

Fine Art Connoisseur

THE PREMIER MAGAZINE FOR INFORMED COLLECTORS



AARON WESTERBERG (b. 1974) is best known for ethereal paintings of elegant women, posed gracefully among exotic textiles and studio props, seemingly removed from place and time. How he came to tread so surefootedly the trail blazed by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, William Merritt Chase, and John Singer Sargent is a story of personal determination and inspired mentoring.

Having grown up in San Diego an inveterate draftsman and copyist (especially of comic books), Westerberg found little at nearby Palomar College to excite him, except a class in life drawing. Soon he joined the local atelier of Jeffrey R. Watts (b. 1970), where he focused on drawing in hopes of a career in illustration. Westerberg fell for fine art, however, when he saw reproductions of Sargent's paintings, followed rapidly by Dewing, Duveneck, Tarbell, Zorn, Sorolla, Fechin, and other masters of that golden age. Two years on, he enrolled in the California Art Institute near Los Angeles, where he later taught before taking a permanent teaching position at the Los Angeles Academy of Figurative Art. Westerberg says he always learns from his students, and he prizes the mutually supportive community of contemporary realists working in Southern California today.

Although he also paints still lifes, *plein air* landscapes, genre scenes, and portraits, women are Westerberg's focus. "I think they're the most beautiful and elegant subjects," he explains, "and I want to immortalize them in paint. To me, watching women move is visual poetry."

Technically speaking, Westerberg has one foot each in the old and new worlds. He loves to draw live models with charcoal on thin rice paper, and to paint them in transparent sepia tones on stretched linen. For finished paintings, it's oils all the way. "When it's something that has been done in the past, you feel a lineage almost like a classical musician would," he says. "It's sharing the same experience those artists before you had." Yet Westerberg does not always use a live model, and thus may photograph her and compose his next scene using the computer and sketches. Well before he approaches the easel, this allows him to manage and anticipate any issues that might be hindering his vision.

Fortunately, his canvases betray none of a photograph's flatness or harshness. They are, instead, softly edged, richly textured, and slightly mysterious. In our era of visual stridency, these effects are welcome, and we look forward to watching Westerberg evolve in the years ahead. □

Aaron Westerberg (b. 1974)
Solace
2011, Oil on canvas, 31 x 18 in.
Gardner Colby Galleries, Naples

WESTERBERG is represented by Gardner Colby Galleries (Naples, FL), Parke Schaeffer Fine Art (Wayne, PA), and Whistle Pig Galleries (Fredericksburg, TX).