

Jordan Buschur defines her current role as “a woman painting women, now” and certainly this is the case. However, when her work is successful, it is not just a result of femininity; it lies in the way her portraits peel away glamour and fame to reveal the universal humanness of her subjects. Several groups of paintings are united in spirit by asking the viewers to relate to the subjects in various ways.

The studio walls are lined with rectangular paintings in neat rows, arranged like a walk-in family album. The work falls into several categories: portraits of individuals inspired by film stills and snapshots, large portraits, and paintings emphasizing line work. The paintings are united in that they are all portraits of women in a similar style. The brushwork is soft but confident, and the cohesive color palette is delicately melancholy. This is evident in her wall of inspirational ephemera, showing the sorts of colors and textures that a favorite aunt might have tucked away in the attic sixty years ago—stamps, photos of birds, flowers and bottles, advertisements of cheerful housewives, accessories, an apron. This careful selection of inspiration reinforces that she is painting women *now*, but with a careful eye on the past.

The series of small individual portraits was inspired by film stills of the mid-twentieth century. Its initial impression is one of solitude, similar to Edward Hopper’s work. However, Hopper’s women tend to be products of their environments (diners, offices, trains) while Buschur’s stand alone. Each one attempts to capture a specific feminine pose or attitude. In a series like this, an image where the expression is bland or the pose is not immediately significant, and the item may be easily forgotten by a viewer. But in the successful examples of this series, the women show attitude and conviction. One figure clad in yellow glances over her shoulder with a suspicious gaze and expressive eyebrows. (She captures the essence of Lillian Bond in “The Old Dark House” without re-creating it). Another in a peach slip dress leans on a wall with a sultry yet demanding expression. Buschur also has some of the women in dramatic make-up and nail polish, and she uses the color red sparingly in the palette. With such a subtle color palette and outwardly pleasant subjects, it is important that she inject the paintings with energy in this way. Small details of expression are what elevate the work from pretty pictures of glamorous ladies to insightful portraits of individuals. The actresses were all famous at one time, but these are not meant to be portraits of them; rather, they ask the viewer to seek out individuals in the midst of ambiguity.

A second group of paintings reveals a refreshing change in line work, ensuring that the consistency of style never melts into blandness. The shapes are more outlined and defined. It is reminiscent of the contemporary illustrations of illustrator Martha Rich whose inspiration comes from Southern folk art. Here, the figures are shown in groups and interact with each other. The best example is a portrait based on the Andrews Sisters, a trio who entertained Allied troops during World War II. The women have sisters’ puffy hair and chic dresses. But as with the film stills, the traits that stand out are the ones that set the individuals apart like exaggerated outlined features like a toothy, crooked smile and dramatically pouffed hair. The loose style of painting in this group makes the figures themselves seem more approachable and lively, giving the viewer a sense of camaraderie with the subjects. The last category of art to be discussed here is found in Constance, a character from D. H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover. Buschur includes this as the first in a series of “fallen women” from literature. Much larger than the other canvasses, about the size of a poster, the painting shows a tall blond standing near a park bench under a bare tree.

This figure does not carry any of the expected iconography of an adulteress; there is no excess cleavage, her hair is tucked neatly behind her shoulders. You can not even see whether she is wearing stiletto heels on her feet. In fact she does not look remarkably different from the ladies of film stills or World War II-era entertainment. Her mark of distinction is her steadfast gaze—unapologetic, almost perturbed, as if to challenge the viewer. What is the challenge, exactly? One theory is this: if this adulteress looks like any other woman, perhaps any of us could be in her shoes.

This studio exhibition is a study in women and in how they are perceived by an audience. By portraying several groups of women in a similar style, we are able to draw conclusions about their individuality as well as their unifying quality of femininity.