



VANESSA ROTHE

The Paris Seminar:  
A Contemporary Fine Art Project Based on Historical Success

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**A dozen American Artists repeat history in hopes of taking the next step in their work**

Throughout history American artists have found inspiration and gained much knowledge by viewing the masters, and painting in the grand museums of Paris, one of the most artistic cities in the world. From Whistler to Sargent, Cecilia Beaux to Mary Cassatt, artists have flocked here to study not only the masterworks on the walls, but with the masters themselves, learning from the respected master artists of their times. The tradition continues today, as our group of American realists journeys to Paris together in May of 2017 for the Paris Seminar. However, this trip will differ in that we will be teaching one another and learning from one another rather than from just one master.





Jeremy Lipking, *Girl with Tananger*, 2016, Oil on linen, 16 x 12 inches



Following in the footsteps of the great artists before us, we will copy from the masters and study their work in person. We will learn from curators and educators in the field, and paint together as we study pictorial composition and humanities, with the main focus of learning to create larger-scale, multi-figure compositional works.

There is a need for this voyage. It has been noted that there is a general lack of training for advanced figure composition in American art schools and ateliers in the last 20 to 30 years. Naturally there are schools that teach this advanced aspect of fine art, but there are not enough. This has left a gap at the top layer of learning for some American artists, perhaps causing us to shy away from creating large-scale, multi-figural works as masters from the past were so eager to accomplish. The Paris Seminar is intended address this need.

Naturally the world of fine art has changed quite a bit since the mid-1800s, when large-scale works were commissioned for the Church, Government officials, or Department. However, this doesn't necessarily mean we should no longer create such grand works, and instead paint only single figures, since we know those will sell—although we will no doubt also continue to do so. We aim to encourage the knowledge and desire to create multi-figure works ranging from large pertinent themes of struggles or glory of today, or even to create small a 16" x 20" work of three women sitting on the grass in dappled sunlight.

The Paris Seminar also aims to encourage greater artist camaraderie and social discussions among professional fine artists, to share our visions and inspirations as artists have done in Paris for generations. Sampling from schools such as the Florence Academy of Art, Grand Central Academy, California Institute of Art, Golden Gate Atelier, and Laguna College of Art and Design, the following artists will join together for this journey in 2017: Ryan Brown, Jeremy Lipking, Michelle Dunaway, Casey Childs, Olga Krimon, Katie Whipple, Brendan Johnston, Iliya Mirochnik, Alan J. Lawson, Richard Greathouse, Nicolas Martin, Sean Forester, and myself, Vanessa Rothe.

Ryan Brown said, "One of the great things about bringing all these minds and talents together is the opportunity to stretch far outside of our comfort zones. I think we can make some real strides towards more significant thinking and critical consideration of our pictures in the design/concept phase of development."



Iliya Mirochnik, *A Jewish Wedding*, Oil on linen, 84 x 111 inches

For our first voyage in 2017, these 12 artists will travel together—to learn from one another about group figure composition and humanities, to strengthen our palette of skills by sharing our knowledge. However, the future of the Paris Seminar aims to include two to three of these original artists as teachers, who will return to Paris the following year to teach group composition and humanities workshops to atelier or fine art students.

About the 2017 seminar, co-founder Sean Forester said, “Ateliers today teach cast drawing, still life, portraiture, and the study of the human figure. Important as this program is, an artist needs more. This is why we have founded the Paris Seminar. Studying compositional principles enables students to imitate the masters, not on the superficial level of following their subject matter or style, but on the deeper level of incorporating the truths they express. A grounding in the humanities helps students cultivate ideas for their work. Seeing how Goya, Manet, or Hopper addressed the issues of their time, students can find a way to do the same today.”



## *So what will be accomplished while in Paris?*

Sean Forester, a classically trained artist who studied at Cambridge University and the Florence Academy of Art, will be leading our seminars on group composition and a three-part discussion on art and humanities.

“The Paris Seminar humanities program is a brief survey of Western culture as it applies to visual artists,” Sean said. “We will first discuss Classical Greek world and its influence, followed by Dante and Shakespeare and some paintings and sculptures they inspired. Finally, we’ll try to understand some of the ideas that have shaped our world, from the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Modernism, to contemporary life. Hopefully it will offer Paris Seminar artists some ideas and inspiration.”

As an Artist, Editor, Curator, and Lecturer with a French Literature major, I will be giving group composition discussions touching on the importance of “atmospheric perspective” for group figure. I will also discuss the influence of the written word, exploring the effect of literature on fine art that was created in Paris during the 1800s and 1900s, and how it can be a great tool in creating contemporary works to this day. In addition to lecturing and organizing our group, I will also give a walking tour of Paris, recounting its history, pointing out further art, stories, and inspiration suitable for both plein air and studio work.

Iliya Mirochnik of the Repin Academy, along with Ryan Brown, who studied at the Florence Academy, will add important notes on group composition, sharing what they have learned at these top fine art schools. They will discuss how they created large-scale works and their approach. Other professionals in the world of art will offer additional notes and share their ideas.

Iliya will be showing us the steps they take at the Repin Academy of Art in St. Petersburg to concept, sketch and do layouts for a large scale, multi-figure work, and he is looking forward to sharing themes and how to develop new ideas.

“We will also have open conversations about why someone decided to do one theme and not the other,” Iliya said, “and hopefully even influence each other. I have a hard time believing that creating anything follows a linear trajectory. Often one theme influences (and even becomes) a completely different one. The greater the chances of that happening here, the better the outcome.”





Ryan Brown, *Christ Consoling the Widow*, Oil on linen, 60 x 60 inches

Ryan suggests perhaps adding a narrative paragraph about an idea we have to paint to help us get started: “I think this type of visualization and context would help people dive deeper into the purpose of making a painting, something I think is needed and sometimes lacking in much of today’s contemporary realist work. Finding more purpose for a work will help us move beyond mere depiction and image making to a richer realization of the creation of lasting works of art.”





Michelle Dunaway studying/copying hands from John Singer Sargent's *Portrait of Mrs. Edward Darley Boit (Mary Louisa Cushing)* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 2013



Artist Michelle Dunaway has often found the opportunity to paint directly from the masters at museums, and notes the importance of doing so. The value of being in front of masterworks, examining their strokes and taking notes on their successful compositions first hand is of utmost of importance for artists to observe how they put theory into practice.

Sean reminds us that, “Studying master paintings was integral to atelier training in nineteenth-century Paris. American artists like John Singer Sargent and Mary Cassatt spent many hours at the Louvre. Copying had two purposes. The first was to learn the technique of the master—the brushwork, color harmony, orchestration of values. The second was to be inspired by their composition and ideas.”

While in Paris, after filling our minds with the masters, we will make multiple charcoal and/or oil sketches of multi-figure compositions with live models. We will paint from life, make sketches from different points of view and try different approaches, making notes as we go. This is how nineteenth-century artists prepared for the Prix de Rome and how advanced students train at the Repin Academy today.

One strong theme we will be presenting, viewing, and using as inspiration is that of laborers or workers. Physical labor and poverty are as relevant today as in the nineteenth century, although as contemporary artists we may present it in a different manner. This theme has been painted by artists as diverse as Courbet, Repin, and Wyeth, and well as by photographers like Dorothea Lang. Field workers, and peasants specifically, have been painted by artists from Le Page to Julien Dupré to Van Gogh, and can be a moving subject for a contemporary artist as well.

As an example of what we aim to accomplish while on location in Paris sketches, Sean has painted this sketch in oil by using two live models in costume, and then inventing a background. After initial sketches such as this, we will be reviewing each of our works together and asking questions such as: Could the poses be changed to more powerfully express the idea or emotion? What could be done to make the painting more contemporary?







Sean Forester, *Laborers Sketch*, Oil on canvas, 9 x 12 inches



Studies such as these will be created posing models both indoors and outdoors during the Paris Seminar.



Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Hay Making*, 1877, Oil on canvas, 63 x 76 inches, (c) Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Jules Breton, *Calling in the Gleaners*, 1859, Oil on canvas, 35 x 68 inches, (c) Musée d'Orsay, Paris





Julien Dupre, *Femme Versant à Boire*, 1882, Oil on canvas, 25-1/2 x 32 inches, (c) Rehs Contemporary 2017



Vincent Van Gogh, *The Siesta* (after Millet), 1889, Oil on canvas, 22 x 35 inches (c) Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Looking at the images above, most of which we will see in person in Paris, we can trace the inspiration that comes from studying the masters. From the classics in the early 1800s, including Jules Bastien Lepage, Breton, and Dupré, to the late 1800s, including Van Gogh's *The Siesta* (who was inspired by Millet), to my contemporary work of *The Shepherd* created on location in France in 2015, all these adopt the general theme and feel of workers in the fields. However, what if there were multiple figures as well in my contemporary work? And how should they be laid out on the canvas, using what compositional rules or ideas?



Vanessa Rothe, *The Shepherd*, 2015, Oil on linen, 16 x 20 inches



Our project will address these questions and will also include curated visits to Paris museums and the École des Beaux Arts. We will also have a historical lecture by Dominique Sennelier, third-generation chemist and art supplier of Sennelier colors in Paris since 1887, who will teach us about pigments, the history of art tools and materials. We will paint together at the Rodin Museum, and outdoors at the Luxembourg gardens, doing figure painting. We'll paint indoor at "La Grande Chaumière," an historical atelier between Saint-Germain and Montparnasse where such greats as Picasso, Cezanne and Modigliani met and often painted together. With this project we hope to create the type of camaraderie and the sharing of ideas that existed and reoccurred in Paris, while gathering inspiration and dynamic content for our future works to come.

For more information aboutt his fine art project or the artists and their works please visit [www.parisseminar.com](http://www.parisseminar.com)



#### **ABOUT VANESSA ROTHE**

In addition to her editorial, lecturing and curatorial work, Vanessa Rothe is a fine artist exhibiting the last 15 years alongside the nation's top artists in galleries, art clubs, as well as Museums. She is a Signature member of the American Impressionist Society as well as its Educational Advisor, and an official Artist Member of the famed Salmagundi Art Club in New York. Rothe was also proud to be included among the "Artists for a New Century" by the Bennington Center of the Arts in 2012. She has recently been invited to the Alpine Fellowship, a seminar in Venice Italy, where she discussed art and technology today with some of the top writers, art historians, critics, painters and poets.

Vanessa Françoise Rothe grew up in the artists colony of Laguna Beach, CA, the daughter of a well-known German clothing designer, Detlev Rothe, and Jacqueline Ricaud. She received top scholarships to study Business/Marketing and French Literature at the University of San Diego, University of CA, Irvine, and later studied Fine Art at the Laguna College of Art and Design.