ELIZABETH BARLOW

ELIZABETH BARLOW didn’t set out to be an artist, but she can pinpoint the moment she knew it was in her future. She was sitting on a park bench in San Francisco one afternoon, looking up at the clouds, when a voice in her head said, “I’m going to start painting now.” She studied for a year at the Art Students League of New York and earned a post-baccalaureate certificate in visual arts from the University of California at Berkeley.

Today the Pebble Beach, CA, artist paints still lifes in a contemporary realist style. In her recent Portraits in Absentia series, she paints people she knows or imagines by depicting their belongings—often their shoes—rather than their faces. “Shoes can reveal so much character,” she says. “And jeans and white shirts are so ubiquitous, iconic, and gender-neutral. I thought, I could tell a story in how I arrange the fabric. These pieces can also be portraits of our contemporary culture.”

Barlow enjoys the process of painting these works, specifically the luxury of being able to look for a long time at something. “Those white shirts—there’s a whole world inside those folds and in the edging, buttons, and shadows,” she says. “It’s a landscape of fabric.”

Her art journey was nearly inevitable, given that her childhood was full of visual stimuli. Her father, artist Philip Barlow, also paints still lifes—and still paints every day at 82 years old. Barlow’s paintings can be seen in More Than Your Selfie, on view through May 15 at the New Museum Los Gatos, CA; Galerie Citi, Burlingame, CA; and www.elizabethbarlowart.com.—Jessica Canterbury