

POETS *and* ARTISTS

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interview with

Frank Bernarducci

featuring the

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Jenny Morgan

Jeremy Geddes

Michael-Earle Carlton

Eric Stevens

Jon Hul

and more

Jennifer Presant

www.jenniferpresant.com



Born and raised in New York, Jennifer Presant received her B.F.A. from Washington University in St. Louis. She has studied at Lorenzo di Medici in Florence, and taken numerous classes at many of the art schools throughout New York City. After returning to New York, she worked as a graphic designer for years. Her background in design and facility with the computer influences both the composition and content of her work. Bold compositions and flattened shapes get paired with an uncanny realism. Scenes shift seamlessly across the canvas. After deciding to leave the design field for her greater passion, painting, Jennifer received her M.F.A. from the New York Academy of Art. She is the recipient of the O. Alden James Junior Award, from the National Arts Club, the Prince of Whales Fellowship, and was awarded a juror's prize to be the artist in resident in St. Barths for the month of June. Presant has shown in various galleries throughout the country, and her paintings are held in several private collections. Her work has been featured in *American Art Collector*, *New American Paintings*, *Chicago Reader* and *Flavorpill*. Reviews include *The Chicago Sun-Times* and *The Chicago Tribune*. She is currently in two group shows in New York, and *Passing Through*, a solo exhibition of her work is now on view in St. Barths at the Eden Rock Gallery. Presant is represented by Linda Warren Gallery in Chicago and will have a solo show there in December. Jennifer lives and paints in New York City, where she both teaches privately and in the foundation art program at Queensborough Community College.



Sunday News oil on linen 23"x42"



Snowed In oil on linen 23"x42"



A Thin Covering oil on linen 23"x42"

Q&A JENNIFER PRESENT

Do you have a ritual you follow before each new work is started?

I clean up my studio. Often when finishing a painting, my studio becomes piled with papers and books. A clear space and a good cup of coffee or tea help me focus on the new work. I put on NPR or an upbeat piece of music and sit for a bit staring at my new canvas. Sometimes I'll even hang it on the wall and envision it being finished.

What medium have you not used in the past that you may wish to try out?

Since some of my paintings reference installations and video art, I think I'd like to try those mediums one day. Often I paint an invented space with a fictional narrative. It's as if I am documenting an installation that didn't exist. I wonder how my work might change from working first with the actual physical space. Models would be used, along with projections and objects.

How does your family life come

into play with your artistic life?

I do not have a family of my own yet, but I am close to my parents and brother. They have been very supportive of my art career throughout my life. However, the absence of my own family has played a role in my work. Many of my paintings are about the home, the longing for one and the one that you can't live in or go to anymore. The iconic house becomes a metaphor for the transitional stage of life I am in, or have been in for several years.

What will be your signature painting?

I think my signature painting might in fact be one of the first conceptual paintings I did for my graduate thesis project. Projection, Memory, Desire, I feel, at the time, was the culmination of my technical skills and conceptual ideas in one piece. Sometimes one will look back at old work and think, "look how far my work has come!" But sometimes, the opposite is true, and one wonders how to get back to that original idea or

quality! I hope since then I have made work that might have surpassed it in interest or quality, but I cannot always be the best judge of my own paintings.

Explain your process.

I start with sketches from my imagination. Various sketchbooks serve as visual diaries of ideas I have for paintings. In the course of my daily life, I find inspiration from most everything: from dreams, to current events, autobiographical narratives to poetry. If there are figures in the painting, I hire models, take photos and do oil sketches from life. While traveling, I take many photos of idyllic places. I look for images that move me, where the light is particularly beautiful or evocative, when the color washes over everything. These places all have personal significance for me, almost like autobiographical time capsules.

Color is a very important element in my work. I tend to favor cool color schemes, for their dream-like quality, but often pair warm and cool environments as well.



Still Moving oil on linen 23"x42"

“My paintings address the complexity of personal memory, by blurring the lines between recollection, projection and reality. Each painting becomes a psychological landscape or waking dream, reinforcing the fluid relationships between time, memory and place. By merging various locations, the spaces seem familiar yet strange and uninhabitable, consequently questioning the notion of *reality*.”

JENNIFER PRESANT

Sometimes an area of saturated color is juxtaposed against a very monochromatic area for emphasis. When deciding to combine various spaces, the color is often one of the key elements. Either the light is drastically different or both scenes feel illuminated by the same source.

I then create digital compositions in photoshop with my source material and play around in the virtual reality until I find a composition that feels right. I use architectural elements to frame and divide the spaces and line up graphic elements. I search for that fine line between the strange and familiar, plausible enough to engage the viewer but leave an open-ended narrative. At first glance I like the image to feel as if it existed exactly as I painted it.

With photoshop, not only has the content of my paintings changed, my entire process of making art has been affected. The ability to reposition and combine images, colors and filters on the computer, enables me to have the kind of image making freedom that I wouldn't have with just my sketchbook. This process supports an ongoing theme of layered reality in my work.

Once I have finalized a digital composition, I draw the image on the canvas in charcoal and begin the actual painting. Even though I begin each work with a finalized composition in mind, I am constantly surprised by the unexpected turns a painting takes in the process.

How have social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and others

come into play with your art?

I don't think that they directly have an affect on my work, other than to say that the phenomenon of virtual reality is a subject of much of my work. The inundation of imagery in our culture and the technological distractions has distorted our sense of reality, and sense of place. The experience of being "here" or "there" has shifted.

Documentation or sharing of an event has surpassed the actual lived experience.

I also like the instant dialogue one can have with an extended network of artists and friends. Posting work on facebook, in progress or finished is very engaging. Painting can be isolating at times, so the network is really invaluable.



Passing Through oil on linen 9.5"x13.75"

Introspective: *Passing Through*

I started this series while doing a residency in Vermont, during winter, when it snowed every day. It was incredibly beautiful and cold, and I spent a lot of time looking out of windows. I started combining views from outside and inside and merging the two as a metaphor for the transient sense I had about being there. There was a slightly voyeuristic feeling of looking in or out at other spaces and people's lives.

The painting *Passing Through* was created during my recent month-long artist residency in St. Barths. The challenge was to create a body of work during the month for an entire solo show. Inherently, this was a bit daunting. However, I liked the particular challenge of responding to my environment, one in which my immediate impressions would be translated into unmediated visual narratives. I wanted to make paintings that were specific to the island, yet thematically felt like my work. While there I was struck by the streamlined modern design of the architecture and its often-abstracted geometric motifs juxtaposed against the wild natural beauty of the landscape. As a temporary visitor on the island, I felt transient and somewhat voyeuristic looking in, outside the culture of its inhabitants and tourists. My solution was to

create images that feel compressed as if several views collide, eliminating any real space to inhabit, and consequently questioning the notion of "reality." In this painting, I combined an outside view from a villa, with the mountainous landscape behind. The reflection in the window had to tie graphically and coloristically to the background so that the two spaces would seem related. I think in the little time I had, I was happy with how I accomplished making paintings that I liked, that reflected my experience of being there, while fitting into the larger context of my body of work.

JENNIFER PRESENT

