

TOP

Art collectors Steven Bennett and Elaine Melotti Schmidt created the first-ever prize for women figurative artists. After 647 entrants, we are pleased to announce the 10 finalists.

The March 2017 issue of *American Art Collector* featured an extensive, multipage article on the Texas home of collectors Steven Bennett and Elaine Melotti Schmidt. The collection—which included many paintings that had appeared on the pages of this magazine—focused on paintings of women by women figurative artists such as Andrea Kowch, Katie O'Hagan, Zoey Frank, Anna Wypych, Suzanne Anan, Candice Bohannon and Pamela Wilson.

This past April, Bennett and Schmidt announced The Bennett Prize for women figurative realist painters. The two decided that the prize would be \$50,000 to fund an exhibition that would then tour the country. The amount stems from the idea that the two wanted to fund an artist in a way that would allow the winner to spend one year entirely focused on creating artwork.

"In our discussions with women artists, we could sense the genuine struggle presented by making a living, raising a family and trying to paint, all at the same time," says Schmidt. "Our worry was that all this juggling, when combined with working in obscurity, might invite some women to quit too soon."

In six months, Bennett and Schmidt saw almost 650 women from 45 different states across the country apply for the prize. In mid-November, the 10 finalists were announced. The finalists are: Dorielle Caimi, Jennifer Campbell, Kira Nam Greene, Mary Henderson, Aneka Ingold, Stefanie Jackson, Daniela Kovačić, Rebecca

Leveille, Jenny Morgan and Carrie Pearce.

The winner, who will be announced in May 2019, will receive \$25,000 annually for two years to allow her to devote the time necessary to mount a solo exhibition of figurative realist paintings, which will open at Muskegon Museum of Art in 2021 and then travel the country.

Bennett and Schmidt also endowed a \$3 million fund at the Pittsburgh Foundation to ensure The Prize will be awarded every two years in perpetuity.

"More people should be seeing the important figurative realist paintings that women are creating," says Bennett. "These painters have much to say at a time when we're struggling to understand human differences, including gender and race."

Bennett and Schmidt have been overwhelmed by the response and the interest in the prize. It just reaffirms for them the need for such an award.

"When we first announced The Prize and the exhibition surrounding it, we knew there was a need for more support for women artists, but we had no way of knowing just where this project might go," says Bennett. "This level of interest has given us the assurance that The Bennett Prize and exhibition can be sustained and grown, helping give voice and support to figurative women painters around the country for years to come."

Look for another in-depth article on the winner of the prize later this year!



DORIELLE CAIMI

Dorielle Caimi (b. 1985) is a Hispanic painter whose family has lived in New Mexico for 15 generations. Her large-scale figurative work highlights the strength and complexity of the female form through a careful and methodical deglamorization of her subjects. In 2010, she completed a BFA in painting (summa cum laude) from Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle.

*YESNOYESNOYESNOYESNOYESNOYESNO...
oil on canvas, 64 x 40" (framed)*



DANIELA KOVAČIĆ

Daniela Kovačić Muzio (b. 1983) is a figurative painter born and raised in the Chilean Patagonia (Punta Arenas) and is currently working in the Chicagoland area. Her work explores different topics around self-identity, largely through the depiction of women and children, and has been exhibited and published internationally. She has a master's degree from the New York Academy of Art and a bachelor's degree from Universidad Finis Terrae, Santiago, Chile. Daniela has received prestigious awards and scholarships such as the Fulbright, Becas Chile, Robert Gamblin Painting Award, NYAA scholarships and the Giverny Residency.

Ani, oil on canvas, 60 x 48" Headshot: Photo by Joerg Metzner.



KIRA NAM GREENE

Kira Nam Greene's work explores female sexuality, desire and control through figure and food still life paintings surrounded by complex patterns. Imbuing the feminist legacies of the Pattern and Decoration Movement with transnational/multicultural motifs, Greene creates colorful paintings that are unique combinations of realism and abstraction, employing diverse media such as oil, acrylic, gouache, watercolor and colored pencil. Combining Pop Art tropes and transnationalism, she also examines the politics of food through the depiction of brand name products and junk food.

Sun with a Beach Ball, oil, acrylic and flashe on linen, 30 x 24"



MARY HENDERSON

Mary Henderson earned her BA in fine arts from Amherst College in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1995, and her MFA in painting from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, 2001. Recent shows include the solo show *Public Views* at Lyons Wier Gallery in New York, as well as group shows at Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum in Arizona, Wilding Cran Gallery in Los Angeles, the Woodmere Museum in Philadelphia and Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, among other venues. She is the recipient of a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship, a PCA SOS grant and has been a resident at the Jentel Foundation in Banner, Wyoming.

Fervent, oil on panel, 20 x 40"



ANEKA INGOLD

Aneka Ingold's artwork consists of ambiguous narratives combining flat color and pattern with realism. She specializes in mixed media techniques, combining drawing and painting processes. As an undergraduate student at Grand Valley State University, Ingold was the recipient of the Alexander Calder Honors Scholarship and the Advanced Visual Arts Scholarship. She received her MFA at Kendall College of Art and Design where she was awarded the Kendall Scholarship of Merit Award in 2011 and in 2013.

Aberration, mixed media on vinyl, 84 x 72"



STEFANIE JACKSON

Stefanie Jackson's paintings draw on her own life experience as well as broader issues of social justice. Her influences span a broad range of styles, including surrealism and African-American literature. One major influence on Jackson's work is Southern blues music and culture. Much of Jackson's work deals with major events in U.S. and African-American history. Her art has responded to the Atlanta race riots, the destruction of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina, issues of public housing in Detroit and New Orleans, and the French colonial history of New Orleans.

Knocks Me Off My Feet, oil on canvas, 48 x 72"





JENNIFER R. A. CAMPBELL

"I am fascinated by storytelling," says Jennifer R.A. Campbell. "Humans have created a complex set of symbols and signs, which fill every aspect of our lives with meaning. We tell ourselves and others stories every day in order to create and manage this meaning, and to interpret the world and our place in it. Human interaction is mediated by the use of symbolic language, to tell stories we must assign meaning to symbols and we must constantly interpret them. In painting, these signs and symbols are uncertain. Without text to stabilize how images are to be interpreted, the meaning is indeterminate and fluid, the image is subject to multiple interpretations. Storytelling is essential to the human experience. In my work, I am interested in the process of storytelling and how this transmission of meaning works."

Red Light Blueviolet, oil on canvas, 20 x 30"



REBECCA LEVEILLE

Breaking out of the prescriptive narrative mode of illustration Rebecca Leveille's relationship to language persists, yet the narrative potentials in her current work are subverted by her determination to create that which is poetic rather than literal. These personally driven explorations delve into sensuality, the female gaze, media imagery and examining collective mythologies and pop culture and its influence on identity from the perspective of a one-time creator of pop culture within mass-market imagery.

Maenads, oil on canvas, 48 x 36"



JENNY MORGAN

Jenny Morgan was born in 1982 in Salt Lake City and holds a BA from the Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design in Lakewood, Colorado, and an MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York. Morgan's work has received critical attention in numerous publications including articles in *Whitewall*, *Hi-Fructose*, *The Village Voice*, *The Denver Post* and the cover feature of *Juxtapoz* in May 2015. She celebrated her first solo museum exhibition, *Skin Deep*, with the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver in 2017.

Break of Dawn, oil on canvas, 30 x 24½ x 2"



CARRIE PEARCE

Carrie Pearce was born in Peoria, Illinois, in 1969. She has been drawing and painting as long as she can remember. Her earliest memories include a Walt Disney light-up table and asking her mom to draw her pictures as she described them to her. Pearce's first major inspiration came from Ann Adams, an artist who drew with a pencil between her teeth. At the age of 6, Pearce was amazed at her ability, and tried to duplicate her drawings with and without a pencil in her teeth. ●

Joy Ride, oil on panel, 40 x 30"

