the magazine for artists by artists from around the world

JAMES GURNEY MASTERCLASS
Drawing with the Brush

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Howard Terpning: The Making of a Masterpiece

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MY INSPIRATION
I was inspired to paint "Twin Arts" when my twin sister and I were reunited in the Dallas area, after a two-year separation. Our post-graduate jobs kept us apart, but in 2009, she and her husband moved closer, and my idea for this painting was able to come to life. Emily and I are mirror-image twins—we grew up looking alike, sounding alike, and exercising similar talents and interests. We were both artistic and musical, but Emily leaned more towards music—playing piano and writing songs—while I became increasingly passionate about art. My inspiration for this piece is our unique situation as twins, but I wanted to allow "Twin Arts" to be interpreted any number of ways. Some viewers may think it is a double self-portrait, showing the internal battle to choose between art and music. Others might see it as a representation of the Greek muses. Still others relate it to their own experiences, understanding the intimate connection between music and art.

MY DESIGN STRATEGY
"Twin Arts" has a rhythm and motion to it that expresses our special friendship. There is a spirit of competitiveness in the work—yet we stand close to each other and could almost be holding hands. I designed the painting to look as though the figures are circling each other and acknowledging each other's skill. The diagonal lines of the piano and bench help soften the vertical composition and bring the eye back around to the figures. The carpeted floor brings out the colors on the palette, without competing with the darker tones that dominate the composition. The overhead light source symbolizes our acknowledgement of our gifts, given to us from above. And, as might be expected in a portrait of twins, there is repetition of shape and color, (as in the hair and folds of the dresses), but with slight variation to show individuality.

MY WORKING PROCESS
I hand-stretch, size and prime all my canvases, preferring to work on portrait linen. Once the canvas is ready, I tone the surface with a light wash of Burnt Sienna and Ultramarine Blue. For an image this large, I use a grid to draw my design, using vine charcoal for the graphite because it wipes off easily, and using colored pencil for the drawing. I often employ different techniques for my paintings, depending on the subject matter and my goal for the finished work. In this case, I wanted the painting to look traditional, so I started with a thin underpainting followed by a grisaille. I then began to add color, working thinly at first and gradually building up my lights. My standard palette consists of 14 colors, including Titanium White, Ivory Black, Naples Yellow, Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Orange, Vermillion, Alizarin Crimson, Violet, Brilliant Pink, Burnt Sienna, Ultramarine Blue, Cobalt Blue, Sap Green and Viridian.

CONTACT DETAILS
annarosebain@gmail.com
www.annas-blank-canvas.com/

FINALIST
ANNA BAIN, Texas, USA, Twin Arts, oil, 48 x 40" (121 x 101 cm)