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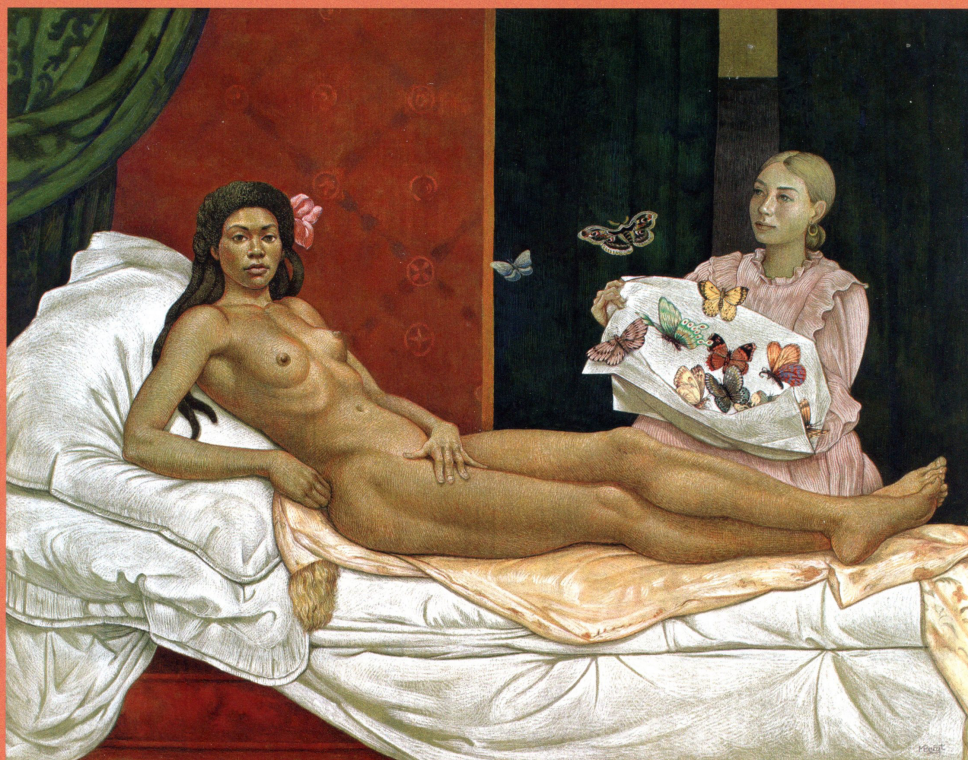
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COLLECTOR'S FOCUS THE ART OF THE NUDE

# BEYOND *the* SURFACE

BY JOHN O'HERN

**T**he English painter **Bruce Sargeant** (1898-1938) has been described as "a mythic figure in the modern art movement." He is also mythical, the imagined great-uncle of **Mark Beard** and one of many imagined artists that allow Beard to paint in different styles without appearing to be unfocused.

Sargeant, who died tragically young in a wrestling accident, was in his virile prime during the First World War thought then, optimistically, to be the war to end all wars.

Sargeant's *Bathers by the Shore* recalls early photographs of WWI soldiers bathing or at leisure—impossibly handsome and improbably innocent. These

figures appear to have farmers' tans as if they had been freshly harvested from the farm before being sent off to slaughter. (The war claimed nearly 10 million military personnel and another 10 million civilians.)

Sargeant's name is an oblique reference to John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) who produced homoerotic drawings and was rumored to be gay. Sargeant was born several years after the infamous libel trials of the Irishman Oscar Wilde in which the phrase "Love that dare not speak its name" arose. He and Wilde would be amazed that over a century later Ireland would be the first country to legalize same-sex marriage on a national level by popular vote.

**Michael Bergt** approaches art history by reversing the elements in Manet's iconic painting *Olympia*, 1863, a female nude reclining in her boudoir being presented with a bouquet of flowers by a black servant. It was deemed indecent at the time by the French public. Bergt comments, "Often, the only way for people to understand how their specific perspective may

be skewed is to be able to occupy the 'other' perspective. Societies create structures of what is commonly accepted to be 'normal.' In *Released*, I wanted to reference a groundbreaking painting that represented modern female nudity, which, at the same time, reinforced an old racial stereotype. By flipping the roles, we're compelled to see our own unconscious projections."

He continues, "Instead of a classic reclining white female nude, we see a reclining black nude. Instead of a black servant, we see a white servant. In Manet's painting, the black servant is presenting the nude with a large bouquet of flowers. In my painting, the white servant is releasing butterflies. The butterflies represent the metamorphosis of a dynamic, the change of a state and a new mission to pollinate these ideas to the world."

The butterfly element complements his recent series of works, *Chrysalis*, symbolizing transformation and emergence.

**Kristine Poole** recalls, "Repetition and pattern in sculpture have always been intriguing to me. I created my first curled figure for the sculpture *Chrysalis*. I had a number of wax casts of the original sculpture sitting on my desk and I started playing with them. I was mesmerized by the way they coalesced into these amazing geometric patterns."

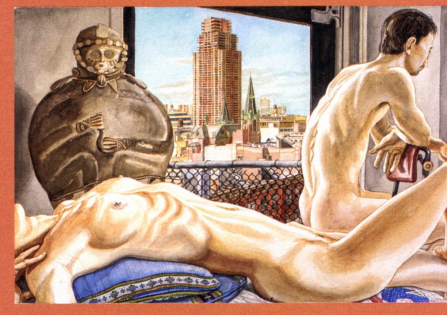
*Quaquaversal*, with seven figures, is the first in the series. Its title means "moving outwards in all directions from a common center." Mandala comes from the Sanskrit word for "circle," representing wholeness. It is used as a focusing device for meditation and spiritual practice. *Quaquaversal* suggests the common roots of humankind, the individual figures emerging from and coming together to form a symmetrical, ordered whole.

The founder of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius (1883-1969), wrote hopefully in an earlier period of crisis: "We are in the midst of a momentous catastrophe of world

history, of a transformation of all aspects of life and of the entire inner human being. This is perhaps fortunate for the artistic person, if he is strong enough to bear the consequences, because what we need is the courage to have inner experience."

*The Art of the Nude* includes artwork that is rooted in a classic tradition, but the artists featured expand on the techniques and ideas to create paintings and sculpture of today.

The Pittsburgh-based **Michael Berger Gallery**, since 1970, has hosted four one-man shows for **Philip Pearlstein**. A fellow native Pittsburgher, Pearlstein's massive talents and achievements have far exceeded his origins. When he was just 15, in 1942, two of his prints won a national competition and were reproduced in color in *Life Magazine*. As the preeminent figure painter of the era of the 1960s to 2000s, he led the revival in realist art. Pearlstein has always stressed the masterful architecture of his human figures, and of their contextual



1. Nuart Gallery, *Released*, gouache, colored pencil on toned paper, 21½ x 28", by Michael Bergt 2. EVOKE Contemporary, *Quaquaversal*, bronze with steel, ed. of 10, 14 x 14 x 3" with 20" high base, by Kristine Poole 3. ClampArt, *Bathers by the Shore*, oil on canvas, 66 x 84", by Mark Beard as Bruce Sargeant (1898-1938) 4. Michael Berger Gallery, *Gothic*, watercolor on paper, 40 x 60", by Philip Pearlstein