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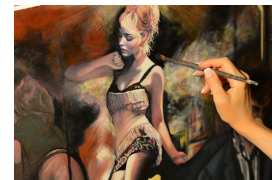
STUART LUKE GATHERER – WHEN REMBRANDT MEETS HOPPER

JULY 27, 2017 · AMERICANNOIRPAINTINGS · 0 COMMENTS



Self-Portrait as a Painter – Oil on Canvas

Stuart Luke Gatherer is one of Scotland's most sought after contemporary artists. With sold out shows from London to New York, this ambitious figurative painter transcends his classical background with an intriguing approach that bridges the old with the new. Evocative of



About The Artist

I am a contemporary artist living and working in Southern California. I'm the creator of "American-Noir" – a modern twist on film noir interpretation. This blog will keep you posted on new work, upcoming projects and exhibition dates. I'll also be sharing news and interviews of fellow artists, musicians, filmmakers and

Caravaggio and Rembrandt, his compositions are cryptic and arcane, the technique spotless. The figures in them appear quintessentially young and affluent, maybe even a little reckless; but perhaps what I enjoy most about Stuart's work is his 'all is not as it seems' approach. Look very carefully at these paintings and you will discover some important missing pieces, which he has intentionally left to the viewer to disentangle; but don't try too hard, as I suspect some of the elements are strategically absent to retain ambiguity. Look closer still, however, and you will correctly identify the artist himself, who like Hitchcock, chooses to make random appearances.



"The Keeper of Kings" by Stuart Luke Gatherer – Oil on Canvas

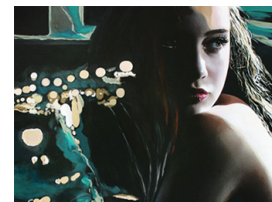
I first discovered Stuart's work at his New York exhibition in 2004, and have been a fan of his ironic satirical humour ever since, as has his long list of high-profile collectors, including Billy Connolly, Dame Judi Dench, and Michelle Pfeiffer, among others. Stuart's works can currently be seen at London's Albemarle Gallery, a long-time personal favourite, also featuring the work of artists Ian Cumberland, Vittorio Gui, and my friend Philip Munoz.

writers, and I welcome the interchange of thoughts and ideas; creativity is a circuit that connects us all.

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"Anatomy Lesson Of The Online Doctor" by Stuart Luke

Gatherer – Oil on Canvas



"The Darkling" – Oil on Canvas

As a figurative painter, it was a pleasure for me to get the chance to chat with Stuart over the holidays, about his life and art. Whilst I was hoping the exchange would demystify his work and process, I've decided some things are best left as they are – inscrutable and thought-provoking. Stuart was once asked that question every artist eventually encounters, "What would you do if not an artist?" to which he replied with the only answer

any artist worth his or her salt should, “I cannot even think of it.”



“Westminster Bridge” – Oil on Canvas

Q: When I first discovered your work, probably 10 years ago, one of the things that struck me most was the element of surprise at play in some of your works, as a means of triggering viewer response. They're very engaging in an almost filmic way; you ask yourself, who are these people and what has just happened here? An obvious narrative subtext runs throughout many of the compositions. What sort of response are you hoping to elicit from the viewer?

A: I don't want my work to be merely literal or illustrative. What I am trying to avoid is a sort of Victorian didactic art; a moralising narrative or an

improving picture. There has to be something more; something that only the unique physical handling of paint can achieve. The idea that the poetry is in the image sublimates the physical act of painting to rendering. Art is not technique. I believe painting is a tightrope between what you want the image to say and what you want the paintwork to say, and believe the best paintings to be execution and inspiration in perfect equilibrium.

As I get older my aesthetic vision has changed whereby I wouldn't be interested in a subject that photography could do better. Although I couldn't go as far as pure painting, whereby the viewer judges the painting on the quality of design (colour, line and form) rather than on the quality of the illusory deception and the message held there in. For me the greatest drawback of abstract painting comes from the fact that it can only elicit one type of response; an aesthetic one. A figurative painting can engage with the viewer on so many different levels, whether it be perceptions, emotions, memories, dreams, nightmares etc. It is this multi-layered connection that fascinates me about painting the human condition. What I look for in a situation is ambiguity with a slight touch of surreality; one that will not automatically come to a logical conclusion. I think my best work has always had a portentous air. The division between the imitative and the suggestive creates a strangeness for the viewer to complete; nothing is obvious, nothing is clear cut. Something is left hanging in the air.

Q: There is a beautiful use of chiaroscuro and a bit of an almost "homage" to some of the Old Masters implicit throughout some of your

paintings. Is there any particular artist from the past who most inspired you?

A: The artists who most inspired me at a formative time were the baroque masters; namely **Rubens**, **Rembrandt** and **Caravaggio**. I suppose it was Rubens's wonderful movement and Caravaggio's lighting. But as a painter concerned with the human condition, the greatest influence on my work has been Rembrandt, who is, in my opinion, the greatest painter of what it is to be human. Degas is an artist and draughtsman I greatly admire and Edward Hopper, with his vision of surreal isolation, is someone I will always return to. But in reality there are just too many artists alive and dead to mention. The trick is to keep on looking.

Q: How do you go about designing your compositions, and are the scenes painted from photographs, or do you use live models? Like Hitchcock, it seems you make random appearances in your paintings now and then; am I correct?

A: Once I have an idea for a subject I jot down several thumbnail sketches. From these I create more sketches in which I work out the details for tone, colour, lighting and models, and then I sketch one final "pose" drawing. At this point I organise models to come and sit for drawings and photographs. I do it this way round as the chosen model has to fit my compositional drawing with regards to height, gender, colouring etc. I will "direct" the models when it comes to the mood and style of the painting, for example; sinister, mournful, ambivalent etc. I don't consider myself a portrait painter, so it is not the case of "he looks good, I'll

design a painting around him” – the composition comes first.

After transferring the design to canvas or panel the photographs will only be used in the initial stages for notes on drawing, light and shade etc. After this the drawings and photos are discarded and the painting takes on a life of its own. What matters is the aesthetic of the painting rather than faithful photographic likeness of a particular model. Like Hitchcock, I do make random appearances in my work, and this is occasionally due to a late addition to the composition. I, like many artists, paint self-portraits to experiment with certain aspects of technique and style. I am convenient; that is all.

Q: There is a polarity in many of your compositions, groups of people ironically bonded together logistically, yet isolated from one another. I notice also humour and possibly even an element of absurdity. It's hard for me to link your work to a studio setting, as there appears to be a real exchange between yourself and the world around you – the presentation of someone who constantly observes. Where do you find your ideas, and what compels you?

A: “Where do you get your inspiration from?” is the hardest question of all for an artist to answer. My ideas come from several different sources; some from research, some by accident but mainly a mixture of the two. Although my work has been likened to a still from a film noir, I rarely watch films or TV and never go to the cinema. I am probably most inspired by museum and gallery trips (both

contemporary and pre-modern) mixed up with sources such as photography, magazines and books. Even certain music can help set a mood for a painting. Also, walking has always helped me to clear my mind of the quotidian and focus on composition. I think the greatest inspiration probably comes from being out and about and seeing how people interact with each other: a stranger's askance stare or a reunion on a street corner can make their way into my work.

Q: Is there something besides your work you feel passionately about?

A: I listen to a lot of classical music, and played the trumpet for 10 years in my youth, although I never saw myself moving into that field professionally. Had I not been a painter I would probably have sought to be either an architect or a carpenter. I feel happiest doing something that combines art and craft; the cerebral and the manual, in equal measure. Outside of painting what I'm happiest doing is hill-walking or mountain trekking.

Q: Many artists are cursed with the belief that we may never be able to reach exactly what we want, a sense of dissatisfaction or wrestling with that unobtainable goal; and many great pieces of art have been created out of this melancholic sublime. Do you believe there is a link between anguish and the creation of art? Is the "suffering artist" a truth, or just a myth?

A: I think if you asked my wife, she would say that 'the suffering artist' idea is alive and well, but I really think you have to see it as a job in which

you'll have good days and bad days. Although the methodical nature of his work might explain **Chuck Close's** quote – "inspiration is for amateurs, the rest of us just turn up for work", I am certainly more in accordance with this than the idea of the tortured artist waiting at the bottom of a glass for the perfect work. That romantic view of the artist has little relevance in this age where a lot of the most-acclaimed contemporary artists are more accomplished businessmen and self publicists that they are artists. That said, I think some artists do suffer, and the isolating nature of the work might make us more prone to depression, anxiety and self-doubt, but I really don't think there is one type of artist. In that way we are just like any other profession.

Q: I know you have shown your work in New York. Any plans for future US exhibits?

A: At the moment I have no plans for a U.S. show, but I will certainly be showing there again at some point in the future. Many of my patrons and supporters are U.S. based so it would be good to make an appearance there again. I think the west coast would be a good place to show next time, giving me another opportunity to explore the wonderful country.

For more on Stuart Luke Gatherer
visit: www.stuartlukegatherer.co.uk www.albemarlegallery.com

*Stuart Luke Gatherer photo by
Hugh Kelly Photography*

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