

# *Figuratively Seeing*

January 21 – March 3, 2009

Sandra and David Bakalar Gallery

Reception: Wednesday, February 4, 6 – 8 pm

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Hannah Barrett  
Holly Coulis  
André Ethier  
Jeronimo Elespe  
Chris Faust  
Vera Iliatova  
Keith Mayerson  
David Ording  
Bénédicte Peyrat  
Bettina Sellmann  
Jason Teraoka

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With references to art history and the long tradition of figural painting, with hints of allegory and glances at film, the artists in ***Figuratively Seeing*** revel in the materiality of paint on canvas. This exhibition features work by contemporary artists who are examining – and in some cases redefining – figurative painting and portraiture. Although their focus is the human subject, these artists do not always draw from live sitters like traditional portrait painters. Instead, they create new individuals, either by showing actual sitters in a new light or by concocting fictional images pulled from memory, history, popular culture, and/or photographs. ***Figuratively Seeing*** interprets, invents, and records realities, emphasizing process and playfully revealing new ways of seeing.



Since 2000, **Hannah Barrett** has painted several series of bizarre fictional portraits based on collage. Focusing on sections of found photographs and paintings, Barrett reassembles these various parts to create new figures of ambiguous gender, pushing conventional male/female roles in portraiture. In her ***Copley Bastards*** series, she draws from John Singleton Copley's 18<sup>th</sup> century portraits of wealthy Yankee couples. Hybridizing the two people from each Copley portrait, she creates a single four-eyed figure. Barrett admires the rich color, costumes, and details in Copley's portraits, but as she says, "I am attracted and simultaneously repelled, envious of the elaborate gold rococo frames, yet relieved to be on the other side of them." Also included in ***Figuratively Seeing*** are images from Barrett's new hermaphrodite series. Barrett is a graduate of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Boston University (MFA).

For more information: [www.hannahbarrett.net/about/index](http://www.hannahbarrett.net/about/index)  
[www.howardyezerskigallery.com](http://www.howardyezerskigallery.com)



Canadian born **Holly Coulis** lives and works in New York City. Her paintings exist somewhere between the film still and still life. As such, her figures are suspended on the threshold of ordinary actions, yet concede to the weighty traditions of pictorial realism and portraiture. The human characters in her canvases are invented composites. Assembled from collected source material and memories, Coulis constructs her envisioned ‘portrait sitters’ through accumulation, casting imaginary roles from an image bank compiled of magazine clippings, found digital photos, and the recollection of particularly interesting people she observes on the streets of New York. Poised against backgrounds of lavish color and fabric-like pattern, Coulis’ characters often appear out of place in their given environments. Permeated by stillness, a quality at the core of both film still and still life, her figures become pictorial objects fixed for consideration.

For more information: [www.cherryandmartin.com](http://www.cherryandmartin.com)

Catalog— *Seeing Stars: Paintings by Holly Coulis*,  
Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles, CA: 2006



**André Ethier** is both painter and musician. A former member of Toronto's garage rock band *The Deadly Snakes*, he now composes, writes, and performs his own work particularly based on his preference for British ballads. Ethier transposes from music to art the general ambience of mystery and magic as well as the earthy references to the body of folk legends. He relies on old views of the English countryside as a mythological universe populated with fairies, elves, magicians, and ancient barbaric Celts, saying, "I am simply trying to connect with the human imagination that creates these fantasies and legends." The mythological paintings of Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon featuring giants, Cyclops, and fantastic landscapes, serve as pertinent inspiration for Ethier's symbolist emphasis on color and shape. He enjoys bright jewel colors and glistening, scratched-enamel-like surfaces as imaginative solutions for his highly improvisational work.

For more information: [www.derekeller.com](http://www.derekeller.com)



Jeronimo Elespe paints pint-sized images – portraits, landscapes, and interior scenes – some as small as 4” x 4”. Born in Madrid and educated at Yale (MFA), Elespe’s paintings retain a historical connection to the work of Spanish artists such as Goya and Velazquez, especially through the use of background gray, which dominates Elespe’s palette and mood. Though his work reflects an obsession with detail and surface found in Medieval and early Renaissance paintings, it is also solidly autobiographical and contemporary. His intimate portraits of friends and relatives, meticulously rendered on aluminum panels, are painted from memory. Sometimes working on an individual painting over the course of months or even years, Elespe allows each piece the time to develop as representational or abstract. The result has been called “a dreamlike fissure of haunting and ambiguous images built on many (physical and metaphysical) layers and surfaces.”

For more information: [www.johnconnellypresents.com](http://www.johnconnellypresents.com)





MassArt alum **Chris Faust** continues to live and work in Boston. Painting directly from photographs he has taken, Faust draws and edits, changes color and abstracts until he has created a new version of the photograph, something bigger and unto itself. Faust enjoys reworking the stopped moment of the photograph through the medium of paint. This slowed-down, close looking creates an intense interaction with time and memory not otherwise possible. As he says, “I feel that I participate more in the image as I’m painting it than when I first take the picture. It becomes a time loop.” Faust’s work references the realist, figure-in-the-landscape tradition handed down by Hopper, Homer, and Wyeth, and as a New Englander, he feels a commitment to continuing in that tradition. But in contrast with their historical references, the images in ***Figuratively Seeing*** each deny us the opportunity to gaze upon the subject’s face. Confronted with the shiny locks of the back of a head, we can only look ahead of the subject and wonder. The image becomes at once alienating and intimate.

For more information: [www.christopherfaust.net/home.html](http://www.christopherfaust.net/home.html)



Russian born **Vera Iliatova** teaches painting at MassArt in the two-year visiting artist position. She received her MFA from Yale University and currently lives in New York. In her last exhibition, entitled *Any Where Out of The World*, Iliatova referenced the poet Baudelaire and his expressed inability to find satisfaction in any solitary location. Like Baudelaire, Iliatova's characters show a sense of dissatisfied displacement. The visual mood fluctuates with changing seasons and locations alternating from Russia to California to New York, and acting as a film director, Iliatova 'casts' herself as each of several characters contained within one painting. Each piece is like an installment in a to-be-continued series. Combining both fictional and personal narrative, these delicately handled works are ambiguous meditations on mundane disconnect. But collectively, the works might ease Baudelaire's itch to not stay still; grouped together, they softly address the inconclusive moments that their demure, disheveled subjects seem to experience.

For more information: [www.monyarowe.com](http://www.monyarowe.com)

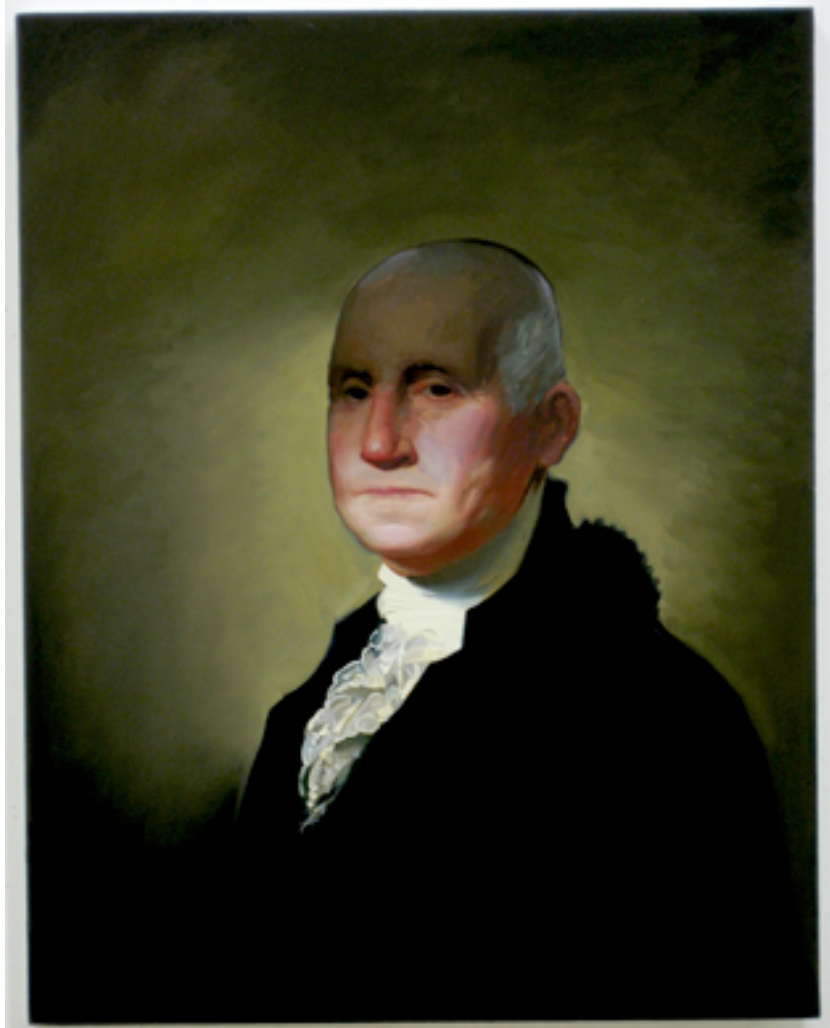


Interested in iconic images and pop-culture narrative, **Keith Mayerson**'s work is about the painfully euphoric process of losing oneself in someone else. He appropriates photographic and film source material, transforming it through careful editing, alteration of scale and proportion, and inventive use of color. Mayerson's painting style features energetic and tactile brushstrokes and a lush, subtly modulated palette. The effect is so sensual and earnest, it is almost as if we are seeing these ubiquitous icons for the first time. Mayerson intends his subjects as allegory – who is this hero really? In the slow medium of oil paint, he seeks answers, learning to know and care for his chosen pop-culture icons over a long period of time. A graduate of University of California, Irvine, Mayerson teaches at NYU.

For more information: [www.derekeller.com](http://www.derekeller.com)

Catalogue— *Keith Mayerson: Heroes*, Gallery Alain  
Noirhomme: Brussels, 2006.





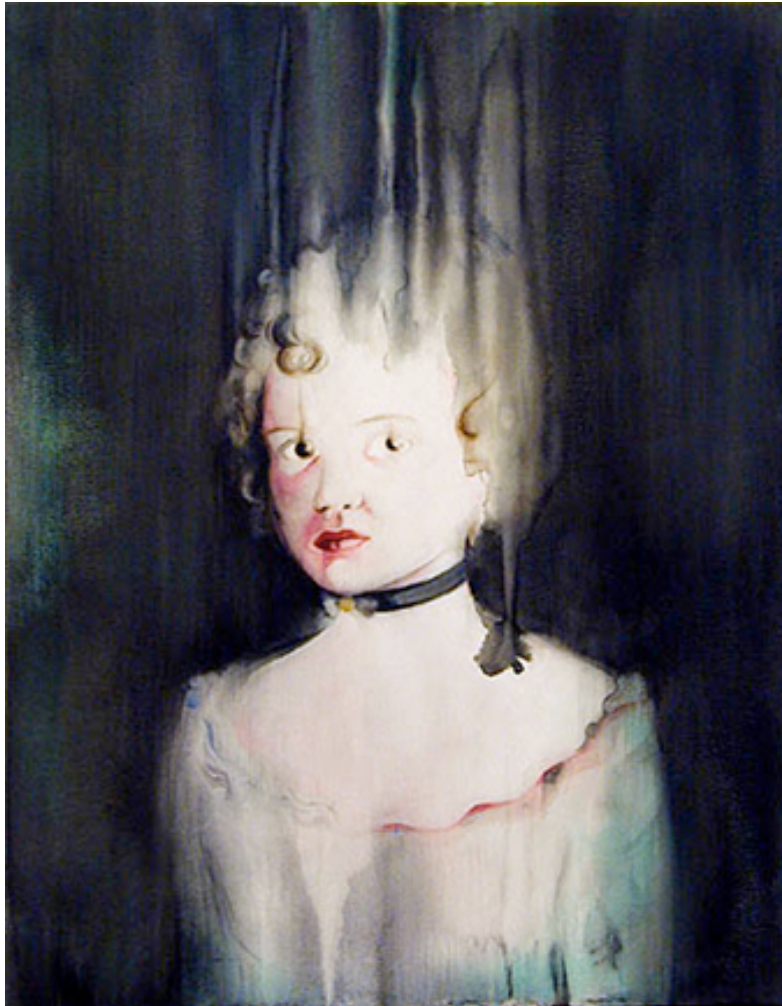
**David Ording** is known for oil paintings that revisit canonical images from Western art history. The paintings presented in ***Figuratively Seeing*** are skillfully executed quotations of famous works of art by Sargent, Velazquez, and Gilbert Stuart. Ording aims at homage to the originals as well as meaningful re-representation. Painted from digital photographs of the originals (which he sometimes takes surreptitiously) or from color plates of some of his favorites, Ording updates the recognizable characters, recreates a whole from a fragment, and re-titles the images to remind the viewer how convoluted the process of picturing other people's pictures can get. Ording, who works in the Fogg Art Museum's Agnes Mongan Center for the Study of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs says, "Most of my painting is involved with museums and with the way art history is taught."

For more information: [www.carrollandsons.net](http://www.carrollandsons.net)



**Bénédicte Peyrat** was born in France and studied at the École des Beaux-Arts de Paris. Her classical compositions are idyllic and allegorical, referencing paintings from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the style of Delacroix, her bold brushwork and vibrant color are both dynamic and romantic. But uniquely, her figures betray a graceful awkwardness. Pushing the figures' edges out toward the picture surface, her works confront the viewer "without perspectival politeness," as one reviewer has noted. Some of Peyrat's paintings are intense and vaguely grotesque individual portraits that grimace and emote. Among these are her unflattering, masculinizing self-portraits. Peyrat's oddball mix of painterly relish and remorseless exposure creates an aesthetic less like Francis Bacon's than it sounds; her work looks at once old masterly and postmodern. Peyrat divides her time between Paris and Karlsruhe, Germany.

For more information: [www.morganlehmangallery.com](http://www.morganlehmangallery.com)



Inspired by art historical imagery, **Bettina Sellmann** creates “see-through versions” of old master paintings. Using watercolor on canvas, she builds up veil-like layers of pigment, leaving a translucency that makes for vulnerable figures with a mysterious inner psychology. As color dissolves, so does the permanence of the portrayed figure, suggesting isolation or decay. Sellmann’s subjects may reference the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but her process recalls the soak-stain technique of modern color field painters. Highly expressive and instinctual, she says, “My strategy is to strictly follow the painting impulse only, uninterrupted by superficial concepts, and bring the painting onto the canvas as immediately and directly as possible.”

For more information: [www.derekeller.com](http://www.derekeller.com)



Honolulu born **Jason Teraoka** paints portraits that capture the dramatic, interstitial moment depicted in classic film noir movies – that neutral, dim space from which the subconscious emerges. Yet his characters are confluences – creations made from impressions of someone he’s seen on the street, old family photographs, things he’s found at swap meets. Painting with acrylic on wet glue, Teraoka moves quickly to create the basic structure and figure, achieving a transparency of flesh and a painterly metallic background from which his subjects emerge. His palette is lush but reserved, reminiscent of low-lit back rooms. The scale is intimate and voyeuristic. Comprised of 88 small-scale paintings, Teraoka’s *Neighbors* series is like a storyboard of not only realistic folk, but also Satan, Frankenstein, the demons and monsters that people the subconscious. At once humorous and compassionate, Teraoka’s *neighbors* include us all, the humble ‘us’, a motley crew.

For more information: [www.tomiokoyamagallery.com](http://www.tomiokoyamagallery.com)