

APRIL 19-APRIL 25, 2006

FREE

mercury
change your temperature

BURNED OUT
Lessons from the
Salve dorm fire

'DOWN LOW'
Do you know
what it means?

**MOLIÈRE
THAN THOU**
2nd Story's
'Misanthrope'

ON BACKGROUND

Luke Randall's paintings tell the whole story





'Listen to the Lion,' 2006, oil on canvas

Even, natural light flows from a window onto Oliver Randall, posing on a stool. The shallow perspective pulls the background forward and threatens to push the boy out of the frame and into the gallery.

Object lessons

An eclectic collection of still-life pieces illuminates the physical environment, a continuing source of fascination for painter Luke Randall.

What is the difference between a *picture* and a *painting*? Several intriguing questions are now on display at the Newport Art Museum in "Backgrounds," a selection of current work by Saunderstown artist Luke Randall.

"Backgrounds" traces the development and recent maturation of the Newport native's highly personal iconography and painterly style. This solo exposition was awarded in recognition of his winning "Best In Show" in the Museum's Annual Juried Exhibition of 2005. I imagine that last year's juror must have seen in Randall's work a depth of meaning and psychological reverberation that distinguishes his *paintings* from mere *pictures*.

Randall's earlier paintings were exercises in color and loose brushwork, strongly reminiscent, in style and subject matter, of Marsden Hartley and Fairfield Porter. There is nothing wrong with this. Every artist (hopefully) learns from other artists. We all have our personal pantheon of influences. The challenge is to integrate our dialogue with our heroes' successes into a vocabulary we can call our own. It was in Randall's "Grumpy Baby" series of several years ago that he began to do just that.

At the heart of Randall's work is an eclectic collection of ornate curios—artistic fetishes and adopted intercessors that aid him in the evocation of longing and desire.

"Grumpy Baby," represented in this show by "Grumpy Baby and Tiger 'Too!," is a very seri-

ous doll that you may think of as one of Randall's first spirit guides into the world of objects and meaning. Many of the curios, gimcracks and gewgaws make repeat and guest appearances, so that we are compelled to follow their progress from painting to painting. Through the objects' reflection, repetition and relationship to one another, meaning is created.

The early tableaux are melancholic, comprised as they are of collections of the flotsam and jetsam of forgotten things. They are, for the most part, remnants

of childhood: Stuffed animals and puppets, interspersed with a chandelier here, a ceramic birdcage there, a ragged ottoman and a geisha doll. This is nostalgic stuff, marinated in the past.



what's up
CYNTHIA FARNELL

Randall's newer paintings maintain an underlying tension while transcending the weight and melancholy

of the earlier work, through a light-suffused palette of peaceful, creamy neutrals, blushes, blues, and greens. In "Lisa Utman Randall," a portrait of the artist's wife, the figure is draped in an exquisitely painted kimono, the patterned blossoms brushed and daubed effortlessly, caressing the body and echoing the copy of the 19th-century Japanese print that serves as the background. She stares directly at us, an individual, rooted firmly within the scene.

A portrait of the artist's son Oliver, "Listen to the Lion," is the most arresting piece in the exhibition. A young boy stands on a stool by a window, which illuminates the scene in an even, natural light. The shallow

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perspective causes the background to rush forward, threatening to push the figure out of the frame and into the gallery.

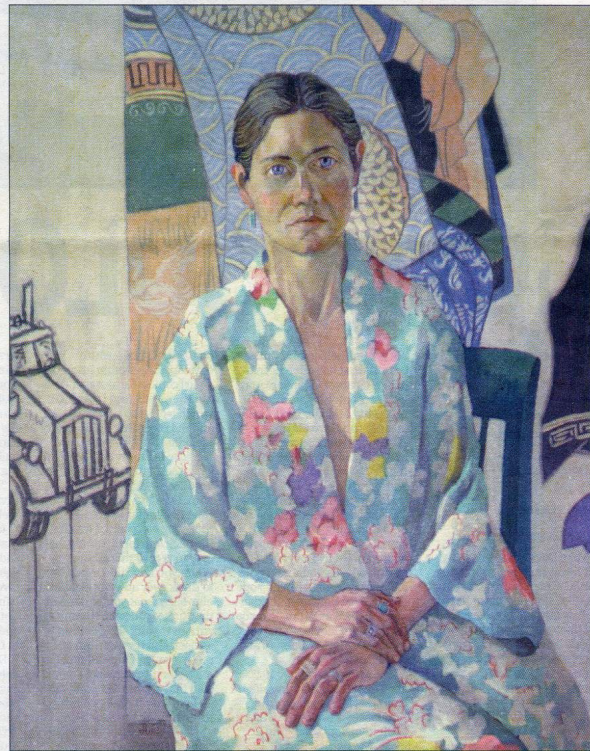
Much art these days is made to be consumed and forgotten in one quick glance. What I enjoy the most about Randall's work is that it invites us to linger and discover new things we have not seen before, and that is the difference between a painting and a picture.

'LUKE RANDALL: BACKGROUNDS'

Through 6-11
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www.newportartmuseum.com

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'Lisa Utman Randall,' 2006, oil on panel

The artist's wife wears an exquisitely painted kimono with details that complement the copy of the 19th-century Japanese print in the background.