



Inspired Interpretations

Upcoming contemporary artist, Aaron Westerberg, prefers realistic art but in each painting he deliberately leaves areas that are completely abstract, which he wants the viewers to interpret

Young artist, Aaron Westerberg, calls himself a representational artist. Inspired by 19th and 20th century legends such as John Singer Sargent, Velasquez and Rembrandt, he paints in oils. As an upcoming artist, he has already shown his works in galleries and exhibitions across the United States and his best paintings can be found in the homes of well-known and respected collectors, who tell Westerberg that his paintings enrich both their homes and their lives – a compliment that he fully appreciates.

Westerberg prefers to paint in a style that is more towards realism but he maintains that his paintings also have areas that are completely abstract, thus allowing viewers to interpret his works.

His preferred medium is oil. "Oil has the largest number of effects," explains Westerberg. "You can use it thick, thin or somewhere in the middle. Oil paint can look like water-colour, charcoal or acrylic. There are limitless opportunities."

Westerberg particularly admires Sargent – "for his painting style and his guts; he was a portrait painter but he transcended the sitter each time he painted one," says Westerberg, adding that "there are several people who paint or have painted portraits over time, but very few have the same outcome as Sargent or Velasquez. They could paint the soul of the sitter and did it in a technically beautiful and simplistic way. Sargent could say more with one brush stroke than most could say with fifty."

Despite being so hugely influenced by Sargent and other realist-artists, Westerberg only encountered their works by chance, when he was in college and found a local artist teaching traditional drawing. Until then Westerberg had wanted to be an editorial cartoonist: he had been drawing mainly from comic books and cartoons and never considered drawing portraits or real life scenes as a way of making a living.

However, in this extra-curricular class he took, Westerberg discovered the 19th century masters, who he thinks have become his greatest inspiration: "I began seeking out their work in museums and galleries across the country – these masters shaped everything about how I paint today," he

says. Since he discovered them by chance, in a private drawing class, and not as part of school curriculum, Westerberg became all the more determined to learn everything that he could about them and their style. Even today he frequents museums and galleries eager to see art up front, however far he needs to travel in order to do this, and asserts that this is a major source of inspiration for him. "If there is one thing I would like to see changed," he says, "it would be to have more 19th and 20th century representational artists talked about in the schools and universities."

As a full-time artist working from a home studio, Westerberg displays his works regularly in galleries in California and around the USA. He teaches at the Los Angeles Academy of Figurative Art in Los Angeles in California as well, and asserts that being an artist is not just about skill but also about life experiences, which influence the art – therefore sitting in your studio all day and perfecting techniques will not, in Westerberg's view, make you a better artist. Instead, it is being exposed to the works of both legendary and contemporary artists, painting with

other artists and painting from life that leads to artistic growth.

It is not surprising, then, that he spends a good part of his day painting or planning for painting. Of course, it is not always possible to prioritise painting or even to paint everyday: "I have to do the same things that other people do," he reminds us, and these include mundane things such as painting the house or receiving visitors.

Although he has always painted and been drawn to figures, he sold drawings and still life paintings when he first began exhibiting his works in galleries. Now, however, Westerberg primarily paints figures.

Westerberg's painting style involves finishing one area of a painting at a time rather than working in layers: he finds that this kind of work-style keeps the painting fresh and he does not lose his concentration about the overall look of the painting. He usually works on one painting at a time, occasionally putting away a difficult piece of work in order to return to it later, but generally attempting to finish one piece at a time. This allows him to retain his initial inspiration and focus,

especially if the painting is a large one. "It's very easy for me to lose inspiration if I have too many things going on at one time," he confesses.

Once a painting is done, it is coated with Damar varnish until the painting is absolutely dry – and this could take up to three months. Painting itself can take him anywhere from a week to a month depending on the size and complexity of the composition. "I don't like to rush painting," he says, "every brush stroke tells a story and I do not want any hurried or tentative strokes. Just music, everything matters. You buy to the conclusion or focal point at those contributing notes are not played correctly, it takes away from the overall meaning and effect of the piece. In this way I can spend hours or days just on the supporting elements of my paintings."

In terms of a certain central story to his paintings, he says that his positive outlook in life is reflected in his paintings. One of the things that he loves about painting is the fact that he can create something beautiful that will be around long after he is gone.

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