

Egg Tempera Lives On

BY MATTHIAS ANDERSON



Since it opened in 1986, the gallery at Tree's Place on Cape Cod has established an international reputation for handling superb contemporary realist art. Among its strengths are paintings in egg tempera, the fast-drying medium consisting of powdered pigments mixed with a binder of egg yolk. Usually applied slowly to smallish wooden panels, tempera produces a hard, luminous surface that resists chipping; it's no accident that some of the oldest known Western paintings are temperas, which predominated before the advent of (generally less expensive) oils on canvas during the Renaissance.

Tree's Place became closely associated with tempera while representing the American master Robert Vickrey (1926-2011), who championed

a distinctive form of late surrealism alongside such older contemporaries as Paul Cadmus (1904-1999) and George Tooker (1920-2011). With the passing of that generation, Tree's Place feels it's time to highlight artworks it retains from Vickrey's estate, and also the next generation of talents in this medium.

The oldest of the four artists appearing in *Natural Selection: Masters of Egg Tempera* (July 20-31) is Gary Milek (b. 1941), who learned

Robert Vickrey (1926-2011)

Parthenon Procession

2004, Egg tempera on gesso panel, 18 1/2 x 24 in.





Fred Wessel (b. 1946)

Amanda

2008, Egg tempera and gold leaf on panel, 16 x 12 in.



Phil Schirmer (b. 1952)

Reflecting

2013, Egg tempera on panel, 18 x 24 in.

the Old Masterly techniques of preparing gesso panels, tempera mediums, and gold grounds while studying at Amsterdam's Rijksacademie. He went on to teach at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire for 17 years. Fred Wessel (b. 1946) has taught at the University of Hartford since 1976, but a 1984 trip to Italy to look at Renaissance art made a huge impression on him. Since then, he has been fascinated with what he calls the "ever-changing inner light that radiates from gold leaf used judiciously on the surface of a painting, and the use of pockets of rich, intense colors that illuminate the picture's surface."

Koo Schadler (b. 1962)

Lake Warren

2013, Egg tempera on panel, 6 1/2 x 17 1/2 in.





Gary Milek (b. 1941)
Golden Solomon's Seal
2012, Egg tempera and gold leaf on panel, 13 x 15 1/2 in.

The artist and art historian Koo Schadler (b. 1962) discovered this ancient medium while studying at California's College of Marin under Chester Arnold. Now based in New Hampshire, she has authored several books on egg tempera and is a board member of the Society of Tempera Painters. By contrast, Maine's Phil Schirmer (b. 1952) taught himself to paint in tempera, which, he says, "takes a minimum of three lifetimes to master."

Actually, we think that he and the other artists highlighted here have done just fine in one lifetime. ■

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