

AMERICAN
art
COLLECTOR



FN
2014

HEATHER NEILL

From within



1
The Trinity,
oil on panel,
34 x 39"

2
The Muse,
oil on panel,
14 x 14"

3
Aren't we aging well,
oil on panel, 24 x 36"

4
My Captains,
oil on panel,
16 x 12"



If figures appeared in Heather Neill's earlier paintings they were often cropped at the neck or appeared only as clothes on a mannequin. A standing joke among her friends is the story of the late actress Patricia Neal inquiring about a painting hanging in a gallery. When she was told the artist's name she replied, "Oh yes. She's the one who paints the people without any heads!"

Neill's paintings of props, fishermen's shacks and the landscape are finely rendered and often full of humor and subtle associations that enrich the viewer's experience. She paints her emotional response to her subjects.

Full figures and portraits, however, have only appeared recently in paintings that she painted "just for me," paintings that are "very personal and straight from the heart."

Her partner Pat Lackey has been urging her to show the paintings. When her Santa Fe dealer Michael Sugarman asked her about the paintings she is most proud of she replied, "I have rarely taken the time to do work that is just for me. It is interesting because if I had to answer honestly, these portraits are the ones I am most proud of because they are all about love at the deepest part of my soul."

Aren't we aging well is a carefully composed double portrait of the artist and her partner. They vacation on Martha's Vineyard every summer. The bluff overlooking the ocean has always been a favorite spot. It has eroded away but remains significant in their memories.

Neill's paintings can be inspired by a phrase or a title she records along with sketches in her notebooks. "The sketch goes up quickly," she says. "After I transfer it to the panel it's almost immediately obscured with paint. When I get to a place near the end and I've got the tones down and all the details I need to pick up from my photos, I throw them away. Then I sit back and analyze and change things. I'm not really wed so much to the specifics of the details."

She knew the phrase *Aren't we aging well* was perfect for her and Pat. The



3



4

beloved bluff was a given and then she turned to the composition. As she worked on details that would suggest the depth of her relationship with Pat and its public and private aspects she ran back and forth to her camera, setting the timer. The result, however, appears spontaneous and full of the vitality that animates their relationship.

Last year, Neill lost her longtime Vineyard friend Ted Meinelt who was 97 years old. Her portrait of Ted and his friend Pete, who died shortly after him, has echoes of her painting of herself and Pat. *My Captains* shows the two men sitting on the railing of steps going down to the ocean.

"I was going to do a close-up of their shoes," she recalls, "those wonderful old loafers. I did that just for myself. I needed to see the two of them together—relating to each other but really relating to the ocean. They

would sit together and wouldn't look at each other and would exchange maybe five words in three hours. It took a special kind of relationship to be friends with Pete. He was such a curmudgeon."

Ted, on the other hand, was someone she spoke with several times a week for years. "It's scary to do a portrait of someone you know so well," she admits. Speaking of her portrait, *The Muse*, she explains, "I intended to do a straight on portrait with him looking straight at you. I couldn't do it. It was a little too confrontational. You can still see his mischievous eyes. I reached into a place that was so deep and personal and private in my love for Ted. I put it out there on that canvas."

Her personal portraits and new paintings will be shown at Sugarman-Peterson Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 3 through 31. ●