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art and the city

by Jim Magner

Artist Portrait: Katie Miller

You will be entranced, totally captivated, by the overall majesty of the canvas. Beautiful young people, children really, are curiously suspended in undefined space, and enveloped in extraordinary trappings—from hard, shiny, multicolored glass beads, to the plush softness of stuffed toys. These are the jolting visual clues to the uncertain and shifting currents that blow through their insular worlds—the sudden pressures they must endure.

You will be stunned by the painting itself; the up-close encounter with flawless technique can pull you in and keep you prisoner for quite awhile.

Katie Miller is not herself prisoner to her own mastery of technique—the classic realistic depiction of objects and people, reminiscent of the 15th century Renaissance. The technique is primarily for the telling of the story. It becomes the visual language of adolescence. It amplifies the tension of the transition years: the progression from the custody of childhood to the freedom, and ultimately servitude, of adulthood.

Finally, of course, it is the work of art, the painting itself that must triumph, and it does. Katie Miller takes pleasure in the creative evolution of ideas and themes. After much work with the child models in costume, taking many photos and combining elements that express the right emotions, the painting itself can take months. She begins with the under paintings and then builds up the opacity of paint through colored glazes. It's a systematic and exacting process.

Katie studied at the International School of Painting, Drawing, and Sculpture, Montecastello di Vibio, Umbria, Italy, and received her BFA and MFA, 2011, at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. She has won a number of awards in a short period of time, has exhibited widely, and is included in private and corporate collections.

Her latest series, "Enduring" can be seen this month at Connersmith gallery, 1358 Florida Ave, NE. See www.connersmith.us.com.

Jim Magner's Thoughts on Art

It is impossible not to be completely captivated by the paintings of Katie Miller. For me, each is the seductive opening to an adventure in imag-



ination. It's like reading the opening lines of a story by Ray Bradbury or Kurt Vonnegut. Each painting can be a leap into the unexplored possibilities of existence. I want to know what happens next. Why exactly does the kid have blue frosting on his face? Or the young guy with the squirt guns, suspended in eerie light...what's happening there?

The "tweens" in her paintings are, in a way, floating through this strange period in their lives—suspended in a space inhabited by expectations, demands, and influences. Each child is purposely portrayed, Katie says, with "emotional ambiguity: their mouths neither open nor closed, with hints of fear, bewilderment, pleasure, confidence and wonderment."

And that is precisely what makes them intriguing. Ray or Kurt (or Poe or King) would take one look and away they would go...scribbling like mad, creating fantasy worlds more real than real. And that's what I want to do when I look at these wonderfully painted moments.

Actually, you don't see much story telling in art. You see a lot of pretty pictures that are simply notions of an ideal world. Some contemporary works are flat statements of despair. Abstract paintings are usually neither...just exercises in color, mostly pleasant. But when you look at a painting that leads you into your own mind, back into that wild and scary period when everything is possible—where all roads are open—before the age when so many paths to the future have already closed... Wow.

You remember. There was no clear path to follow, no imposed handrails that would keep you from dropping over the edge. Yes, take it from there and let your imagination soar.

At the Museums

"Andrew Wyeth: Looking Out, Looking In"
National Gallery of Art, West Bld.
7th and Constitution NW
May 4–Nov. 30

Andrew Wyeth, 1917-2009, is one of the best-known and publically loved painters of 20th century America. His works in tempura and watercolor always contained a quiet, lonely loveliness, and were often sentimental at a time when



Youth in a Party Hat. Katie Miller 2014



Girl Wound in White Cloth by Katie Miller, 2014.

Left: A Young Lady Adorned with Beads by Katie Miller. 2014