

ANDY NEWMAN

WINDOW ON A UNIQUE TALENT

In a career replete with more than 50 solo exhibitions on three continents, gallery representation in four countries, and a slew of international collectors, painter Andy Newman identified two highlights. First, his March 1997 sold-out exhibit in Macau, whose government sponsors gave him the «Cadillac treatment» including a 166-page full color catalog translated into three languages.

The second will occur in September 2004, when Newman will have three solo exhibits opening in the span of two weeks: Opening on September 12: a show devoted to figures at Galerie Madeleine Lacerte in Quebec city; In Concord on September 16: *Doors and Windows* based on vernacular architecture of Lisbon, at Emerson Umbrella's Blanchard Trust Gallery; and a landscape show in St. Ives, Cornwall, England beginning on September 23. While Newman's two principal genres, landscapes and figures, have been inspired by a life of travel – he speaks Italian, French, and Portuguese- his recent art is locally produced in Concord.

During a recent studio visit, *Doors and Windows* was arranged on the wall of his high-ceiling studio at Emerson Umbrella art center, ready for the final cut. The exhibit explores three ideas, Newman said: the relationship of squares and rectangles to the picture plane, the contrasts of light and shadow, and Lisbon itself. Since 1995, Newman has mounted an exhibit every other year in Lisbon where his work is in great demand and is considered a sound investment. He has not exhausted his enthusiasm for the subject matter of Iberia. His show this past spring at Alpers Fine Art, in Andover, featured work inspired by a visit more than 10 years ago to the Spanish village of Torre del Compte. «I think the absence of a street grid appeals to Andy's soft spot for antiquity, and the irregularity of building angles fascinates him, » said Peter Alpers who has represented Newman since he opened his gallery five years ago. «One of Andy's challenges is to make a beautiful painting out of a unprepossessing village street. The approach he takes opens up vast opportunities of expression, color, and the interplay of light and shadow. »

For *Doors and Windows*, as in much of his work, Newman feels constrained by the limited sizes of ready-made canvases so he makes his own by laminating canvas to wood panels cut in the aspect ratios he desired. After applying an acrylic gesso ground, he «drips on» a thin, yet richly hued, acrylic undercoat that swirls and streaks, or that he tamps with a brush to «suds it up.» He paints in oil over the subtle irregularities made by the dried acrylic. The undercoating imparts a patina of age, especially to stucco facades. «The paintings gain strength from the accident of the under painting, » Newman said. «The paint mirrors the texture of the surfaces themselves. »

Newman, 49, is a self-taught artist. His father was a U.S. Foreign Service officer, and Newman spent his formative years in international schools in Italy, France and England before completing a degree with «first class honors» in history from Trinity College, Oxford. Then he went to Georgetown University Law Center and practiced international law in Washington, D.C., for 14 years before quitting at the end of 1994 to practice art full time. Law and art overlapped for about five years, but he said he never felt any tension between his analytical and creative sides because his natural discipline prevailed. Interestingly, an informal tally of his galleries' customers revealed two categories: psychiatrist and lawyers. «I think there is orderliness to my work that appeals to these groups, » he said.

«I could see his figures in a psychiatrist's office, » said Evelyn Smith of Powers Gallery, in Acton. She speculated that the empathy came from his lawyerly contact with people in difficulties. The emotion expressed in the figures' colors, composition, and poses, even when a back is turned, has universal psychological appeal. Gallery owner Larry Powers has represented Newman since spring of 2000. He has been successful selling both figures and landscapes because Newman's distinctive, transcendent style sets his work apart no matter what the subject. «We don't have anyone doing anything close to what Andy does, » Smith said.

Newman's organizational skills have stood him in good stead as he and his partner, Gregory Maguire, famous for having written the novel *Wicked: The Life and times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (Regan Books) on which the eponymous Broadway musical is based, arrange their lives around raising three adopted children ages, 6, 4 and 3. Newman's studio time is now set by the schedules of others: his children and the twelve sales outlets for his work. As a result, he said, about three-quarters of his recent output is landscapes versus figures. «I'll call 1999 to 2010 the kids-small landscape period, » Newman said with a smile. Devoting energy to his children and thinking about painting are not mutually exclusive. «I've learned not to waste canvas, » he said.

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By Nan Shnitzler