

Wynne Paquette



JANUARY 7—MARCH 12, 2006



Portraits of Society

Shannon Reynolds



GLENHYRST ART GALLERY OF BRANT

Portraiture

has a long history as a popular subject in visual art. Since the first human picked up an implement to depict their world, the human form became a focus of representation. Portraiture began as a means to establish a connection with the spiritual world and later to preserve the identity of an individual. Having one's portrait painted became an opportunity for affluent citizens and governments to celebrate individuals, their aspirations, societal accomplishments, and cultural traits. As artists began to choose their own subject matter from their own walks of life, beyond commissions, portraiture became a means to document the temperament of society.

The exhibition, *Portraits in Society*, compares and contrasts contemporary approaches to portraiture by Shannon Reynolds and Wynne Paquette with portraits from the Permanent Collection's mid 19th century oil paintings and 20th century works on paper. The viewer will find that all of these artists reflect their own contemporary society through their subject matter, stylistic approaches and figurative compositions.

19th Century

Permanent Collection

Robert Reginald Whale's chief motivation was to depict a likeness of the sitter who commissioned him, inadvertently capturing the austere approach to life that was at the core for these new settlers in the mid-1800's. These solemnly dignified characters reflect the sitters' place in society. Whale painted the prosperous members of his community who became his patrons.

He painted their children and their wives and often exchanged these works for the staples of life for himself and his family.

Robert Reginald Whale was born in a farming village near Altarnun, East Cornwall, England. He was from a family of stonemasons, carvers and decorative painters. He was mostly self-taught, learning the art of portraiture by copying the works of the English romantic painter, Joshua Reynolds. He immigrated to Canada with his family in 1852 and eventually settled in Burford, Ontario where he began working in a 'faux finishing' style that is still traceable to Burford-area farmhouses. In 1864, Whale moved to Church Street, Brantford where he was more readily available for portrait commissions.

As was common, in portraiture, Whale introduced subtle adornments such as spectacles, jewellery, or a rolled paper that reveal traces of information about the sitter and also date the painting. The main focus however is the eyes. The eyes confront the viewer, drawing the attention there perhaps at the expense of the rest of the painting. The glowing, smooth skin is extended to the elderly and enhances the youthfulness of the sitters. When we do look beyond the cherubic faces of the children in the painting, *The McGiverin Children*, one notices a chaotic perspective. We can see this in the disproportion of the male youth's leg, the hands of the child on the left, the lack of volume and the flattening out of her crinolined dress. He then creates a wonderful sculpted sense of depth in her leg that extends to her patent leather shoe. This inconsistency is attributed to either a production line approach to painting by his studio apprentices or Whale's need to complete a work quickly due to monetary familial needs, and to move on to the next commissioned portrait.

20th Century

Permanent Collection

A selection of works from Glenhyrst's permanent collection reveal a popular approach to making art in the 20th century—that of print making. Drypoint, serigraph, woodcut, etching, and lithograph are accompanied by works in graphite and coloured chalk. Printmaking was a way for artists to easily ship their work throughout the country and make it accessible to the people through limited edition, affordable art. For the most part these works were acquired through the 'Graphex' juried exhibitions that were held through the Art Gallery of Brant in the 1970's. These portraits tend to reveal an inner, reflective life rather than just a surface one. We see anguish, contemplation and interaction with their environment. Rather than depicting a specific individual, these artists look to reveal a more universally conceived sense of society and to expose the energy within it.

21st Century

Wynne Paquette and Shannon Reynolds

Like Robert Reginald Whale, Shannon Reynolds and Wynne Paquette achieve a likeness to their models.

Wynne Paquette paints female figures, up-close and drawn from life. Often in foreshortened composition, these large-scale figures look down from above, toward the viewer. Her process includes sketches and photographs of the model and some projection of those images onto the canvas before applying paint.

These women, who dominate the canvas, are created with emotional brush strokes in brilliant fauvist colour. The Fauvists, meaning wild beast, were a group of painters exhibiting in France in the early 1900's who achieved a sense of liberation and experimentation with their bold colours and distortions.

In Paquette's paintings, the viewer enters a world of form and energy. Brilliant colours on nude skin tones create a combination of power and sensuality. These are not passive women. Paquette's defiant women simultaneously expose and challenge themselves to the viewer. They are nude figures that are either searching for their strength or have found it and proclaim it in loud colours and body language. Her figures flush out the canvas in a compositional storm of sculptural form.

Peering into the canvas' surface the viewer sees frantic brush strokes, dripping paint, and scratches that create a tidal pool of activity. The figures are very much a part of their environment trapped within an orchestrated world of colour.

In referring to her models, Paquette states, " It is fascinating to me that there exists in them such anomalies: powerful and dominating in their presence yet genteel in their emotionality: slight and pretty in stature, ferocious in temperament".

These figures look down at the viewer as though superior yet these sad eyed ladies pull inward with a longing to escape. One feels a physical and sexual presence that is at the heart of the paintings.

Wynne Paquette is an artist from Guelph, Ontario. She graduated from Fanshawe College and has been a facilitator at the Guelph School of Art since 2000 at the Open Life drawing classes there. She has been showing her work since 2001 in group and solo exhibitions.

Shannon Reynolds, a Kitchener artist, began an ongoing series of paintings in 2003 entitled, *Suspect Profiles*, that investigate what she refers to as, 'societally imposed roles'. Reynolds solicits volunteers, often from the artistic community, to pose as criminals for her paintings. After a session of photo shoots she paints realistic renditions of these models' 'mug shots' against a measured backdrop that indicate the suspects' height, as in a police line-up. She looks to address subtle forms of discrimination, racial profiling, and fears in general. Reynolds paints on a consistent size of birch panel to enhance the idea of societal structure. The work however is installed in waves, according to the height of the 'suspect', to give a sense of their presence in relation to each other.

In another series, *Dramatis Personae*, acting as artistic director, Reynolds casts characters in the poses of archetypes or a prime example that personifies a strong character trait. Her arbitrary list of characters, tend to be actor personas that are considered essential to a literary plot. Her list of characters includes the Coquette, Dandy, Lusty Women, Sage, Tragic Lovers, Fifth Business, Crone and the Femme Fatale. Volunteer actors/models have been solicited by Reynolds to play the 'cast of characters'.

She allows her models, many of whom are fellow artist friends, a certain interpretive leeway in their costumes, makeup and characterization. Drawing from her background in literature and to dramatize theatrical imagery, she includes literary text that lingers just below the surface of the painting. While the viewer may find the text obscure, in the case of the *Coquette* for instance, she had the idea of Daisy Miller, from the Henry James novel. The character's flouting of social convention led to her label as a flirt and ultimately her death. Reynolds's model, on the other hand, was influenced by the pin-up calendars of the 1940's and '50's. Reynolds liked that interpretation and painted the Coquette as a

character from that era inserting text behind this work that she culled from internet references of flirting tips. The birch panel that she uses is a strong support for the underpainting and repeated rubbing that is a layering of ideas and images. The process itself is as essential as the finished painting.

To bring a unity to the series of work she has placed the figure on a stage with little reference to background but with appropriate props that define the character. Like Robert Whale's last century paintings, the portraits' direct gaze towards the viewer, gives power to the subject.

Both of her parents were illustrators so Reynolds grew up with the idea of art having a narrative relationship. With an educational background in both English and Visual Art from the University of Waterloo, Shannon Reynolds has been exhibiting her work since 2002 and continues in the pursuit of figurative painting.

While each of these artists represented in Portraits of Society have their own agenda, their work consistently reflects the influences of their life and times.

Kathryn Hogg

Curator

2006

List of Works

Wynne Paquette

HRH

Oil on canvas 48 x 72 in.

Lenore

Oil on canvas 48 x 96 in.

Sagacity

Oil on canvas 48 x 96 in.

Bronze Arnora

Oil on canvas 48 x 48 in.

Shannon Reynolds

Suspect Profile Series #1 through to #9

Oil on birch panel 25 x 37 in. each

Dramatis Personae series; *The Dandy, The Crone, The Coquette, The Sage, The Lusty Woman, The Tragic Lovers, Fifth Business, The Femme Fatale*

Oil on birch panel 36 x 64 in. each

Robert Reginald Whale (1805-1887)

(collection of Glenhyrse Art Gallery of Brant)

Portrait of Mrs. Bennett 1847

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Muriel Bennett Pfahler

Portrait of Mr. Bennett 1847

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Muriel Bennett Pfahler

The McGiverin Children n.d

Oil on canvas

Reginald Henwood and dog n.d.

Oil on canvas

Portrait of Annie Digby Henwood n.d.

Oil on canvas

Portrait of Helen Capron c. 1875

Oil on Canvas

List of Works

Works On Paper

(collection of Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant)

David Rifat (b. 1934)

The Silent Scream

1972 Serigraph

James B. Spencer (b. 1940)

Untitled

1971 Acrylic

Michael Poulton (b. 1948)

Two Sisters

n.d.

Drypoint A/P (ed. 40)

Frederick Varley (1881-1969)

Portrait of a Woman

n.d.

Coloured chalk

Gift of Douglas M. Duncan Collection

Eugene Mazzei (b. 1945) *Face*

1975 Etching A/P

Works on Paper

(collection of Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant)




Francis Coutellier (b.1945) *Jaime*
Mon Nez 1973
Lithograph 3/25

Bruno Bobak (b. 1923) *Anxiety*
1967
Woodcut 11/30

Paul Beliveau (b. 1954)
Autoportrait #3
1980
Graphite
Gift of Ascolectric

Robert Couturier (b. 1905)
Hommage a Rodin 1966
Etching 113/120

Jim Westergard (b. 1939)
Puckered Peppers
n.d.
coloured pencil

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PHOTO CREDITS: Cover page: (from top to bottom) Wynne Paquette, <i>Arroz</i> <i>Arroz</i> ; Robert Reginald Whale, <i>The McGiverns Children</i> ; Shannen Reynolds, <i>Suspect #3</i> ; Frederick Vazley, <i>Portrait of A Woman</i>		Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant 20 Ava Road, Brantford, Ontario N3T 5G9 (519) 756-5932 www.glenhyrst.ca Tuesday to Friday 10—5 pm / Weekends 1—5 pm
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