



Kimberly Brooks, *The Collector*, 2011

Oil on linen, 16 x 12 inches, Courtesy Kimberly Brooks and Taylor De Cordoba, Los Angeles.

ARTISTS TO WATCH

Dressed to Thrill

BY BRUCE HELANDER

It's a little hard to imagine how we got to a point that what we wear and how we wear it has become an important benchmark of social status and political correctness, financial achievement and power points, not to mention a constant interpretive ingredient for artists to incorporate into their work, from ancient Greek statues to the last fashion designs of Alexander McQueen. Certainly the first style statements were made without a slick runway lineup of skinny chicks and their front row critics confronted with and temporarily blinded by a nuclear blast of flash bulbs from the heavens, but rather through the slow evolution of survival and the realization of a necessary fact of life that if you didn't properly cover yourself you might freeze to death, let alone give up the visual common denominator of tribal belonging. It didn't take long for disparate tribes to embellish their primitive couture with decorative beads and bangles, that would accent a snappy little outfit of woven grass crowned by a multi-colored feathered headdress. Soon enough, drawings on cave walls or mosaic Pompeian floors began to depict for eternity a *Woman's Wear Daily* special issue of historic proportions. The best ensembles these days seem to be an inventive combination of the old and the new with comfort often thrown to the wind. Designers like Gaultier, Saint Laurent and McQueen have blurred the lines between art and fashion. What is clear is the important role of fashion in art and the important art created around fashion.

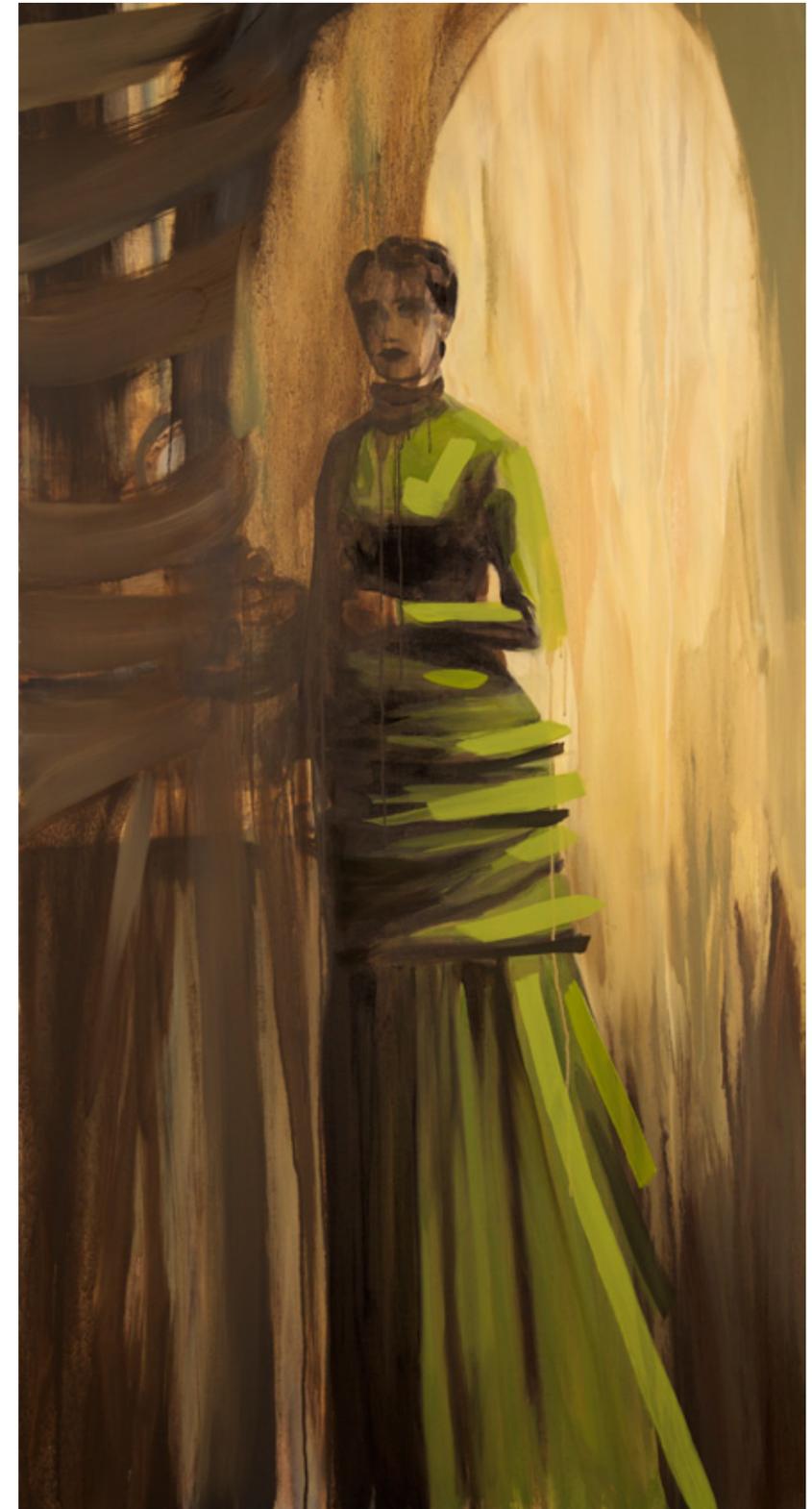
In her latest series of marvelous, brightly-colored painted canvases, Kimberly Brooks takes a cue from a variety of legendary artists, from the boldness of Francis Bacon to the sophistication of a Renaissance maestro to the elegance of John Singer Sargent. Brooks takes the viewer on an exclusive house tour of full length portraits that allow a voyeuristic view of a single subject dressed to the nines. Figures sometimes look directly and admiringly at the artist (and the viewer) with a cooperative but often secretive, seductive stance that obscures their identity and personality clues. Some poses that creatively use ambient illumination and shadow, like photographer Bruno of Hollywood lighting a nude but with some modesty, complete a tantalizing arrangement that incorporates

abstract expressionism, color field gestures, post-modern slashes and dashes of built-up medium and often deliberately exaggerated limbs that seem to melt into the overall composition. *The Collector*, a work that celebrates the reserved subjects of Fairfield Porter, presents a lady in a red dress that fits gracefully into a studio corner reminiscent of a Hunt Slonem environment, complete with a bird painting on the wall. The mystical portrait of Amy Fine Collins depicts an elegant rendering of an equally elegant lady, perched on a sun-drenched settee under a nearby Manhattan window and accented by geometric pillows and scholarly bookshelves. Other pieces utilize a technique made popular by Richard Prince and Brice Marden of purposeful drips that create a surface tension of painterly delights. Brooks' careful approach to molding convincing figures out of flat, oil-painted canvases becomes sculptural, with minimal backgrounds that act to push forward her abstracted models. As a final stage in her configurations, the artist goes back with quick gestures of brushed highlights, like de Kooning decorating a cake as the candles are lit, which often assist in "topping off" the images like carving one's initials into the bark of a tree. Having followed this artist's ascension into full maturity with an iconic identifiable signature, it is reassuring that she has found a niche that spins together interiors with gusto, figures with limbs akimbo and overall compositions with bravado. If Brooks' artwork continues along the path it has meticulously carved out of a Southern California urban jungle, she not only will be an artist to seriously watch, but to desire. —BH

Kimberly Brooks is represented by Taylor De Cordoba gallery in Los Angeles. T. 310.559.9156, www.taylordecordoba.com



Kimberly Brooks, *Amy Fine Collins*, 2011
Oil on linen, 9 x 12 inches, Courtesy Kimberly Brooks and Taylor De Cordoba, Los Angeles.



Kimberly Brooks, *The Victorian*, 2011
Oil on linen, 50 x 27 inches, Courtesy Kimberly Brooks and Taylor De Cordoba, Los Angeles.