



# Art as Social Commentary

Mark Messersmith: When No One is Watching  
Carrie Ann Baade: A Foreshadowing of Events

MARK MESSERSMITH  
WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING

CARRIE ANN BAADÉ  
A FORESHADOWING OF EVENTS

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
BFA & MFA STUDENTS

GADSDEN ARTS CENTER & MUSEUM  
SEPTEMBER 28-DECEMBER 15, 2018

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COVER. Carrie Ann Baade, *Manufacturing of Tears* detail, 2018, oil on linen

# **Art as Social Commentary**

**Mark Messersmith: When No One is Watching**

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**FORWARD BY**

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**ESSAYS BY**

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ANISSA FORD



**GADSDEN ARTS CENTER & MUSEUM**  
**QUINCY, FLORIDA**



**IMAGE 1.** Mark Messersmith, *Tarpon Hunter*, 2017, oil on canvas, mixed media

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## INTRODUCTION

BY ANGIE L. BARRY  
CURATOR OF EXHIBITIONS & COLLECTIONS

One could argue that all art is social commentary. Whether commenting on themselves, their environment, other humans, a pretty landscape, or the interesting compilation of objects in a still life, artists are trying to convey and connect to their audience. People, places, and things they see, literature they've written, or emotions they've felt influence artists every day. In the case of the artists exhibiting in *Art as Social Commentary*, it's a bit of everything. In response to the social ills of the world, artists Mark Messersmith and Carrie Ann Baade have created bodies of work that challenge humanity's impact on, and relationship with, the environmental, sociological, economic, and social climate. In stark contrast to many contemporary artists who have distanced themselves from traditional, representational painting,

Messersmith and Baade create richly detailed oil paintings that incorporate traditional techniques, iconography, and symbolism rooted in Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque painting. Both artists repeat imagery and themes, recalling earlier works, and both work in series, working through an overall theme but taking pains to define a distinct narrative for each individual painting.

Messersmith and Baade are colorists, utilizing pigment to its most effectiveness, not shying from the power and influence of oil paint. Stepping into a gallery filled with these artists' work is akin to entering a sacred space. Messersmith's pieces are reminiscent of Christian altarpieces, but instead of commemorating Jesus Christ, his paintings are filled with the tales of Florida's environmental ruin. Baade's



**IMAGE 3.** Carrie Ann Baade's *A Foreshadowing of Events* exhibition in the Munroe Family Community Gallery.

paintings include the actual symbols seen in historical paintings and are filled with allegories connecting ancient thoughts with her personal considerations. Each painting is a surrealist's dream, taking the viewer across continents and centuries to reclaim moments and bring a contemporary voice to the ageless issues of morality, politics, and self-expression. These artists share a duality to their work: the subject matter is beautiful yet disturbing.

In keeping with the overall theme, Mark Messersmith and Carrie Ann Baade, professors of studio art at Florida State University, invited their students, Toni Ardizzone, Elton Burgest, Kelly Hanning, Brian Holcombe, Caroline Manuel, and Michelle Wilcox, to exhibit in the adjoining Zoe Golloway Gallery and portray the next generation's own art as social commentary.

While the subject matters and styles are different, the underlying expression of thought and ideas comes through, unique to each artist.

As you view these works, listen to the audio tour, and read the catalog and text panels, I invite you to have a dialogue with the paintings – how do these paintings make *you* feel? What do *you* think the artist is trying to tell you? And are you hearing that message? Or something else entirely? While art is a commentary, as a viewer you have a voice, and art can be a two-way discussion between yourself and the artist.

Angie L. Barry  
Curator of Exhibitions & Collections  
Gadsden Arts Center & Museum

*Carrie Ann Baade*





**CARRIE ANN BAADE: A FORESHADOWING OF EVENTS  
WHILE THE WORLD SLEEPS**

**BY ANGIE L. BARRY  
CURATOR OF EXHIBITIONS & COLLECTIONS**

Carrie Ann Baade’s exhibition, *A Foreshadowing of Events*, relies on the artist’s ability to realistically describe the world, imitate it, and then subvert and distort it to show the viewer her distinctive visions. Baade’s paintings are executed using old master techniques as a way to maintain the material connection to the cultural past and to help viewers feel at home with the traditional oil paintings known in museums and books. The artist’s subject matter, however, is a whole other world, containing a cacophony of images culled from two decades worth of historical paintings in Baade’s archive—people, angels, fire, and animals all configured into imaginative, surreal metanarratives detailing her view of the apocalyptic climate the world has adopted due to religious and sexist dynamics.

Carrie Ann Baade has been fascinated with art since she was a small child, especially the emotional and gripping works by European masters created in oil 500-700 years ago. She was desperate to keep the spirit of these paintings alive, to create portals that connect her paintings to other paintings from another time.<sup>9</sup> She starts each creation with a vision, something from her *mind’s eye*, which she often physically depicts in her painting as an enlarged eye cut out and pasted onto her self-portraits. The artist then delves into her

**IMAGE 17.** Carrie Ann Baade, *Babel*, 2018, oil on linen

**OVERLEAF.** Carrie Ann Baade, *Unspeakable*, 2017, oil on linen



**IMAGE 18.** Carrie Ann Baade, *Allegory of Bad Government*, 2017, oil on linen

catalog of images and creates a collage of her vision, making it real.<sup>10</sup> She paints at night, usually until the sun comes up, gathering and employing, as she says, the raw energy produced through others' dreams.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes, Baade paints a replica of the collage, usually keeping the "collage" element and painting the delineations between images, a trompe l'oeil effect that is often disconcerting to the viewer. Is this a collage? Or is this a painting?

One of the older pieces in the exhibition, *Allegory of Bad Government*, is a painting that Baade worked on for years, beginning in 2012 and finally completing in 2017. She

often exhibits her works "green," saying sometimes they need time to ripen, so she will keep repainting them.<sup>12</sup> This piece was inspired by a fresco of the same name by Ambrodio Lorenzetti from the 1330s that is housed in the City Hall of Sienna, Italy. Lorenzetti's original intention was to remind leaders to remain just while being enticed by the seven deadly sins. Baade reinterprets this vision and draws viewers into a scene of structured madness. Similar to the tea party in *Alice in Wonderland*, a rowdy cast of characters surround an off-kilter table, each in their own world of chaos. Each sin is represented at the table, acting out



**IMAGE 19.** Carrie Ann Baade, *Hell Mouth*, 2017, oil on linen

**OVERLEAF.** Carrie Ann Baade, *Manufacturing of Tears*, 2018, oil on linen

their bad behavioral traits to disrupt the significant meeting. The artist also interprets the disturbances as intentionally sabotaging internal states of the mind. Baade is reflecting on not only what a government can mean to its people, but how we as people “should aspire to states of internal governance to mobilize our human initiative to use our energy and our time creatively.”<sup>13</sup>

*Manufacturing of Tears* is a painting that Carrie Ann Baade began developing over 10 years ago. She first created the collage and painted this scene in 2010, but it sold so fast she never felt it was quite complete. For the last 8 years, she has felt a need to

revisit this composition, and this time she imagined it on a much larger scale. In fact, at 5 x 7 feet, this is the largest painting Baade has ever painted. In *Manufacturing of Tears*, multiple towers of Babel are aflame, and a windmill kicks debris to fuel the fire that is engulfing the crying figures throughout the composition. The tower of Babel is an origin story from the Book of Genesis in the Bible meant to explain why people of the world speak such diverse languages. In the book, all the people of the earth worked together to try and build a tower to reach heaven and God, but the deity was not happy with this plan







**IMAGE 20.** Carrie Ann Baade, *Anti-Vanitas*, 2018, oil on linen

and disrupted the work on the tower by dispersing humans all over the globe and giving them different languages to speak so they could not work together again.

Baade reimagines Babel as three towers, each supporting a weepy female figure who is crying in an effort to provide enough water to extinguish one of the many menacing fires. To end one person's suffering each must participate, since no one person can cry enough to put out their own fire. According to the artist, this painting is a metaphor of "the futile and painful aspects of existence," and "that there appears to be something or someone



**IMAGE 21.** Carrie Ann Baade, *Memento Mori*, 2018, oil on linen

higher than ourselves that demands we participate. To deny participation is death."<sup>14</sup>

A completely new series in this exhibition is a collection of three paintings, *Anti-Vanitas*, *Memento Mori*, and *Self-Portrait as a Visionary*, all completed this year, and all touching on similar themes of *memento mori*. The term literally translates to "remember you must die" as a reminder of the final future all humans face. *Vanitas*, part of the larger *memento mori* motif, is a collection of still-life objects in paintings that symbolize the inevitability of death, and is an element utilized throughout the years in



**IMAGE 22.** Carrie Ann Baade, *Self-portrait as Visionary*, 2018, oil on linen

## “to deny participation is death”

Baade’s work. For example, she includes a human skull in the foreground and a distant missile in *Manufacturing of Tears* to offer a glimpse of the foreboding future.

These latest *memento mori* paintings do take a turn from previous work by showing a loosening of brushwork, a darkening of her palette, a larger canvas, and a letting go of extemporaneous elements. It seems that Baade is no longer tied to filling up her compositions to catch her viewer’s attention with shiny details, bright colors, and head-

turning scenes. The artist said herself that this is a time to “go inward,” and this series may be a reflection of that.<sup>15</sup> After exhibiting across the globe for the last ten years, Baade has taken the last year to concentrate on just painting, discharging the multitudes of paintings that have been swimming around in her head for years. While her earlier work burst with imagery and vibrant colors and narratives, this series is quieter, muted, more settled. That is not to say Baade isn’t conveying a message, but she is



**IMAGE 24.** Guido Cagnacci, *Allegory of Human Life*, 17th century, oil on canvas, Collection of the Crocker Art Museum, CA.

whispering it, challenging the viewer to lean in, look closer, and stare into the depths of darkness to receive her fables. At age 44, she says she has reached “a maturation,” one that is evident in these latest works.<sup>16</sup>

*Anti-Vanitas* is a self-portrait, in which the artist stands with one hand on her hip and one hand out, poised to catch a lifeless snake dangling from the mouth of a vulture who is perched on her shoulder with wings outstretched. A fragment of the “mind’s eye” is placed upside down on her forehead, shadowing her closed eyes, while an *ouroboros*—a snake devouring its own tail—floats in the upper left corner, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life. A third hand appears, holding a monochrome rainbow that pours into her offering hand. Baade says she was inspired by the 17th century painting, *Allegory of Human Life*

by Italian painter Guido Cagnacci and the *Rainbow Portrait*, a portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, also from the 17th century.

In the original Cagnacci, a female figure, nude from the waist up, gazes off into the sky, surrounded by *memento mori*—a skull, hourglass, and flowers—while the same *ouroboros* hovers in the background. In the Queen Elizabeth portrait, the ruler is depicted young and strong (although she was in her sixties) and above the monochrome rainbow she is also holding and catching, reads the inscription *non sine sol iris*, or there is “no rainbow without the sun.” Scholars interpret this as the queen demonstrating her power and will over the country.

Baade’s incorporation of the *ouroboros* and rainbow is curious. The artist shows



**IMAGE 23.** *The Rainbow Portrait*, c. 1600-02, attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, Collection of Hatfield House, England.

herself strong, with shoulders back and clothed in an elegant costume with wing-like shoulders. The vulture, while often a symbol of death, is also sacred in many cultures as it kills nothing, only devours what is already gone. Her acceptance of the snake and her connectedness to her mind's eye suggests she is in power and at peace with the reminder of death. The title, *Anti-Vanitas*, confirms that the artist isn't scared; she doesn't need shadowy presence of *memento mori* to remind her of death. In fact, Baade says that death is more mysterious, less defined, and could even be seen as an opportunity.<sup>17</sup>

Carrie Ann Baade's paintings are filled with rich stories commenting on issues that can have multiple interpretations touching on our deepest fears, desires, and introspections. The surrealist feel of her

work is clear throughout the paintings, no matter the subject matter or theme. It is through this fantastical eye that Baade can share her visions with her audience, bringing the viewer on her journey to explore historical, and her personal, revelations.



**IMAGE 32.** Photograph of Carrie Ann Baade

## ARTIST WEBSITE

[www.carrieannbaade.com](http://www.carrieannbaade.com)

Carrie Ann Baade 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, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Jacksonville, Florida, and the Galeria Stara in Lublin, Poland.

## EDUCATION

MFA, University of Delaware, 2003

BFA, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1997

## SELECTED AWARDS

Committee of Faculty Research Support, FSU (2013, 2009).

2nd Prize, "Flaunt", Thomasville Art Center, Thomasville, GA (2011).

Florida State Division of Cultural Affairs Individual Artist Fellowship (2009-2010).

First Year Assistant Professor Award (2008).

United States Artists Award Nominee (2007, 2006).

Delaware Division of the Arts Fellowship for Established Artist in Painting (2005-2006).

University of Delaware Calloway Magness Fellowship (2001-2003).

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

**The Apocalyptic Orgasm**, La Luz de Jesus, Los Angeles, CA, 2018

**Gospel of Sophia**, Jung Center, Houston, TX, 2018

**Pieces of Pieces**, Averitt Center for the Arts, Statesboro, GA, 2016

**Burza w Szklance Wody, Galeria "Stara" Biura WystawArtystycznych**, Lublin, Poland, 2015, Catalogue

**Solar Midnight**, Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, FL, 2012

**Tales of Passion and Woe**, Rosenfeld Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, 2010

**Virtues and Vices**, Delaware Center for Contemporary Art, Wilmington, DE, and Ningbo Museum of Art, Ningbo, China, 2007

**CARRIE ANN BAADE**

Carrie Ann Baade, *Allegory of Bad Government*, 2017, oil on linen, 36 x 48 inches

Carrie Ann Baade, *Anti-Vanitas*, 2018, oil on linen, 48 x 36 inches

Carrie Ann Baade, *Babel*, 2018, oil on linen, 48 x 36 inches

Carrie Ann Baade, *Hell Mouth*, 2017, oil on linen, 36 x 48 inches

Carrie Ann Baade, *Manufacturing of Tears*, 2018, oil on linen, 60 x 84 inches

Carrie Ann Baade, *Memento Mori*, 2018, oil on linen, 36 x 48 inches

Carrie Ann Baade, *Self-portrait as Visionary*, 2018, oil on linen, 48 x 36 inches

Carrie Ann Baade, *Unspeakable*, 2017, oil on linen, 48 x 36 inches

**FSU BFA & MFA**

Toni Ardizzone, *All Flesh is Grass*, 2018, mixed media, 58 x 61 inches

Toni Ardizzone, *Universal Truth*, 2018, acrylic on fabric, 35 x 32 inches

Elton Burgest, *By Standards*, 2018, digital painting printed on aluminum, 18 x 12 inches

Elton Burgest, *Links*, 2018, digital painting printed on canvas, 24 x 36 inches

Brian Holcombe, *Target 1b*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36 inches

Kelly Hanning, *Herd of the Cosmos (Pt. 1-4)*, 2018, oil on canvas roll, 60 x 20 inches

Michelle Wilcox, untitled, 2018, oil on board, 16 x 16 inches

Michelle Wilcox, untitled, 2018, oil on board, 12 x 9 inches

Caroline Manuel, *Reflections*, 2017, oil on canvas, 48 x 30 inches

Caroline Manuel, *Looking Glass*, 2016, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches

- 1 Tom Anderson and Barry Fraser. *A Sense of Place: A Portrait of Mark Messersmith*. Youtube. February 12, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu36dk4z3hM>
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Mark Messersmith, "Interview at the Artist's Residence, Tallahassee, Florida," interview by Angie L. Barry & Anissa S. Ford, May 14, 2018.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Carrie Ann Baade, Ray Burggraf, Lilian Garcia-Roig, Mark Messersmith, and Judith Rushin, *Back and Forth: Thinking in Paint* (Tallahassee: John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Florida State University, Museum of Fine Arts Press, 2015), p. 46.
- 8 Mark Messersmith, May 14, 2018
- 9 Carrie Ann Baade. "Myth & Majesty." *Miroir Magazine*. 2018, 98.
- 10 Selena Chambers, "Painting with Blasphemy: An Interview with Carrie Ann Baade." *Beautiful/Bizarre*. July 24, 2018. <https://beautifulbizarre.net>
- 11 Nathan Spoor, "Carrie Ann Baade: The Intemperate Zone." *Hi-Fructose*, (2009).
- 12 Chambers, *Beautiful/Bizarre*.
- 13 Carrie Ann Baade et al., *Back and Forth*, (2015), 19.
- 14 Carrie Ann Baade, 2018.
- 15 David Molesky, "Carrie Ann Baade: Overview and Interview." *Poets and Artists*. July 20, 2018. <https://www.poetsandartists.com>
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- 17 Carrie Ann Baade, "Interview at the Artist's Residence, Havana, Florida," interview by Angie L. Barry & Anissa S. Ford, September 13, 2018.

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# Art as Social Commentary

**Mark Messersmith: When No One is Watching**

**Carrie Ann Baade: A Foreshadowing of Events**

The Gadsden Arts Center & Museum presents *Art as Social Commentary*, a trio of solo exhibitions centered on art as a catalyst for conversations about social change. In response to the social ills of the world, artists Mark Messersmith and Carrie Ann Baade have created bodies of work that challenge humanity's impact, and relationship with, the environmental, sociological, economic, and social climate. In stark contrast to many contemporary artists who have distanced themselves from traditional, representational painting, Messersmith and Baade create richly detailed oil paintings that incorporate traditional techniques, iconography, and symbolism rooted in Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque painting.

As professors at Florida State University, Messersmith and Baade encouraged MFA and BFA students to create their own interpretations of "art as social commentary" or "art for social change." Working in a range of media, six students were juried into the student exhibition: Toni Ardizzone, Elton Burgest, Kelly Hanning, Brian Holcombe, Caroline Manuel, and Michelle Wilcox.

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