



## Colette Calascione

*A genuine fascination for Victorian Era aesthetic is easily identifiable in your painting. Where does this come from?*

"I grew up in San Francisco – a city with a lot of Victorian character and architecture. I find the Victorian era such an interesting period... I think of it as the time when machines were being born along with a new universal awareness owing to communication and cross-pollination. I've been attracted to antique things for as long as I can remember. I also had a lot of Edward Gorey books as a kid, which were my favorite books – I learned to read with them. The aesthetic of that era is such a pleasure to behold! And perhaps some of the films I saw when I was coming-of-age had a certain influence on me. For example, I was entranced by Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* when I was 12, and *A Room With a View* too (Ed. Note: Written and directed by Ingmar Bergman in 1982, the original Swedish title is *Fanny och Alexander*. *A Room With a View* is a British film directed by James Ivory in 1986)."

*The figure of the mermaid is one of the recurring themes in your paintings...*

"Maybe it's just me, but have you ever noticed your legs in dreams? Whenever I notice my legs in dreams they seem so awkward. In dreams, I feel I like I'm swimming or flying in the subconscious, so I guess mermaids are a symbol of the subconscious for me, and very sexual symbols as well. I suppose nudity is the theme that recurs most in my work; nudity is timeless and I like that, but I wouldn't say that I am being narrative. Perhaps the 'solitary figure' is the narrative part to me. When I get an idea for a painting, it is often triggered by an image I 'see' which becomes like a mysterious glowing seed in the palm of my brain and I feel inclined to water it to see how it evolves. It is an exploration of the subconscious. I guess you could say I am sort of a surrealist. Color is one of the biggest challenges in my process and will sometimes destroy an almost finished painting. Color is harmony and mood. I will tell you a

little story: my parents divorced when I was a baby. When I was six, my mother joined a cult which required us to wear the colors of the Sun, ranging from oranges to wine reds. And my father was perhaps a bit opposed to this cult practice... So, I wore the Sun colors during the weekdays with my mother and then blues and greens on the weekends with my father. I think of this as my first lesson in color theory. Going back and forth between my mother and father, the moods were very different. During weekdays with my mother in the Sun colors, I was surrounded by chaos with people expressing themselves in a most unrepressed manner – if they weren't wearing reds they were naked, dancing hippies. And I was eating vegetarian food. I was also a weirdo freak at elementary schools. By contrast, weekends with my father in blues and greens were quiet with classical music, museums, films... and meat! I also had two different names: on weekdays I used a Sanskrit Indian name given to me by the cult guru, and my birth name on weekends. When I was ten years old, I dropped out of my mother's cult. I gave myself a new name: Colette. And I started wearing black."

*You seem to have situated yourself in the practice of the classical portrait*

"I feel the need for structure in order to balance. I can get a bit obsessive compulsive about composition; it's for the comfort of the viewers' eyes and mine too. I tend to enjoy the intensity of a simple composition more and more; the subject becomes further intensified in this way. And, for the past twenty years, I think I've been using the same formula for my paintings, monochromatic under painting with color glazes on top. I just hope my rendering is getting better!"

Interview by Anne & Julien

Colette Calascione lives and works in California, USA.  
She is represented by the Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York.  
[www.nancyhoffmangallery.com](http://www.nancyhoffmangallery.com)  
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