



Andrea Kowch

Ambiguous narratives that compel the viewer to engage are the heart of my work. The stories and inspiration behind my paintings stem from life's emotions and experiences, resulting in narrative, allegorical imagery that illustrates the parallels between human experience and the mysteries of the natural world. The lonely, desolate American landscape encompassing the paintings' subjects serves as an exploration of nature's sacredness and a reflection of the human soul, symbolizing all things powerful, fragile, and eternal. These real yet dreamlike scenarios serve as metaphors for the human condition, all retaining a sense of vagueness to involve the viewer in uncovering the various layers of mood and meaning, despite the fact that my main idea will always be present.

As a people, we share a common thread, and as active participants in an ever-changing modern world, the purpose of my work is to remind viewers of these places that we feel no longer exist, and to recognize and honor them as a part of our history that is worth preserving. In juxtaposing the human form with animals and a bygone uninhibited American landscape, I provide glimpses into "rooms," those oftentimes chaotic places we possess internally. The rural, Midwestern landscape of my home state serves as backdrop for the stage of human emotions and the animals present are vehicles for expressing the feelings and underlying tensions suppressed behind the human mask. Symbolic explorations of the soul and events concerning our environment are expressed through the combination of these elements to transform personal ideas into universal metaphors.



The Feast, 60" x 84", Acrylic on canvas, 2011 (pg. 14)

The Feast was born out of a commission request to create a table scene of sorts, and is my largest painting to date. The unique challenge of creating imagery on such a large scale allowed me to truly test and push my boundaries. The figures in this piece are one hundred percent life-size, allowing viewers to participate in the whole scene when they stand before it. I wanted to create a narrative laced with tension and mood where various windows and doors behind each figure contain something unique, symbolizing different thoughts and states of mind, themes and motifs commonly present in my work. One of the main purposes of this work is to allow viewers to raise their own questions as they interact with the characters and environment.

Marsh Hare, 30" x 30", acrylic on canvas, 2010 (above)

A further exploration in mood and color, Marsh Hare is a scene where I wanted to create a sense that something is slightly askew. The feelings present in this work are meant to arouse questions on the part of the viewer, and my own love of strange and eerie atmospheres led me to paint Marsh Hare with the purpose of evoking the mystery and intrigue often associated with quiet marshes, where nature's creatures lurk in the rushes, their presence and murmuring sounds creating an otherworldly, magical realm all their own. I want viewers to look at this painting and feel the dampness, hear the echo of a crow, the rustles in the silence – to feel as if you've fallen down the rabbit hole.



No Turning Back, 24" x 48", Acrylic on canvas, 2008

One of my earlier, more personally influenced paintings, No Turning Back embodies the realization that experiences present themselves to teach us about ourselves, leaving us with a feeling of gratefulness for them in the end due to what they show us and the positive ways in which they ultimately shape us. This painting represents the glory of new beginnings after coming to terms with things past and moving on. While it may seem strange, even destructive upon first glance, the intent is to promote reflection. In agriculture, field-burns occur each year to cleanse the earth of any lingering diseased crops and prepare the land for re-seeding. In the manner fire paves way for nature's re-growth, the flames symbolize purification and renewal. Will the house catch fire? That's where a lot of the suspense lies in this piece. The figure, unbound, is not in the house, and the swallows that nested in the upstairs room are leaving, too. All the living creatures are free, while the old, decaying house, a symbol of the past, will either remain or burn to the ground; a matter of choice. Seemingly perilous on the surface, there is an odd sense of "safety" that lies beneath.



Night Hill, 36" x 24", Acrylic on canvas, 2010

Originating from a desire to explore a night palette, as well as to represent the mood and mystery associated with night itself, Night Hill speaks of those still moments where our subconscious takes over. Each time I look up at stars I can't help but realize how small I feel alongside the universe as it stretches up and on into dark oblivion. We make up such a small part of it, despite our immense impact; mere fireflies circling about, lighting the way before flickering out. I came across this very stagecoach at an antique shop on the side of the road one day. It was strangely intriguing to me, and I thought, why not put it up on the hill? It encompassed an ethereal almost spiritual quality, like an artifact of the supernatural realm, where all things legendary and ghostly dwell. Fire holds several meanings for me, and I often find my thoughts unintentionally centering around duality as I paint, coming to realize its steady presence at the core of my pictures. The real and unreal, history and the present, opposing emotions, endings and beginnings, nature's seasons and cycles, all of it is present there. I wanted this painting to capture night's magical quality, when imaginary illusions become tangible realities.



The Travelers, 36" x 36", Acrylic on canvas, 2011

A trip on the verge of going awry, The Travelers involves an attitude of both panic and indifference; when we become unconscious of what we are actually doing because we are so caught up in our heads. The world, however, stops for no one as animals reveal, continuing to go about their tasks, driven by their basic needs in their uncomplicated ways. There are several contrasting emotions here. The neutral sky and hazy landscape gives this painting an air of ambiguity, which further serves the purpose of this picture, as I wanted its essence to be one of dark playfulness tinged with uncertainty.



Pheasant Keeper, 36" x 48", Acrylic on canvas, 2011

Inspired by the natural world and our primeval attachment to it, Pheasant Keeper, speaks to the ways in which we, as humans, "attach" ourselves to things of meaning to us. Windows for me often serve as portals to alternate states of reality, revealing landscapes that oftentimes both mirror and contradict inner longings of the portrayed characters. The air of fixed isolation permeating the room contrasted with the free, unrestrained landscape is reflective of being in a state of limbo between the physical and the spiritual, ready to face the new and unknown, but held back, unable to escape. Tone and atmosphere were important factors for me in this.

Sojourn, 72" x 60", Acrylic on canvas, 2011, (pg. 19)

The concept for Sojourn came about out of an initial curiosity to create a composition involving butterflies as a subject. I also wanted the structure of an old farmhouse to figure prominently in the scene, a large looming shape where I could indulge in exploring the details of all the old farmhouses I so love discovering on back road haunts, that are now leveled and no more. In several ways, Sojourn serves as a lingering homage to a past where things were so much purer, simpler. But like butterflies, which are in a constant state of transformation and migration, such is life, where things come and go, leaving it up to us to choose what's worth keeping and preserving. Butterflies have always served as symbols of hope and beauty throughout the ages, creatures that, despite their delicate fragility, still must brave long and brutal migrations. Even so, their short rests along the way are one of nature's most beautiful and fascinating events to behold. The contrast between them, the women, and the house was something that struck and appealed to me in my mind's eye; like a fusion of past, present, and future.



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