

JOANNE ARTMAN GALLERY

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“Yes, Masters: A MANthology” - A Conversation with Danny Galieote



JA: This exhibition, *Yes, Masters: A MANthology*, explores Old Master paintings being reframed in a contemporary context, in addition to the idea that the compositions and narratives still hold relevance in today’s art and society. Do you think of your works as portraits of figures at a particular time and place? Are your paintings set in the past, or are these figures that would exist only today?

GALIEOTE: Well, I am creating modern versions of Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* from 1943.

I like to think of these paintings as being timeless in the sense that they relate to our needs as humans since the beginning of time. FDR made his famous speech about the *Four Freedoms* in '43 in one of the most intense times during WWII and Rockwell painted them when people wanted and needed such encouragement. In fact, Rockwell's paintings of his *Four Freedoms* were shipped around the country via train, in what was called 'The Freedom Train', to allow as many people as possible to see them. So, to make a long story short, yes...these four new works are images of people TODAY, but they're in recognizable compositions that relate to this core set of meanings behind Rockwell's iconic imagery of people that can exist THEN and NOW.

JA: Where did you get your imagery from for this series? What, if any, sources or particular artistic movements did you reference?

GALIEOTE: This series of works are inspired by and employed through a modern appropriation of Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms*. Rockwell created them in response to FDR's famous speech in which he mentions Freedom of Speech, Freedom from Want, Freedom from Fear, and Freedom of Worship. Not only do all these apply to our lives today socially and culturally but also, they work nicely into my personal style of painting, which gleans from the WPA artists of the 1930s and 40s. I love the sincerity and solid craftsmanship in design with which great artists of the 40s, like Rockwell, created memorable and meaningful works for everyone to enjoy. I am using these classic means to create a modern version we can relate to today.

JA: A large part of the construction of culture is how we depict each other. How do you select and then choose to portray the figures in your work?

GALIEOTE: I like to think of the figures in my work as sculptural icons that hopefully have a timeless essence. And I also like to capture individual personalities in my work, since this is what is most interesting to me. I love capturing people/personalities in my work and even though I often purposefully idealize/stylize the figures in my work and they go through my 'personal style filter', I want them to be people that we can somehow recognize in a general sense...such as in my recent paintings entitled "*The Workhorse*" or "*An Evening Dip*." We are all one human race and we all have similar needs, wants and desires, which are addressed in these *Four Freedoms*. This set of four paintings felt like a perfect fit for me to create at this point in my career and a perfect fit for this show.

JA: How does this differ from your typical work? What challenges did you face creating this new body of work?

GALIEOTE: These differ from my typical work in the sense that I am following one particular artist's set of compositions. Even though I am creating from all new references and my own art models, there is a constant voice and vision in the back of my head that goes back to what Mr. Rockwell created in his compositions. So it has been quite a challenge to do his original compositions justice and keep a timeless quality with modern imagery and people. Actually, I inherently paint and draw in a style that harkens back to this earlier generation, so I had to keep reminding myself to create them in a new light in a modern setting that we could visually and culturally relate to today.

JA: Is there a cultural experience that changed the way you see the world? How has this affected your artistic practice?

GALIEOTE: Well, I have always had close friends from all races and cultures in my personal life, so that sense of equality always existed and was a no-brainer. Also in my commercial art working days as a younger artist, I was creating movie scenes (at Disney) that I knew would be seen by people all over the world. This really gave me a sense of the power in the visual arts and film. It doesn't matter what language someone speaks or where they're from because we as humans can all relate to each other in a really personal way. So when I started painting vigorously around 20 years ago, I had this in the back of my mind...that I am creating from a standpoint that we are all one human race and that I want to create work that everyone can dive into' so to speak.

So the description of my work as "Pop Regionalism" fits this new series of paintings and what I've been doing in my work for the past 15 years really. The American Regionalists of the 30s and 40s (Benton, Wood, Curry, etc) created works of the everyday man and woman in a time when people needed to be uplifted.

To make a long story short, I feel like my work as a 'Pop Regionalist' fits into our modern culture and hopefully everyone can relate to the work somehow...not just in America but in all cultures. And by looking at a decent amount of international sales of my works, I think it is safe to say that the work is relatable in most regions of the world. I hope this new set of the *Four Freedoms* will illustrate these concepts of how we are all one.