

CARRIE ANN BAADE | OVERVIEW AND INTERVIEW

JULY 20, 2018 · DAVID MOLESKY



Caritas | oil on panel | 40" x 30" | 2018

CARRIE ANN BAADE

BY DAVID MOLESKY

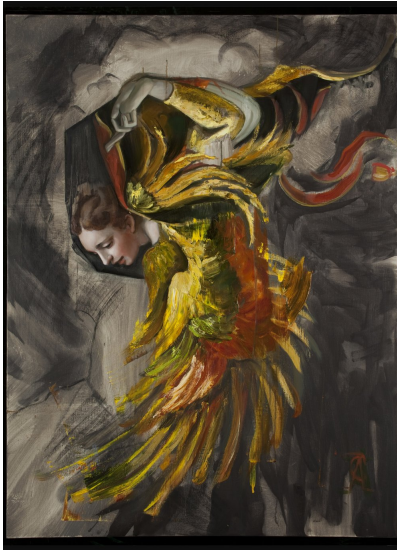
Around the turn of the millennium, I caught wind of a new genre in art that was quickly gaining attention and support. The Internet was opening up new possibilities for artists who were overlooked by the old gatekeepers, those critics and curators who aimed to perpetuate the dogma of progressive modernism. This group of emerging artists, who mix skill with inventive mashups of popular media, were first collectively identified as the Lowbrow movement. As this original pool of artists expanded its numbers, it saw a shift from the popular culture of hotrods and tattoos towards a merging with the grand history of European painting. This group predominantly painted narrative imagery and was soon rebranded as the Pop-Surrealists. Carrie Ann Baade is a name that I have long associated as a key player amongst this field of highly imaginative representational painters.

My attention became more focused upon Carrie when Greg Escalante, the late co-founder of *Juxtapoz* magazine, called me to share his enthusiasm about conversing with her at an art fair. He thought of me as she explained how her main inspiration comes from the paintings by European old masters. With hopes that I would one day write an article about her, Greg introduced us. Over the past few years, via

phone conversations and email, I've gotten to know some of the significant milestones of her journey as an artist.

Carrie, who is now an Associate Tenured Professor at Florida State University in Tallahassee, was an extremely precocious youth; far along her artistic path by 6 years of age. About that time she also purchased her first artbook: a complete works of the Louvre. She so greatly admired these painters who had worked more than 150 years ago for their ability to render allegory and imagination through their unique subverted versions of reality. But she also came to a debilitating observation, which would take decades to break free from, that "real art was made out of oil and that it was made by men."

After finishing her BFA at the Art Institute of Chicago, Carrie gave her parents a good fright by announcing her plans to move to Africa to study drum making. Luckily for us, they called her bluff and convinced her instead to enroll at the Florence Academy to "really learn how to paint." However, the endless rendering of sculpture busts irked her as she really wanted to "be a student of her own imagination rather than reality."



Angel at the End of Time | oil on linen | 48" x 36" | 2017



The Involuntary Thoughts of Madam Cecilia Devereux | oil on panel | 16" x 20" | 2015



Shakti | oil on panel | 12 x 18" | 2013

Delving into her art book collection, it seemed in her mind that she was born 200-500 years too late, and she began to accept a fate of isolation as a misunderstood artist. As she left the Academy, she also left realism; or rather she was cast out for painting an extra arm into a figurative work. Realism to her was a bit of a cult that she was anxious to abandon for deeper exploration of her own unique perspectives. As she made baby steps towards working from her imagination, she supported herself for a time as a house painter and then began doing a lot of commission work throughout her 20s.

Shortly after, she went to her studio and tore up all the paintings she had hanging on the wall as well as

much of her art book library into a leaf-like pile of chopped-up painted images on her floor. Diving in, she began to play with how her older work layered with Bellini and Lucien Freud, for example, could be reassembled into new meanings. This moment not only presented her with a unique way of working that she continues to employ today, but it also taught her that the biggest breakthroughs come out of playfulness.



Allegory of Bad Government | oil on linen | 36" x 48" | 2017

Around 2002, with the advent of Internet ubiquity, she finally found herself having arrived into her appropriate time of existence. She came to discover that there were other female artists working with incredible skill to create narratives that were sometimes humorous. With greater confidence, she began using the "citation style" of cutting out images from other paintings, as a kind of graffiti over Art History that contained her personal statement as a woman. Although Carrie at first wanted to be a kind of historical painter who made new allegories, she found herself suddenly swept up in the Internet-driven emergence of the Pop-Surrealists. Through this came many opportunities to participate in exhibitions that were part of the rise in populist



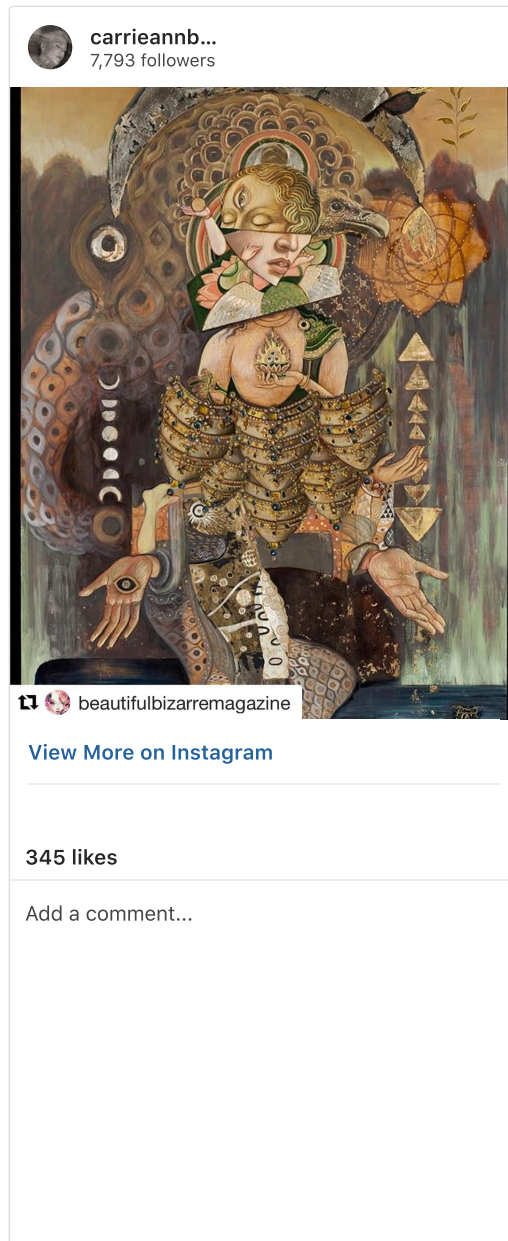
Angel of Paradox | oil on panel | 16" x 20" | 2015

culture coming out of California. Following this new artistic herd like a pack of wolves also came a new population of collectors guided solely by their own tastes and further stoked by new online galleries and bloggers. Carrie's world was no longer a world of books and isolation; artists could now find each other through various social media platforms and interact.

Jon Beinart, an Australian based artist, created one of the first online communities and galleries for these artists who before then had been completely marginalized. In 2005, Beinart included Carrie's work in an online exhibition with Ernst Fuchs, Alex Grey, and HR Giger, even though they were much more senior and famous than her. Overnight, because of it, her work became viral and she found herself with 10,000 new friends on MySpace. Her inbox was flooded with people asking her what it was like to be famous. This incredible exposure and new notoriety, however, did not translate immediately into increased stability or even an ability to pay her rent in a decrepit part of Philadelphia. In her efforts to keep her head above water, she began applying to positions as a professor.

The upswing of Carrie's career was also aided by an influential book about the movement, which became increasingly popular and was quickly translated into several languages, effectively circulating images of her work around the world. This great exposure resulted in people tattooing their bodies with images of her self-portraits. This somewhat awkward phenomenon came full circle in 2010 at an exhibition opening in New York where her work was shown with HR Giger. Giger was in attendance and Carrie serendipitously was wearing a backless dress exposing the Giger tattoo on her back.

In an effort to develop criticism and scholarship around the pop-surrealist movement, she curated an



exhibition of the artists, mostly based in Los Angeles and New York, who were leading the field. The exhibition, *Cute and Creepy*, turned out to be her university museum's most attended exhibition, tripling the previous attendance record. The popularity of the exhibition was due to its appeal to a much broader population. It wasn't an exhibition of art based on art theory, which would appeal to a smaller milieu of people educated in obtuse academic rhetoric. The exhibition was carnivalesque and grotesque with humor, and left everyone feeling happy and satisfied.

The friendships that Carrie has developed with artists she has met online or at exhibitions has been an important part of her development. One such person was LA-based artist Amanda Sage, who had worked as an assistant for 11 years with Ernst Fuchs. She came to FSU of her own accord to speak with students, and brought a painting she had been working on for many years. Her discussion of the work and the ideas behind it reminded Carrie that painting has a unique opportunity to change the world. It was 2011, the year that many people in the US were embarking on the March on Wall Street and other protests about the discrepancy of wealth. Seeing Amanda's work made Carrie want to create a painting that could potentially change consciousness. Since then, Carrie has begun to use her work as an amplifier for her concerns about government, and her collage mashups have begun to take more of a political agenda.

INTERVIEW

with CARRIE ANN BAADE

Recently, I caught up with Carrie during her summer break from teaching to talk about ideas and upcoming shows.

Can you briefly describe your painting process?

"After talking with artists who had studied near or under Fuchs, I adapted what I called the "Bastard Misch" technique. I used the true chalk gesso panels from my training in egg tempera, developed an ink under-drawing, which is then sealed by an imprimatura. Then I build the surface in lead white. This use of the ink drawing helped me to achieve tighter details that held to the original contour. Beyond that, I work from collage from torn up books. I then copy the contours with a photocopier and trace the edges because I like exactly how the collage looks but I want to make a replica in paint. I work in an underpainting that sometimes uses casein and sometimes is more traditional grisaille, but other times uses egg tempera. I work in layers of glazes but always paint opaque paint into transparent.

I would say it's a hodgepodge of 12th through 17th-century techniques that I have not mastered but keep practicing."

You've said that at an early age you discovered that real paintings were made out of oil and that men painted them. How have you been affected by this early idea and how has your perspective developed?

"I grew up asking people to name 5 female artists. After O'Keefe and Kahlo...they were usually stumped. The women in my family gave up everything for their children: art careers, acting careers, and teaching careers. It was not brought up often but it was a silent scream of unfulfillment. I remember feeling like I was the wrong sex and born 500 or more years too late. However, by my early 30s, I felt that I had arrived on time. With so many fabulous painters, I can only believe that this is the time to be alive. But especially for a woman who is a painter. I think women have untold riches to offer and share and that there is a gap. I don't think it's difficult to imagine that female painters must survive many more travails and that many perish before becoming."

It is clear that you have found influence in all the corners of the earth. How important do you think it is for artists or aspiring artists to involve themselves in something entirely outside the "Art World?"

"I challenged myself, after falling asleep in my freshman art history survey, to see every piece of art in Gardner's Art Through the Ages in person. I saw 98% by age 21. It took me until I was 25 to see the rest. Later I would teach art history, and realize seeing is not understanding. As an artist, I considered it my duty to have an in-depth and holographic view of earth, its culture, its people, its religions and its symbols. I consider it a human responsibility to be well traveled, well read, and to traverse the perils of education to be an informed inhabitant of this planet."

As someone who is representative of both the past and also the future (educators are by definition forward thinking), what would you say about the landscape of art today?

"I think we are in a new Renaissance. I am exhilarated by the revolution that is happening moment by moment inside of so many minds through this great gift of access brought by the Internet. I think da Vinci was the forerunner for what artists still have to negotiate today: do we use our creativity to serve science, to serve technology, to serve war, to decorate, or to change art and life itself and how people see themselves?"

Your final product is very evolved and very contemporary, but your means of getting there is anything

"I was told as an undergrad in 1994 that there would be no more art movements. It was the death of painting, the end of art. In 2001, critic Donald Kuspit declared

but – in an age of easy-ways-out, where does the inspiration come from?

the return of the “new old masters” and then suddenly it was as though someone resuscitated art by throwing open the deep vaults of Valhalla and every manner of figure, flora, and fauna spilling out including Representational, Narrative, and Surrealism. Those had still been unspeakable bad words when I was in graduate school at the turn of the millennium just the year before. But suddenly, it was all welcome. It was all open for negotiation and for sale. But I also think I saw a lot of amnesia about what to call art that looked like something that was also meaningful. I think many labels were generated just trying to recall narrative art, symbols, allegory...all of this was very old but I saw artists and galleries struggling for language or maybe it was branding.

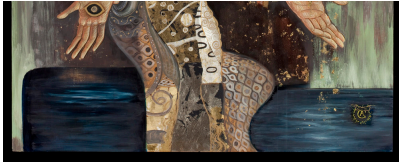
Until this moment talented artists who lived through the dark ages of Representational Art in the 20th century, such as Odd Nerdrum and Alex Grey, had to form their own subcultures and support themselves outside of the high art world after repeated bashing. I think they really took culture by the horns after their difficult entry. They used the power of the underground and surfed the tide of shifting trends as everything sifted and renegotiated. They are impressive examples of artists and craftsmen."

Why Pop Surrealism? And what would you say is “Pop”—as in, pop-culture—about your work? Do you think the term Pop Surrealism is used too generously to cover the imaginative, representational painting movement? As a genre, should it be limited to surrealist works containing pop-cultural elements?



"Narrative art was suppressed in Western Culture as a result of World War II and the power of propaganda. When it was renewed, it was with a giddy vengeance. I think Lowbrow and Pop Surreal are relevant because they were the transition. They were there before and they were there after the shift. They absorbed all the trends and the tastes that were forming and pouring out. Trying to understand what was happening myself, I took the opportunity to wrap my mind around what is Lowbrow? What is Pop Surreal? Why? I am not from LA. I am not from the psychedelic 60's hot rod culture, I didn't know anything about Margaret Keene. My influences were not meant to be cartoons, tattoos, or from popular culture or be camp. I think I was honestly trying to build icons to something that was lost... and then when culture found itself pouring out through the floodgate of images available through the Internet I got swept into new and unfamiliar territory.

I am fascinated about how the West Coast originated culture out of streets, the walls, using TV movies and tattoos as culture. However, it was always a mystery to me why I was showing with this group as I was not from the West Coast, had so



Artemis | oil and gold leaf on panel | 2015

few of their influences, and my work was far more complicated allegorically. I was swept up and they claimed me as their own, so I was not going to complain as my work sold and I had ten years of invitations to exhibit. I had a good time with the big-eyed works (a la Margaret Keene) and the monsters. It was the best seat in the house to watch. Pop Surrealism was a subset spawned out of Lowbrow art that proliferated out of California but went coast to coast at the turn of the millennium. Kristen Anderson coined this genre. It is something that arrived out of changing tides and the rise of the populist tastes permitted by art being available via the Internet and thus proliferated out of control with the rise of social media platforms by 2005. It is a child of Lowbrow but rose up with the money before the recession. This is one of the first movements that you could have followed entirely online, yet I chose to arrive in person.

Pop is not pop as in Warhol. It's Pop as in Populist. A power to the people to get on the Internet and get to the gallery and support the art that they like. Taking art away from the elitists who were dictating what was "art" and who were responsible for about five decades of art that most people could not relate to without learning why it was art."

Who of your contemporaries do you find most inspiring?

"Adrien Ghenie blew my mind most recently at the Venice Biennale. His work was amazing enough to make me rethink accuracy and detail for the raw materiality of paint. However, Amanda Sage is my sister by choice, and her vision, her grace, and her work have challenged me to see what painting can do to change consciousness. I also have a group of artists, many of whom are my former students, called Art Nuns. I have learned so much through teaching. They blow my mind and my discipline all the time."

What are your current projects?
And do you know what's next?

"After being in over a hundred exhibitions worldwide in the last ten years and meeting what I would consider some of the most talented artists who have ever existed, I am going to paint... I am more interested in books and inner life than the world right now. It's time to go inward."

One thing is abundantly clear: you love oil paint. Your paintings are in many respects like odes to oil paint. If you had to write a love letter to oil paint, what would you say?

"I do and I did when I took my vows, I quoted Lou Reed, "you are my wife and you are my life." I got married publicly to Art in 2013. That's as poetic as I get. I have a gorgeous ring and everything. What are we all but a little bit of colorful, animated dirt?"

Special thanks to Scout Opatut for her assistance in the interview.

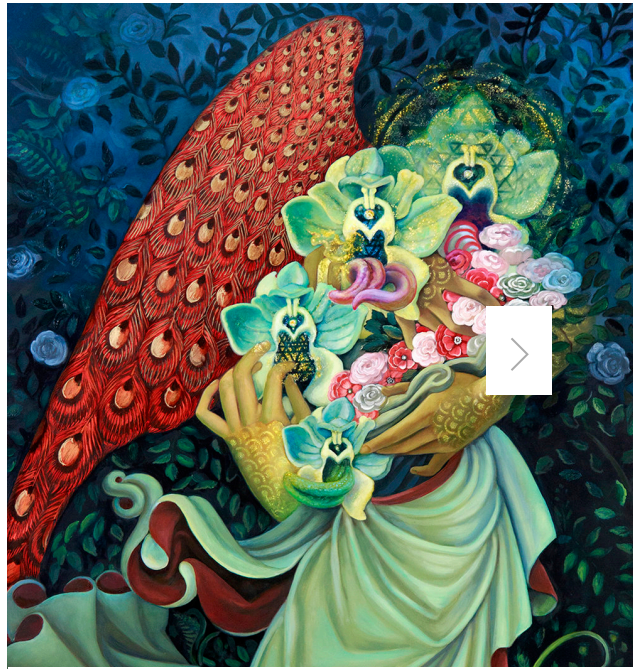


PHOTO CREDIT: [MIKA FOWLER](#)

Carrie Ann Baade is known for her allegorical oil paintings. These painted parables combine remnants of Renaissance and Baroque imagery, creating surreal landscapes inhabited by exotic flora, fauna, and figures. As a contemporary painter, she returns to the relevant moments in art history in order to reclaim them, not merely as a quotation of a theme or an image, but also as the materiality of methods and techniques that ultimately create them.

Carrie was awarded the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs Individual Artist Fellowship in 2010, the Delaware Division of the Arts Fellowship for Established Artist in 2005, and was nominated for the prestigious United States Artist Fellowship in 2006 and the Joan Mitchell Grant in 2012. Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries nationally and internationally, including solo exhibitions: the Delaware Center for Contemporary Art, the Rosenfeld Gallery in Philadelphia, Billy Shire Fine Arts in Los Angeles, the Ningbo Art Museum in China, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Jacksonville, Florida.

As a native born Louisianan, Carrie has deep southern roots but she has traveled and studied painting history & techniques around the world. She received her Masters in Painting from the University of Delaware and her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago that included one year of study at the Florence Academy of Art in Italy. The NY ARTS Magazine, the Philadelphia Inquirer, Austin Chronicle, the Albuquerque Journal, and Philadelphia Today have featured her work. She currently lives and works in Tallahassee where she is an Associate Professor of Painting and Drawing at Florida State University.



Caritas | oil on panel | 40" x 30" | 2018



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