

## Artists Making Their Mark

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



**MARK WILSON MEUNIER** (b. 1949) makes paintings that exude serenity, regardless of whether they happen to depict verdant northeastern landscapes, seashores, architecture, or still life.

Now based in rural central Massachusetts, Meunier was born less than 20 miles away, in South Hadley. When he was a teenager, his family moved to the Washington, D.C., area, so he majored in art at Maryland's Montgomery College and studied oil painting with the distinguished teacher Daniel Mistrik (1928-1997). After returning to Massachusetts, Meunier taught himself to paint in egg tempera so expertly that, by 1978, he had given up oils altogether.

Egg tempera is a fast-drying medium consisting of powdered pigments mixed with a binder of egg yolk. Usually applied slowly to smallish wooden panels, tempera produces a hard, luminous surface that resists chipping; it's no accident that some of the West's oldest known paintings are temperas, which predominated before the advent of (generally less expensive) oils on canvas during the Renaissance. Though he has mastered this difficult technique completely, Meunier has recently begun adding oil glazes on top to create even more saturated color.

Rarely longer than 24 inches, the resulting panels are exquisite windows into other, quieter

Mark Wilson Meunier (b. 1949)

***Blue Canoe***

2007, Egg tempera on panel, 12 x 16 in.  
Collins Galleries, Orleans, MA

worlds. Meunier is particularly adept at capturing the varied scenery of Massachusetts, from lighthouses and white clapboard shacks to winding trails through green woodlands. The jewel-like effect of his paintings is maximized by their frames, which he often makes by hand to complement the paintings' tones.

Meunier is represented by Collins Galleries (Orleans, MA) and Tilting at Windmills Gallery (Manchester Center, VT).

**XIANG ZHANG** (b. 1954) is a Chinese-born painter whose biography reflects a unique combination of Old World technical skill and New World subject matter. After graduating from Beijing's Central Academy of Drama, where he was profoundly influenced by the 19th-century Russian masters whose impressionistic canvases had inspired the Chinese socialist realist school after 1949, Zhang immigrated to the U.S. He earned his M.F.A. from Tulane University in New Orleans, a city that has long welcomed immigrants.

Increasingly interested in the world of cowboys, Zhang opened a new chapter in his life in 2002 by moving to a ranch near Sherman, Texas, a town of 38,000 people located 70 miles north of Dallas. Given that he was born in the Year of the Horse, perhaps it is no surprise that Zhang is completely immersed in the ranching lifestyle. Sometimes as long as 82 inches, his crisply sunlit paintings underscore the symbiotic relationship between cowboys and their horses, an interconnection always accompanied by dynamic movement, and often by narrative drama. Zhang's vocabulary includes riders dressed in denim and leather, huge Texas skies, broad-flanked cowponies with sweat glistening from their sides, and — of course — lots of cattle.

Zhang deftly combines impressionism and realism in the Russian, Soviet, and Chinese traditions, even as he reminds some viewers of the early-20th-century Spanish master Joaquín Sorolla or the European-trained Americans who created the Taos Society of Artists around the same time. The hallmarks shared by these traditions include the strong color and bravura brushwork seen in Zhang's *Longhorns at Palo Duro*, a skilled weaving together of landscape, *plein air*, and figure painting that gradually leads our eye back toward the horizon above a seemingly never-ending arc of cattle.

Zhang is represented by McLarry Fine Art (Santa Fe) and Southwest Art Gallery (Dallas).

**KRISTY GORDON** (b. 1980) is having a good year. This spring she earned her M.F.A. from the New York Academy of Art, and her self-portrait is one of 30 finalists for the \$20,000 Kingston Prize for Canadian Portraiture, a biennial competition to be exhibited at the Art Gallery of Calgary November 20-December 21.

Born in Vancouver, Gordon first earned a diploma in television animation from Algonquin College in Ontario, then a B.F.A. from Toronto's Ontario College of Art and Design. Over the years she has worked as a teaching assistant for such talents as Jeremy Lipking and Yuqi Wang, and now she is based in New York City, the ever-shifting street life of which clearly inspires her.



Xiang Zhang (b. 1954)  
*Longhorns at Palo Duro*  
2013, Oil on canvas, 48 x 80 in.  
Southwest Gallery, Dallas

Steeped in art history, from Northern Renaissance masters like Brueghel to 20th-century ones like Germany's Felix Nussbaum, Gordon has developed a skill in draftsmanship evident not only in her paintings' underlayers, but also in her multi-figure compositions in charcoal on paper. Ranging in size from small to very large (72 inches long), the paintings are usually made in oils on canvas, linen, or shellacked paper.

Gordon is best known for portraits and self-portraits, which often use moody lighting, cool tones, and off-kilter compositions to evoke her own journey of self-discovery and the transformations that occur within other people. Particularly affecting is the recent painting *Nevermore*, which shows a middle-aged woman

Kristy Gordon (b. 1980)  
*Self-Portrait with Batman*  
2012, Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 in.  
Private collection



slumped in a chair, with her mouth open and elbow parked on a table that bears a syringe and liquor bottle.

Gordon says her latest paintings "investigate the sensation of moving through the unknown. They explore the idea of remaining buoyant through transitional periods and often depict creatures that create their own light. They embody the idea that one must create one's own light to stay positive through these in-limbo periods. They celebrate bi-polar opposites such as light and dark, soft and hard edges, the beautiful and the dangerous." These themes are explored in a surprising variety of forms — a frieze of five young people locking arms to endure their *Dark Night of the Soul*, a large drawing of people hurrying along a city street, or the gauntlet of doors that greets people entering an unfashionable apartment building.

More surprising is Gordon's large new painting of a mushroom cloud exploding in a wasteland: "Moments before the explosion," she explains, "one would have seen nothing, but then in a flash, all the potential that was within [this cloud] explodes into fruition.... It came about from a big ol' ending in my own life, and was a recognition that endings bring new beginnings." Also addressing this notion of dangerous potential is an equally new, and equally beautiful, scene of jellyfish glowing faintly underwater.

Gordon is represented by Cube Gallery (Ottawa) and Grenning Gallery (Sag Harbor, Long Island).