

The Ripple Effect

In Eric Zener's dissolved paintings, modern man faces life head-on

By Samantha Brooks

A VISCERAL REACTION to a work of art is rarely based on the image itself. Usually, we react to something we see beneath the surface of the canvas that digs into our subconscious. When the paintings of Eric Zener were shown in a feature on Joseph Fryzer's Pacific Palisades residence ("A Well-Traveled Home," *Robb Report Luxury Home*, Winter 2005), the response was strong, indeed. "I have been a dealer in Beverly Hills for 18 years and have not seen anything like this; there is such a universal appeal with Zener's work," says Travis Hansson, who represents the artist and originally put Fryzer in touch with Zener. "We have almost 9,000 clients in 32 countries, and I must say that Eric's work engages the eye and the mind of clients from around the globe."

The dichotomy that plagues much contemporary art is that it is rarely thought-provoking and beautiful at the same time. But Zener's work transcends that of his peers. "No one else is doing anything like this," says George Henoeh Shechtman, who discovered the artist 5 years ago and continues to exhibit Zener's work at his New York gallery. "He is using the natural world as a metaphor for life. The beauty in which they are painted is what makes it easy for people to associate with them, but he's doing it in a way that captures your imagination, putting you into the painting and forcing you to think about yourself."



Previous pages: *Into the Clear*,
71" x 61", 2003. Oil on canvas.

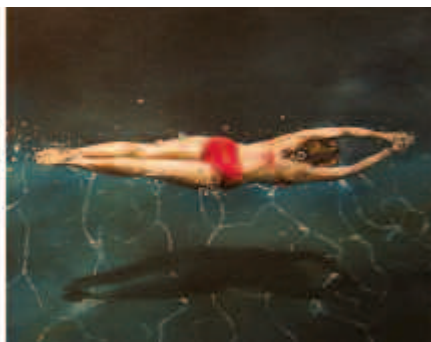
This page: *The Dive*,
66" x 54", 2004. Oil on canvas.



Zener graduated from the University of California Santa Barbara in 1988 with a degree in psychology. His father was a psychologist. His grandmother was a painter. He had grown up surrounded by the tangibles of art—the smell of oil paint and the feel of brushes—and after finishing college, he decided to turn a hobby into a career. “Painting is something I figured out on my

own,” explains the self-taught artist, who attributes his skill to two things. “First, it’s repetition, having the dedication to perfect a craft. But, the second element is something more mysterious that you can’t explain. You can go to school and learn how to play piano perfectly, but no one can teach you how to write Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. It’s something inside you.”

What is inside Zener is a remarkable ability to accurately portray modern man faced with the decisions of reality. His earlier work features people, usually placed near water, who are confronted with choices; they are about to make a proverbial leap of faith. However, his more recent pieces tend to show people after they have made the leap, submersed in water and headed toward



something. “If you lined my work up chronologically, it looks like a relaxed evolution, but with the same core feeling,” explains the San Francisco-based artist, who paints in a studio overlooking Union Square. “The people in my paintings are always complex, but in calm environments; they are searching. They’re not stuck—they’re the opposite of stuck. They are moving forward, facing the uncertainties of life head-on.” While uncertain, there is also a

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Previous page, top: *Refuge #2*, 48" x 48", 2004. Oil on canvas.

Bottom: *Discovery*, 24" x 48", diptych, 2004. Oil on canvas.

This Page: *The Returning*, 67" x 55", 2003. Oil on canvas.



Resources

Eric Zener

415.392.3119

www.ericzener.com

Gallery Henoeh

917.305.0003

www.galleryhenoch.com

Hespe Gallery

415.776.5918

www.hespe.com

Travis Hansson

Fine Art

310.271.1297

sense that things will turn out for the best, an underlying positive gesture of reassurance. Above all, Zener's paintings relay a feeling of hopefulness.

Another evolution in Zener's work is that the backgrounds have become increasingly blurry and dissolved, focusing entirely on the subjects, whose faces are usually turned away or obscured, further causing

viewers to interact with the painting and place themselves inside—a move that has made his work even more successful. "In the past two years, his prices have doubled," says Shechtman. "Half of his show here last April sold out before it even opened, and all but three of the 18 pieces sold before it closed. It's great to see this happen to someone who is so young, and it's exciting

to see what he'll do in the future."

Zener will participate in two art fairs this fall with Shechtman's Gallery Henoeh before his next solo show there in February 2006. His work can also be purchased through Travis Hansson in Los Angeles and Charles Hespe in San Francisco. Most of Zener's pieces are priced between \$15,000 and \$30,000. 