

ART SPOTTING with Jamie Thompson

WORK, DIGNITY, AND BEAUTY: Q&A WITH AMERICA MARTIN

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The bold, large-scale works of America Martin pulse with energy. Her art emphasizes line, color, and texture and uses the human form to express "universal truths."

Martin, a Colombian-American painter and sculptor, has a distinctive style that mixes abstract and indigenous motifs with hints of Picasso and Gauguin. She injects her work with a vitality and enthusiasm that demands attention.



For her paintings, Martin employs raw canvas, layering it with oil and acrylic paints and finishing with varnish. The roughness of the canvas conveys a sense of raw, unabashed emotion.

On August 30th, Martin will be in Maine for a launch of her new contemporary works at Rockland's Carver Hill Gallery. During Labor Day weekend "America's Maine," an exhibition that represents her time spent on the Maine coast, will be under way. I had the pleasure to ask Martin some questions about her influences, her process, and her upcoming exhibition.

What inspires you?

I am inspired by work, dignity and beauty. These three elements, when authentic, are never without one another.

I love the lobster men and women on the Maine coast, their bold sure movements in bringing in a catch, the curve of a strong back and the clean lines of an action done a thousand times. I appreciate the dignity of a woman running, or at rest and the simple beauty of child coming to understand the world and the people in it.

Can you talk about how your Colombian heritage influences your work?

Roots are like fingerprints. They are always there informing and coloring every choice you make. My Colombian roots definitely have an impact on what I find beautiful aesthetically and what I'm drawn to. But I'm also influenced by other peoples' culture and heritage. That's something I welcome. Is it not the best thing to learn something you did not know before?!

How did you become interested in creating art?

When I was nine, I found an old large-scale book of the works of Vincent Van Gogh at a garage sale and bought it for a quarter. I was sitting on the floor of my bedroom — the sun was setting making the air gold and thick with beauty. I remember turning the pages and gazing at the paintings and feeling something change in the very center of me. I knew at that exact moment that I had two homes: the home of my mother and that of my spirit. I remember so clearly feeling an overwhelming sense of comfort, relief and gladness, and I knew that I would not get lost along my life's road because I loved something very much, and that something was art.



Your work is reminiscent of some of the Old Masters — is this a deliberate choice or does it come through from your inspiration?

By nature I am drawn to enduring classics. I'd rather read Portuguese poetry than watch reality TV. The wonderful thing about all the arts — music, literature and fine art, is that we understand by observation and comparison. And we compare things to other things we've experienced. This is what makes art so cool and the most universal language. I deeply love the works of the masters, after all, they have created the very vocabulary we use today. I look at the work of other artists past and present, as an ongoing conversation that we all must add to. Artists do not ask permission to speak, to make — we do so because it is how we breathe.

Can you describe your process?

I usually put up a canvas, or take out a piece of paper and just look. I let the image present itself. I think of this point as when the artist and muse come together. People often ask, how do you know when a piece is done? You know a piece is done the second you are aware of it. It's when you stop creating intuitively and start looking at the work objectively. That's the time to stop because you're already outside of the arena.



What can we expect from the Carver Hill Gallery exhibition?

The August exhibition will be a collection of images inspired by falling hopelessly in love with Maine. Last summer I drove up and down the Maine coast, visited neighboring islands and listened. The voice that I heard was as vast and as varied as the colors of the ocean. I came away with a respect for the beauty, the people and the dedication it takes to work with the seasons and the sea. There is a pace to Maine, a rhythm that works on you and leads you to wander, to be quiet and to look. The images I created came from that space and from that rhythm. Whimsical renditions of men at work, a boy with a bucket of clams, night swims in lakes, ink studies of docks and busy hands — and always the female form. As a woman feeling the presence of seasons, I found that the voice of time sings in harmony in Maine with a nostalgia that heightens moments and memories. These are not elements that I would associate with Los Angeles, where I live. But all painters know that solitude is a window that is never closed. Places that beckon and nurture the insights of solitude seem to glow with a kindred light. Maine brims with this light.

Anything you can tell us about upcoming projects or plans?

I have a new large scale book entitled "Yes" coming out in October through Snail Press. It will feature selected works from 2009-2012. The rest of the year I will be developing a new body of work for a multi-media exhibition in 2014, entitled "My LA." This exhibition will essentially be a portrait of Los Angeles, and will permit me to regard my home city with new eyes. This will be such fun for me as I will be working with multi media: photography, painting, drawing, sculpture and film.

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JAMIE THOMPSON

Jamie Thompson works in Portland as a web editor and is also a freelance writer whose work has appeared online and in regional print publications. She's written about art, fashion, travel, and interior design. A former art gallery intern, archival collections assistant, and magazine editor, Jamie's professional aspirations have always revolved around her passion for art and the written word. She has a true appreciation for creativity, and even wields a brush herself once and a while. Jamie loves to explore her home state, read, listen to music, and bake far too many cupcakes.

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