

The New Criterion

Dispatch May 02, 2012 12:22 pm

Painting Outside the Box

by James Panero

Watwood and or type unknown

Patricia Watwood, Pandora (2011)

There's a museum's worth of must-see shows now on display on lower Fifth Avenue. Through June 9, the Forbes Gallery features "Patricia Watwood: Myths and Individuals." Watwood is a leading figure in the contemporary classical movement, and this major survey of thirty paintings and drawings from the last twelve years has come to New York from the Saint Louis University Museum of Art. Here are several show highlights. On April 30, Watwood herself came to Forbes to lead a panel discussion on "The Integrity of Craft and the Search for Meaning in contemporary figurative art." Her panelists were Sabin Howard, Peter Trippi, and Nelson Shanks.

Across the street at the Salmagundi Club, Tim Newton, the club's chairman, has helped organize several outstanding shows that fill out three floors of this historic building. The shows are all open to the public and remain on view through May 11.

McGurl_Cairn 30x40 oil-42K

Joseph McGurl, Cairn

In the Main Gallery is the American Masters at SCNY exhibition, a group show of figurative art now in its fifth year. On May 4, the 135 works on display will be sold at a gala event to benefit the club. More here

07_51(1) and or type unknown

Walter Biggs, "Dunkard's Foot Washing Day," Watercolor, 1946

Downstairs past the dining room is "Our Illustrious Heritage: Salmagundi and American Illustration," with several works on loan from the collection of the Society of Illustrators and other donors. Among the highlights are works by Carl Rungius, the celebrated German-born American illustrator of wild nature. (On a visit to the American Museum of Natural History, look for Rungius's expressionistic backdrop to the Alaska Moose Diorama.)

Image not found or type unknown

Upstairs in the Patrons' Gallery is the work of the contemporary artist [Sherrie McGraw](#) ([more here](#)) who is leading a demonstration at the club on Wednesday, May 2. More of her paintings are on view in the American Masters exhibition on the main floor.

ASL for web 400

Image not found or type unknown

Pictured Left: Rudolph Frederick Schablitz (1884-1959), Academic drawing, 1903, charcoal on paper 29 ½ x 20 in.

Pictured Right: Richard Tweedy (1876-1952), Academic drawing, c. 1895, charcoal on paper, 24 ½ x 18 ½ in.

Finally, in the library room next door, is a remarkable show of "[Early Academic Drawings from the Permanent Collection of The Art Students League of New York](#)." Life drawing, based on 20-minute poses, was the building block of classical art education and part of the ASL's core curriculum at its founding in 1875. These examples of student work, some identified, some not, from a hundred years ago, speak to the artistic skill-set once conferred through classically training. They also serve as inspiration to what today's classical painters like Patricia Watwood, in part, hope to revive.

James Panero is the Executive Editor of *The New Criterion*.