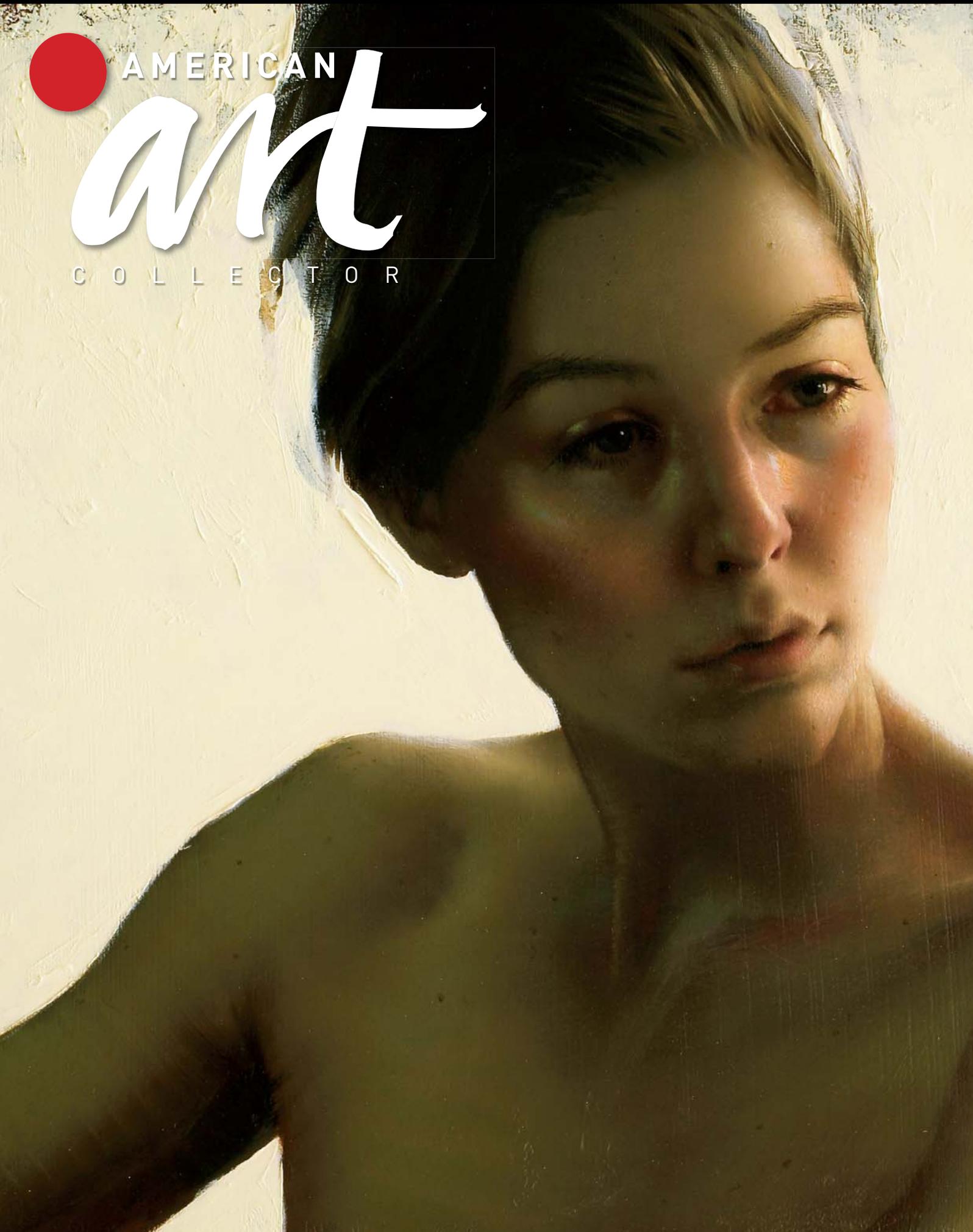




AMERICAN

*art*

COLLECTOR





ROLAND KULLA

# Pedestrian perspectives

After 35 years in social work, Chicago painter Roland Kulla “took the plunge” into the art world. “Someone once told me that when your horse dies, get off,” Kulla says. “And let me tell you, art sure beats social work.”

The self-taught artist started with some oils and then acrylics. Since then he’s ventured into a variety of other mediums, including woodcuts and lithographs. Kulla’s most recent works are acrylic on canvas examinations of New York City bridges—specifically the spans on the East River: Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queensboro and Williamsburg bridges—sometimes from pedestrian viewpoints, perspectives

that may seem foreign on these prominent structures and their famous silhouettes. These new works make up Kulla’s solo show *East River Bridges* at the George Billis Gallery in New York. The show opens May 27.

“I was thinking about the meaning of conceptual art one day and I found myself walking across a bridge and I was marveling at how the light was hitting the bolts and the metal. It was fascinating,” he says of the day he realized he had found a new subject. “I was really drawn to the bridges with steel and cables. Rust could add a whole new complexity and patina.”

Rather than paint the bridges from afar,

“something that’s been done countless times before,” he found new angles that he’d never seen, angles that revealed the bridges’ hidden superstructures and their architectural souls. In *Queensboro*, tan girders crisscross the canvas with patches of deep blue sky amid spans of riveted steel. In *Williamsburg*, utility outmaneuvers design—the entire bridge appears to be made of steel girders in a drab gray. Even the iconic Brooklyn Bridge, in *Brooklyn III*, with its brick towers and identifiable profile, is rendered almost unnoticeable from Kulla’s extreme close-up.

“Most people don’t look up and they don’t pay any attention to what they’re





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standing on. They use bridges functionally, to get from place to place. Standing there looking up you can see these great towers, chunks of structure, and these guy wires...these are views people don't normally see," Kulla says. "I'm attracted to bridges because they're a different kind of engineering, and the ingenuity is amazing."

He jokes that his focus on his bridges is so close that it's hard to tell which way is up in the painting. "I wired one piece so it could be hung from three different ways," he adds.

His process for scouting involves research online, photographing the bridge and, of course, walking across it to discover those interesting new angles. "I'll pick a day with a nice blue sky and strong light, because I want to catch that contrast against the void," Kulla says, adding that back in the studio he mostly focuses on detail. "I've stared at enough bolt patterns that I can paint them without looking at them. I'll start with the raw phase and then the lights and darks, and then everything starts to pop and my image starts to emerge. And that's the best part." ●



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1 *Williamsburg II*, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 60"

2 *Queensboro*, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 45"

3 *Brooklyn III*, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 48"

4 Roland Kulla works on one of his bridge pieces in his Chicago studio.