

DAVID BARNES

Painter David Barnes works with a range of approaches from historically important transition points in western art. His confident finesse of form, fluidity of line, space and color is reminiscent of picture plane pioneers from Goya to Degas. Barnes avoids the pitfall of an excessively reverential time warp, making seamless transition to associations with post-modernists like Eric Fischl and Mark Tansey — coalescing in a contemporary visual statement that is uniquely David Barnes.

In his most recent solo show, "Crisis and Transcendence," which closed on February 28 at the University of Rhode Island Art Gallery, Barnes explored the influential nature of social media feeds by mining these platforms for visual source materials that become the subject of his paintings. A layer of interest in his work involves his re-purposing discarded thin aluminum newspaper printing plates, which he uses like canvas in many of his paintings. He allows a certain amount of bleed-through of text and copy as picture ground merges with the development of his image field.

Barnes estimates that roughly 90 percent of his source material comes from culled still images he's excerpted from videos created by the untrained eye, made by individuals coincidentally or purposefully caught up in transformative global events. He excerpts images that depict the drama of life-changing chaos, identifying one picture buried in millions to transform the idea of bearing witness.



September 18th, 2010, oil on aluminum, 48" x 48".

His maneuvering of paint related to the innovative approaches of Master painters profoundly connects the epic and everyday, showcasing present time as correspondingly on the edge of change.

Barnes has an unflinching gaze on real time as it gets into history. His formal pursuit of painting becomes a means to embrace moment-to-moment reflection before the information cascades away. Newspaper plates as facsimile for canvas reinforces the concept of change. Mainly Barnes coaxes reflection on life's experiences with techniques that convey a sense of ongoing movement, and in the URI exhibit especially this seems to effortlessly focus the sensation of being amid mobs in turmoil; we see through to such things as bystanders with backpacks and merging human figures: everything that brings the onlooker into whatever drama is at the center of attention.

Responding to the different context of "Legacies in Paint: The Mentor Project" — on view at the Newport Art Museum through May 5 — Barnes switches his attention from global violence and insurrection to source materials gleaned from snippets he's found in domestic home videos. The images he excerpts here capture banality while jumping to a "less-is-more" moody, structural interplay that flips between subtlety and disquiet. Newport Art Museum curator Nancy Whipple Grinnell suggested Barnes for the current "Mentor Project" show organized by painters Paula Martiesian and Mollie Hosmer-Dillard. The 10 chosen artists engaged in a four-month-long journey of mentoring each other through discussion and studio visits, and this sharing ultimately became this exhibition. Barnes



The Fighting Across the River, 2012, oil on canvas, 16" x 20".

is the only Newport artist in the show that is mostly composed of Providence painters. The show also reaches out to include a few artists living as far afield as Brooklyn.

Barnes paints in a studio in Fall River. He is a graduate of the University of New Hampshire and UMass Dartmouth, and teaches Advanced Drawing and Color Theory at Bristol Community College in Fall River as well as drawing and painting classes at Newport Art Museum.

"The Mentor Project" runs through May 5 at the Newport Art Museum, 76 Bellevue Ave., Newport, RI; David Barnes' watercolors will also appear in the RISD Museum's "Locally Made" group show of works-on-paper, curated by Jan Howard, opening July 12 in Providence.

Suzanne Volmer