

Painting a Narrative

Philip Barlow at Phillips Gallery

by Sue Martin, 15 Bytes

Philip Barlow doesn't want to be pigeonholed, boxed in as this kind of painter or that kind. The 80-year-old artist says he keeps "one foot in the box and the other outside—exploring the unexplored."

That's why, in Barlow exhibit this month at Phillips Gallery, you'll see a few moody landscapes, some narrative still lifes, and a bit of whimsy, too. Exploration makes him happy. And, "When I'm happy, my art is happy," he says. Though Barlow denies having a "style," his oil paintings are consistent in their smoothly glazed realism reminiscent of the classical masters. For his highly realistic still life paintings, he carefully sets up his models, lights and shoots them, and then paints from the photographs.

Sometimes his subjects are simple and simply beautiful, such as a bowl of blueberries and a spoon. Other times, his subjects suggest explicit or implied narrative. For example,

in "His and Hers," the models are two coffee cups, flanked by his and her respective eyeglasses and reading materials. Another painting features an old console radio on which a folded American flag is draped. Text at the bottom notes the date of President Roosevelt's broadcast and his words: "A state of war now exists."

These concepts for still life subjects often come to Barlow in the middle of the night, but he doesn't have to write them down: they're still there the next morning or when he starts his next five-hour stint in his studio.

His affinity for narrative or communicating some kind of feeling for his subject may go all the way back to sixth grade when he created his own comic strip. Or maybe it stems from his career as a graphic designer, working with clients on advertising and packaging design projects, where clear communication was key. Or perhaps it was the influence of his



Rick's Cafe, Casablanca
by Philip Barlow
Oil on Canvas
18" x 24"



Photo courtesy
Zoe Rodriguez, 15 Bytes

instructors at the University of Utah—George Dibble, Leconte Stewart, and Doug Snow—or his favorite artist John Singer Sargent. All of these experiences and influencers produced an artist who can only paint what he cares about, whether it's the whimsical or ironic juxtaposition of objects, the way light hits a bowl of berries, or the way storm clouds gather over the landscape.

After graduating from the University of Utah in 1962, Barlow set up his own commercial art firm in downtown Salt Lake City. Those were the days when the tools of design were pen, ink, watercolor, and gouache. Even as he produced work for his clients, he was using those same tools to create paintings for fun. He got involved in the Utah Watercolor Society and served as its president from 1985 to 86. He also found time to begin scouting galleries and began to sell his watercolors in Taos, Albuquerque, and Park City.

Barlow later switched to oil paint and honed his skills in the classical realism style that he is best known for today. But with that other foot outside the box, he acknowledges that some of the biggest influences on artists in the last part of the 20th century were the abstract expressionists, like Pollock and de Kooning, and pop artists like Warhol. There's a part of Barlow that just wants to play with paint for the sheer joy of it. He may do so, alone in

"Barlow keeps 'one foot in the box and the other outside, exploring the unexplored.'"



Songs Gone
by Philip Barlow
Oil on Canvas
16" x 22"

Songs Gone I
by Philip Barlow
Oil on Canvas
20" x 16"



meaning, though their subjects are different. They are both represented by District Gallery in Park City, where they have had father-daughter exhibits in the past.

Barlow's work is also in the Park Gallery in Carmel, California. He notes that one gallery can't hang as many paintings as he can produce, which is why he likes having relationships with three.

When asked if it's even possible to retire from art, Barlow's answer is emphatically, "No. As long as God gives me time, I'll keep painting." For now he's quite happy with two golf outings per week and a painting schedule that averages five hours per day, seven days a week.

When pressed, he acknowledges that maybe someday he'll no longer want or need galleries or money and can just step way outside the box and do something entirely different. "Maybe completely abstract. Maybe throw paint down and walk across it with my bare feet. If I got some enjoyment out of it, it would probably be worth it."

Barlow's work will share the main gallery with Sandy Freckleton Gagon at Phillips Gallery May 17 – June 14. 🍷

Home Alone
by Philip Barlow
Oil on Canvas
18" x 24"



his studio where no one can see. But he feels an obligation to his galleries and collectors to meet expectations.

However, that doesn't stop Barlow from a whimsical series of egg paintings, at least one of which may be in the Phillips Gallery exhibit. Noting that eggs are so perfect in their symmetry that they might be boring, Barlow challenged himself to make them anything but boring in the ways he posed and painted them—brown eggs next to white ones in a comment on diversity; and real eggs next to a plastic egg spilling its jellybean contents.

Though he doesn't paint as many landscapes as he used to, he couldn't resist the drama of stormy darkness. It reminded him of the way mystery writers used to start a story or novel with, "It was a dark and stormy night." So, working from photos he has taken during his travels, these paintings became a series of moody, almost monochromatic, paintings of storm clouds gathering over the landscape.

Barlow's daughter, Elizabeth Barlow, is also a painter based in San Francisco. Her style is also classically realistic and she shares her father's interest in narrative or symbolic

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"Surround"
17" x 6" x 6"