

Artists Making Their Mark: Three to Watch

There is a *lot* of superb art being made these days; this column shines light on a trio of talents.



JEFFREY T. LARSON (b. 1962) is a leading member of a small but talented generation of American artists who have utilized their training in classical realism to picture not the glories of the past, but the simple pleasures of life in our own time.

Larson grew up in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, where he spent the early 1980s attending the pioneering *atelier* founded by Richard Lack (b. 1928). He excelled in the Old Master and impressionist techniques transmitted there, topping them off with anatomical studies at the University of Minnesota and extensive sketching in European and American museums. Rather than settling in a Europhile metropolis, Larson, his wife, and three children now occupy a former school in rural Maple, Wisconsin, five miles from Lake Superior and a 40-minute drive southeast of Duluth, Minnesota.

Larson's reverence for the quotidian is visible throughout his oeuvre. Painted outdoors during Wisconsin's cherished summers, his landscapes present attractive though relatively non-descript views of local scenery. His more remarkable achievements *en plein air* are the brilliantly hued, sunlit scenes of family members and friends splashing in the water, daydreaming, or reading books under blue skies. Somehow

these images of blond children and blooming flowers avoid both sentimentality and nostalgia, partly because the broadly painted figures do not usually gaze back at us, or even at each other.

This well-chosen reserve, coupled with Larson's mastery of how sunlight penetrates and reflects upon hanging laundry and other fabrics, reminds us powerfully of Joaquín Sorolla: Likeable as they are, both artists are clearly as concerned with the compelling arrangement of blocks of color as they are with winning subjects. Indeed, Larson notes that "light expressed through color can beautifully represent heartfelt feelings about God," hardly something we hear in Chelsea much, though possibly a given in turn-of-the-century Madrid.

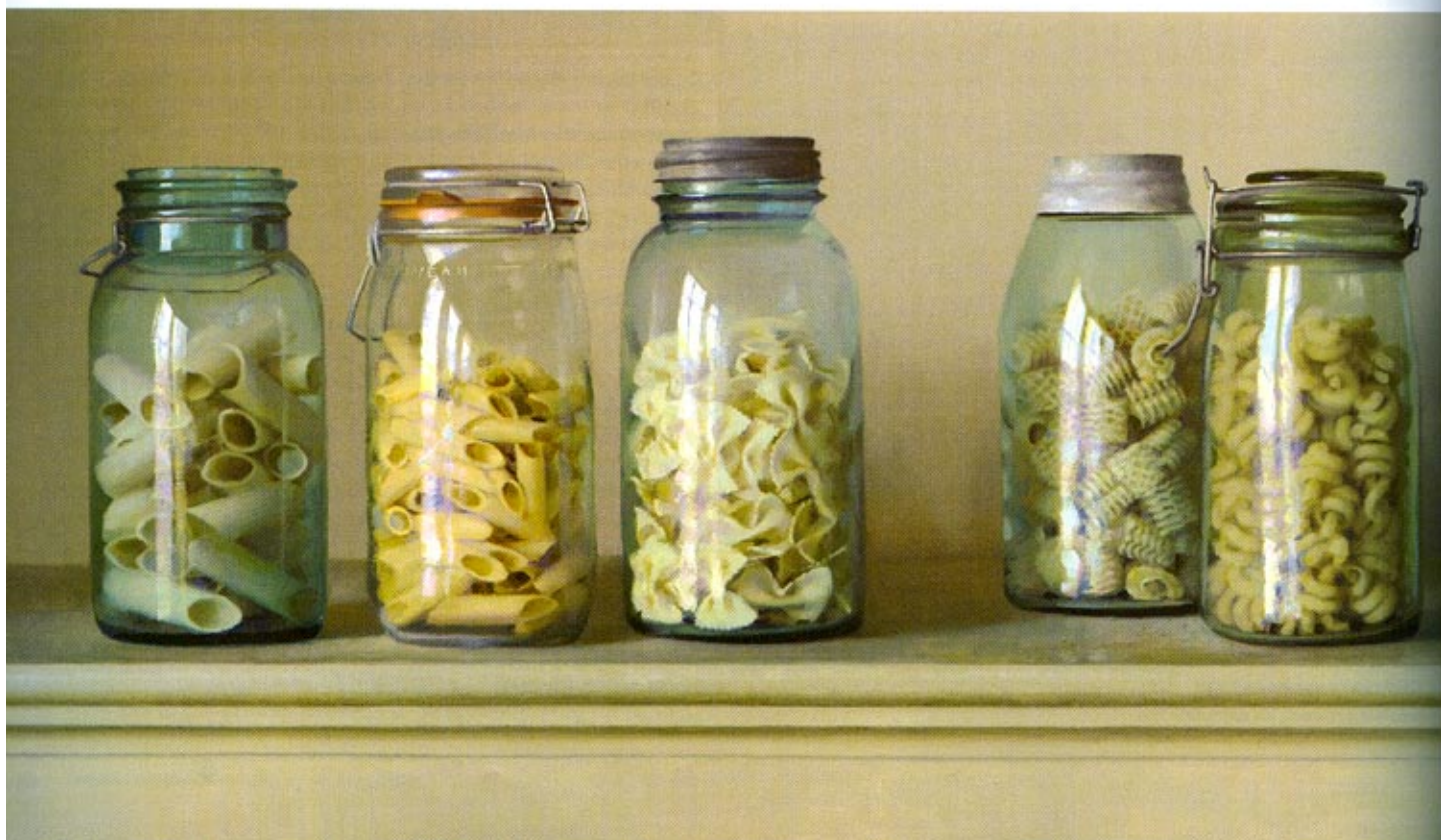
By contrast, the still lifes of ordinary objects painted during Wisconsin's long winters feature a cool palette and exquisitely drawn details that Larson does not slow down to capture outdoors. Indoors or

JEFFREY T. LARSON (b. 1962)

JARS OF PASTA

2008, OIL ON CANVAS, 16 x 30 IN.

COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST



New York is 1990
New York is 1990
2007. In 2009, 12 x 16 in.
Courtesy of the artist

out, Larson conceives a scene, poses his models or props, and draws a thumbnail sketch in pencil to arrive at the best composition, referring to it later at the easel. Nothing, then, is accidental — surely a by-product of Larson's meticulous training.

Working up to ten hours per day, Larson creates enough art to have presented more than a dozen temporary exhibitions at the upscale Galleria mall in the Twin Cities suburb of Edina. His next solo show is set for July 26-31 at Tree's Place in Orleans, Massachusetts (Cape Cod). He is also represented by Eleanor Ettinger Gallery in New York City.

KATHY BUST In 1990 makes paintings that appear — at first — more abstract than those usually featured in *Five for Commerce*. Look again, and we begin to discern the water, mist, shores, fields, and hills that transition gently into the ethereal skies that dominate her images.

Bust's fascination with nature is lifelong, as she grew up on a flower farm in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where her father taught her to camp and fish. It was her mother who encouraged her to paint and earn a BFA at the Kendall School of Design in nearby Grand Rapids. It took another 12 years, however, for Bust to pursue advanced studies at the Vermont Studio Center and New York Academy of Art, though she had been painting the whole time.

Since graduating, she has maintained her residence in Manhattan, but now paints primarily in a studio at Ocean Grove, New Jersey. There, by the Atlantic Ocean, the sky is ever-changing, and Bust admits "there is nothing I love to do more than watch what nature does minute by minute." Though we cannot automatically differentiate land waves in her scenes, Bust notes pieces for their origins (e.g., *Forney, Virginia*), or the concepts on her mind as she works (*Transcending Day Break*).

Whether she is sketching in watercolors and pencil outdoors, or painting in oils indoors, Bust works visual drama with forms that could be storms, waves, winds, or spreading clouds. "When I see a landscape," she notes, "I'm always trying to look beyond the structures into something more inward, more elemental." Not surprisingly, a favorite location is another New Jerseyan, George Inness (1825-1894), whose landscape painter beliefs in the spirituality of nature informed his atmospheric, and mysterious, study of light's effects on color.

Complementing this are Bust's representational methods of handling paint, which she mixes generously with medium. This material is then applied in various strokes with brushes (both ends), sticks, eggs,

or Bust's own hands — whatever seems most appropriate. Although the resulting effect often speed and happenstance, her images are actually built up carefully in layers, and the positioning of vibrant colors near muted ones occurs only after close consideration. Bust's admiration of the thick, expressive surfaces of Chaim Soutine (1893-1943) makes perfect sense in this regard.

Bust's canvases range in length from 7 feet to 6 inches, though all scales pose challenges. "In the large works, it's preserving spontaneity and coherence. With the small ones, it's capturing the energy without confining it." Again and again, Bust makes it work, and in our era of growing concern about environmental fragility, her painted tales to nature are especially timely and welcome.

Bust is represented by Diana Ferrone Gallery (Laguna Beach, CA); Gallery Suzanne (Lanada, CA); Larsson Fine Art (Boston); Niki Gallery (New York City); Sage Stone Gallery (Charlottesville, VA); Scott Frederick Gallery (Allentown, PA); and Water Street Gallery (Douglas, MI).