

MARK BECK

THE VAULT GALLERY
2289 MAIN ST
CAMBRIA, CA. 93428
805-927-0300

CURRENT REPRESENTATION

J. CACCIOLA GALLERIES, New York, New York (1997 to present)
PETER BLAKE GALLERY, Laguna Beach, California (1993 to present)
VAULT GALLERY, Cambria, California (1993 to present)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2004	—	Bakersfield Museum of Art, August 2004, Bakersfield California Vault Gallery Peter Blake Gallery
2003	—	J. Cacciola Galleries Peter Blake Gallery
2002		Peter Blake Gallery Vault Gallery
2001		Peter Blake Gallery
2000		Vault Gallery Peter Blake Gallery
1999		J. Cacciola Galleries Peter Blake Gallery Vault Gallery The Arts Fund Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California, Solo Exhibit and \$3,000 First Place Award in Painting.
1998		Peter Blake Gallery J. Cacciola Galleries
1997		J. Cacciola Galleries Peter Blake Gallery Vault Gallery
1996		Mendenhall Gallery - Pasadena, California

1995	Mendenhall Gallery Vault Gallery
1994	Mendenhall Gallery
1993	Mendenhall Gallery Gallery Hanku, Osaka Japan Just Looking Gallery, San Luis Obispo, California
1992	Diane Nelson Gallery, Laguna Beach, California
1991	Diane Nelson Gallery
1990	Diane Nelson Gallery California State University, Julian A. McPhee Gallery, San Luis Obispo, California

GROUP SHOWS

2004	—	Chicago Art at the Navy Pier
2003	—	Millicent Rogers Museum, 14th Annual Juried Portrait Show, Taos, NM
2003		Albuquerque Museum's 11th Annual "Albuquerque Contemporary"
2003		J. Cacciola Galleries Peter Blake Gallery 10th Anniversary Show Vault Gallery
2002		J. Cacciola Galleries Peter Blake Gallery Vault Gallery
1999		Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA. J. Cacciola Galleries Peter Blake Gallery Vault Gallery
1997		Santa Barbara Printmakers Association - Juried Show, Honorable Mention.
1996		Pasadena Twin Palms Gallery, California, "The Pasadena Bridge" Show
1994		Diane Nelson Gallery "Three California Realists"

	LA Art EXPO
1993	Chicago Art at the Navy Pier LA Art EXPO
1992	Tokyo International Art Show, Tokyo
1990	Diane Nelson Gallery

PUBLICATIONS

Crosswinds Weekly, Albuquerque, NM. August 14, 2003, pg. 26, Art Scene review by L. Polisar.

Albuquerque Journal, August 17, 2003, page F6, Art Review by Wesley Pulkka.

Albuquerque Alibi, August 21, 2003, pg. 25, Art Review by Steven Robert Allen.

Southwest Art Magazine - Named "Top Contemporary Realist" with feature article, March 2001.

Metropolitan Home Magazine - Della Robia Italia, ad campaign, May 2002, May 2003, Issues. Featured painting: "Industrial Building."

Coast Magazine, cover, May 1999 Issue. Featured painting: "House by the Sea."

Los Angeles Times (with TV series NYPD Blue) December 8, 1997. Interview with Director Paris Barclay. Barclay requested permission to film a painting he owns of Beck's for his TV series finale and was photographed with this painting for the LA Times interview. Featured painting: "Remote Facility."

Pasadena Magazine, cover, Winter 1996 Issue and Art Review of Twin Palms show, Pasadena Bridge. Painting: "Contemplating Suicide Bridge."

Orange County Magazine - June 1992 issue. Feature article "Spectacular Homes of Orange County," Painting: "Industrial Building."

AWARDS

First Place, Painting, Santa Barbara Arts Fund Individual Artists Award, juried competition, 1999

Honorable Mention, Santa Barbara Printmakers Association Juried Competition, 1997.

First Place, Painting, Bank of America Achievement Award, 1974.

EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT

Painting Instructor & Mural Crew Leader

UCLA's California Arts Reach Program - California Men's Colony, San Luis Obispo, CA., 1987 - 1990.

Lead, Mural Production

Bowman and Associates, San Luis Obispo, CA, 1990.

Portland School of Art

Portland, Maine, 1983-84

MARK BECK

Artist Statement

"My paintings represent an interest I have in the traditional image of the United States - particularly the notion of the 'American Dream' and how we go about finding it or losing it. I am inspired by this long held American notion along with a more sober perspective of present-day America: a country that often appears lost, searching and in opposition to its founding principals. I try to make beautiful paintings which convey in a subtle way certain glorifications or realities of our life in America. I admire the works of Flannery O'Connor, Charles Burchfield, Walker Evans, Edward Hopper, Robert Cottingham and others who, in my opinion, succeed at interpreting commonplace American objects and people that can sometimes be overlooked. These artists have greatly influenced my paintings and through my work I attempt to create with their same honesty by illuminating certain American conditions. I am particularly interested in the simple forms of older American buildings and the universal symbol of a home. In painting, a home is a point of departure for me. It is a vehicle to express serenity, belonging, rootedness, a sad memory or even a self made prison."

Born in Las Cruces, New Mexico, Beck studied at the Portland School of Art in Maine. For four years Beck worked teaching inmates to paint at the maximum security prison The California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo. "I've always credited that experience with being a continuing and fascinating source of inspiration for my paintings," said Beck. "Many aspects of the prison system and the people incarcerated there can teach us a lot about our life here in America."

THE HOMING INSTINCT

PAINTING HOUSES AND OTHER STRUCTURES
ALLOWS **MARK BECK** TO COMMENT
ON THE HUMAN CONDITION **BY BONNIE GANGELHOFF**

FOR PAINTER MARK BECK, a house is always more than just a home. It's a universal icon as well as a symbol of the American Dream. "When I make a painting about a house, I'm trying to reveal something about the people inside beyond the perfect, rosy picture outside," Beck explains from his own home in Albuquerque, NM.

The painter's moody, evocative images bring to mind lonely landscapes by Edward Hopper, an artist to whom Beck is frequently compared. Both artists use houses as vehicles to explore larger themes about people and the human condition in general. Beck explained his artistic vision in a 1999 catalog accompanying a show of his work at Peter Blake Gallery in Laguna Beach, CA. "When you look at my paintings they tell you a story," he says. "It is not entirely the story of a beautiful sky or the sentimental idea of a home by the sea. It is the story of you or your neighbor; it is the story of everyman."

The individual stories are not all happy ones, he goes on to say. His paintings suggest wrecked lives and broken bridges, longing and loss, sadness, salvation, solitude, peace, and contentment—the contradictory experiences and emotions that constitute people's lives.

Sometimes Beck's houses appear deserted, as in *DESOLATION ROW*, where a series of white bungalows dot an empty street. At other times the homes show signs of habitation, as in *LILAC*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
THE BUILDING, OIL, 68 X 84.
OVER THE SEA, OIL, 32 X 44.
DESOLATION ROW, OIL, 34 X 60.

KNICKERS, which depicts
laundry hanging on a
clothesline near a teal-

blue house by the sea. Whether Beck chooses to express the loneliness of the former painting or the sense of belonging to a family of the latter, his intention is always to create visually pleasing paintings that are calm and powerful.

In a recent one-man show of Beck's work at the Bakersfield Museum of Art in Bakersfield, CA, one



arresting painting in particular prompted significant discourse among viewers. In *BEAUTIFUL LAKE*, a house sits surrounded by water like an island that could sink at any moment. The image is both eerie and stunning—echoing the terrible beauty that arises when Mother Nature's wrath descends in the form of thunderstorms, hurricanes, and tornadoes.

A plume of smoke also rises from a chimney, indicating that there may be people inside, perhaps sitting by the hearth completely unaware that water is

rising outside their door. "My original inspiration was watching the news and seeing floods in the Mississippi River Valley," Beck explains. "I found them fascinating—sometimes you see dogs on roofs and people hanging on in trees. And sometimes people refuse to leave. They are in denial."

Beck is deliberately vague about the meaning behind *BEAUTIFUL LAKE*, preferring to let viewers come up with their own takes on the work. But he



LILAC KNICKERS, OIL, 50 X 62.

does acknowledge that there is often more than meets the eye in this and all of his works. *BEAUTIFUL LAKE*, for example, can strike a more universal note about denial beyond the threatening weather. "People can be in denial about all kinds of things like pollution, global warming, personal problems, and political situations," he says. "Smoke coming out of a chimney could be a symbol of any of those. The idea is that people can close their eyes to what's around them."

IT'S THIS CONTRADICTIONARY BLEND of the terrible, the beautiful, and the mysterious that seems to attract viewers to Beck's pieces, explains Phyllis Baldwin, assistant curator at the Bakersfield Museum of Art where attendance was high during his show. "People are very drawn to *BEAUTIFUL LAKE* and all of his

paintings," Baldwin says. "I think people feel like they understand them even if they don't get all the nuances. The paintings make you uneasy, and they are intriguing. Yet there is a soothing quality because there is so much space in them."

In addition to forces of nature, Beck also finds his muses in music, film, and literature. In particular, he is a fan of writer Flannery O'Connor and photographer Walker Evans, both of whom are associated with the South. Oddly enough, Beck has never set foot in the region, but he has an affection for O'Connor's and Evans' ability to interpret everyday people and places, and he's also bent on illuminating certain American conditions with similar honesty. "O'Connor's work is about simple people seeking salvation in simple settings," he says. "You can just see their farms and the rural people trying to find some meaning in life and salvation."

His vision is a romanticized one, Beck admits, but he does see the South as less pretentious than other places in the country—populated with folks getting by the best they can and having a good time throughout the journey. Rural life has long fascinated the painter, ever since 1976 when 19-year-old Beck left the San Francisco area to spend a summer working on an uncle's farm in Minnesota. It was this engaging experience that led him to major in crop science at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, CA.

Beck's love affair with rural life ended before he graduated four years later, and he decided that his true calling was in the art world. He had drawn, doodled, and created cartoons as a youngster, but the idea of pursuing art as a career didn't seem feasible until he was older and met people making a living by selling paintings.

In 1983 he enrolled at the Portland School of Art in Maine, heading east to begin anew. Before he left the West Coast, though, he sold several landscape paintings capturing the scenic San Luis Obispo area. They each sold for \$1,000, and he took the sales as a sign that he was finally moving in the right direction.

But at 28, he was an older student among less serious 18-year-olds. Beck recalls that he soon grew impatient with the program and the students. "I just wanted to paint on my own," he says. "I already had

good work habits." After a semester, he returned to California, where he found a job teaching art at a state prison in San Luis Obispo under a grant from the University of California's arts outreach program.

It was a struggle financially, but the modest income gave Beck the flexibility to paint in his spare time. After about three years of juggling work and art, a lucky break came his way. In 1990, he displayed a series of 16 paintings of houses in a small gallery in town. The director of a gallery at Cal Poly saw the works and offered him a show on the spot—it was to open in two weeks. "I had painted the works flat on the canvas. I couldn't even afford stretcher bars then," Beck recalls. The gallery gave him some money to buy stretcher bars and frames to prepare for the exhibition.

Another opportunity came soon after. Diane Nelson, a Laguna Beach gallery owner, saw his work and scheduled an exhibit for him later that year. The show sold out, and Beck's career was launched after about a decade of trying to find his artistic way.

HOUSES HAVE BEEN reoccurring images in Beck's work since then. Although he has a particular affection for the South, the structures also come from cities he has lived in and visited around the world. In *THE BUILDING*, Beck depicts a structure he saw in a piazza in Milan, Italy, an apartment building he passed daily for a month. In the morning he noticed activity, and during the afternoon the shades were always closed.

"To me, the painting represents all of us," Beck explains. "And the windows are symbols of people—some are tightly closed and some are open. The bottom doorway is surrounded by dead trees that stand near green, thriving trees. They are all symbols of how people live in the world."

Beck points out that the streaks and strain of time are evident on the building's surface, and they represent all the generations of people who have lived in the old structure. "I try to make the light appear transformative, representing salvation or a spiritual presence—something trying to help people find meaningful answers or inspiration," he explains. "I try to give it a weird quality so that it gets you thinking and wondering what's going on inside."



BEAUTIFUL LAKE, OIL, 74 X 56.

Beck has quite a bit going on inside his house these days. As this story went to press, he and his wife, Carmela, were welcoming the arrival of a baby girl. And in between taking care of the new family member, Beck is in his studio preparing for two shows in December—one at J. Cacciola Gallery in New York City and the other at The Vault Gallery in Cambria, CA. "I am in a position now to reflect on what it is I want to do next," Beck says, pondering the future. And that, as far as he is concerned, is a very good place to be. □

Bonnie Gangelhoff is the senior editor of *Southwest Art*.

Beck is represented by Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach, CA; The Vault Gallery, Cambria, CA; and J. Cacciola Gallery, New York, NY.

MARK BECK

New Paintings - Bakersfield Museum of Art, 2004

Mark Beck's solitary structures stand like silent monuments amid vast empty spaces. Vacant rooms looking out on empty landscapes suggest the long absence of their human inhabitants. Looking from the outside, curtains veil the windows and one wonders if the owners might be hiding inside and surreptitiously peering out. Yet, in spite of this eerie absence of occupants, the paintings are strangely unalarming. They seem to fulfill our longing for days past when cluttered yards and congested streets were still unknown, when you actually could look for miles in a direction without sighting a fence or power line. The silence is soothing. It allows us to breathe deeply and reflect on the direction of our own lives. Their haunting, "Hopperesque" beauty makes it difficult to turn away. Austerity in this case is good.

On a more technical level, Beck's contemporary realist paintings are all about mood, light and breathtakingly modulated color. His skillful agility with paint allows him to make the most sensitive gradations in tones and textures. The contrast of sharply geometric shapes softened by delicately articulated hues and the playing of shadow against light and solidity of structure against a flowing expanse of earth and sky, are a testament to Beck's talent as an artist. His paintings are real and they are unreal. They are intriguing on many levels and that is a characteristic of enduring works of art. Beck says, "My paintings are simple in abstract terms and familiar in subject... my aim is to make visually pleasing paintings that are calm and powerful..." and he does do that and much more.

Phyllis Baldwin
Bakersfield Museum of Art