

Madness

SOUL

IN THE

SIX ARTISTS EXPLORE
THEIR MUSES IN A
NEW GROUP SHOW AT
REHS CONTEMPORARY
IN NEW YORK CITY.

BY MICHAEL CLAWSON

A strong case can be made that the most important aspect of an artist's work is not the canvas or the paint, nor is it even the paintbrush itself, but the engine that powers the artist, the drive that inspires them to not only get the brush and put it to canvas, but to let it push them into the oblivion as they embark on their artistic vision. This engine is the artist's muse, the inspiration that guides them, shapes their ideas and hurtles them forward.

The idea of the muse is not a new one, with roots that stretch back to ancient Greece, where the Muses were nine goddesses who embodied the inspiration for the arts, including poetry, history, comedy and astronomy. When Plato wrote about the Muses in his dialogue *Phaedrus* more than 2,300 years ago, he first suggested how a muse can have a persistent shriek, enough to drive someone to the brink. "[It] enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical...But he, who, not being inspired and having no touch of madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks he will get into the temple by the help of art—he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man is nowhere at all when he enters into rivalry with the madman."



1 Hiroshi Furuyoshi, *Ella*, oil on canvas laid on board, 3¼ x 5½"





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The words of Plato, and his prophetic warning, will greet visitors at a new group exhibition opening October 26 at Rehs Contemporary Galleries in New York City. The show, *ARC Select: The Modern Muse*, will feature six artists—Amanda Greive, Randolph Dilla, Linda Adair, David Bowers, Hiroshi Furuyoshi and Michael Van Zeyl—culled from a long list of finalists for the Art Renewal Center's annual salon show. The Rehs show, also held annually, will focus on these six artists as each of them explores the idea of the modern muse.

"I'm quite excited about the roster we've brought together this year," says Lance Rehs, co-director of Rehs Contemporary. "It's one of the more diverse selections we've shown. We have a few international

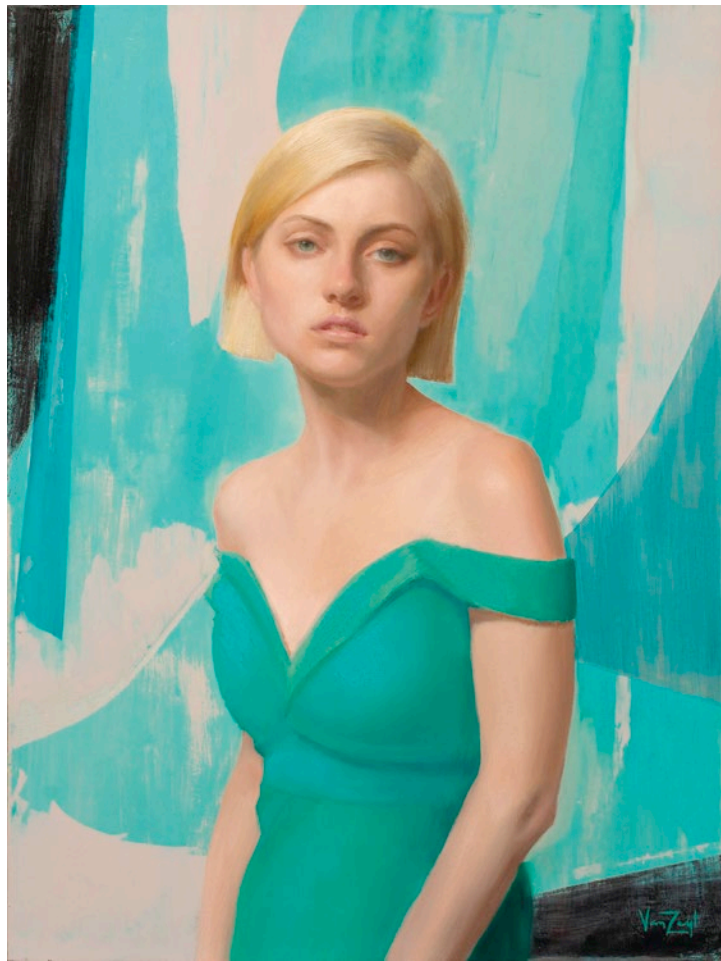
artists, including Hiroshi Furuyoshi, who's from Japan and is very well established there with auction records, and Randolph Dilla, who's from the Philippines. We have well established artists and some emerging artists, as well as some artists in the middle of very successful careers. And their subject matter also shows a broad variety."

Rehs says that the gallery is mostly known for its more traditional work, including artwork from the 19th century, so it seemed fitting to use the muse theme, which itself is a traditional concept rooted in art history. "It was something we just gravitated toward right away," he adds. "And the artists rose to the challenge."

For Florida-based Bowers, his muses were art history itself as he turned to famous

paintings for inspiration, including Edvard Munch's *The Scream* and Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. For this show Bowers takes unique liberties with each painting that make them his own and yet also part of the cultural fabric of art, just identifiable enough to be recognized and yet different enough to make viewers ponder. For *Goddess of Decadence*, Bowers samples loosely from the Caravaggio painting *Bacchus*.

"This series of paintings started out by Lance and Rehs Gallery being intrigued by my painting titled *Preserving America* in which I depicted Grant Woods painting *American Gothic* being wrapped in tinfoil. They thought it would be interesting to take some famous paintings and add my own twist to them," Bowers says.



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"I was asked to do some similar paintings when I was an illustrator, so I've been down this road before. The hard part was selecting the right paintings and what was I going to do with them. I picked *The Scream* because it is so iconic and [in my humble opinion] think it's silly what someone paid for it at auction, so I'm kinda making fun of the person that spent millions for the bragging rights to have it in their possession."

Like Bowers, Dilla is also inspired by other artwork. Where Bowers paints playful variations of the art, Dilla paints the museum galleries the art might hang in. His interior scenes not only show painted works on the walls, but they also emphasize sculptural works on the floor or on pedestals. What makes the work special is how the art appears to be alive in the interior spaces, whether it's women posing amid stone busts or nude figures positioned in front of paintings in gilded frames.

"I like to paint museum interiors and make somehow

a movement or distortions to make a story and meaning to the artworks on display," Dilla says. "Regarding the theme of the exhibition, *The Modern Muse*, for me, 'muse' represents loved ones and the great artworks in museums. Both give me a different kind of inspiration and motivation to create artworks. Muses (loved ones) are usually the source of our energy to work and seeing artworks in museums inspire and challenge us on our skills and talent."

The Rehs show is not only a major exhibition for the Philippine artist, it also represents his first show in the United States. "I am very excited and humbled that I am included in this show especially in a respected gallery," he adds. "Hopefully this will open other opportunities for me."

Furuyoshi will be showing *Ella*, a delicate portrait with a colorful arrangement of flowers in front of his female subject. "I painted a young woman surrounded

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Linda Adair, *Verity*,
oil on panel, 15½ x 23½"

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Michael Van Zeyl,
Powder, oil on aluminum
panel, 24 x 18"



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by flowers...In Japan as well, women are often compared to transient flowers. I always use the model's first name for my picture's title," the artist says. "I am honored to be able to participate in this show. I am Japanese, but I love traditional Western paintings, so I would like to know what kind of evaluation my picture receives in New York, not only with anxiety but also with great interest."

Van Zeyl will be bringing *Sunlight on My Face* and *Powder*, two paintings that share several characteristics, including female subjects and green dresses. "My work in the show is a continuation of my series of portraits and figures with botanicals. Featuring imagery composed with floating flowers as abstract movement, my work could be characterized as imaginative realism. Color palettes are chosen to complement the color of the

flowers, and I often find one of my favorite hues to harmonize with is aqua-blue, so you will find that soothing color through a few of my paintings in the show," the Chicago painter says. "*Powder* is my most recent composition, and I took it into a more graphic abstract design for the background. The painting started as a monochromatic image on an aluminum panel with the thought of only aqua-blue being used for the dress and the background, with the metallic look of the aluminum showing through. As the painting developed, I began adding high-key skin tones and used transparent glazes of aqua-teal to add more dimension and layers of texture to the background."

Greive will be showing a variety of her female figures, many of which she presents with their faces concealed and often interacting with nature in intimate settings.

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David Bowers, *Venus Against the Wind*, oil on Belgian linen, 20 x 18"

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Randall Dilla, *Metamorphose*, oil on canvas, 24 x 30"

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Amanda Greive, *Muscle Memory*, oil on wood panel, 25 x 16"

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David Bowers, *Goddess of Decadence*, oil on linen, 24 x 20"

These vulnerable figures, hidden behind magnolias or buried nude underneath uprooted tulips, hint at a deeper message for the artist.

"The pieces in this body of work consist of images of women in repose under the weight of a floral element or of women with their faces covered with flowers. The primary motivation behind my work is to tease out the nuanced emotions embedded within the human condition and to confront isolation and anxiety born of gender-based stereotypes, specifically those stereotypes that women, or those who identify as women, confront on a daily basis," Greive says. "*Drowning in the Delicate* evolved from my own experiences as a woman, as well as conversations with other women. I derive a great deal of inspiration from hearing the stories my models tell and in researching floral history and symbolism. As I see it, the qualities of one parallel the qualities of the other. Both women and flora can be viewed as delicate and fragile but also strong, persistent and resilient. The floral element present in *Drowning in the Delicate*, as well as my other works, symbolically draws attention to femininity as a source of possible societal, emotional and personal conflict for the figures portrayed. I think it depends on the viewer's own experience as to whether the flowers are taken as an element protective of the woman depicted or as one that is smothering the figure."

Adair also paints mostly female figures, including a number of nude figures in masquerade masks and occasionally holding weapons such as old flintlock pistols or fencing foils. "With this Neo-Baroque, Carnivale and Rococo themed series I hope to transport the viewer into another world, much like the theater and opera transports us into their reality. And through this momentary suspension of reality show the viewer the art of the duel," Adair says. "[I am] inspired by this Oscar Wilde quote, 'Everything in the world is about sex except sex. Sex is about power.' I aim to communicate the dynamic of human intimacy and the power plays involved. This body of work was initially inspired by histories of actual female duels; I then expounded on that idea by imagining these would be set as a re-telling for a theater play or opera. What has typically been regarded as a masculine art, I was fascinated to find the actual recorded events of female duels, some rather famous and spectacular."

La Maupin has one of her duelers reclined nude on a couch against a bright blue wall, while *Performance* features two nude figures, each in masks wielding pistols. In *Theatre of Duelists*, a nude figure with



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almost translucent skin stands menacingly over a rival who has taken a more casual, and less threatening pose on a bed covered in a blue sheet. *Verity* comes from another popular quote. "Inspired by the Oscar Wilde quote, 'Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.' Painting the figure on a bare mattress and having her partially bare as well as opposed to the ornate outer coverings like the bed frame and her mask, I wanted to show the reality of what lies beneath," Adair says. "Lounging as on a therapist's couch, she bares her soul. The model is pure, sincere, an unprotected soul,

like many people who, in my view, if we remove all our masks and protective shields, without exception, are beautiful, graceful, sincere and absolutely wonderful." ●

ARC SELECT: THE MODERN MUSE

When: October 27-November 16, 2018;

October 26, 6-9 p.m., opening reception

Where: Rehs Contemporary Galleries,

5 E. 57th Street, Eighth Floor, New York, NY 10022

Information: (212) 355-5710, www.rehs.com