



## An Aesthetic Endeavor

BY BRANDON M. FITZPATRICK

The representational artists showing with Brandon Michael Fine Art share the demanding project of highlighting beauty and intensity in modern life. They also set the present moment in the frame provided by a tradition of artistic reflection. Each of these artists established themselves as important figures within our artistic tradition. For example, the paintings of Ruth Epstein are renowned in New York, and she is esteemed on the East Coast. Anatoly Dverin resides in Massachusetts and his work is prominent nationally. Well known to collectors in Santa Fe are artists Eric Michaels, Bill Gallen, and Elizabeth Sandia. These three painters are, in addition to their notoriety in Santa Fe, collected nationally and internationally. Eric Michaels has exhibited at the Royal Watercolor Society in London, Bill Gallen has won awards at Salon International, and Elizabeth Sandia has paintings in the collec-

tion of the US State Department. The success of each artist is a result of a capacity to achieve full artistic intention and this capacity has clearly appealed to collectors.

Found within each artist and most collectors is the aesthetic impulse to create and enjoy objects for their own sake, to delight in the way things look and sound, and to find significance in appearances. However, the aesthetic impulse is only part of the full artistic intention. Michaels, Gallen, and Sandia set human emotions within a visual context that, at its best, illuminates our experience. In their work, the aesthetic impulse encounters the spiritual impulse. Through this combination they draw upon and convey a sacred view of human life. Such work produces a lasting resonance and we continue to revisit their paintings.



The impressionist paintings of Eric Michaels invite us to look beyond the sensuous and the consumable to a meaning that sets us apart from the rest of nature and enables a fuller appreciation of our passage through it. Whether a pastoral or market scene, he presents through various mediums an invitation to see authentically. Michaels is a signature member of the Oil Painters of America, National Watercolor Society, and the Pastel Society of America. Through his art Michaels creates contact with our experience — the experience that unites us in the here and now. In *Pueblo Afternoon* he sets the viewer in the scene. The women of the painting are curious about us. We are curious about them. The subjects of his paintings span across continents, but Michaels always sets their experience within the spiritual context that shows the weight of a life.

Bill Gallen creates works of art from deeply held convictions

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bill Gallen, *Floating World*, oil on linen, 30" × 40";

THIS PAGE: Bill Gallen, *Winer Stream*, oil on linen, 18" × 24"

worked out through years of contemplation. Gallen has a vision of human life that enables him to live to the full, to accept our mortality, and to recognize the value of being who we are. The power of experience is present in each of his paintings. In *Floating World*, Gallen ennobles what is genuine within our perceptions of a vast desert landscape and the sky above — the vastness of being, space, and self. In order to capture the emotions brought about by such a setting, Gallen often paints on location to come closer to the subject of his study. Within landscape painting, Gallen counts Ned Jacob, Michael Lynch, and David Ballew among his most influential teachers. We learn from Gallen's paintings the goal of the representational artist is not achieved through a break with the past, but through an extension of an artistic lineage. Gallen works from within this historical tradition and strives to present his subject with the singularity of his own vision. He looks to pass along his experience to the next generation by teaching, returning the largesse he has received from his teachers to the line of painters that is to come.

Elizabeth Sandia works primarily with pastels and is a signature



member of the Pastel Society of America. Her paintings have appeared in more than twenty art publications in the past decade, such as Pastel Artist International, Southwest Art, and American Art Collector. She credits Albert Handel with introducing her to pastels. Like Handel, Sandia has an ability to use the existing forms of artistic expression in order to show something important. She does so with color. Sandia's *Gold Light* offers a vision of the sacred. The heavy bells within organic architecture bring the capital of our inherited New Mexico culture to bear on the present moment. From Sandia's paintings we learn culture is at once local and placeless, present and timeless, the possession of a community sanctified by time.

Michaels', Gallen's, and Sandia's award winning paintings are in museum, corporate, private, and state collections. As collectors, we admire artists, but are also part of the artistic endeavor. To participate properly requires a reorganization of our lives, and involves a spiritual as well as an aesthetic discipline. The appreciative collector must come to the work with as much effort as the artist put into it. The

paintings of Michaels, Gallen, and Sandia assemble in the background of our lives always ready to reward our attention. Enter the painting, pass through the frame and come to see the vision of true artists: a vision of human life as mattering, and mattering more than can sometimes be said. To engage a painting is an exercise of imagination; it is also an exercise of taste, which in turn is a meditation on human experience and an attempt to build a shared conception of what is worthy of our attention. Our interest in art does not stem from our passing desires, but reveals what we are and what we value. In this regard, the paintings of Eric Michaels, Bill Gallen, and Elizabeth Sandia are worthy of our attention. ■

OPPOSITE PAGE: Elizabeth Sandia, *Gold Light*, pastel on board, 15" x 9"; THIS PAGE: Eric Michaels, *Pueblo Afternoon*, oil on panel, 24" x 30".

Grand Opening June 1st 2008. Visit Brandon Michael Fine Art, 202 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, NM, 87501. Phone: 505-670-6603. [brandonmichaelfineart.com](http://brandonmichaelfineart.com).

