

Three to Watch: 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.



JENNIFER L. HOFFMAN (b. 1970) was raised in the Pennsylvania German community of Ephrata, which is surrounded by rolling fields dotted with picturesque barns and silos. Quite understandably, she has always loved being outdoors and eagerly drew what she saw there, taking up oil painting at age nine. Unsure of her artistry, she enrolled at the University of Delaware to study English literature, but soon shifted to printmaking and painting, in which she earned a BFA under the tutelage of Stephen Tanis and Robert Straight.

JENNIFER L. HOFFMAN (b. 1970)

ECHO

2009, PASTEL MOUNTED ON PAPER, 12 X 9 IN.

PRIVATE COLLECTION



Four years later, in 1996, Hoffman picked up and moved to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, which offers scenery of a far more rugged and dramatic kind. For a year she worked as studio assistant to the gifted landscapist Scott Christensen, then six years at the superb National Museum of Wildlife Art, where she encountered the achievements of historic masters like Carl Rungius, and contemporary ones such as Bob Kuhn, who passed away in 2007. Hoffman is quick to cite the influence of additional role models, including Ned Jacob, Greg McHuron, Hollis Williford, and Skip Whitcomb.

Now residing in Hoback Junction, at the mouth of the Snake River and Hoback Canyons, Hoffman can often be found outdoors making sketches that become the building blocks of her more significant work in the studio. The results are glowing landscapes in oils and pastels, as well as moody monochromatic drawings in graphite, charcoal, and conté.

Although she also depicts still lifes, animals, and figures, Hoffman's focus is quite firmly on the scenery around her. Yet it is not Wyoming's sweeping "purple mountain majesty," bright yellow aspens, or wildflowers that excite her most. Rather, Hoffman seeks out the softer, more tonal colors found at dusk, in snowy weather, or early spring, imbuing her scenes with a shimmering mistiness that drives our thoughts inward. Every year, she says, "my paintings move further away from documentation and more in the direction of poetry. At least, I hope."

This openness to both the external realities and intimate resonances of unspoiled landscape has helped Hoffman stand out in the crowded field of plein-airists. She is scheduled to show alongside D. Lee at Jackson Hole's Galleries West Fine Art (July 2-18), and a 60-page catalogue of recent works, prefaced by the art blogger Tammy Christel, is now available through blurb.com.

CHRISTOPHER STOTT (b. 1976) is an oil painter, primarily of still lifes. He grew up fascinated with art in Saskatoon, on the Canadian prairie, and remained there to earn his BFA in painting, photography, and art history at the University of Saskatchewan. After graduating in 2003, Stott worked as a photographer in the university's fine art department, but now paints full time in his home studio nearby.

Stott's still lifes might almost be considered portraits because he paints them relatively large, with simple, straight-ahead compositions that emphasize the way pure white light falls upon them, virtually transforming them into icons. We find here the typical props of still life, such as bottles and fruits, but more charged are the 20th-century retro items Stott discovers in antique shops: typewriters, worn luggage, well-loved tricycles, cameras with moving parts, rotary telephones, propeller fans, and alarm clocks from the pre-digital age. Viewers over 35 recognize these objects instantly; whether we know it or not, they elicit subtle responses from us, sometimes fueled by specific memories, sometimes by a vague nostalgia.



CHRISTOPHER STOTT (b. 1976)

7:00, 8:00, 9:00

2009, OIL ON CANVAS, 20 x 40 IN.

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Stott's blanced lighting and settings set in motion a harmony of neutral grey, white, and even silver tones that vibrate all around his colorful subjects, bringing to mind the scenes of Johannes Vermeer. (Those, too, are dead-still, yet the artist's deft orchestration of light, color, and absence of color keeps us looking.) Stott also admires the still life pictures of J.-B.-S. Chardin and Wayne Thiebaud, however, so it will be interesting to watch how his work in this genre evolves in the years ahead.

Stott's first solo show at the Elliott Fouts Gallery in Sacramento will run from June 5 through July 2.

TOMÁŠ HŘIVNÁČ (b. 1959) creates engravings in drypoint, a technique that offers him immediate gratification. He carves directly into a copper plate with a pointed steel instrument, bypassing the acid normally used to "bite" into the metal. (Thus the process is "dry.") Hřivnáč then inks the plate, which is pressed against a moist sheet of paper to produce editions that vary between 10 and 45 impressions. Although he also works in mezzotint, etching, oil, acrylic, and even ceramic, drypoint is his true métier.

Most Hřivnáč prints depict the female nude, though sometimes they are clothed (most recently as flamenco dancers). Either way, it is

clear that he honors and understands both femininity and the female body, considering it from every angle, often in contorted, crouching, or twisting poses. Somehow these images avoid titillation, underscoring instead aspects of womanhood simultaneously primal and beautiful.

This is achieved through an abundance of marks and lines on and around the figure — curving, straight, cross-hatched, sparsely or densely gathered, as the composition requires. Together these strokes convey a sense of movement, a rhythm that animates the figure, creating a veritable static or flickering akin to those grainy, jumpy scenes of early film actresses moving around. Some passages are worked up heavily into dark shadows from which the figure seems to emerge. Understandably, Hřivnáč remains fascinated "by the fact that I can print a line that was just engraved into a flat surface of metal and have it represent a recognizable image replete with dimensions and emotions."

Hřivnáč was born in Prague, but his father, an architect and designer, soon moved the family 12 miles away to the town of Říčany, where the artist still resides. He studied at the Prague Art Academy and worked as a technical draftsman for an architect in the Design Institute for Urban Development. Although he drew at home and exhibited unofficially, Hřivnáč did not possess a certificate from the communist regime allowing him to exhibit formally. He created his first prints in 1985, and when the Iron Curtain finally fell in 1989, he took a job as a night watchman that provided much more time for making art during the day.

Over the years, Hřivnáč has vastly expanded his repertoire of printmaking techniques, with which almost 500 different compositions have been made. A reticent conversationalist, he prefers to communicate through his art, and that is surely a bonus for those who collect beautiful prints. Hřivnáč is represented by Justin Robert Galleries (Santa Fe).

TOMÁŠ HŘIVNÁČ (b. 1959)

ŠVESTKA V CUKRU (SUGAR PLUM)

2004, DRYPOINT ENGRAVING ON PAPER, IMAGE: 3 1/2 x 4 1/2 IN.

JUSTIN ROBERT GALLERIES (SANTA FE)

