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DANA LEVIN (b. 1969) paints complex tranquility. In her own words, she creates “an image that offers an immediate visual impression, which slowly, over time, unfolds on levels deeper than the surface of the canvas. I want to communicate a sense of poetry that allows viewers to access their imagination, to transcend their everyday lives, and to reconnect with the rest of humanity.” Levin’s objective sounds ambitious in these frenetic times, but her pictures — predominately still lifes and portraits — certainly deliver.

The key to understanding Levin’s cool palette, straightforward composition, and blend of virtuoso drawing with vaporous *sfumato* is her eight-year experience at the Florence Academy of Art in Italy. Led by the American Daniel Graves (see the May/June 2007 issue of *Fine Art Connoisseur*), this academy has been training talented realists since 1991. Having sailed through the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a BFA in painting and drawing, Levin arrived at Florence in 1996 and began its three-year certificate program. She stayed on another five years to teach full time, and during that period found her own artistic voice.

The teaching bug had bitten deeply, so in 2005 Levin founded the New School of Classical Art in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, near Providence. (She closed it in January 2009 upon the birth of her son, Maxfield, and is not certain if or when she will reopen.) Housed in a large atelier with north-facing windows, the New School allowed Levin to share the Florentine vision with New Englanders disenchanted with the “do what you feel” ethos at nearby institutions. Particular attention was paid to the demanding sight-size method of Charles Bargue, the 19th-century Frenchman whose curriculum taught generations to draw, including van Gogh and Picasso.

Beyond teaching them “how to,” Levin has functioned as a role model for students, articulating why this kind of art matters: “My role as a realist is to identify the subject’s subtle qualities, reveal them through observation, and translate that into a poetic image. As I undergo the process of aesthetic choices, I try to integrate universal qualities while maintaining the individuality of the subject — to blend

DANA LEVIN (b. 1969)

BED OF ABUNDANCE

2006, OIL ON LINEN, 21 3/4 X 32 IN.

ELEANOR ETTINGER GALLERY, NEW YORK CITY

the eternal with the momentary. This selection process reveals what I find meaningful about the image, and in a larger sense, significant about our human existence.”

Still painting daily in her private studio in suburban Boston, Levin is represented by Eleanor Ettinger Gallery (New York), John Pence Gallery (San Francisco), and Principle Gallery (Alexandria, VA).

MAX WERNER (b. 1955) can be found, for at least several months each year, riding horses in the rugged mountains of Wyoming, admiring sweeping vistas still relatively untouched by man. Here is where this Belgian-born, New Jersey-based artist truly feels at home, and where his growing knowledge of the region’s peaks, valleys, forests, and skies informs his remarkable landscape paintings.

On location, Werner makes a few notes, photographs, and sketches, then resumes his ride. Back in his Princeton studio, he reviews the materials collected and begins painting. He starts with the sky that defines the landscape’s light, always the most significant element for him. Growing up in Ghent, where daylight was scarce, Werner developed a fascination for light and darkness highly influenced by Hergé (1907-1983), creator of the legendary *Tin Tin* comic series. Werner admires Hergé’s technique for creating atmospheres that communicate something magical, even threatening. This admiration led Werner to study and master etching at the Byam Shaw School of Art and Slade School of Art in London, another city characterized by gloomy skies. There he created dark, witty, and emotionally intense images of people, drawn from the narratives of urban life, his imagination, and even his vaguely surrealist dreams.