

# THREE TO WATCH

There is a lot of superb art being made these days; this column by Allison Malafronte shines light on a trio of gifted individuals.

In the paintings of **SARA SCRIBNER** (b. 1982), young women appear in ethereal settings, dressed in vintage clothing, and usually surrounded by flowers, butterflies, birds, and other feminine symbols. Featuring otherworldly environments and mystical motifs, these paintings create a sweeping sense of being in another time or place, perhaps even in a dream. That is why Scribner refers to her paintings as “dreamscapes.” In her words, she is looking to transport the viewer to “a more magical place,” using her imagination and skills as a realist painter to create that portal to another world.

“Lately, I have been thinking more about creating dreamscapes,” the artist shares. “I want to capture the moment when you wake up from a dream — when you open your eyes but can still see the other world you came from, in your mind’s eye.” Scribner also draws inspiration from real-life settings that contain dream-like qualities. In particular, when she is outdoors — in forests, gardens, or by the sea — she likes to reflect on the beauty and grandeur around her, then uses it as fodder for future paintings. “There is something about being in nature that makes me contemplative,” Scribner says. “The paintings *Evening Hollyhocks* and *Harvest at Last Light* are both studies on that feeling.”

As with all of her paintings, in *Evening Hollyhocks* Scribner not only pays close attention to fine details in the figure and flesh tones but also in the design of the background. When looking through her work, we see numerous backgrounds that, if extracted from the whole, could function as decorative paintings or textile designs themselves. Combining the complementary aesthetics of portraiture and design creates an even more compelling image.

Based in Oklahoma, Scribner honed her painting skills at the Academy of Art University (San Francisco), from which she graduated in 2005. Through her studies and experimentation, she realized that combining traditional and imaginative realism was her strength and passion. As she says, “Traveling the world through books, sifting through stories, I find myths and folktales that use flora and fauna in their allegories. When combined with realism, the results are contemporary paintings that speak a language that has been used by painters and poets for centuries.”

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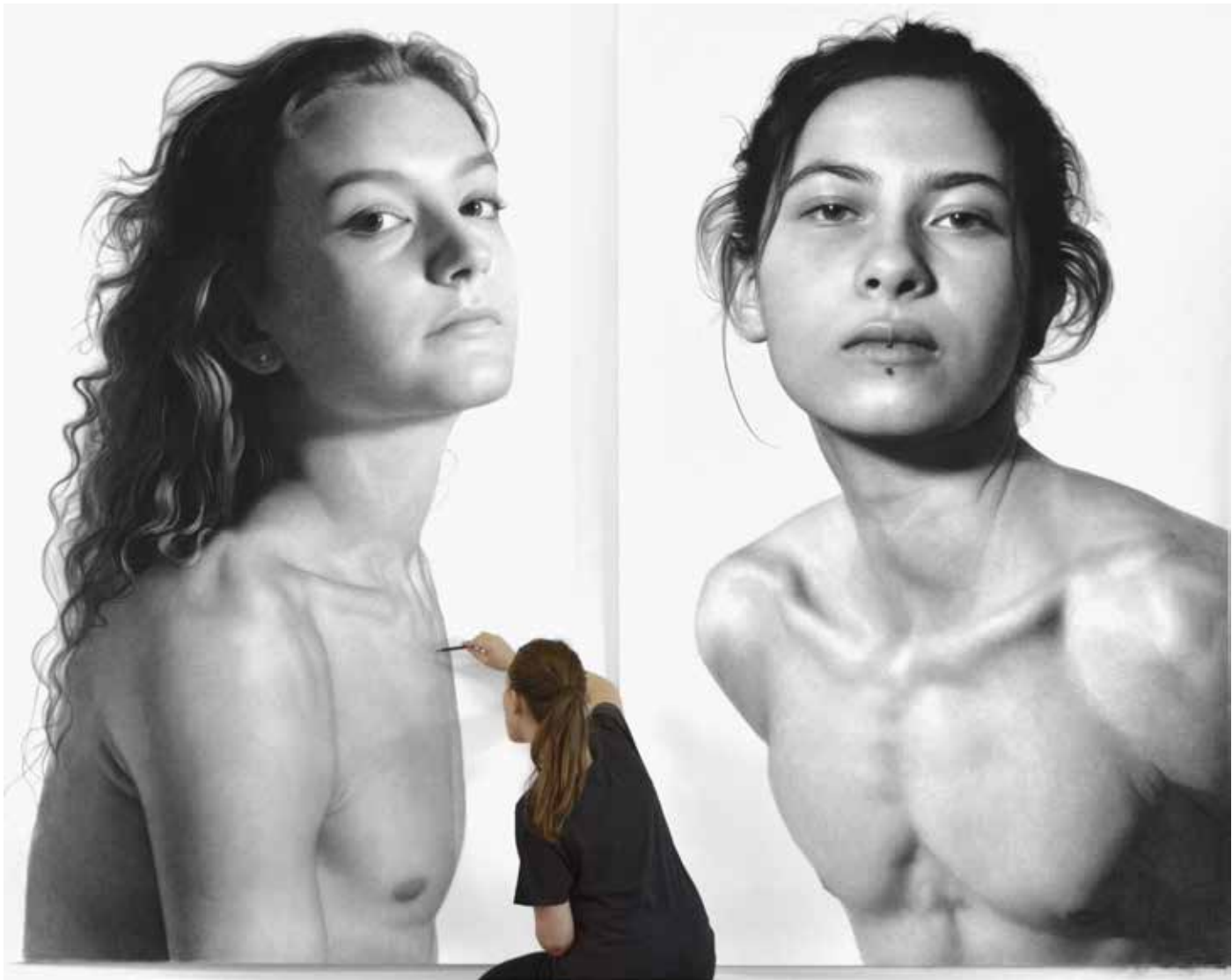
SCRIBNER is represented by Wally Workman Gallery (Austin).

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**SARA SCRIBNER** (b. 1982), *Evening Hollyhocks*, 2019, oil on aluminum, 24 x 8 in., Gallery 1261 (Denver)

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**CLIO NEWTON** (b. 1989), *Hayden* (left) and *René* (right), 2019, compressed charcoal on Fabriano paper, 91 x 58 in. each, private collection

The debut solo exhibition by **CLIO NEWTON** (b. 1989) — which appeared this autumn at Forum Gallery (New York City) and opened to a packed house — piqued many people’s interest and raised more than a few eyebrows. *Venus* was the artist’s first public presentation of her series of large gender-composite drawings exploring the themes of femininity in art history and gender identity today. In such fictional portrayals as *Hayden* and *René* (pictured here), Newton renders portraits of women onto the bodies of men using a hyper-realistic technique that on the surface blurs the edges and transitions between the two.

One of the artist’s purposes in creating these bi-gendered amalgams is to investigate classical norms of beauty, modesty, and idealism as expressed in art history. Newton believes that the artistic conventions of androgyny and idealization were an inherent part of a tradition governing and censoring representations of the body and women in the past, particularly during the Renaissance. “I am interested in a Renaissance aesthetic of masculine femininity without idealization,” she shares. “The specificity of a face, the idiosyncrasies of a body, and the psychological world these details can suggest, act against a tradition of censorship. I hope to question what defines

a body or a gender and what qualities make that body appealing, approachable, threatening, or political.”

Newton continues, “I am also deeply interested in the politicization of women’s bodies and non-binary individuals. In these drawings, I wonder which features of a person inform our understanding of a body, what is deemed appropriate, and what is perceived as beautiful.” Despite part of this discourse relating to gender issues and gender identity, Newton’s depictions do not fall easily into transgender categorizations, but rather retain distinctly female (face) and male (body) characteristics. If indeed there is a message to be surmised from the art, it seems to be less political and more humanistic: the artist intends to celebrate the possibilities of the body and the individual.

Having received her B.F.A. at Cooper Union (New York City) and an M.F.A. at Zürcher Hochschule der Kunste in Zürich, Newton completed further studies at the Florence Academy of Art in Italy. Today she lives and works in Zürich.

**NEWTON** is represented by *Forum Gallery* (New York City)

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**ALESSANDRO TOMASSETTI** (b. 1970), *To the Birds*, 2019, oil on aluminum, 27 1/2 x 19 1/2 in., private collection. This painting will travel with the Art Renewal Center's International Salon in 2020 ([artrenewal.org](http://artrenewal.org)).

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While the women painters featured in this month's *Three to Watch* section focus on female perspectives and explore various sides of the feminine beauty ideal, the figurative work of **ALESSANDRO TOMASSETTI** (b. 1970) is about what it means to be male. The Canadian-born Italian artist does not pull any punches in presenting the rarely exposed sides of masculinity: vulnerability, sensitivity, and intimacy. These softer characteristics conventionally associated with the female form are juxtaposed against the physical appearance of his sitters, who often appear quintessentially masculine: strong, strapping, self-assured.

This irony is no accident, as Tomassetti's art asks viewers to rethink assumptions about female and male attributes. At the same time, he is looking at how women and men have been portrayed in traditional portraiture and modern advertising throughout history. "Painting predominantly figurative work of men is a natural fit for me," the artist explains. "Obviously I think there is beauty in the male form. There is a very strong tradition in fine art of female representation and female beauty, both by male artists and female artists, but the opposite is not as true. Male portraiture sort of went the way of popes and CEOs and captains of industry. But the men that I was seeing and was interested in painting weren't represented. I think being able to see men in a gentler, more vulnerable way can only benefit our society today."

Now based in Barcelona, Tomassetti received his B.F.A. at McMaster University (Ontario) and went on to work as a special-effects and computer-animation artist for Disney and Sony, followed by a stint as a menswear fashion designer. After taking a workshop with the Spanish painter Eloy Morales in 2014, Tomassetti decided



to pursue the profession of painter full-time, teaching himself the majority of what he knows today. Three short years after that workshop, he began exhibiting and selling his work in Europe and the U.S. to a widely receptive and responsive audience. Today Tomassetti continues to revere the historical tradition of realism while acknowledging the language of contemporary times. And although most of his models are recruited from Instagram, his paintings stand in stark contrast to the social-media selfie. Instead, in his imagery, the creative instrument of interpretation — the paint brush — is back in the artist's hand.

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**TOMASSETTI** is represented by 33 Contemporary Gallery (Chicago) and RJD Gallery (Bridgehampton, NY).