tradition.

The Pop Surrealists and the Visionaries, as they exist today, are close cousins. They are both narrative and influenced by altered states of consciousness or images generated in the mind's eye. Both are strongly driven internally by community support...these are not groups with a few members or set numbers; if someone arrives on the scene with some work that is evocative, they really just welcome him/her on board. One event that was seminal for both groups was the forming of online collectives, such as the beinArt Surreal Art Collective and the publication *Metamorphosis*.

WITH THE RISE OF ONLINE NETWORKING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA, CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS CEASED TO BE HERMITS IN THEIR PRIVATE STUDIOS.

This collaboration became the cradle for many blogs, books, galleries, curation projects, and exhibitions. What is also interesting, and unlike in other movements that came before them, is how these groups are creating websites about themselves, writings books about themselves, writing entries in Wikipedia about themselves, and generating the essays and manifestos to get their images and ideas out into the world. In a world where the established order did not seek to report on their achievements, they embraced DIY.

Both groups are non-academic. There are only a few with master's degrees, no one went to Yale. As far as I know, I am the only tenured professor...and these are not groups that automatically value this credential. In fact, I have found that they are more inclined to hold such credentials suspect since they come out of a recent past where their work was not accepted by academia as relevant. I have barely found ways to build my academic affiliations' legitimacy in the larger art world outside of curation.

I was delighted, yet surprised, to be embraced by the Pop Surreal movement in 2005. Also, the Visionaries have recently included me, even though this community of artists would appear to have more mystical if not spiritual motivations that I appreciate. I cannot say one of these movements is commercial and the other is not. Both include artists that support themselves through their creations.

Growing up, I slept with a book of works from the Louvre under my pillow. However, I must acknowledge my debt to popular culture. One day not too long ago, I had to admit that I had grown up, since I was a toddler, drawing images from album covers. One of my favorites that I drew was Bitches Brew by Miles Davis. It was not until I was at a workshop with Ernst Fuchs in 2011 that I realized that this album cover was the work of Marti Klarwein who was influenced by Fuchs and was one of the teachers of Robert Venosa. It is impossible to escape the affect of popular culture and be from this time. While I never would have admitted it, I was profoundly affected by H.R.Giger as an artist; I have had an image of his work tattooed permanently on my skin for 21 years. The way that these images affect us are outside of art history tests and college painting assignments; they are in the movies we watch and the music we listen to. Those albums covers I copied were just as didactic as the master copies artists used to teach students to draw from.

THIS IS WHY I HAVE A PET PEEVE ABOUT ANYONE WHO SAYS THEY ARE AUTODIDACTIC. WE DO NOT GROW UP IN A VACUUM. IN THE END WE ALL TAUGHT OURSELVES AND WE WERE ALL INFLUENCED BY EACH OTHER.

Z: There is a dark edge and a mysterious intensity in your work that's reminiscent of the symbolist painters. Gustave Moreau comes to mind; you have that same atmosphere of veiled, incense-filled rooms and esoteric visions. Are you a fan of symbolist and decadent literature?

C: In my youth, all I wanted was to resurrect the past. I felt like I was born 150 years too late to make any sense or to make contribution to life. Of course, I read...it was the only way to find my dead friends. Moreau is certainly a hero. You know, I am really honored by this comparison. I value him most importantly because he was such a permissive teacher. Matisse and Roualt were among his students. During his life, he reached the height of the technical skill alongside the French Academy but he also explored symbolism, and moved into abstraction with the evolution of modern thought. Moreau painted his first "symbolist" work at the end of his thirties. His adaptability is reflected in his work and in his teaching.

Gustave Moreau said: “I have never looked for dream in reality or reality in dream. I have allowed my imagination free play, and I have not been led astray by it.”

I am seeking this world...much like a Leonora Carrington. I have been in a period of reckoning and reconciling my life’s experiences. I have spent a good amount of time in what I would call “reality” in the last three years and I want to slip into my imagination again, and into the world of paintings...much deeper than I have ever dared to go before. At 40, I feel that everything I have done so far has all been preparation. The real work is coming.



Z: We share a fascination with masks and the hidden secrets of the psyche. The viewer's gaze wants to penetrate, to know the thoughts of the figures it sees on the canvas, and your characters willfully, and playfully, reject that attempt. What sort of interaction do you hope for when someone encounters a painting of yours?

C: The impulse for storytelling is what I hope to engage. If the viewers get frustrated

by being unable to see underneath the form, they might walk away from the work, or perhaps they will use their imagination to make up what they cannot see. I spent my childhood trying to solve the mysteries of the unseen worlds. I preferred ghosts in the house or spirits in the trees to the elaborate silence that was embroidered into a family dinner; everything was hidden when I was a child. I think I was very often frustrated or disappointed by the world I was investigating and would then just make up something more exhilarating. Later, I would go all over the world in search of something great to experience or understand. In the end, the process was always more interesting than the answer. I would like to give the viewer some of that same puzzle to solve.

Z: What about oil painting and egg tempera draws you? It's intriguing to see an artist using such traditional techniques in a time when multimedia has become so trendy.

C: There is a bit of alchemy in an artist's chosen medium. Some things exhilarate you, others repel. I was in love with oil paint before I ever touched it. When it had finally arrived, I had been crying out for it for years. Not the quick years of an adult, but the 100 years that fit into one year of a child. My first oil paint was stolen. My little brother couldn't listen to me complain anymore and he broke into the neighbors' vacant summer house to steal an old woman's paint, which he then gave to me. From the first smell, I knew I would breathe this smell for the rest of my life. Why would I ever know what oil paint was in a child's world of tempera? My book on the Louvre stated what media the painting was made with and it only listed oil. Also, there were no women artists in my book, so I would take this as my mantle.

My relationship to paint is romantic. It exists out of a desire to recreate the past with me in it. When I teach Materials and Techniques of the Old Masters, we start in tempera and work through indirect painting in oil. This was an enormous technological advance that changed how we express ourselves. Recreating an egg tempera by Piero della Francesca, Crivelli or a Botticelli and then painting a Velázquez, da Vinci, or Holbein in oil reveals the mysteries of the Renaissance. Granted these are bastardized approximations but the understanding my students achieve enhances their every creative undertaking. We demystify the masters from the past and see that it is not impossible, only that it has structure, processes, and requires a good deal of time to make. While this is atavistic compared with current trends, my students are not interested in applying this information merely to

traditional painting. They steal what they like from my teaching and apply it where they like.

IF DA VINCI WERE ALIVE RIGHT NOW, HE WOULD NOT WASTE HIS TIME WITH PAINTING.

Z: Your artist's statement mentions you like to start with a "prototype collage" using scraps of images from many different sources: your own photographs, art history books, etc. So really, you are a very contemporary, multimedia artist. On your website, you boldly state, "I steal from everyone." What could be more apropos of our time than that!

C: The truth is, I see a complete image in my mind's eye, and then seek the source material needed to construct the vision from cut-up images of art history. This is why I was attracted to the visionary artists. Meeting this group of artists was the first time I felt normal. I went to graduate school with visions...and came out speaking art theory. On the one hand, my process was born out of anger at all the books and images hanging on the walls in my studio that seemed to mock my circumstances of creating awkward work that wished to be from the 19th century. It didn't matter how hard I worked, my work was stuck and suffered in critiques. It was easier to cut up art history with scissors and make it perform my vision, since my "vision" seemed to fall flat when interpreted in paint without the collage. There is a way to interpret what I did by making paintings out of other paintings as the result of the "anxiety of influence," that these paintings are the result of the "mechanical age of reproduction," and in the end they would become metanarratives, using a taxonomy of totemistic images. However, I would say my goal is to find meaning through the images...both the parts and the whole. I am more interested in archetypes than originality per se. In a sense, it is like reverse engineering—starting with the end result, then finding my way back to the beginning. By cutting up these paintings and using them to create collages, I combined the power of historical masterworks with my own experience as a contemporary artist. Using this fragmentary "boneyard," I took historical images that appeared meaningless and breathed new life—my life—into them. As Glenn Brown says, "It would be very boring to make a painting that did not refer back to something."



Z: You are an associate professor of Painting and Drawing at Florida State University. What do you think your students get out of academic training? Do you think there are some skills that require training to master? Are there some things that can't be taught? When we're goofing off at the Zymbol office we talk about how great it would be to bring back the traditional apprenticeship model of fine art training.

C: I teach in academia so this is the new academic training, but it is little recognizable from the traditional academies of the 19th century . I teach traditionally but it's not like this is universally supported by our faculty or curriculum. I teach courses where we copy from the masters, work from life, and make studies from still lifes or plaster casts of antiquity. To be honest, I only went to the Florence Academy so I could master a bit of reality...so I could subvert it. At FSU, our students have opportunities to work with technology: video, laser cutters, digital media, 3-D printing, cnc milling etc. They have a little traditional training and then they are thrust into the global world of the future. There is only so much one can learn in 4 to 5 years. There is an enormous amount to reconcile in our history of art education. Ideally, would we learn everything from the past and everything from the present and then make up the future? I know I teach in a faculty that keeps the prejudice of the 20th century avant garde. They have little use or respect for tradition and I have to respect that they are authentically a reflection of the time they live in, just as I came of age straddled between the School of the Art Institute of Chicago which was one of the most progressive schools and the Florence Academy which was one of the most reactionary schools. James Elkins' book *Why Art Can Not Be Taught* summarizes this experience pretty well. I ended up on time for the millennium where I found the collapse of 20th century elitism into a "return of the new old masters," as identified by Donald Kuspit. Now that fashion has multiplied and collapsed in on itself... you are allowed to do anything...there are so many choices that the students must navigate. The undergraduate students who are coming through right now are my favorite in the 15 years I have been teaching. I am chronically amazed by what they seek and invent. I would not want to stand in their way. After all, in my humble opinion, this is the best time to be an artist. Especially if you are a woman and/or a minority.

Z: On your website, there's a wonderful section where you offer advice to emerging artists. It's very generous of you to share your experiences and encourage young artists in these harsh economic times. We have a couple more questions in that vein: What milestones along the road do you think are critical to artistic development? Exhibiting, or travel, perhaps?

C: Everyone's path is unique. Nothing I did would guarantee success for anyone else. Not giving up is the closest thing I could suggest. I changed my philosophy about teaching art after talking to Alex Grey a few years ago. I was in a crisis. I didn't know how I could go on teaching art in the recession. I wondered: was aiding an artist's

passion reprehensible? My students' parents had lost their houses, and many lives were falling apart in the stress of the situation. I was close to students who were murdered, went psychotic, or suffered horribly from abuse. How could I help them with paint? He suggested I read Joseph Beuys's Energy Plan for the Western Man. This book gave me a philosophy I could work with to teach at the university. It says that every man is an artist.

I took that to mean that every human being could live his or her life with a greater level of intent and artistry no matter what they were doing. Instead of making unemployable artists I felt like I was making capable humans that were architects of their own destiny. Instead of contributing to the skill-less youth, I was making creative problem solvers who could bring originality and ingenuity to a situation. This would be a person who could fit into many roles and produce varied outcomes. My students are quickly becoming unrecognizable as artists who paint traditional paintings. They dream something and manifest it, whether it is a video game, performance, a zine, a film, costumes, or whatever. I am attempting to help them to identify their goals, put the processes in place to attain them, and then I assist with the most important support systems: they should be healthy and happy. During this Recession, our government cut funding to the arts. In the Great Depression, FDR created the Works Project Administration. This produced work for many artists, writers, and actors. The results of our recession influenced government support of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and we are finding our classes and our research influenced and restructured to support STEM.

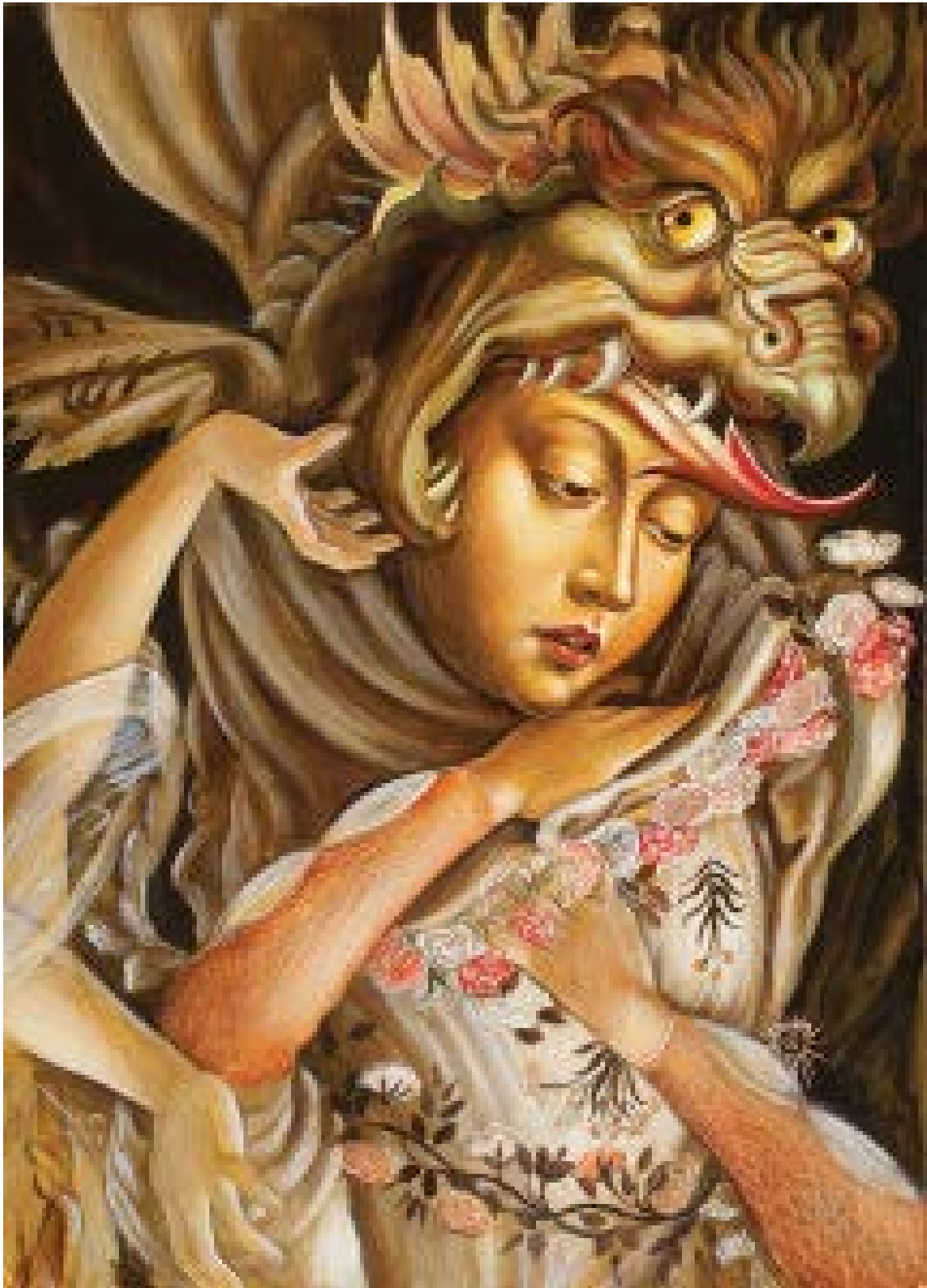
I THINK THIS GENERATION NEEDS TO RENEW ITS UNDERSTANDING OF THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE ARTISTS PLAY IN A HEALTHY WORLD. I THINK THE IMPORTANT MILESTONES START WITH A GOVERNMENT THAT RECOGNIZES THE VALUE OF CULTURE AND THE SUPPORT OF ITS ARTISTS.

Z: What do you do for motivation on days when you're just not feeling it?

C: Performance art: **I got married to my art this past fall.**

I recently wrote on the walls in my house to get the juice flowing to compose my most recent works. I set fire to 25 years of sketchbooks in a bonfire to let go of all my past that was weighing me down. I plan to have an art burn in the spring to reclaim and regenerate effort. I guess the answer is, when I am not feeling it...I walk out of my studio and go live life. Go see live music, go to an exhibit at the British Museum, fall in LOVE. There is no replacement for living. The trick is going to be removing that option for the foreseeable future. Of late, it's been far too easy to slip into an itinerary somewhere in the world to escape my duty in the studio—but this muse is about to nail her wings to the floor.

View full-size images of Carrie Ann Baade's paintings in *Zymbol 3* [here](#). View more photography by Mika Fowler [here](#).



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