



*encountering
the figure*

*A portrait
of five women
painters*



Isabel Deaver

Poppy Dully

Nancy Gillespie

Gail Simmons

Sue Svoboda

Dedication:

This book is dedicated to everyone involved in this project, you know who you are. You are appreciated and loved, with sincere gratitude, *the artists*.

Thanks

Sincere thanks go out to all of the artist models who have taken time out of their precious and busy lives to sit for us in the studio. *We wish you all the best!*

Credits

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Gail Simmon's Artwork Giclées : Nance Paternoster

Design and Layout: Nancy Gillespie

Best studio dog: Charlie Gillespie – Woof



Five women come together to present a body of work celebrating each individual's encounters with figurative painting.

Childhood influences, visits to art museums, art classes at various stages, formal training in art school — history, anatomy, studio time, the practice of putting brush to canvas in weekly sessions of direct painting with male or female models. These are the building blocks. Each one of us is unique in her own right, yet married to the idea of pursuing and celebrating the human form — portraiture, the figure en plein air, the clothed figure or the nude.

There is a breadth and depth of experience within our group, stylistic differences, years of determination to continue painting together with studio models, and most importantly five unique perspectives and personalities that enliven the world of the blank canvas with oils, acrylics and watercolors through direct figure painting.

Richard Schmidt defines Direct Painting (*Working from Life*) this way: "Direct painting is the most interactive form of representational painting, because the subject and its characteristics, the painting environment, and you, act together. You are not a casual observer using a preexistent method to record something."

In essence, as we begin to paint, the curtain pulls back, the model sits still, the show begins, we act with our tools as in a dance or song or dialogue until the model breaks their countenance and the session is over. We usually paint from 2-3 hours, inside or outside. Very often we paint to music or paint a musician. The models are very much a part of this experience and we want to honor them as well.

Each artist has chosen to exhibit figurative paintings done in this manner.

Isabel Deaver



Despite my best intentions, I always seem to be hurrying to Nance's studio on painting day. A quick check of my materials usually confirms that I have everything I need: paint tubes, brushes, charcoal, paper, palette, easel, water container, paper towels, palette scraper and money for the model. All of this is carried from the driveway through a gate over a beautiful winding path towards the detached studio. Once inside, after a usually boisterous greeting from Charlie, the resident studio dog and occasional canine model, the focused unpacking and setup begins. Shortly, the model settles into the pose and I begin to study the scene before my eyes. Questions float through my mind about what to include and what paint colors to use. A quick charcoal drawing on paper is then transposed to the canvas and I begin to paint. The model is still and we painters in the room mark our canvases. A decision is required with each paint laden stroke of the brush. A sound track plays, compiled by Scott, Nance's musically talented husband. We talk

only at brief breaks. The three hours are devoted to rendering some semblance of the reality in front of us. Otherwise the room is music filled, and each of us in our own rhythm move our gaze and hand down to the palette and up to the canvas. Three hours slip by, the moments of concentrated activity accumulating. The model then comes out of pose for the last time. I take a deep breathe and feel gratitude.

When I finish a painting it becomes reality - a captive moment in time interpreted by me. The end result is a combination of my inner process coupled with my visual connection with the figure, my canvas, my squeezed out paints and my brush stroke. It's almost like channeling an electric current - a fun process and a worthy ride!

Repose, Acrylic on Canvas, 16" x 20"





The Dapper Man, Acrylic on Canvas, 18" x 24"



The Poet, Acrylic on Canvas, 18"x 24"

Poppy Dully



*F*or years, I have met with other artists in my studio, their studios or gardens to work from artists' models. Friendships are formed with the models, as we share in their lives and they observe our development as artists. Working from life informs and strengthens my painting process.

On good days, the paint seems to flow onto the canvas or board as if I am a messenger. I work fast, thinking and not thinking, looking at the totality of the painting, the ground and the figure. On other days, when I struggle with composition and values, I try new approaches, setting challenges to push me. When a painting session comes to an end and I have a few minutes to make changes or adjustments, questions circle through my head: Have I captured the feeling? Are there errors in the figure that need correcting? Do I have enough information to move forward? Is the painting finished? If the painting hasn't come together, will it be the foundation for a new one? Will I let the painting tell me what comes next?

There is a similar process in printing monotypes and creating my artist's books. I work with found imagery from newspapers, films, or my sketches. I use pages of old books to choreograph stories and in constructing new, unique books, I am retelling moments in people's lives. Through the media of ink and paper or pigment and support, I am sharing my observations and hopefully creating connections with the viewer.

Painting engages me in the world. It gives me a focus, a discipline, and a voice. Through painting, monotypes, and artist's books, I create something entirely new, reinvent something old, and stimulate my curiosities.

Jennifer in red dress, 2011, 24" x 18", acrylic on canvas





Kai with friend, 2013, 15" x 15", oil on board

Annalise and sentry, 2015, 28" x 22", oil on canvas



Nancy Gillespie



So, what exactly does “*Encountering the Figure*” mean? It is a combination of relationship, viewpoint, and attitude. The artwork itself is the result, but is by no means the most important element. Encountering the figure is an amazing & humbling experience, very hard to describe, but let me try.

Relationship. i try to understand both the model’s needs and mine as the artist. The relationship that we create together drives the feeling and intensity of the each session. In addition to the model, i depend on relationships with my fellow artists in the studio. We work closely, in a fascinating blend of encouragement, admiration and struggle. Magic happens when the relationships are strong.

Viewpoint. i see the model with my own unique sense of depth perception (try looking through my glasses sometime!). My physical position, angle relative to the model, completely changes how i approach the canvas, as portraiture is the focal point of my painting. With

my viewpoint set, i am ready to translate the illusion i see into the painting that you will see. Understand, painting from life is not photography – the viewpoint is not truly fixed, the artist must create a new viewpoint in the painting that combines reality and imagination.

Attitude. i know the art process takes time, patience and perhaps most importantly perseverance – a steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. As i attempt to embrace ambiguity, i understand the fragile nature of artists and art. i must be focused and attuned to my creative spirit and energy, and follow their lead.

Each day of painting is different, but in the end i get an immense joy from the process and all that goes into it. **Sharing** is the final step, and i am grateful for this opportunity to do so. ❀

Red Lady, 16" by 20", oil on board





Red Man, 16" by 20", oil on canvas

Nude, 16" by 20", oil on canvas



Gail Simmons



Why paint a portrait in 2015 when anyone can take a “selfie” with their iphone or ipad? Can you truly capture someone’s essence instantaneously? If the act of taking a photograph has become gratuitous, then the photograph as an object loses acclaim. The eye of the viewer is lost, and thus, intimacy. As Vivian Maier, the nanny lived, so lives the painter, in virtual obscurity, but with passion and hope knowing the world of expression is there to explore.

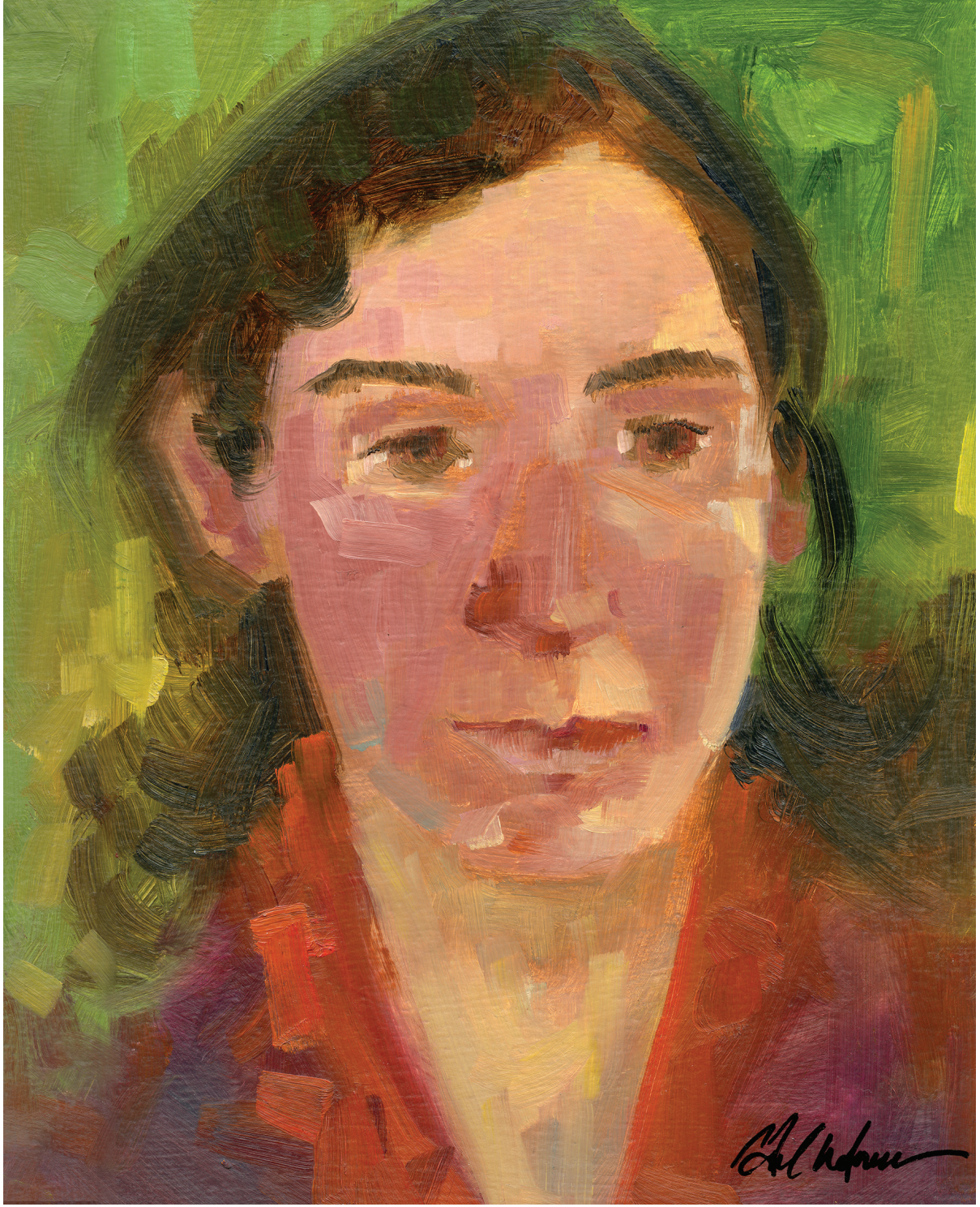
To pick up a brush, to mash color into color, to face the object of desire and humility, challenging oneself to what seems like the impossible task is to dwell in a singular moment. There are those who have come before you – Picasso, Matisse, Bacon, O’Keeffe, and Neel. There is you strolling up to the Gillespie studio with a dolly load of sloshing medium, paints, palette, rags, canvas to the warm welcome of a joyful barking black Lab. No words are uttered as the model slips into a trance. Soon the model tires of holding the chosen pose, 10, 20, 30 even

40 minutes, straining to keep eyes locked open. Break time! Tea, nuts, chocolate, chatter, and confessions. Brushes up, brushes down. Three rounds – measuring, blending, squinting, re-framing, and wiping out. Centered. Awake. Five sets of eyes transfixed, five hands translating the mind’s eye uniquely from model to canvas and back again. Brushes down, finally, and cleaning dabs of color attached to clothes, brushes and fingers. Voilà.

On good days, a painting coalesces. Most days, the practice proves the struggle is worth the effort. To see each portrait realized from a different angle, in a different size, by a different hand, is extraordinary.

Painting is a lasting illusion that I embrace like a sweet kiss.

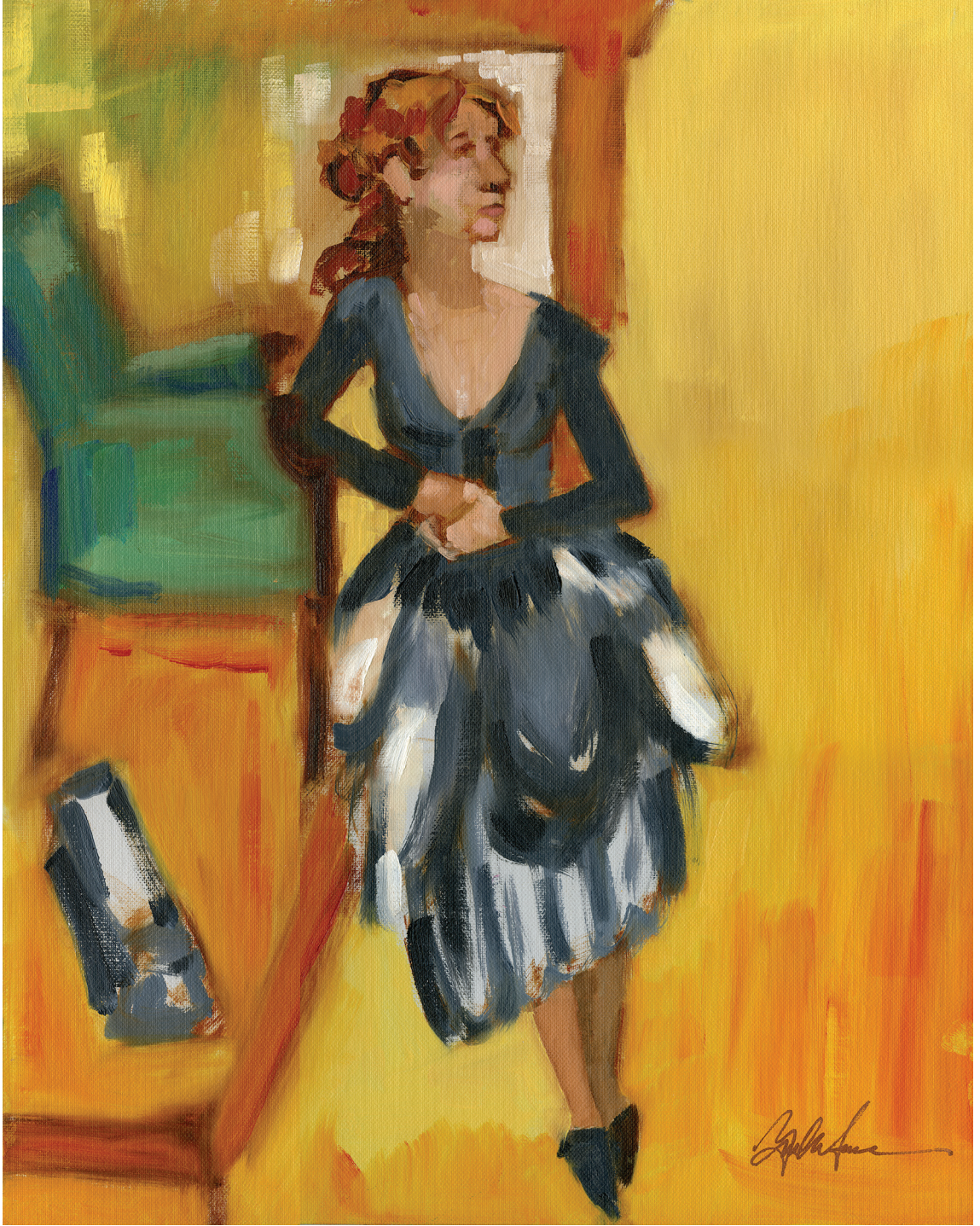
Jamie, Oil on board, 10 x 12"





Blue Buddha, Oil on canvas, 13 x18"

On Her Toes, Oil on board, 16 x 20"



Sue Svoboda



*T*here must be some divine intersection between doing what feels right and good and doing what connects us to others in a meaningful way. Art has allowed me to glimpse this--somehow to feel in step, in synchrony with others. But I wonder, what allows for strong individuality while also affirming our connection to each other and our place in the world?

Underneath it all is a need to communicate and a drive to express something larger than myself. My friend, Melissa, once told me that the 'one true thing' worthy of capturing in a piece of art may not be what you intended at the start and it may not look right when compared to other works you admire, but in the context of that painting, it is the place from which you must work.

For me, creating art presents an opportunity to get below the surface, to understand at deep levels. My painting and sculpture are done from life rather quickly, mostly in

one setting. To some, they may be studies, but to my sensibility, the ones I choose to display are finished works.

I see each piece as an exercise in problem solving, both personally and technically. I try to stay patient, flexible and responsive to the interaction, but often struggle with the impact of the results. My goal is to stay true to artistic principles, persisting through uncertainty and discomfort more with a sense of curiosity than fear. The finished product won't be what was intended from the outset, possibly an accidental result of what paint can do when applied to a surface. I would like to think my process allows the viewer room to bring some of their issues or understandings into consciousness, a surrogate for larger ideas and feelings.

Woman, 26x20, Oil on yupo





Head Study, 19x20, Oil on canvas

Seated Figure, 24x20, Oil on yupo



