Postromanticism; the Art of Passion

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Some artistic movements happen organically. The Impressionists and the Fauves, for example, worked together to give expression to the same vision of art. Their movement emerged naturally from their friendship and practice. The name and the aesthetic philosophy of Impressionism came almost as an afterthought, accidentally. Yet both the name and the concept stuck. An insulting word cast by an art critic about Monet’s painting Impression, Sunrise became the seed that gave this group of artists a more recognizable image.

Other artistic movements happen prescriptively. The Surrealists would not have been what they were without the philosophical structure and sometimes dogmatically narrow focus that the writer André Breton gave to their art.

Today movements can happen virtually. The internet connects artists from all corners of the world who would never have met, created together, seen that they share the same vision, become friends. This is how postromanticism happened.
Before I met any of the artists, I had written about the values contemporary art had lost and should preserve. I called that aesthetic postromanticism and posted it on the internet; but postromanticism as a movement didn’t exist until one artist, the Mexican sculptor Leonardo Pereznieto, saw his art reflected in my words. Since then we have discovered through the internet dozens of artists who identify their art with our vision.

A logical way to explain what postromantic art is about is to begin with its name. Surely with a name like postromanticism, this movement has something to do with Romantic art. Yet since we put the post- in there, it must also come after Romanticism and be contemporary in some way. Postromanticism is, indeed, inspired by nineteenth-century Romantic art. Postromantic painters admire the art of Bouguereau, whose sensual, palpable images of angelic women and shepherd girls were eventually displaced by the less idealized style of the Impressionists. They also find inspiration in the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, which shocked Victorian society only to stand the test of time as one of the period’s most interesting artistic legacies. Postromantic sculptors identify with the art of the sculptor Rodin, who revolutionized sculpture as the expression of passion, sensuality and emotion.

When I recently spoke to a journalist about postromantic art, she raised several questions that were crucial to explaining this movement. She asked me: where is the “post” in postromanticism? What makes postromantic art original? What makes this group of individual artists scattered all over the world a movement? The rest of this introduction will provide answers to these questions.
1. Romantic in inspiration

It’s relatively easy to point to the continuity between the Romantic and Postromantic movements. Like Romantic artists, the Postromantics capture human passion, sensuality and beauty in their works. They mirror and at the same time idealize visual reality. When you look at the sculptures of Leonardo Perezneto or Nguyan Tuan, you immediately detect the influence of Rodin. Similarly, Edson Campos’s paintings evoke the sensual purity of Maxfield Parrish and the allegorical narratives and elegance of the Pre-Raphaelites.

2. Original in creation

The issue of originality is a bit more complicated. One might legitimately ask, how are these artists original when they clearly imitate Neoclassical and Romantic styles that are at least two hundred years old? Moreover, haven’t modern styles of art-abstraction, postmodern installations, ready-mades and pastiche-displaced the tradition of art that imitates and idealizes reality?

To explain why and how postromanticism is original, let’s see first what originality means. What makes art be original? As opposed to new? As opposed to a passing fad? As opposed to something that has mere shock-value?

The whole notion that art had to be above all else original began in the nineteenth-century, with the Impressionist movement. Artists such as Manet (who influenced the Impressionists) and Monet staked the value of art on its ability to go against the norms established by the Academy and the Salons. They presented reality in an entirely new way. As the famous French novelist Emile Zola explained, Manet and the Impressionists set the new standard for what makes art be artistic: originality, which implies not mere newness
of style, but a relevant and revolutionary newness. A novelty, in other words, that is important to society. After Impressionism, modern art, like literature, was meant to provoke thought even more than excite pleasure or emotion. And so art, as the critic Arthur Danto puts it, became increasingly conceptual.

Modern art—the trends of cubism, abstract expressionism, pop art and postmodern art—stakes its worth on establishing this relevant newness. However, contemporary art that continues the trends which began during the early twentieth-century can no longer take it for granted that they're being new and relevant to their society. When Duchamp placed his urinal on exhibit in New York during the early twentieth-century, he was certainly shocking, not fully serious and arguably original. But anybody who does postmodern ready-mades and installations today will need to think critically about how his or her art is original. Doing what Duchamp did eighty years ago cannot be assumed to be original nowadays. Similarly, when Jackson Pollock splattered paint on a canvas and helped establish New York as the epicenter of international art, he was controversial and original. Now the tradition of abstraction is at least fifty years old. Any artist who paints in an abstract style cannot automatically present his or her work as original, cutting-edge, fresh and modern.

I haven’t yet established the originality of postromantic art, but I have shown that its so-called cutting-edge competitors haven’t either. We’re pretty much all in the same boat. In fact, it’s arguably more new and different to find inspiration in styles of art that are three hundred years old than to imitate those that are fifty years old. Modernist trends are much more common and accepted by today’s artistic establishment. Does this mean that we should abandon looking for originality in contemporary art?

Absolutely not. Art today can still be original if it puts a new twist on
whatever tradition in the history of art it follows and if it shows that this
twist is still interesting and relevant to society. For art is even more about the
public-promotion, sales, influence, consecration—than it is about the creative
process and the individual artists.

To illustrate this point, I’ll borrow an analogy from the novelist and
paradox-maker, Borges. Borges once wrote a story about an author, named
Pierre Menard, who tried to re-rewrite the novel Don Quixote in the twen-
tieth-century. Menard reproduced Cervantes’ text word by word. Yet from a
certain perspective his novel was entirely different. When you transpose fiction
into a whole new context, Borges illustrates, everything changes.

Cervantes was creating a whole new lay Spanish language which was
unpretentious and easy to understand for his times. Writing in the same prose
several centuries later, Menard, however, sounded stale and quaint to his
readers. Furthermore, the social and religious assumptions Cervantes could
take for granted, Menard had to learn with great effort by reading biogra-
phy, history and learning the classical languages. Last but not least, while
Cervantes’s novel fit with his context and established the tradition of novel
writing, Menard’s Don Quixote stuck out like a sore thumb in the context of
twentieth-century literature. By then readers were used to the train of thought
style and fragmentation of modern fiction. In this context, a novel like Don
Quixote seemed glaringly traditional. Borges’s story shows that art is never just
its content, but is in large part a product of its social context. Writing and
readers, art and public, are inextricably intertwined. Which is why one can’t
bring back the past exactly as it was even if one reproduces older styles down
to their smallest details.
Much like Menard’s twentieth-century version of Don Quixote, postromantic art deliberately sticks out against the background of the two main currents of contemporary art. The first current is the kind of art that represents reality (such as neo-realism) and aims to bring back unchanged and unscathed nineteenth-century styles. Postromantic artists know, like Borges, that this goal is impossible and undesirable. We don’t want to bring back intact older styles of art, but we do reinvent them for our own times.

Postromanticism is therefore not a reactionary current in art. We do not wish to freeze art in time and keep it pure of “the modernist corruption.” Instead, postromantic artists wish to preserve the best of tradition—by placing emphasis upon technical skill, beauty and passion—while still keeping up with the times—by using new media, being sensitive to our contemporary public and creating new styles. Which is why you will discover postmodern pastiche mixed with a traditional techniques in the paintings of Edson Campos and David Graux and the use of new media—acrylics and fiber optic illumination—in the Rodin-like sculptures of Leonardo Pereznieto. Not to speak of the exquisite photography of Guido Argentini, who endows modern images with the beauty, immobility, expressivity and endurance of Romantic and Modernist sculpture.

In retaining elements of the Neoclassical and Romantic traditions, however, postromanticism also makes a statement against a second and more prevalent current in contemporary art. Postromanticism implies that since art took a conceptual turn it lost sight of the technical skill, visible talent, appreciable beauty and sensibility that have characterized art for four hundred years. We believe that it’s not worth dispensing with our tradition of art from the Renaissance to the nineteenth-century—or giving it only a dead, historical value—when it can provide so much stimulation and inspiration for art today.

3. Uniqueness
In conclusion, postromantic art sticks out like a sore thumb in the contemporary art scene. It rejects the worst of both worlds: namely, the reactionary nature of art that tries to save tradition exactly as it was and the elitist and pretentious nature of some modern and postmodern art. At the same time, postromanticism retains the best of tradition and the best of modernity. That is our originality: we are new in our unique and coherent combination of modern and traditional techniques; we are relevant in providing the sophistication critics seek with the beauty, passion and accessibility that the public likes.
4. The Postromantic movement:

Does the fact we’re original in some ways make us a movement? More generally, what makes something be an art movement? First, a movement has to include a significant number of artists, a group. Such a group needs to be formed by artists who have a reputation on their own, as individuals. Our movement, which has just begun to form, already includes twenty-one established artists from several countries, including Mexico, Brazil, the United States, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Romania and Italy. And we’re growing rapidly as more artists see the appeal of postromantic art.

Second, to be a movement, a group of artists has to cohere to some shared techniques and vision. The postromantic artists do have that in common implicitly. My job as a writer is to help make what they have in common more explicitly evident and relevant to the public.

Third, and most importantly, a movement has to move. An art movement affects the public; is discussed by art critics and the press; adapts to its society; is challenged and reacted against (otherwise it becomes complacent and stale); spreads and mutates; is imitated or followed by other artists. We’re starting to meet this tougher standard as well. The postromantic artists have had articles written on their art all over the world. They will have a major collective exhibit at the Biennale di Firenze, the art expo in Florence, Italy, where a section of the museum will be devoted to postromanticism. But what ultimately will make this movement move is you—our public and readers—for whom we paint, sculpt, photograph and write. It’s to you that we devote postromanticism, the contemporary art of passion.
Guido Argentini was born in Florence, Italy in 1966. He studied medicine for three years at the University of Florence. At 23, he decided to turn his passion for photography into a profession and started to shoot fashion and beauty. His work has been published by some of the leading magazines in the world, including Marie Claire, Moda and Vogue. His book, Silvereye, is a favorite among artistic photography lovers.
Guido Argentini is an artistic and fashion photographer. However, these descriptions don’t even begin to explain the uniqueness of his art. There are literally thousands of photographers who feature artistic nudes and fashion photography, which count as two of Argentini’s specialties. Yet he stands apart from them all. What makes him unique and, even more importantly, what makes his uniqueness significant, suggesting a new trend in artistic photography? In *The Critique of Judgment*, the philosopher Immanuel Kant elaborated the standards for artistic uniqueness. True art is original, exemplary and inimitable, he wrote. Original, because it stands out from the rest. Exemplary, because it’s worth following. Inimitable, because it stands out despite all imitations. Guido Argentini’s photography meets all of these criteria.

Photography is often said to replace the need for representational painting. This claim, which has some truth to it, has become a cliché. It suggests that of all the visual arts, photography is closest to representing reality as we see it. It also suggests that the visual arts have been compelled by the invention of photography to move towards expressing an inner reality-reality as we imagine it or idealize it-rather than the outer reality of visual appearances.

Guido Argentini’s silvery, sculptural photography nuances these assumptions that have become the foundation of modern art. He shows us that photography is not so much about capturing visual reality-its ephemeral, changing, dynamic nature-but rather about immortalizing form. His images preserve a representative pose and movement.

Photography, Guido’s unique art persuades us, can be as monumental and enduring as sculpture. Not surprisingly, the artist finds inspiration in three of the greatest sculptors of all times: Michelangelo, Rodin and Brancusi. “I try to put into the ‘poverty’ of two dimensional photography the strength of the three dimensional shapes of the marble of Michelangelo and the polished bronze of Brancusi”.

His focus is not on the face’s expressive powers, but on the expressiveness of form itself. For sculpture, from Hellenistic times to the modernism of Brancusi, has always been about the ways in which the human body, captured statically in a single moment, appears dynamic and timeless. Sculpture presents a glimpse of human essence frozen in time, yet still moving, expressive.

In Argentini’s Studio Series, photography usurps the timelessness of sculpture. Silvery, shimmery, muscular, exquisite bodies exhibit the elasticity and beauty of woman. Similarly, in the Nature Series, the sensual nudes blend into the stark immobility of their natural surroundings. Cliffs, ocean, grass, stone become one with woman. Rather than being reduced to the natural or biological, however, women are elevated to the status of the monumental. They become as timeless as the rounded, polished stones which echo the curves of their bodies. Argentini’s talent endows photography, the art of the ephemeral, with a timelessness and importance that go far beyond what can be seen, consumed, bought or touched.
Contemporary painter Henry Asencio is one of the most original young painters working today. He skillfully combines traditional figure painting with abstract art in a congruous manner. In 1996, Asencio was sponsored by the art supply company Thayer and Chandler, which enabled him to exhibit his work in galleries in the United States, Germany and Paris. His painting has won several awards and is exhibited in dozens of galleries throughout the world.
Henry Asencio, though so fresh and modern in style, clearly hasn’t forgotten the importance of tradition. In his technique, we find the influences of his favorite artists: the honest naturalism of Lucien Freud (the grandson of Sigmund Freud); the vigor of Willem de Kooning’s energetic brush-strokes; the decorative appeal of Gustav Klimt’s dazzling paintings.

Just consider the paintings themselves. In “Ascending,” the composition, texture and color of the painting express its central theme. We move from the fervent red of the bottom of the canvas to the woman that seems to float on the cloudy whiteness of the bed. These colors—bright reds touched by dark shadows; soft whites enfolding the shape of the reposing woman; the luminosity of shades of orange-yellow above—all suggest the elevation of mood, thoughts and feelings evoked by the title. The female figure seems immersed in a world of dreams that carry her and us to a different vision of what counts as reality.

“Afternoon Light” is as much about the wistful tranquility of the young girl in the painting—beautiful, nude yet, paradoxically, partly hidden from view by her own contemplative pose—as about the bold patches of white light that illuminate her breast and shoulder. Nevertheless, when Asencio draws our eyes to the paint—to the medium of expression itself—we do not return to the formalism celebrated by the New York critic Clement Greenberg in Jackson Pollock’s art. For Asencio, art is clearly not just about the expressivity of the medium itself. Nor does he create art only for art’s sake. On the contrary, through his emphasis upon the artistic medium, Asencio brings us closer to the naturalism of Renoir, where the flesh comes alive from the inside. Just as the body conveys mood, so the expression of psychology offers a better, fuller way of understanding the movement and form of the body.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Asencio’s painting represents the cutting edge of art today. He congruously combines the age-old tradition of representational art with the twentieth-century tradition of conceptual art to create a style that is truly young, expressive and beautiful. His painting has artistic integrity, paying its respects to representational art while also challenging the viewers with its plausible combinations of new and old techniques. To invoke Picasso’s famous words of advice to Françoise Gilot, to subvert old traditions one must first master them; to invent new ones one must be innovative rather than merely shocking. Henry Asencio’s art is faithful to these words.
Chad Awalt was inspired by his grandfather to pursue woodcarving from an early age. Awalt studied anatomy at the University of Colorado and has spent the past twenty years expanding his knowledge of classical art and design. For over fifteen years, he has been creating works of art that are sought after by clients and galleries all over the country. His work can also be found in many corporate and private collections.
Since the Renaissance, sculptors have traced the fine line between tradition and innovation. This line is not a straight path from the classical period to, let’s say, Donatello’s delicate, classical-style sculpture of David. During the Renaissance, and even more so in our days—when artists are obsessed with originality—it was important to carry on a respected tradition only if done in an innovative way that filled the needs of one’s patrons, public and culture. Perpetuating any kind of tradition—be it religious or artistic—is the art of making something old be new and relevant again; of preserving tradition within the space of historical gaps and ruptures. The problem of cultural continuity, in other words, is inseparable from the one of discontinuity.

Chad Awalt’s sculpture gives material form to this link between artistic continuity and rupture. His sculptures clearly evoke the classical style and ideal body types of ancient Greek sculptors such as Praxiteles and Lysippos. They also allude to the cultural mixture and discontinuities that are part and parcel of respecting the classical heritage. Awalt sculpts the ancient goddesses—such as Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt; Clio, one of the muses who presided over the arts and sciences and the Egyptian Isis, the goddess of fertility and motherhood—in an unmistakably classical Greek style. Yet, much as these statues are often destroyed, amputated and transformed by time in a way that reflects the fragility of their beauty, so all of Awalt’s sculptures are marked by bodily discontinuities. Supple, hollowed, balanced, fluid and harmonious yet also floating and amorphous, Awalt’s sculptures are fragmentary, haunting visions of long-gone epochs that can be admired and emulated, but not preserved intact, by current art.
“I always strive for a well balanced, restful composition, in which the technical aspects get as much attention as the aesthetic ones,” states Thierry Bonnaffé, a Belgian artist who works in the tradition of figure painting established during the Renaissance and pursued until Impressionism. In his search for harmony and balance in the representation of feminine beauty and sensuality, Bonnaffé has strong affinities with the ideals of postromanticism. His charcoal and sanguine sketches combine a rare delicacy and sureness of touch with creativity of vision.
From the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, meaning all the way to the Impressionists, the École des Beaux Arts in France privileged the drawing of outlines and contours—a technique inherited from the Renaissance masters—as opposed to focusing upon blocks of color as a way of teaching painting. The implicit assumption behind this hierarchy was that color was found in nature whereas outlining a human form was a more difficult, acquired skill. Whether or not we agree with this claim, Thierry Bonnaffé’s “Cindy” shows how impressive painting can be when an artist captures the essence of both color and form.

Cindy’s body is painted with the soft contours inherited from Renaissance techniques. The body is fluid form, revealed through minimal outlines, subtle shading and a sure touch. The shading is not performed through the contrast of specks of color that has become familiar to us since the Impressionists. It’s drawn in the older style of chiaroscuro and sfumato, the gradual shading that leaves forms just enough to the imagination to render them all the more expressive.

Only a few curved lines reveal that the young woman’s troubled emotions belie her repose. To complement the form, the color is equally understated. A fire-hot, agitated red—and that’s all—bathes her body in a luminous warmth. In the way it conveys the human form and moods so minimalistically-through such lightness of color and touch—this painting is exquisite.
Born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Edson Campos has enjoyed sketching and painting since childhood. He is a completely self-taught artist. He moved to the United States in 1978 and exhibited his lifelike, passionate paintings and drawings in major cities throughout the country, winning several awards. Not surprisingly, Campos’ sophisticated artwork also has great popular appeal: it has been commissioned to be exhibited in the Queen Mary Hotel in Long Beach, California and the Tuscany-style Veranda Park of Florida. Recently, Campos participated in the Art Expo New York, where his work was highly praised by critics. The November 1999 issue of The Artist’s Magazine featured his work in a special section on painting techniques.
Pablo Picasso once complained: “Everyone wants to understand art. Why not try to understand the songs of a bird? Why does one love the night, flowers, everything around one, without trying to understand them?” In voicing this objection, Picasso was not, of course, saying that we don’t try to understand the biology of life. He was instead claiming that we don’t try to grasp its mysteries; to understand the why not just the hows of life in the same way that we try to understand everything about art. Life and art, he implies, are both mysterious and nothing, no science or analysis, can fully explain them.

Keeping Picasso’s objection in mind, perhaps the best we can do is try to understand some of their components in order to better appreciate the whole. Which is precisely how the painting of Edson Campos needs to be approached. In alluding to numerous artistic styles and periods, Campos’s works invite the analysis of their parts. But we can’t ignore their overall effect, which creates an entirely new image of representational art. As Picasso reminds us, in art, as in life, the whole is always greater, more interesting and more mysterious than the sum of its parts.

Consider the painting “Paradise.” In the foreground we see a young woman who dazzles with her beauty. Her flesh tones; her slightly ironic but unmistakably sensual pose; her bright red hair all make her radiate with life before our eyes. In her pose, in her look, she’s recognizably contemporary. Nonetheless, the almost classical folds that ripple around her body evoke the stylization and refinement of neoclassical and romantic art. The background, a Japanese landscape, seems a perfect way to foreground the young woman’s beauty, while also taking us to a third, even more distant, tradition in art—the Japanese prints that, incidentally, marked so strongly the works of the Impressionists. Campos unites and juxtaposes the most distant traditions in art. He has a gift for painterly allusion, for pastiche.

The contrapposto and beauty of classical sculptures; the sfumato, three-dimensionality and mystery captured by Renaissance artists; the conceptuality of modern art; the playfulness, atemporality and subversion of boundaries of postmodernism; the timeless appeal of beautiful women; the reverence for feminine sensuality, innocence and grace—all these are respectfully saluted, preserved and transformed for our times by Edson Campos’ postromantic art.
Christian Coigny is a well-established Swiss photographer. He studied at the Ecole de Photographie in Vevey. His photography has been featured in several books and exhibited in galleries all over the world. Straddling the boundaries between artistic and commercial photography, he has also designed ads for Pirelli, Panasonic, Mercedes and Baume and Mercier.
If Vermeer is known as the painter of women, so Coigny should be known as the photographer of women. It takes much more than just capturing their image to depict women with a sense of intimacy, mystery and respect. Much of figure painting and photography focuses on women. Yet Vermeer stands alone in being able to convey the feminine world with a simplicity, elegance and understatement that makes him the master of this genre. Simple actions—such as pouring a glass of milk or looking at the potential viewer—render every one of his images of milk maids, servants, and country girls more complex than the most intricate portraits of aristocratic women dressed in all of their regalia.

Coigny has the talent of bringing out such human complexity out of simple, almost stark portraits of women. Some of his pictures, like Vermeer’s, resemble still lifes: a woman posing on a table, next to a vase, facing a wall whose every little nook and cranny is visible. The arrangement of the female form complementing the vase could reduce the woman to the status of object.

Yet under Coigny’s talented touch, just the opposite happens. The young woman’s pose, the play of light and shadow, the lift of her arm, the way in which she holds her head in contemplation, all suggest thought, depth and understated emotion. Coigny’s “Women Studio Series” invite us to rediscover the beauty and complexity of women.
Jeff Cornell was born and raised in Connecticut. He studied at the Paier School of Art in Hamden. He is a nationally-acclaimed artist who specializes in figure painting. His delicate drawings and pastels of the female form capture not only beauty, but also moments of contemplation and tranquility suspended in time and far removed from worldly problems. He exhibits his paintings in galleries throughout the country.
“The female form is of arresting beauty; there is no other thing I would care as much to portray through my work,” declares Jeff Cornell, describing the main inspiration for his art. And, certainly, his appreciation for feminine beauty shows in every contour, every line. What is perhaps more unique and surprising, however, is how fully Cornell can convey the mood of feminine serenity, contemplation and sensuality with so little use of color, such delicate texture and such an economy of lines.

“I want my work to speak to every person who views it, but it is important to me that the message be whispered rather than shouted,” the artist states. His message is certainly whispered, if not softly sung.

With very little use of shading, his paintings show rounded, sinuous forms, volume. With very little use of color, they show vibrancy, emotion. With an economy of lines, they reach a level of astonishing realism, but only through suggestion. With almost no texture, they are nonetheless palpable. And with very little narrative structure, they hint at movement, thought, feeling and action.

Jeff Cornell’s art is perhaps the most difficult of all: the art of subtlety. The art of suggesting human subjectivity—unexpressed thoughts, subcurrents of emotions and hidden desires—rather than displaying them dramatically on a canvas.
Alexandru Darida was born in 1955 in Romania. He benefited from an extensive artistic training. He studied at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Romania, the Liberal Academy of Art in Rome and the American Academy of Art in Chicago. His work has been featured in Municipal Galleries and the National Museum of Art in Bucharest, Romania. It has won numerous awards, including the prestigious Formello-Rome International Prize for painting.
Alexandru Darida was born in Transylvania, the region best known in the West for its ruthless ruler, Vlad Tepes, and the myth of Dracula that it later inspired. Yet his is not a regional work, but an art that recaptures the timeless magic and poetry of fairy tales. His iconographic paintings, though they retain an Eastern European feel, transcend any particular place and time, in the same way the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm did during the eighteenth-century and the Romantic poetry of Romania’s national poet, Mihail Eminescu, did during the nineteenth-century.

Just as the Romantics sought inspiration in medieval and gothic literature, architecture and art, so the postromantic art of Alexandru Darida harks back to the radiance of medieval illuminations. His mysterious, ethereal female figures seem transposed from a distant place and time; a time when femininity was associated with magic, mysticism and spirituality. Light, winged, golden and glowing like religious icons, embellished with flowers and crowns like classical goddesses, Darida’s women are allegorical fantasies that still populate our childhood fantasies and dreams.

His application of paint is both delicate and rough. Soft plays of light and shadow highlight the luminosity of gold. At the same time, the vitality of heavy, swirling and knife-edge application of paint endows his paintings with a modern feel: as if bringing down to earth, into our very lives, the lightness and elevation of his fairytale art.
François Fressinier is a French artist of remarkable versatility, delicacy and talent. Influenced by the great European masters, he has studied fine art at the Ecole Brassartin Tours. His paintings are exhibited all over the world, including the United States, Europe and Japan.
François Fressinier's work appears so familiar and yet so unique, it's because he makes his own the art which clearly has influenced his style: the frescoes and sculptures of the classical and Hellenistic periods; the fervor, beauty and simplicity of David's Neoclassical painting; the tempting, innocent beauty of Bouguereau's Romanticism; the evocative theatricality of the Pre-Raphaelites; the ornamental motifs that embellish the sensuality of Klimt's art nouveau. Absorbing so many distinct periods and styles, Fressinier's paintings are a lesson in art history all unto themselves. Yet what strikes viewers even more than the density of these cultural allusions, is the individuality, freshness and versatility of the artist's style.

Fressinier gracefully moves from the vaporous fresco-like classical paintings such as I love you, The Three Graces, Odalisque and Pure Innocence—where beautiful young women seem to emerge like Venuses from the froth of creation—to the allure, vibrant color and ornamentation of the art deco style of Visions, Woman of Love and The Pearl, where the beauty of the feminine form is almost confounded with the richness of the background. Each style he touches, the artist transforms, adapting it to his own goals: "My passion is to paint the human figure in all of its intricacies of beauty and life. I am interested in projecting sentiments of admiration and joy, with modern images reminiscent of the ancient world."

Which is why even in Fressinier’s decorative art nouveau-style paintings we won't find the decadence; the membrane-like flatness; the impossible effort to dissolve the flesh into the immateriality of decoration. On the contrary, his modern decorative techniques only bring out the softness, vibrancy and beauty of femininity. They offer a feast for the eyes and an even more satisfying one for the imagination.
David Graux was born in Besançon, France in 1970, where he still lives and works. He has experimented with different styles before finding his own unique artistic touch. His main subject is the beauty and mystery of woman, evoked both through his sensual nudes and through the symbolic richness and Oriental motifs of his rich backgrounds. His paintings are, in effect, forms of tangible poetry.
Even David Graux’s titles exude poetry, let alone his evocative art. The shadow of the wind, Grazed sigh, The echo of a dream all suggest the last breath of Romanticism as it meets the impenetrable mystery of Symbolism.

In each one of Graux’s paintings we can feel the poetry of Rimbaud, touched by the Orient and transported to our times. As in symbolic poetry, Graux’s art combines the accessible with the unintelligible. The beautiful nudes are palpably accessible: romantic, sensual, classic, in private poses that excite the curiosity, stimulating dream, but not desire. Yet the Oriental symbols-invented by the artist and belonging only to the language of his imagination—are ungraspable. They touch upon the playful and the abstract, never fading into mere background or ornamentation. On the contrary, they travel the surface of the paintings, functioning as background and foreground alike-as an enveloping atmosphere-to the ethereal nudes.

David Graux’s art, like all forms of poetic expression, is inherently philosophical. It captures the essence of a significant aspect of human existence: the way in which what seems most transparent, accessible, real and temporal is simultaneously most illegible, distant and timeless. Deep within the human imagination-along with Hugo’s Contemplations, Baudelaire’s Correspondences and Rimbaud’s melodious symbols-we can find Graux’s tangible poetry.
Philippe Pache was born in 1961 in Lausanne, Switzerland. He was educated at the School of Applied Arts of Vevey. Since 1982 he has held solo and group exhibits in galleries and museums all over the world, including the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris and the Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts.
For centuries soft shadows in painting expressed mood, emotion and intimacy at least as much as color can. Da Vinci used chiaroscuro to convey the ambiguity of human expression; Caravaggio to highlight the drama and tumult of life; Vermeer to hint at blooming youth and the inner world of thoughts and emotions; La Tour to suggest simple faith and pensiveness.

The photographer Philippe Pache relies upon this time-tested technique in painting to bring life, drama and above all contemplation to artistic photography. His nudes exude beauty and tranquility. They are exquisitely posed yet look completely natural. The focus of his images is on how each gesture and expression-the body itself-reveals a rich inner world of thought and feeling.

The interplay of light and shadow not only highlights the depth of human subjectivity, but also marks the fluid boundaries between humanity and nature. Some of his portraits, though always beautiful, are facial landscapes of light, contour and shadow.

They gleam with the insentience of the mountains, sea and land that sometimes surround them; they become one, interchangeable with their magnificent natural settings. The beauty of femininity captured by Pache goes beyond realistic visual representation. It is the landscape of our most haunting and delicate dreams.
Leonardo Pereznieto is, along with me, the co-founder of postromanticism. He lives in Mexico and comes from an artistic family: his mother is a musician and his father was a well-known artist. He has recently won the Mozart Prize for the Arts for his sculpture, which epitomizes the ideals of postromanticism: an incredible life-like quality which is nevertheless full of imagination and fancy; a delicate sensual touch; a passionate sense of the spirituality of earthly existence.
Leonardo Pereznieto’s art harks us back to the motifs of Romanticism—the muse, the angel—which are evocative and beautiful in their own right only to reshape them to our dreams; to make them palatable for our world. He captures the beauty of youth, only to endow it with its own thoughts and dreams. He conveys the poise and delicacy of femininity, only to allow women to fly toward their own visions.

Pereznieto’s sculpture also materializes the spirituality of passionate love. Rodin was the first to show that sensuality and spirituality could be perfectly compatible; furthermore, for the first time we saw in fine art woman locked in a man’s embrace that wasn’t violent or unwanted. Where do we go from Rodin to show the artistic development of passionate sensuality?

Leonardo Pereznieto shows us the way: to heaven. In his sculpture “On the way to Heaven” old spiritual motifs—such as winged angels—enact new human relationships. The angel is a young man grasping a young woman that reaches up to him to uplift her; to bring her salvation. The young woman, her body equally beautiful and idealized as the angel’s, remains, however, earthly. Her pose is more ambivalent and complicated than his. She reaches out to the angel, extending her body on the tip of her toes, as if trying to be closer to her winged lover. At the same time, however, there’s a determination and immobility about her stance. It’s as if she were rooted to the earth and, despite her partner’s efforts, refused to budge. This bronze sculpture is also reproduced in acrylic, with a lit base, which illuminates like a beacon of hope the earthly lovers. The effect is magical.

Ultimately, this symmetry and counterpoint of effort and movement between lovers, raises the question: who’s pulling whom? Is the woman pulling her angel to earth or is he trying to raise her to heaven? And which place is the most adequate for a shared human life; for a life that wedd the physical to the spiritual? This uplifting sculpture embodies the movement and ambivalence of age-old struggles to find, through passionate love, some kind of meaning, solace and spirituality on earth. Leonardo’s art expresses the hopes and promises of our postromanticism.
Tuan is a Vietnamese sculptor deeply influenced by the Western tradition which touched French Indochina. He has received the Gloria Medal from the National Sculpture Society (New York) and been commissioned for a number of public works, including a 15-foot monument for the City of Westminster, commemorating the partnership between American and Vietnamese soldiers during the Vietnam War.
“Art is vital for me. It is to believe in people, in life, in love. It is a response to the beauty of nature. As an artist I do what I do for no other purpose than to express my feeling.” Tuan

These words fit well with Wordsworth’s vision, when he called poetry the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Looking at Tuan’s works, however, it’s not surprising that it came from him nor that his sculptures are often introduced by his own lyrical poetry.

Light, frail, eternally youthful, airy, sinuous—quite literally dancing—Tuan’s sculptures capture flights of fancy; they are embodiments of art itself. Indeed, this postromantic sculptor favors the themes of dancing, singing, playing musical instruments. One art form overflows unto another, bringing mind and body together as did the symposia of Greek philosophers and statesmen, which, as Plato tells us in The Banquet, were introduced by food, dancing and flute-playing. For, the Greeks believed, the deepest thought requires an atmosphere conducive to the elevation of the spirit; to the frenzied, passionate contemplation of the world.

As in Plato’s ancient dialogues and Wordsworth’s Romantic poetry, Tuan’s figures shed the vestiges of their clothes—already thin, torn and as diaphanous as membranes—to escape the materiality of the world unto a higher plane of existence. They fly, dance, swirl towards the contemplation of beauty and the celebration of spirit that have been nearly forgotten in modern times. Tuan helps us remember what beauty looks and feels like when materialized—so evanescently—by art.