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*presents*

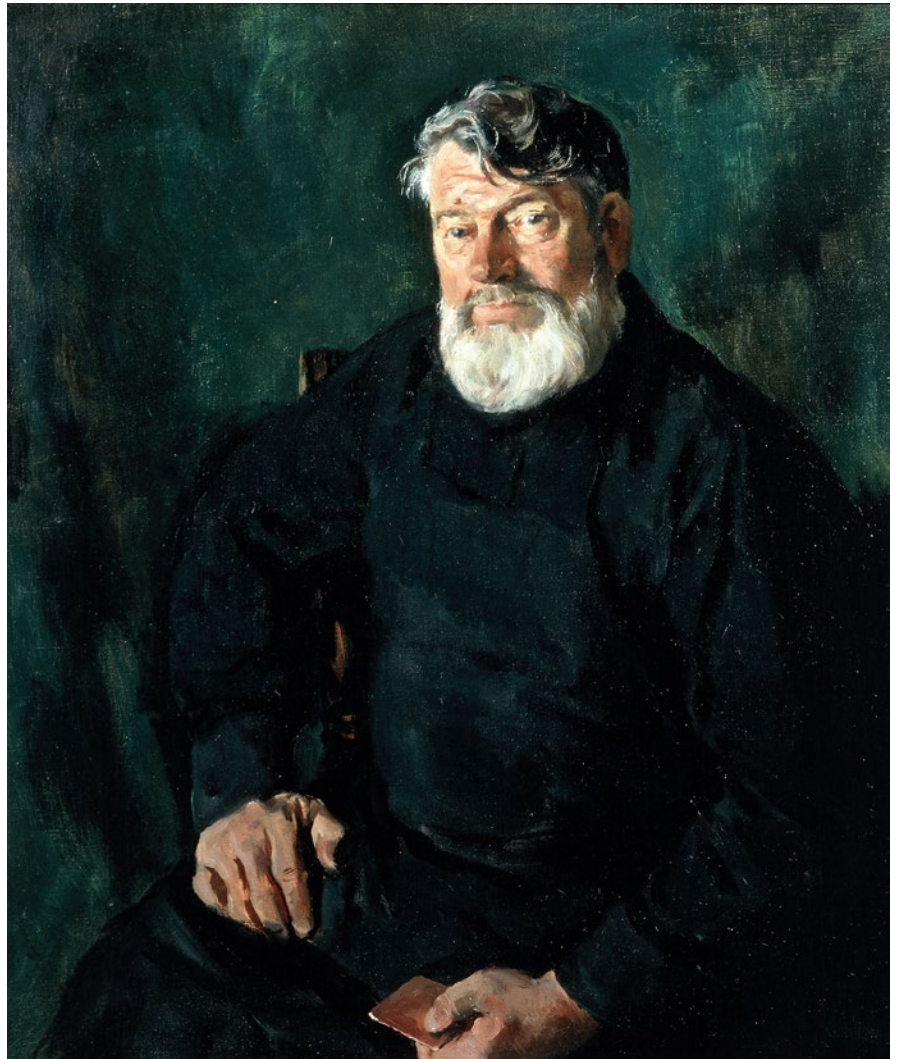
# HUMAN FIGURE PAINTING TUTORIAL

*Painting Figures Like  
the Old Masters and  
Using Figure Paintings  
to Express Your Feelings*

# Painting Like the Old Masters

Portrait artist **Leonid Gervits** takes a stand for the legitimacy of fine draftsmanship and multilayered technique 400 years after Velázquez.

*by Molly Siple*



Leonid Gervits is a portraitist who studied art in the classic tradition at the esteemed St. Petersburg State Academic Institute of Fine Arts, also known as the Repin Institute, in Russia during the 1970s. And yet when there is an artists'-studios tour in Jersey City, New Jersey, where Gervits now lives, he hangs a sign outside his studio that reads "contemporary art." (He also keeps a studio in New York City.) For Gervits, figure painting that was developed centuries ago and is still practiced today deserves to be considered as current and up-to-date as any other approach to art with

more recent origins. To those on the art tour who wander into his studio and are surprised to see his masterful portraits using underpainting and glazing in the tradition of Rembrandt and Rubens, he says, "Look, touch me! Am I not here? I am a 'contemporary artist!'" He has no patience for narrow thinking on what counts as legitimate art—it's comparable to the restrictions once set by the Soviet establishment that only allowed artists to paint one way.

Gervits is a vehement supporter of representational painting. "How can you reduce the image of the face

**Artist Vassily Zvontzov**

1978, oil, 31 x 28. All artwork this article collection the artist unless otherwise indicated.



of a beautiful woman to triangles and squares?” he asks. “What’s wrong with showing actual reality? Losing sight of the value of this does a great disservice to artists who are robbed of the encouragement to make pictures of the world around them.” To critics of representational art who discredit it as “academic” he answers, “Originally there was nothing wrong with so-called ‘academic’ art. Academism started in the 16th century in Bologna, when three artists—two brothers and a cousin, all from a family with the name of Carracci—opened a private teaching academy. They were the first to shape this process of educa-

**Artist Rudolf Yachnin**  
1985, oil, 50 x 42½.

tion based on extensive training in draftsmanship. Academism provided excellent training. Unfortunately, in the 19th century, academic artists became so involved in their craft, their work became overwhelmingly boring. But this problem with academic art was not the fault of the academies but rather the way the artists were showing off their training.” In his own classes, the artist tells students that he is not teaching dogma. “I strongly believe technique can enrich your creative process and improve it,” he says.

Gervits has great respect for the French Impressionists who applied

## GERVITS' MATERIALS

### SURFACE

- oil-primed canvas

### BRUSHES

- bristle brushes in sizes 1, 2, 8, 14, and 20
- sable or synthetic brushes in sizes 0, 2, 6, 10, 14, and 18
- fan brushes from Utrecht in sizes 2 and 4, or from Grumbacher in size 2

### PALETTE

- preferred brands: Schmincke, Sennelier, and Rembrandt
- one-color tonal underpainting: raw umber and Van Dyke brown
- full tonal-scale underpainting: raw umber with white or Naples yellow—or with both

### GLAZING

- Indian yellow, oxide brown, alizarin crimson, cobalt blue, and the Mars pigments—Mars red, Mars orange, and Mars yellow

### MEDIUMS

Gervits mixes his own:

#### STANDARD GLAZING MEDIUM

- stand oil · 1 ounce
- damar varnish · 1 ounce
- pure gum turpentine · 5 ounces
- Old Holland dryer · 15 drops
- American glaze medium
- damar varnish · 9 parts
- turpentine · 9 parts
- stand oil · 4 parts
- Venice turpentine · 2 parts

#### GERVITS' FAVORITE GLAZE MEDIUM

- damar varnish · 4 parts
- sun-thickened linseed oil · 2 parts
- Venice turpentine · 1 part
- turpentine · 4 parts

### OTHER

- medium-soft vine charcoal
- B or 2B pencils

their academic training and drawing skills to new ways of seeing. “The Impressionists were brilliant painters because they were very educated,” he says. “Degas studied Ingres, who valued drawing first and foremost. Ingres was known to say that if there were a sign above his studio door it would say ‘School of Drawing’. But with the coming of Cézanne and the other Post-Impressionists, the academic teaching that emphasizes value as one of the most important parts of a painting was abandoned. After Post-Impressionism, each new phase of art explored only one aspect of great painting. Cézanne tried to open the door to color depiction, but he was not well educated. He was very curious, maybe talented, but a very mediocre draftsman. Others explored only line and spots—for instance Joan Miró—or visual or optical contrasts—like Victor Vasarely—or movement—like the Futurist Giacomo Balla—or geometry—like the Cubists, such as Picasso and Braque. Now, the challenge for the 21st century is to collect all these aspects of painting together again and bring fine art to a new level.”

This is the message Gervits brings to his devoted students at the Art Students League of New York, in Manhattan, where he teaches drawing and oil painting. His classes are an outgrowth of the rigorous training that he received at the Repin Institute, which combined two approaches to making art. His primary instructor in drawing, Alexander Debler, gave little verbal instruction and allowed instinct and feeling to direct his work. He corrected students by making changes directly on their drawings. His other instructor, Alexander Koroliov, was very analytical, emphasizing anatomy and relationship of forms. He had lots to say and would fill the edges of student drawings with instructional, drawn notes and anatomical reminders.

“I teach both approaches,” says Gervits, “because students ask ‘why?’ But Debler would never say why. He would only tell us that an eraser and a piece



**Otis, Gipsy, and Simon  
(Portrait of a Dog Walker)**

2002, oil, 60 x 48.

of rag for smudging are good tools for drawing and would erase our mistakes and have us draw again. I remember being stunned at how high he set the standards for drawing.” According to the school curriculum, the required work time was 35 hours for each head drawing and 50 hours for a portrait with hands. Apparently, Gervits learned his lessons well; he was selected to teach drawing at the Repin Institute during his final year while still a post-graduate student. He subsequently taught art at the Repin Institute for

*“The Impressionists were brilliant painters because they were very educated. Degas studied Ingres, who valued drawing first and foremost.”*

17 years before moving to the United States in 1991. During these years in Russia, Gervits had limited access to museums in Europe to study traditional art because travel for Russians was restricted. But at the same time the Iron Curtain protected the classical tradition from the influence of modernism, then in full play in the West.

Besides classroom time, Gervits takes his students to New York City museums to “interview” Rubens and other so-called Old Masters. “What’s so old about 400 years ago?” he asks. “These artists are still worth our attention. I tell my students, ‘Ask them the questions. Look in the corners of their canvases that are usually less finished and you’ll see the layers of paint they used. You’ll



**Artist's Mother**

2002, oil, 36 x 30. Collection Gervits family.



Gervits advised a student on a work in progress.

## ***Gervits' Process***

1. Gervits begins by painting a 4"-x-6" oil sketch with a soft brush, taking about 20 minutes to decide on the composition, place the outline of the figure and the primary large shadows, and determine the soft and hard edges. He starts by painting the dominant local color of each large shape, which may later be lightened or darkened, or warmed or cooled. Gervits' first concern is fitting the model, the hair, and the rest of the composition comfortably onto the canvas, because such placement can tell the viewer a lot about the personality of the sitter. A faulty composition in the beginning can cause design problems later on.
2. Next, to paint the actual portrait, Gervits follows the time-honored procedure of multilayered, indirect painting, which consists of toning the primed canvas with a color appropriate to the color scheme—such as raw umber—to create a mid-to-light-toned ground, or *imprimatura*.
3. He then draws the figure in charcoal, sketching roughly to place the composition on the surface.
4. After fixing the charcoal with fixative or hair spray, he continues drawing the figure— but now in a dark color with a brush— to create a one-color tonal rendition of the model over the charcoal drawing. As he tells students, switching from charcoal to a brush should feel like a natural transition, with accurate drawing continuing to be the focus.
5. This step is followed by a two-color underpainting in full tonal scale. He sometimes also suggests temperature by adding an additional color to show warm or cool areas in preparation for the final glazing.
6. Finally comes glazing with transparent paints to add warmth, and scumbling with opaque pigment to add cool notes. Gervits advises students to keep glazes thin, to apply darker tones over lighter, and to apply several thin coats rather than one heavy glaze.



see the color of the primer.” One regular destination at The Metropolitan Museum of Art is Rubens’ *The Fox Hunt*.

Toward the bottom of this painting, where Rubens painted some foxes and dogs, the priming, drawing, underpainting, and glazing are clearly visible.

Gervits considers portraiture the pinnacle of fine art. As he says, “Portraiture doesn’t just challenge your ability as an artist but also your ability to empathize with another human being.” He also tells his students that the task of the portraitist is to look for the

**Maryanne**

2006, oil, 20 x 16.  
Collection Portraits  
South, Raleigh,  
North Carolina.

beauty in the character of the sitter, something he believes is always there just waiting to be seen. “Some people think that human beings are ugly facts of nature, but I can see a lot of good in people. I believe in the importance of portraying this beauty. Beauty is a fact of life. This is my aesthetic point of view; it may be old-fashioned, but it is true for me.”

If portraiture of an individual is high art, a portrait that captures the national character of a people tops even this, according to the artist. “You see such faces in Velázquez’s paintings,”

*“We live in a world lit by the sun, so light is the absolute dominant factor in what we see. It travels through and around shapes and changes color. Only the unity of value and color can make a painting successful.”*

Gervits says, “but I also see people with these same faces every day on the streets of Jersey City. They are the Hispanics who emigrated from Puerto Rico, Barbados, and the other Caribbean islands and whose families originated in Spain.” He says he will never forget the day in Madrid when he had just left the Prado Museum with one of his students and saw such a face. “We had been looking at Velázquez’s portrait of King Philip IV of Spain and there in the café where we were eating lunch, at the very next table, sat a woman, not a man, with virtually the same face. I almost fell off my chair! There was the same construction of the face, 400 years later.”

Drawing underlies Gervits’ process of portrait painting from start to finish. As he advises, “Don’t tell yourself, ‘My drawing is excellent so now I’ll paint. Keep thinking about shape and proportion, even though you have a brush in your hand.’” And he adds, “Every time you start working on your painting-in-progress, check the drawing and keep comparing it with what you see in the model.”

Even though Gervits demands excellent draftsmanship, he is not an advocate of exact measuring. If a portrait looks like the sitter, if it gives

the right impression, it is enough. He is not in favor of spontaneity just for the sake of self-expression or design. Asked if he adjusts shapes and lines for the sake of composition he simply answers no. "I trust nature," he says. "Nature is always smarter than the artist. I don't have as much of an ego as some contemporary artists who take artistic license. I just know how to look for something in the face of the person I am painting."

Gervits also lectures about *valeur*, the term used in the French academy to refer to accurate value combined with accurate color. "Velázquez was a top master of *valeur*," Gervits tells his students. "The tone is easy to judge, but not when combined with color. We live in a world lit by the sun, so light is the absolute dominant factor in what we see. It travels through and around shapes and changes color. Only the unity of value and color can make a painting successful."

Careful observation of the sitter also includes spending a day or two with that person, a practice, as Gervits says, that the great Russian painter Serov also followed. "Portraiture involves two people, the one painting and the one sitting," the artist points out. When the artist was commissioned to paint a movie director in Russia, he first made



ABOVE

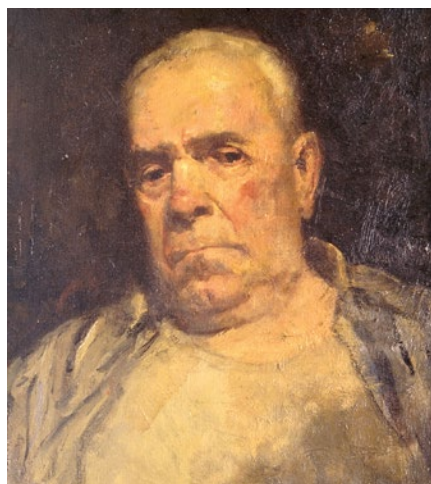
**Portrait of Vladimir Gervits  
(Artist's Father)**

1997, oil, 20 x 16. Collection Gervits family.

LEFT

**My Grandpa**

1975, oil, 16 x 14. Collection Gervits family.



sure to spend time at the film studio watching him work, looking for typical gestures and facial expressions. He points out the great responsibility of a portraitist. "Your finished portrait will show the viewer what you considered most important in that person, what will be remembered of them 100 years from now." In his own portraits, Gervits tells his sitters' personal histories with compassion and respect. ■

*Molly Siple frequently writes about art from her hometown of Los Angeles and is an artist-member of the California Art Club.*

### **The Substitute Model—Joe Ross**

2005, gouache, charcoal, and pastel, 17 x 24. All artwork  
in this article collection the artist unless otherwise indicated.



# Using Faces and Figures to Express Your Feelings

For 35 years I have painted faces as a way of commenting on the political, social, and personal situations that impact humans. Here are some specific ways you might use faces, lines, textures, and words to convey your opinions and feelings.

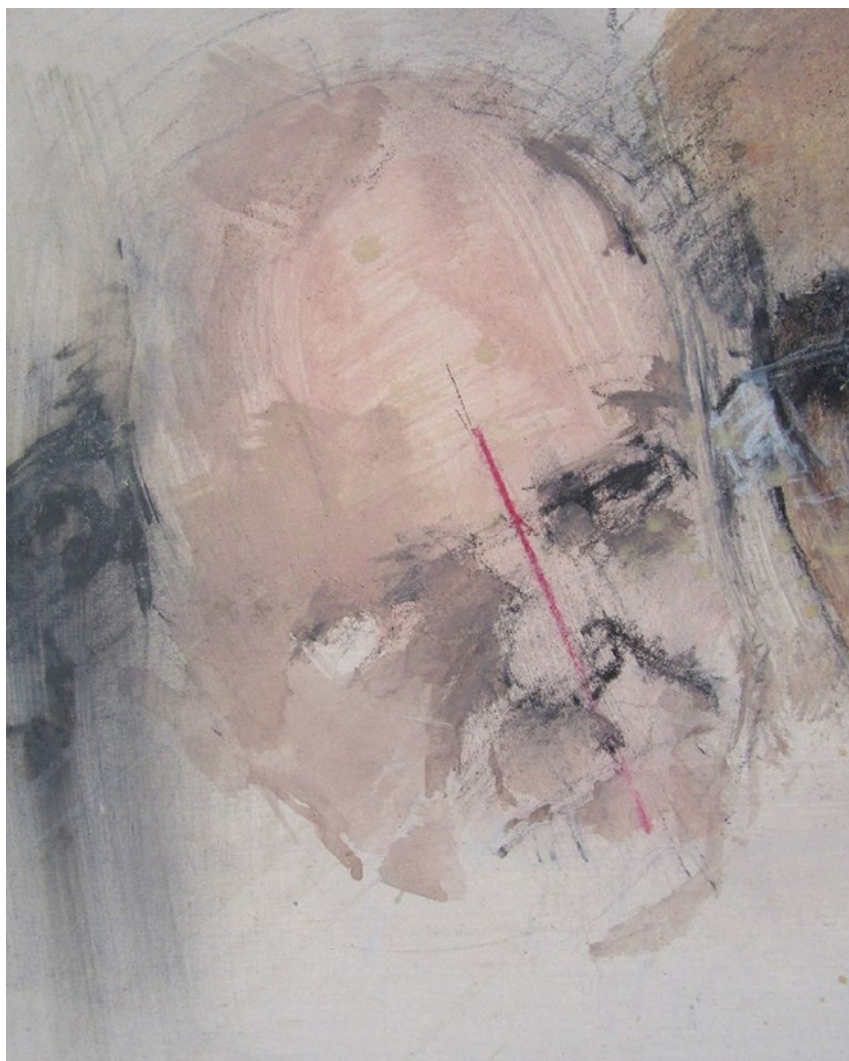
*by Alex Powers*



**Body or Mind**

2002, gouache, charcoal,  
pastel, and collage, 40 x 30.

No other painting subject has interested me more than the human face. I started with landscape painting, as many realist painters do, but quickly realized that painting bushes and trees was not nearly as compelling as the human face and figure. There are many ways in which I gather inspiring material for my figurative work, including having models pose, cutting photographs from newspapers and magazines, downloading digital images to my computer, taking my own snapshots, or drawing television images. Among the most unusual sources of images are the X-rays on airport security monitors. I've stood at the security checkpoint and watched the machines create the almost extraterrestrial, graphic pictures of luggage, shoes, jackets, and bags of holiday gifts. The reversed lights and darks provide another means of presenting faces in unexpected, compelling ways.



## COMPOSITION

One of the predictable ways to present a face or body in a composition is to place it in the center. This is not inherently a bad placement. Think of the crucifixion placed front and center in a Christian church, which is very appropriate for an iconic image. An iconic painting would benefit from the same central placement. But it becomes an all-consuming rendered object when the content is not intended to be iconic. As an alternative to this worn-out placement, I've adapted Richard Diebenkorn's compositional arrangement from his Ocean Park

series of paintings that present large areas of open space in the center and bands along the perimeter. It forced me to think about designing the rectangle instead of object rendering. In other words, I didn't place the face or figure in the center unless the content required it.

Because I like gestural marks, the features of the face—specifically their size and relative placements—have proven difficult for me in the past. Marks that are an inch or two in length didn't look gestured, no matter what I did, because they were too short. Although I didn't like doing oversized heads, which would make the features

larger, I did what I could to make the marks of the features look as gestural as the other marks in the rectangle. I didn't want to be a fake-gestural painter like portrait artists who do the features tight and the background loose. If they were really loose painters, they would make the *important* face as loose as the *unimportant* background.

## BACKGROUNDS

When drawing or painting a face, the hardest part of the process is not the face but the background and the relationship between the two. First, it



### Five of Us

1996, gouache, charcoal, pastel, and collage, 23 x 40. Collection The Franklin G. Burroughs-Simeon B. Chapin Art Museum, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

should be accepted that the background is as important as the face or figure. The rectangle includes both the face and the background. Until this is validated, nothing else is worth trying. Once accepted, what do we do with the background?

Those of us who choose to paint people have more problems with backgrounds than those who paint a landscape. A landscape has imagery throughout the complete rectangle, and the relationship between the closeup house, the trees, and the distant land is known and visible. Conversely, in a face or a figure, the visible background is often not what is desired.

Here is a suggestion for dealing with the background: You may have already learned to let the light source eat into the contour of the face from the background, and to let the shadow plane continue across the edge of the face into the background. That's the beginning of estab-

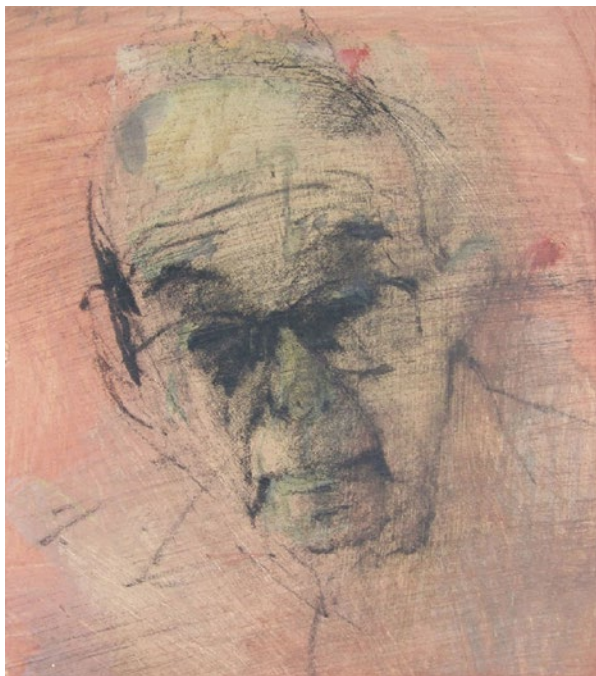
lishing a relationship between the face and the background. If your paintings emphasize shape instead of line and texture, you would not want to paint across the contours of the head very often.

When I am painting alone at home or doing a demonstration painting from a model during a workshop, I have more of a problem with the background than with the face. The reason is that I have chosen the model, but I may not have given any thought to the background. There is one answer to all painting problems, including this one: content (expression). This may sound gimmicky, but it is true. What do I want to express in this painting? Let's say that the model is a literature professor. Then bookshelves in the background might be appropriate. This may be too simplistic, but it gets me on the right track, and makes the background relate to the foreground face. In the end, a demonstration painting is about my painting style, which although is appropriate for me, may not be appropriate for everyone for whom I'm demonstrating.

## LINE AND TEXTURE

I've had a long-time love affair with General's 6B (very soft) charcoal pencils. The charcoal in the pencils is the same as compressed charcoal sticks. It makes a very dark line when I press down with it and a light line when I don't. I don't like graphite as much because it's not as dark and has a shiny surface. I once won a \$300 merchandise award in an art show. I chose to get \$300 worth of General's 6B charcoal pencils. They have long since been used up.

Because I am not as interested in the design-element shape as I am in line and texture, I deemphasize the exterior of the body or the head. This is a pretty decisive matter, for when the outlines are included and emphasized, they create a shape against the background and the background stays back in three-dimensional space. When the exterior contour is deemphasized,



LEFT  
**New York Art**  
2003, gouache, charcoal,  
pastel, and collage, 30 x 40.

## DRAWING THE FACE AND FIGURE

Faces can express anything that humans are capable of feeling or understanding. If I paint more of the body than just the person's face, I prefer that they be nude or partially clothed rather

than dressed in costumes because the interior imagery of clothing is not as interesting to me as the interior imagery of the human face or body.

If the eyes are looking straight out of the painting, they will follow

BELOW  
**Remembering**  
2006, gouache, charcoal, and pastel, 30 x 40.

the viewer as the viewer walks back and forth in front of the painting. It's amazing. Try it if you haven't already.

Some parts of the face just don't interest me, like the top of the head. I frequently stop the drawing or painting at the top of the forehead because I often don't find the hair very significant. Likewise the flesh tone, to me, is often not especially critical to the expression, so I come to it through the back door. One area of the local skin color is usually all that is needed. I am a value painter, not a colorist. If you are a colorist, the flesh tone may be critical to you. I also get bored copying the light and shadow planes of the face, especially if one half of the face is in light and the other half is in shadow.

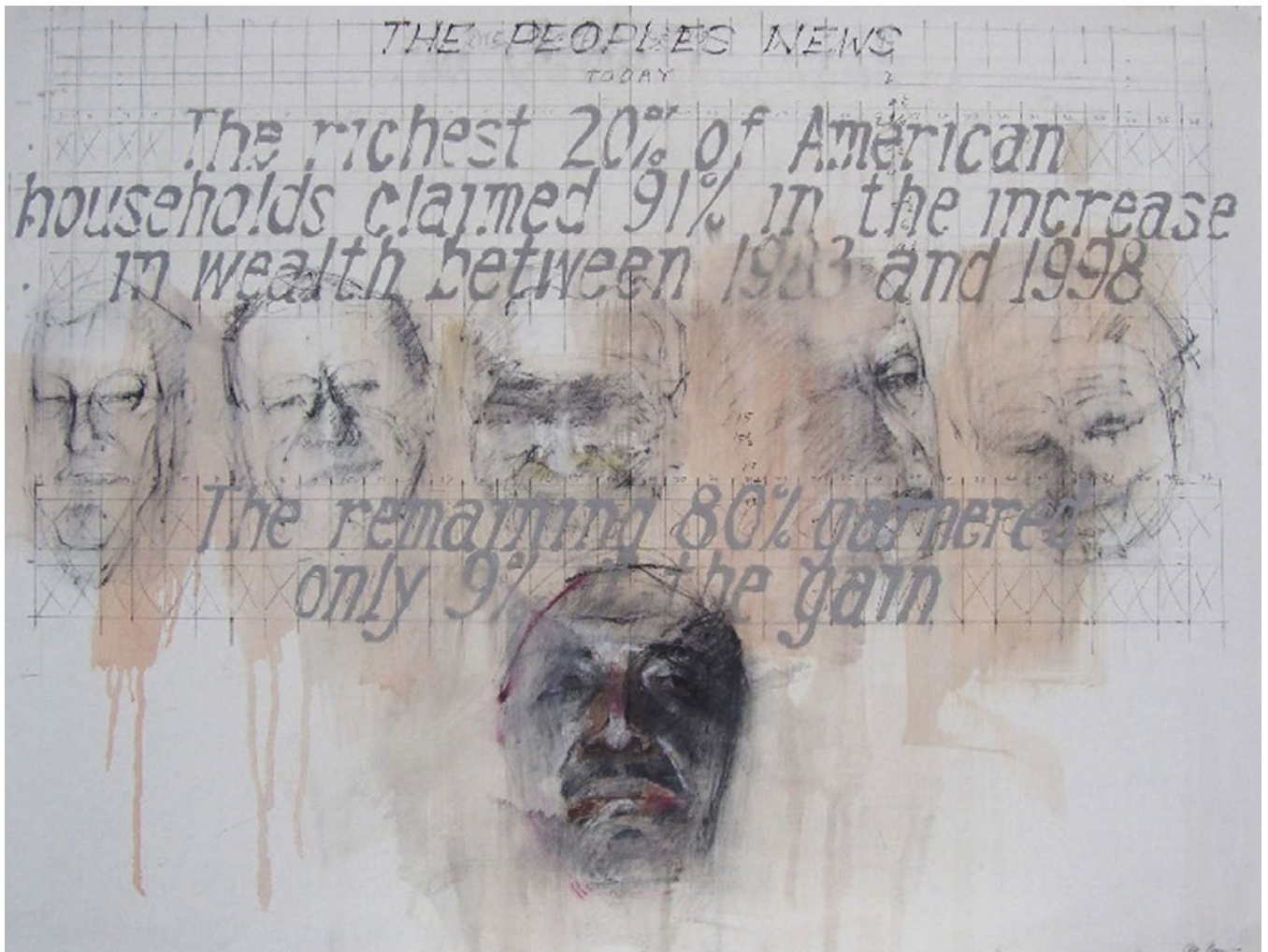
The egg shape of the head is often interesting to me in the way it connects to the tube of the neck, especially if the two are at opposing angles. I prefer that

the background comes forward in space and flattens the entire picture plane. Defining images as they recede into space is not very interesting to me. That's why I prefer Picasso and Braque's Cubist flat space to the Renaissance linear and aerial deep space.

Neglecting the design-element shape may seem strange because most of us were overeducated about shape and undereducated on the other three image possibilities: line, texture, and pattern. All four are valid choices because visual dominance is always appropriate.

I like the beginning and intermediate stages of the development of the painting to show in the finished piece. I want my paintings to have a casual sketchbook look. I also like to include some markings that are not limited to those that are visible on the exterior of my subject matter. For example, I often leave guidelines showing the placement of one feature on the face to another—for example, the inside of the eye relative to the side of the nostril; or in a figure painting, the middle of the head as it relates to the feet.





**Only 9%**  
2002, gouache, charcoal, and pastel, 30 x 40.

the shape of the head have a shallow depth such as that in a relief sculpture. I often define one or two contours of the head, but I try to be careful not to make those lines longer than the other lines in the face. I do not want to separate the head from the background as a shape, as I mentioned previously.

In general, if I want to make a shape quite distinct, which I seldom do, I stop my brushstroke at the edge of the form. And if I want to make a line, I pull the brush across the edge of the form obliterating its edge, which leaves line with

a job to do. This is a basic concept that is not used very often, probably because most artists don't think line is a worthy dominant design element.

## MODELS OR PHOTOS

Just like outdoor landscape painters, artists who paint from live models believe they are being authentic and pure by going directly to their subject matter instead of using photographs or digital screen images. The fallacy of that belief is that one cannot draw character without knowing the model's

character. In many cases, we do not know the model, and yet we falsely feel a human connection because we are working from a live person, when in reality the model is little more than an object for copying.

The faces in my watermedia paintings are often accompanied by words that either add emphasis or introduce another dimension. Adding text to a painting was another way for me to express my social and political concerns. Although I use faces to express these issues, I haven't had a model in my studio in a couple of decades. It would be nearly impossible for me to find models appropriate for each of my social and political paintings.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

All art is political. Even if someone thinks they are avoiding a political statement, they are favoring the status quo, and that is an expression of political opinion. Similarly, every mark we make is expressive of ourselves. As artists, we need to constantly search for what is authentically our own. What someone else has already done is not ours. However, part of our way may be a composite of the ways of others.

Don't forget: It's not just about the faces. It's about what they express! ■

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alex Powers earned a degree in mathematics from Emory & Henry College, in Emory, Virginia, and studied art in Florida, New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. He has been a full-time, self-employed artist and teacher since 1970 and exhibits his paintings in galleries in the United States and Canada. In 1997 he received the gold medal award in the American Watercolor Society's annual exhibition. He is the author of *Painting People in Watercolor: A Design Approach* (Watson-Guption Publications, New York, New York), which is out of print after 17 years. His paintings have been included in 16 books and 22 magazine articles. He has judged dozens of national exhibitions and teaches workshops in the United States and Canada. For more information on Powers, visit his website at [www.alexpowersart.com](http://www.alexpowersart.com).



### Small Talk

2000, gouache, charcoal, pastel, and collage, 30 x 40.  
Collection Anne and Dr. Ronald Jarvis.

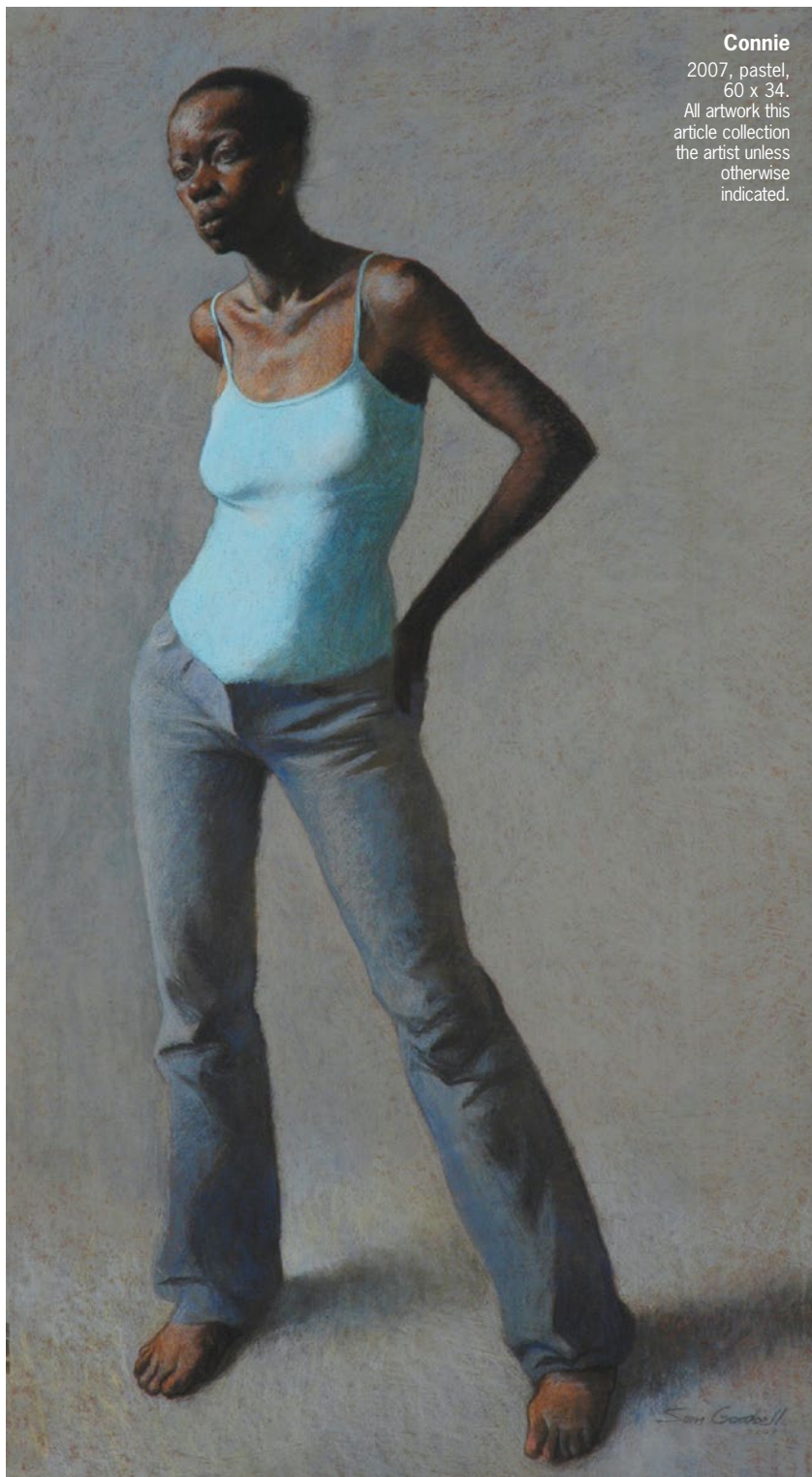
# Sticking With the Figure

In 1994 New York City pastelist **Sam Goodsell** returned to the art world after nine years away, determined to fully explore the challenging and rewarding genre of figure painting. His dedication is paying off.

*by Bob Bahr*

Sam Goodsell's manner is softspoken and gentle, but he harbors a sizable ambition. One could talk to him for a solid hour and not hear of it, but the idea is there, in everything he says, in each discussion about another aspect of his pastel portraits. Goodsell doggedly pursues a seemingly endless goal, one that is only made apparent when you consider two statements he made about 48 hours apart. "I always paint people, I love painting people," Goodsell told *American Artist* one morning. A couple of days later he avowed, "I think drawing the human figure is one of the hardest things to do on earth."

It may very well be. Accurately and empathetically depicting a human body is a multidimensional problem. In addition to the technical skill with art materials one must have in order to create the piece, an artist must nail down the correct proportions of the figure with extreme accuracy. Even the smallest error will be apparent to a five-year-old—knowledge of the human body is innate.



**Connie**  
2007, pastel,  
60 x 34.  
All artwork this  
article collection  
the artist unless  
otherwise  
indicated.

Also, the figure is arguably the most emotional element an artist can put into a painting. All eyes will go to the person in the painting, and viewers will project themselves into the model's viewpoint. Slight subtleties in the rendering and coloring of the face will consciously and subconsciously be decoded or interpreted by the viewer. And, ironically, because the human figure is so familiar, a fresh approach is almost mandatory if one wishes to produce an arresting image.

Goodsell's career in art has been marked with the kind of determination it takes to tackle such a challenge. When his older sister was a teenager, she would come home from Parsons The New School for Design, in New York City, with large figurative paintings, which would fascinate the then 10-year-old Sam. "Being around her and all her art supplies made so much possible—I was always drawing," recalls Goodsell. "It started so early for me. I really liked what my sister was doing and I wanted to do the same thing."

His sister went on to become a fashion designer; Sam was accepted into Manhattan's High School of Art



**ABOVE**  
**Past and Present**  
2006, pastel, 60 x 40.

**LEFT**  
**Mercedes**  
2007, pastel, 40 x 32.

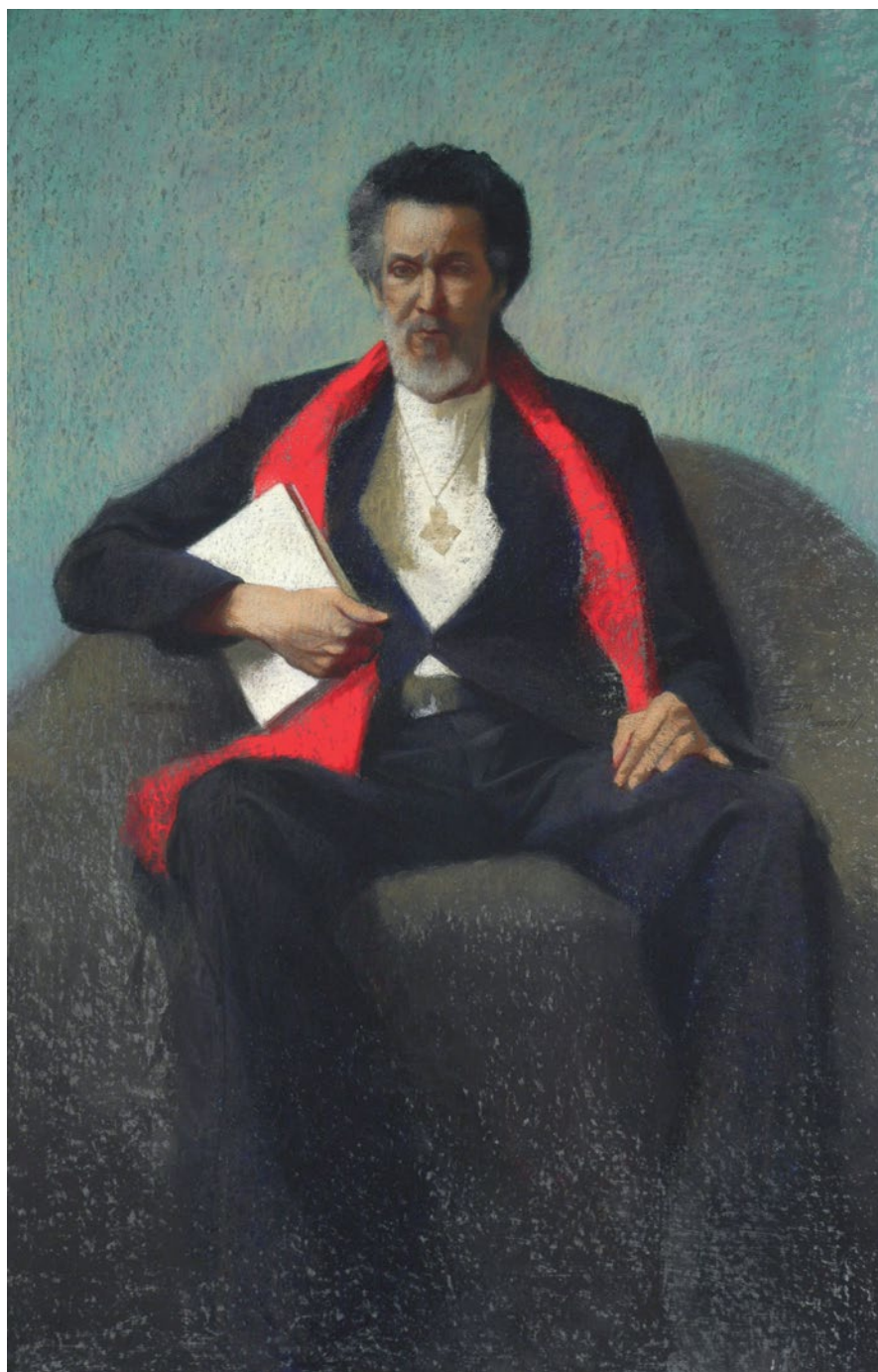


and Design, a commercial arts school in Midtown, where Goodsell received what he considers “serious art training.” The tastes of the time were strongly opposed to figurative work, so upon graduation in the early 1980s, his options for the study of such traditional art were extremely limited. The young artist turned to the Art Students League of New York, opting to take a few classes at the League rather than attend college.

It was here that he truly fell under the spell of the figure. At the urging of his teachers, Goodsell focused on capturing the essence of the sitter rather than simply the likeness. “I had painting and drawing instructors who encouraged us not to get hooked on anatomy and have that be all that we see,” he says. “My instructor Dan Gheno often says the challenge is to draw the individual, to get who they are into the picture.” This important distinction is still a part of the artist’s approach Goodsell says all of his successful paintings capture the essence, but not all necessarily capture the likeness. “Sometimes I grab a part of their likeness but it doesn’t totally look like the person, yet I got the feeling of that person, which I think makes up for it. The more you paint, the easier capturing the essence comes. Of course, you can’t just say, ‘OK, I’m going to get the essence now.’ I may get pretty far along and still be searching, still be in the search mode on a painting. And then it comes.”

Before he could settle into his current career, Goodsell had to suffer an interruption. In 1985, financial demands forced him to take a job—temporarily, he thought. “But then a few months of working outside of the art world became a few years, then a few years became several years, until I said, ‘Enough of this!’” he recalls. “I realized I was good at what I do, and I decided to return to the art scene.” But he had spent nine years away from

**Preacher**  
2004, pastel,  
60 x 40.

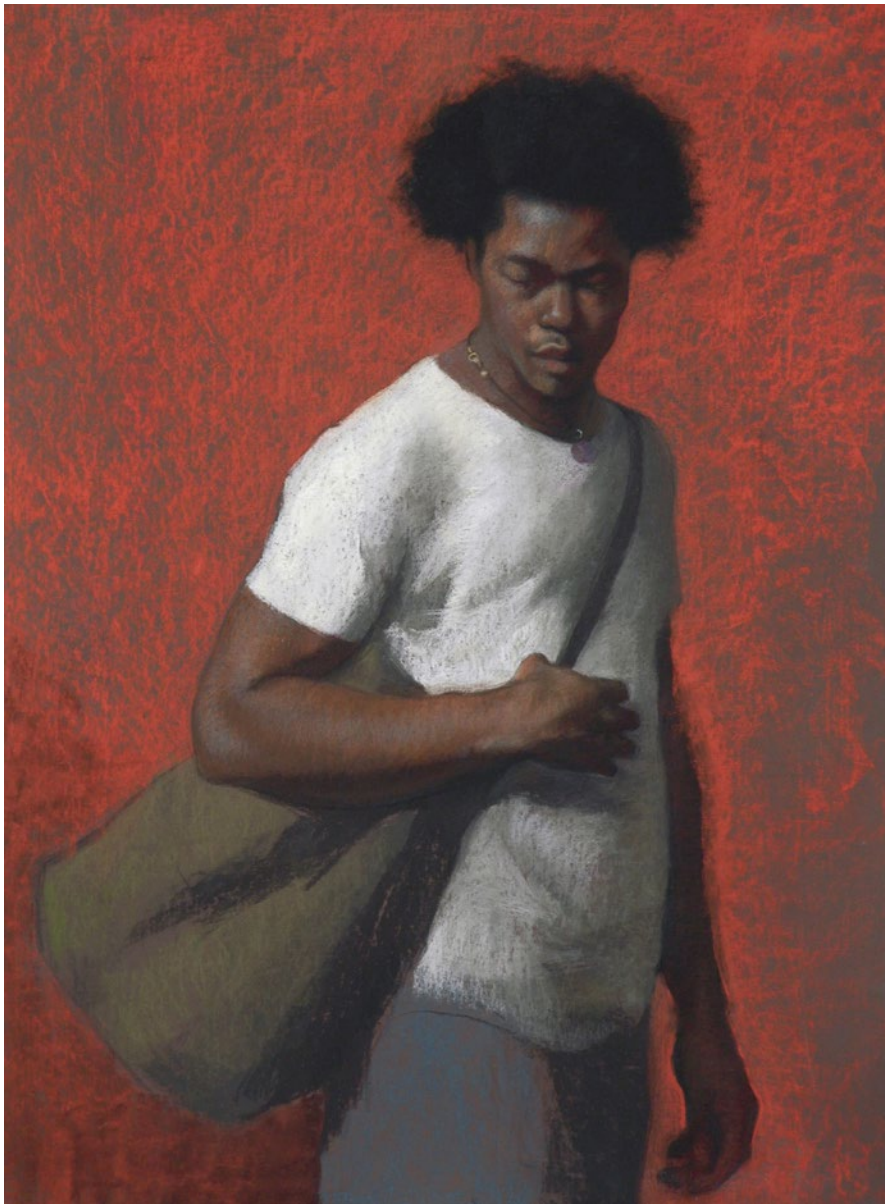


painting. Goodsell felt like he was starting from scratch.

He renewed old connections and trained out-of-practice art muscles, attending sketch classes at Spring Studio, in SoHo “to get a handle on things again.” His favorite teacher at

High School of Art and Design, Irwin Greenberg, had recommended that he study with Harvey Dinnerstein at the Art Students League. Goodsell had worked in oil under Dinnerstein’s instruction in his first go-round in the art world; in 1994 he asked his

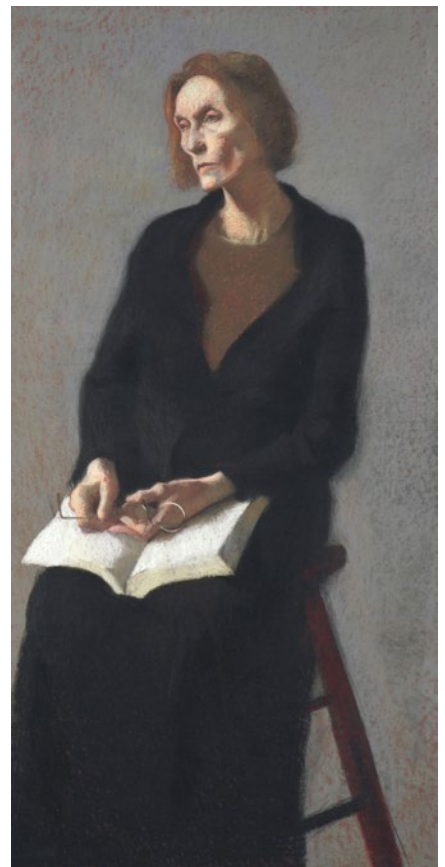




ABOVE  
**Threshold**  
2005, pastel, 40 x 30.

ABOVE RIGHT  
**Passage**  
2005, pastel, 60 x 31.

old teacher if he could resume study under him. “Harvey was very encouraging, and I began attending his classes again,” remembers Goodsell. This decision helped shape his choice of medium— Goodsell admires Dinnerstein’s oil paintings, but the teacher’s pastel work absolutely dazzles him. “I had been fascinated with pastel since high school, but I hadn’t had the chance to work with it because I was so involved with oil,” Goodsell explains. “But I liked and was impressed with what



my classmates were doing with pastel. Then I learned from Harvey how to use pastels at the League. It’s such a fascinating medium. There’s no handle, no brush—nothing between the color and your fingertips. It’s like an extension of your hand. And I love the vibrancy of the color.”

He embraced the medium fully in 1997, and over the last 10 years established a working process that’s a synthesis of equal parts traditional methods and individual preference. Goodsell works on museum board that he prepares using a homemade ground consisting of gesso, fine pumice powder, and acrylic paint. Often this ground is mixed to a rich midtone of Venetian red and black; alternatively, Goodsell applies a blue-gray ground. The choice of color is often suggested by the skin tone of the model.

Goodsell says the switch from oil paint to pastel did not happen fast or come easy, but handling the materials now is second nature. Early on, he would use fixative on specific areas of his work in the middle of the process to restore some tooth to an area, but the artist says this is rarely necessary now that he has greater control over his tools. Goodsell reports that he never applies fixative when a pastel painting is finished because he dislikes how it “kills the color.”

The composition for a Goodsell piece begins as a sketch on 25”-x-19” Canson paper using Winsor & Newton vine charcoal. Next, he draws the subject in charcoal on the prepared museum board. The artist applies the pastels according to color and value—not in order of hard to soft, as many pastelists do. Goodsell is not loyal to any particular brand of pastel. “I tear the labels off and just paint what I see,” he says. The backgrounds in the artist’s paintings are often highly textured, and he builds them up along the way as he is working on the figure. His pieces are generally based on three-week poses.

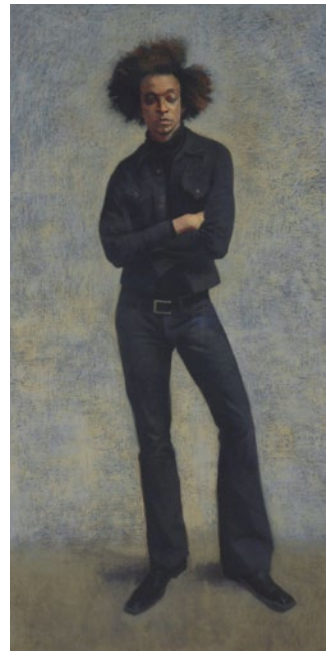
The phrase “art for art’s sake” has taken on numerous connotations since it first began circulating in France in the early 1800s, and in one way it describes the fervent production of the group of figurative artists who currently haunt the Art Students League. Goodsell, a member of this paint spattered tribe, is a magnified example of their aesthetic, which fosters a mindset and lifestyle marked by a curiosity and empathy about other humans, a strong interest in continually honing one’s craft, and dedication to drawing from life. The above values trump the insistence on creature comforts most Americans exhibit and, accordingly, Goodsell lives frugally in the South Bronx, where he was born. He would prefer to hire models to pose in his home studio but, mostly, he draws from the models who pose at the Art Students League every morning



for three hours. This may not be ideal, but one would never know it from the zeal Goodsell expresses regarding these shared sessions. “It’s so difficult these days to be a working artist in the city,” he remarks. “It’s hard to make a living and have the time and money to maintain your art skills in New York. I know a lot of friends who are very good paint-

**Lost in Thought**  
2003, pastel, 60 x 40.

*“Pastel is such a fascinating medium. There’s no handle, no brush—nothing between the color and your fingertips. It’s like an extension of your hand.”*



ABOVE  
**Eric**  
2005, pastel, 96 x 48.

TOP  
**Philadelphia**  
2007, pastel, 96 x 40.

LEFT  
**Marcia**  
2007, pastel, 60 x 40.



**Jennifer (in progress)**  
2007, pastel, 60 x 40.

ers but they had to give up art because they started a family and had to more consistently make money. They had to stop painting.

“I have been fortunate to keep going all these years,” Goodsell continues. “It’s a tough situation; the cost of living is a lot higher here than it used to be. But I feel like there is always a way.” As he says this, Goodsell points to an image on his laptop. “This one here I just sold, and it’s going to pay the rent this month,” he remarks offhandedly. In the past year, the artist has won three major awards, including the Pastel Society of America’s Herman Margulies Award for Excellence and Connecticut Pastel Society’s Art Spirit Foundation Dianne B. Bernhard Award. Goodsell’s goals seem very much in reach. ■

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Sam Goodsell was born in the Bronx, New York, where he still resides. He studied at the Art Students League of New York, in Manhattan, where he still participates in daily figure-drawing and painting classes. The artist was included in Maggie Price’s book *Painting With Pastels: Easy Techniques to Master the Medium* (North Light Books, Cincinnati, Ohio), Goodsell is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the Best of Show award at the Pastel Journal’s 5th Annual Pastel 100 Competition in 2003 and the 2004 Edward G. McDowell Travel Grant, given by the Art Students League to allow artists to study in Europe. Contact the artist at [samgoodsell@yahoo.com](mailto:samgoodsell@yahoo.com).

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