

FIVE TO WATCH

There is a lot of superb art being made these days.
This column by Allison Malafronte shines light on five gifted individuals.

OLGA KRIMON (b. 1972), *Convergence*, 2022, oil on Belgian linen, 24 x 30 in., Hancock Gallery (Newcastle upon Tyne, England)

Los Angeles artist **OLGA KRIMON** (b. 1972) has an eclectic and robust educational background that has led her to develop a signature style now being recognized internationally. Born in Odessa, Ukraine, she received an academic art education in Kazan, Russia, and was greatly influenced by the prominent figures of Russian art history, among them Repin, Serov, Bryullov, Levitan, Kramskoi, and Fechin. She also felt an affinity for the swift, bold brushwork and careful value arrangements of Sargent, Zorn, Sorolla, and Cecilia Beaux, and therefore studied their work closely for many years.

Krimon first came to the U.S. as an exchange student in 1991 and then moved to California in 1996. Eventually she started taking drawing classes with illustrator and California Art Institute instructor Glen Orbik, as well as classes with the Los Angeles figure painter Jeremy Lipking. Add to her resume a B.A. in art history from Davidson College and an M.B.A. from the University of Southern California, and Krimon was perfectly poised to handle all aspects of her professional career as a fine artist.

Her style today is built on the fundamental principles of academic realism, the energetic movement of impressionism and expressionism, and an abstracted view of values, edges, and color transitions. The subjects and themes Krimon chooses to explore — dreamlike imagined realities and suspended spaces where nostalgia and memory have room to breathe — add a layer of intrigue to her work.

For her recent *Weightless* series, Krimon dove deep into both realism and abstraction to find the exact place where color, value, and composition hold together structurally yet flow freely. “I am fascinated with the way reality can be portrayed and enhanced through abstraction,” the artist says. “The realistic paintings I most admire are superbly constructed but usually through a minimum of means. When looked at closely, they are an absolute feast of abstract strokes that create reality, that give life to the forms and make our eye follow a certain path within the painting.”

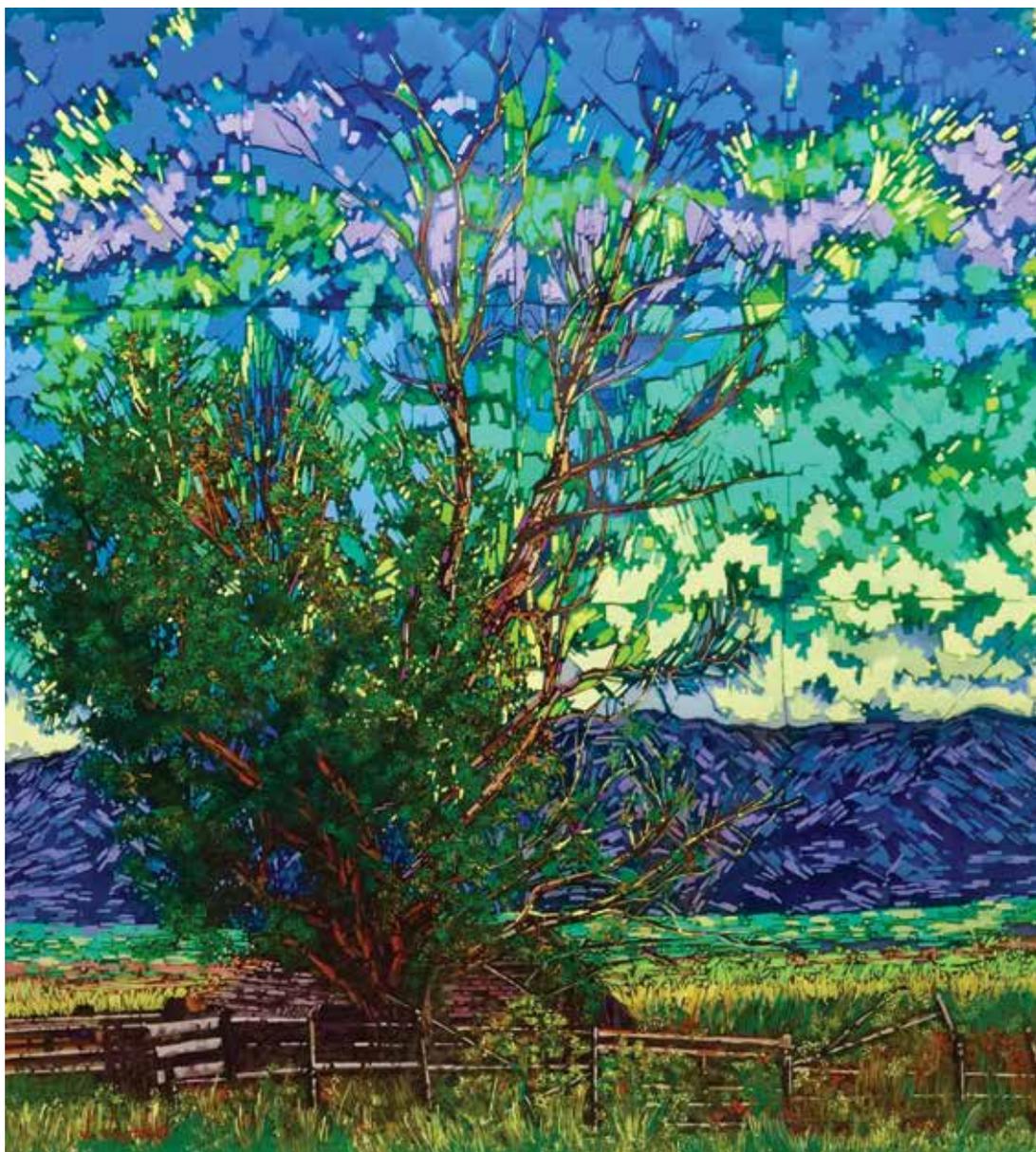
Convergence, pictured here, is one painting from the series that shows Krimon hitting a harmonious chord of color, composition, and content. “I wanted to see how far I could take the abstraction in this piece because it was only through the abstraction of forms that I could create the feeling of water against the skin,” she explains. “It is the contrast of light and dark, the warmth of the skin and the coolness of the water, the



movement of the water and the stillness of the figure that I was after. It is not a portrait; rather it's a portrayal of the feeling of being suspended and carried by the water.”

This painting — which received a Certificate of Excellence in the Portrait Society of America's 2023 International Portrait Competition — captures the exploration and experimentation Krimon has been pursuing to propel herself forward over the last year.

KRIMON is represented by Reinert Fine Art (Charleston), Hancock Gallery (Newcastle upon Tyne, England), and Whitethorn Gallery (Clifden, County Galway, Ireland).



JANELL JAMES
(b. 1974),
Punctuating the Blue, 2020, acrylic
on layered acrylic
glass, 48 x 44 in.,
RARE Gallery
(Jackson, Wyoming)

JANELL JAMES (b. 1974) does not feel the need to define her subject matter in any particular way, nor to confine herself to a specific form of expression. Her portfolio includes multi-layered acrylic-on-glass works, representational oil paintings, abstract paintings, mixed-media three-dimensional pieces, and most recently large acrylic-glass hanging mobiles. This intellectually curious artist is constantly experimenting and pushing the boundaries of her capabilities to see how far she can go and what creative possibilities await.

James is classically trained, but, according to her artist's statement, she "untrained herself through deconstruction of the formal art process, intentionally looking for a way to take what is old and make it new." She continues, "My goal has always been to bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary art. Approaching my work from a modern and abstract perspective allows for endless possibilities.

"In ateliers in Paris and Belmont, California, I first learned to paint light and about the technique of luminescence through layering paint and glazes, as well as the suspension of paint in glazes, to create depth of field. Fifteen years into my career, I began layering painted sheets of acrylic glass to reveal the layers and create a 3-D depth. As I painted

on the front and back of five sheets of acrylic glass, 10 separate layers of paint began to play with light, to cast shadows, and to come alive."

The interconnectedness of these elements — layers of paint, light, color, shape, dimension — gives James's work a surge of kinetic energy and vibrancy that is best experienced in person. Even remotely, however, viewers can get lost in the compelling mosaic-like construction. For *Punctuating the Blue*, James turned again to one of her greatest inspirations, nature, to create a kaleidoscope of shape, color, and design. The outdoors has long been the artist's playground, and when she is not in her studio, she is hiking, walking her dog, and collecting visual stimuli in the mountains of her home state of Utah.

"Nature is a source of abstraction and color for my artist's eye," she says. "It is the muse that gives life to the work I do, regardless of the medium I choose for the expression. Seeing nature through this lens provides me endless opportunities to explore and create."

JAMES is represented by Anne Jespersen Fine Arts (Helper, Utah), ONE Modern Art (Salt Lake City), and RARE Gallery (Jackson, Wyoming).

There is a contingent of contemporary landscape painters whose works could easily be mistaken for those of 19th-century Russia's renowned "Itinerants," but **VIKTOR BUTKO** (b. 1978)'s educational lineage can literally be traced back to one of that movement's leaders, Isaac Levitan (1860–1900).

Growing up in Moscow, Butko was deeply influenced by his grandfather Victor Chulovich, a famous painter whose teacher was a student of Levitan. After studying at the Moscow Art School, Butko trained at the Akademicheskaya Dacha, a summer school named after another Itinerant, Ilya Repin (1844–1930), who helped create that educational venue as an extension of the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg.

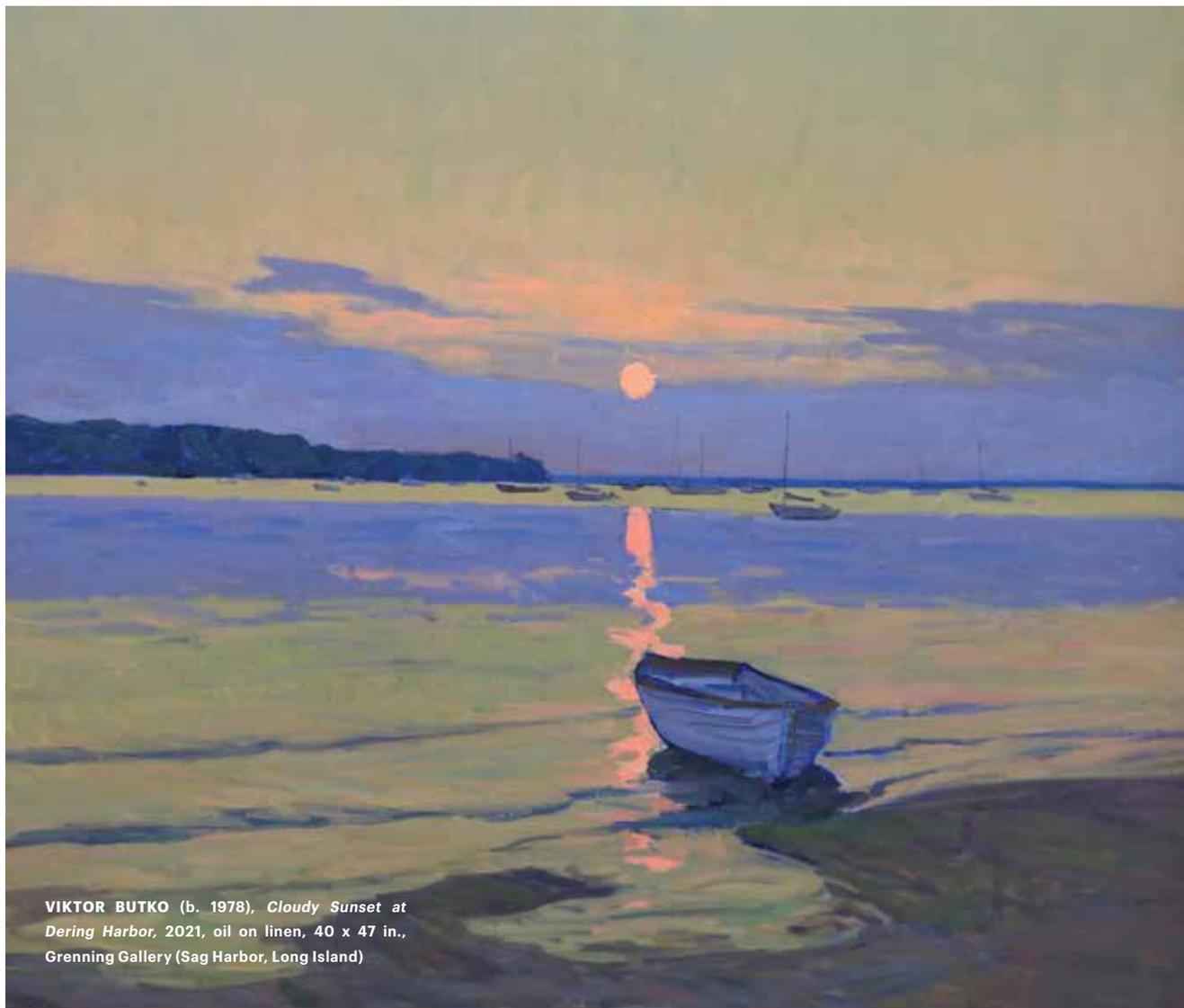
Butko got his introduction to American art and artists in 2002, when he began exhibiting with Thomas Kearns McCarthey Gallery in Salt Lake City. Eleven years later, he became involved with an invitation of American landscapists working at Plyos, a town in Russia's Ivanovo region where Levitan painted some of his most celebrated works. Then Butko had a chance to experience America's East Coast landscape and art scene when the invitation was reciprocated in 2016; he traveled to Long Island and Maine to paint with several of those same landscapists. This cultural exchange, organized by artist Ben

Fenske and Grenning Gallery (Sag Harbor), helped connect Butko not only to like-minded plein-airists but also to America's own landscape-painting history.

Butko has since relocated to Boston, where he lives and paints with his wife, fellow artist Kelly Carmody. He also spends several months each year living on Shelter Island and exploring Long Island's East End, where he is known for lyrical interpretations of the local landscape. The work illustrated here, *Cloudy Sunset at Dering Harbor*, is one such painting that Butko completed on Shelter Island in 2021 – a simple scene brought to impressionistic life through his ability to capture the colorful, golden glow of sunset. "I was impressed by the red sun setting in the clouds and the subtle color of the water," the artist recalls. "When someone sailed in on a boat and left it on the shore, I decided that the image had taken shape, and I had to paint it."

Butko's recent work will appear in a two-person show at Grenning Gallery (Sag Harbor, Long Island) October 15–November 13.

BUTKO is represented by Grenning Gallery (Sag Harbor, Long Island), Collins Galleries (Orleans, Cape Cod), Williams Fine Art & Frame (Wenham, Massachusetts), and gWatson Gallery (Stonington, Maine).



VIKTOR BUTKO (b. 1978), *Cloudy Sunset at Dering Harbor*, 2021, oil on linen, 40 x 47 in., Grenning Gallery (Sag Harbor, Long Island)



FAN YU (b. 1985), *Irish Setter (Blaze of Glory)*, 2020, bronze (edition of 9), 14 x 21 x 5 in., available through the artist

For more than 15 years, **FAN YU** (b. 1985) was a successful groomer and handler of show dogs in competitions and seminars around the world. In 2009, little did he know that his innate artistic talent was about to intersect with his current career and lead him on a new path of sculpting canines in clay and bronze.

Fan grew up in China's culturally rich Imperial City, Beijing, in a visually sophisticated family. His parents dedicated most of their lives to Chinese classical architecture and exposed Fan to aesthetics at an early age. As a child obsessed with animals, he often accompanied his father to the zoo with a sketchbook in hand, and he amassed a large collection of animal books to sketch from as well. As he got older, Fan realized the pressures of the Chinese education system didn't suit him, so he pursued other paths. When an injury kept him bedridden for half a year, he began learning about purebred dogs through a book his father had bought him. Once recovered, Fan took a dog-show-handling class in Beijing and slowly began entering the profession.

In 2009 Fan created his first sculpture of the striking Kerry Blue Terrier "Mick" — the winner of several Best in Show awards — to present to Mick's professional handler, Bill McFadden, who has long inspired him. Fan's intimate understanding of the canine spirit, attained through many years of grooming and handling, allowed his

hands to sculpt with informed ease, and the results were not only eye-opening for him but also for the public.

He began receiving numerous inquiries and commissions from owners, breeders, and kennel clubs worldwide. Clearly Fan had found his niche and started dedicating more time to his new passion, finally leaving the world of professional dog handling in 2017. "The hustle and bustle, triumphs, and frustration of my dog show career inspired me to follow my intuition, and once that intuition was awakened, I just followed the momentum," the artist says.

Today Fan resides in Claremont, California, with his wife, Amy, and his sculptures are celebrated both in the dog show community and in the field of fine art. Particularly rewarding is the fact that, every day, Fan gets to create art that is a culmination of his lifelong interests and passions. "The loyalty, kindness, simplicity, and directness I see in dogs' eyes has always moved me," the artist explains. "Every time I finish a sculpture, I feel like it has also sculpted a piece of my inner soul. As time passes, the dogs have sculpted me into who I am. In a sense, we are one."

FAN is self-represented.



NICOLE PARKER (b. 1994), *Are We Lost*, 2023, oil on linen-wrapped panel, 16 x 20 in., Gross McCleaf Gallery (Philadelphia)

Viewing **NICOLE PARKER** (b. 1994)'s paintings and intaglio prints feels like discovering and dusting off a pile of old Polaroids, or looking at vintage stills of moments and memories long gone. Blurry street scenes, a distant object shrouded in misty fog, pitch-black winding roads — these are the subjects Parker uses to transport us to a time and place in her mind's eye.

“My work functions as a visual memoir, an investigation of how visual memory changes over time and how my perception of the present evolves with it,” the artist shares. “I make pictures of places and things that represent a memory, a state of being, or even a dream that I keep traces of but can't physically return to.”

Parker earned a B.F.A. in drawing and painting from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, where she also developed an appreciation for, and aptitude in, the intaglio printmaking process. Today she works from both observation and memory in her Mount Airy, Maryland, studio, allowing such inspirations as music, language, film, and food to influence her creativity as well. In her current body of work, Parker explores the triangular relationship among her sense of self, what “home” means, and the physical spaces and environments she's occupied throughout her life.

The artist's fascination with the strangeness of “between-ness” or — as she says — being nowhere and everywhere at once, figures prominently in her recent work. In *Are We Lost*, illustrated here, Parker uses

two cars as symbols of this feeling. “Driving is such an interesting activity because when you travel, you're in a transient state between one place and another,” she notes. “It seems inconsequential because it's temporary and a means to an end, but I enjoy the trip as its own event. One of my favorite activities is just the act of looking, and nothing requires more looking than driving. There is barely any time to process the individual things I'm seeing on the way, but I remember the light and the color of a trip. *Are We Lost* is not a perfect representation of actual road locations but rather a collection of generic objects and ideas arranged in specific ways to reflect what I remember from the trip itself.”

Parker continues, “Because memory is imperfect, the process of making images based on it can often feel like circling a destination without ever arriving, or like a word on the tip of your tongue. In the studio, I'm helped and inspired by how potent my sensory memories are, and by the way that light, color, and the smell of the air stick in my mind. These concrete sensory experiences are always at the core of my practice.”

Parker's solo exhibition at Gross McCleaf Gallery (Philadelphia) runs from November 16 through December 23.

PARKER is represented by Gross McCleaf Gallery (Philadelphia).