

BUILD STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS WITH GALLERY OWNERS - SEE P. 12

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INDIAN SUMMER
by Jamie Kirkland



Fragrant Rain by Jamie Kirkland. Oil on canvas, 20" x 20".

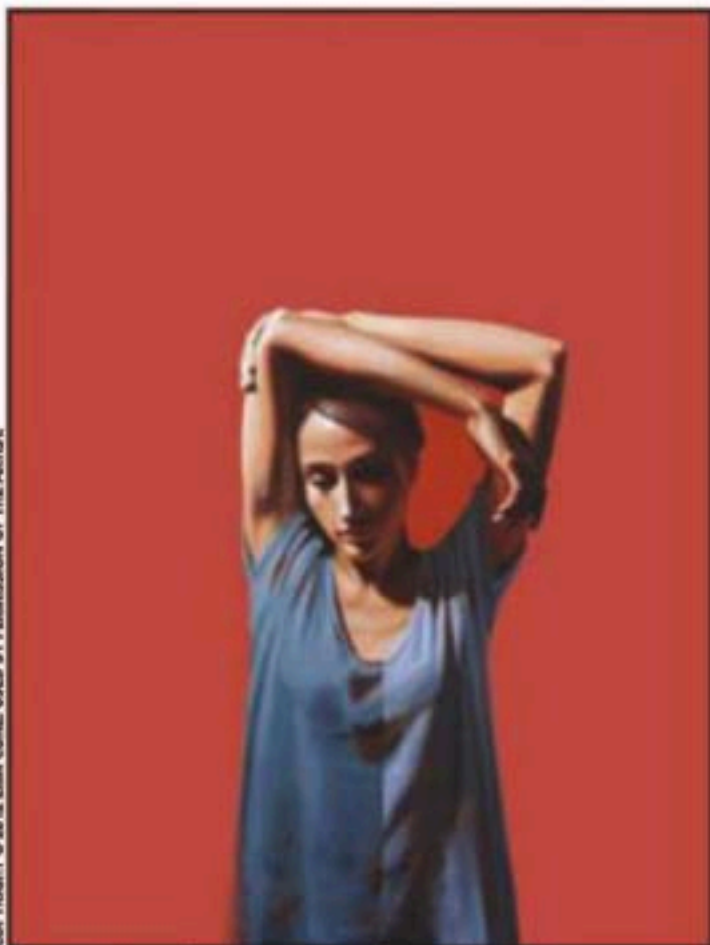
Prelude to a Solo Show

How Three Top Artists Prepare

BY KIM HALL

HAVING A SOLO SHOW in a reputable gallery is nearly every artist's dream, but the reality of creating a body of work for such a show requires extreme discipline. In this article, three top exhibiting artists — Erin Cone, Jamie Kirkland and Brenda Hope Zappitell — share how they prepare for their solo shows. Even if you are not at the solo show stage of your career yet, the work ethic and professionalism of these artists provides a great deal of insight into why "luck" has very little to do with a solid, sustained art career.

A full-time artist for the past 11 years, figurative painter Erin Cone (www.erincone.com) is currently preparing for her 17th solo show, opening in September at Nuart Gallery. She is represented by five galleries, including Blank Space Gallery in New York, New York; Decorazon Gallery in London; Hesper Gallery in San Francisco, California; Nuart Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Rosenbaum Contemporary in Boca Raton, Florida.



Demure, 2012, by Erin Cone. Acrylic, 48" x 36".



Behind The Waterfall, 2011, by Brenda Hope Zappitell. Acrylic with cold wax on panel, 42" x 42".

Landscape painter *Jamie Kirkland* (www.jamiekirklandart.com) is currently preparing for her eighth solo exhibition, titled *Shimmer*, opening in October at Winteroud Fine Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She is also preparing for an exhibition opening in November at The Fort Worth Community Arts Center in Texas titled *Infinite*. She is represented by Winteroud Fine Art; Jules Place Gallery in Boston, Massachusetts; Pryor Fine Art in Atlanta, Georgia; and Rosenbaum Contemporary in Boca Raton, Florida.

A former attorney and full-time artist for almost five years, abstract expressionist painter *Brenda Hope Zappitell* (www.brendahopezappitell.com) is currently preparing for her fourth solo show, titled *A Chronicle of Gratitude*, opening in October at Darnell Fine Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She is represented by eight galleries, including Rosenbaum Contemporary in Boca Raton, Florida; Darnell Fine Art in Santa Fe; Gallery Orange in New Orleans; Atelier Gallery in Charleston, South Carolina; Exhibit by Abersons in Tulsa, Oklahoma; The Christopher Hill Gallery in St. Helena, California; Artful Sol in Vail, Colorado; and Chase Edwards Gallery in Sag Harbor, New York.

Professional Artist: How long do you give yourself to prepare, and how do you keep yourself on track?

Erin Cone: It depends on the number of paintings and what else I have in my schedule. For a large show, I'd give myself most of a year to complete it. I've found that it's important to add in plenty of time for the idea/planning stage, beyond the time needed for the actual art making. Other considerations are the pre-painting tasks, like buying and prepping supplies, and the post-painting things that must be done well ahead of the show date: photography of the work for press and promotional materials, delivery or shipping, and, of course, the installation.

At this point, I have enough experience to gauge my progress pretty well — usually! I do use a calendar to keep track of what I'm doing and planning to do, and I check it at intervals, adjusting as needed. Years ago, I would plan out all the works for a show and then just paint my way through them, but I've found that makes the ideas feel stale and makes it hard to stay motivated. I like to front-load the work, painting a lot at the beginning, to give me a strong sense of accomplishment when my enthusiasm is highest. Getting a solid start like that allows me to take a breath later on if I need to recharge.

Jamie Kirkland: I typically give myself six to eight months to paint for a show and stay current with my other gallery commitments. In the beginning, I probably tended

Erin Cone: Preventing Creative Burnout

"When working on a large body of work in a set timeline, there's a definite risk of creative burnout. My strategy is to begin with the most ambitious pieces — the ones I'm most excited about — which sets a tone for the show and raises the bar so that I stay challenged and engaged. With the constant pace of work, the creative batteries do tend to get drained. In the past, I would try to push through it, but I've learned that's really counter-productive. It's much better to take a break, step back, do something to rejuvenate and start again fresh. I've found no matter how much my deadline is looming, the time spent recharging is always well worth it."

to thrive more under pressure before I understood better time management skills.

I keep myself on track by being very disciplined about studio and easel time. I am in the studio working six to seven days a week, especially as a deadline approaches.

I like to paint large scale, so my goal will typically be to try for one finished painting per week. If I get stuck or

Jamie Kirkland: Ensuring Mutual Success with the Gallery

"I like to discuss with the gallery what their expectations for a show are, especially if it is a new relationship. I want them to have work they are excited about sharing with their collectors. Before painting full-time, I expressed my creative energy as an entrepreneur. I began a small, intimate, award-winning French restaurant in Northwest Florida, and after that an independent book store, so I understand the financial and time commitment the gallery owner makes in brick-and-mortar structures, payroll, advertising, utilities, etc. I really like to have a partnership with my galleries, and I am committed to doing everything I can to ensure our mutual success."

frustrated, I will sometimes work on smaller paintings, and those come along during the months before a show. If I hit a roadblock on a larger painting, I need to keep the energy flowing so I go to other pieces.

I also keep a studio notebook with my weekly goals clearly defined. I often take my laptop home in the evenings to do administrative work and marketing projects after dinner.

Brenda Hope Zappitell: I give myself three to four months. I'm very regimented. I go in, and I work it as a job. And I actually realized that by doing that, you make the most breakthroughs. I find new visual languages as a result of having those ups and downs. To me, the struggles have become the most valuable learning experience. If a painting comes too easy, I have learned that in the future I will look at the work and think I could have pushed myself more.

When my kids are at school, I work 9 to 3 most days. I have a particularly strong studio practice, and I'm very prolific. I have a calendar, assigning myself set tasks each week because if I do that, I'll force myself

to do it. Once I write something down, it's set in stone, and it's going to get it done. I know how much I can handle, but I always leave room (several weeks) in case I need more time.

PA: Do you try to keep the body of work cohesive?

EC: For my first several shows, I was very focused on cohesiveness – really concerned that the pieces "match." At this point, I've learned just to paint what I'm most interested in, follow my current artistic impulses where they lead, and that will automatically result in a related body of work. I think it's a mistake to be overly concerned with the work as a show – it will only hang that way for a few weeks at most, but the individual works will go on, hopefully in a collector's home. The critical thing is for each piece to be stellar in its own right; that matters so much more than having a brilliant theme. For my shows, I often see a theme emerge in retrospect, late in the process, so I just begin painting and trust that it will all make sense eventually.



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Softly 2 by Jamie Kirkland. Oil on canvas, 48" x 60".



COPYRIGHT © 2011 ERIN CONE. USED BY PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST.

Affude, 2011, by Erin Cone. Acrylic, 48" x 48".

JK: I'm always working – taking photos, writing down ideas, making sketches, painting studies, so when as a show approaches I focus in on what's new and exciting, what I find most compelling, and that becomes the cornerstone of the body of work.

I do like to have a mood board for visual stimulation and a focus for the show. The germ of an idea usually springs from a previous body of work something that I want to explore further. Because I am a landscape painter, color and season are important to me. I chose a show in October because I wanted to explore, vibrant oranges, burnt Siennas and lemony yellows — that color palette. I can envision shimmery leaves dancing off the canvas and a surface

that shows more brushwork than is typical for me. (I tend to prefer a smooth surface.)

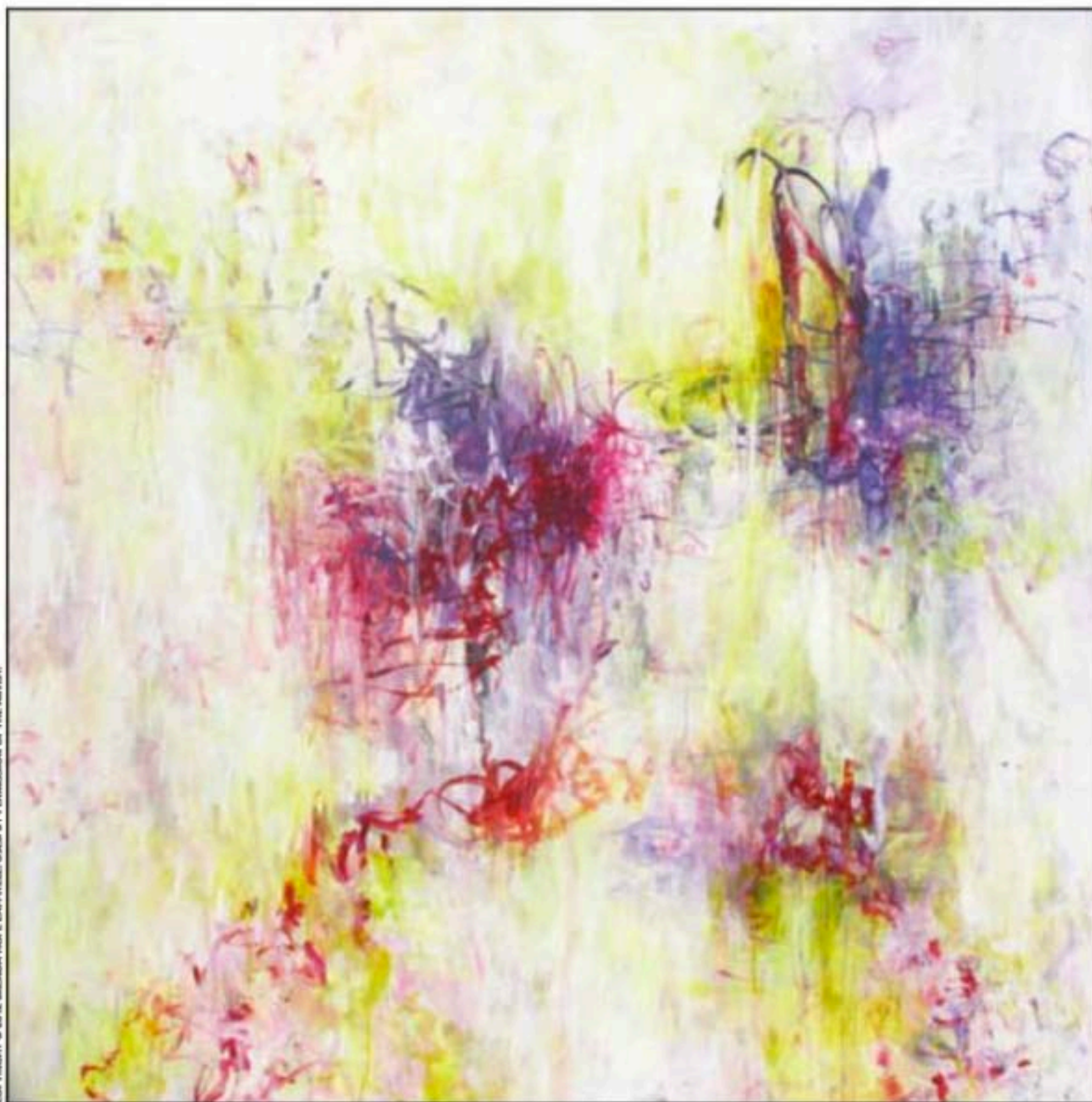
BHZ: I actually work in the wall space into my ideas. I balance out the whole body of work, not just the individual works. I do it in a variety of ways. Often, I will do a series of paintings that have the same names. For example, *Journey of Uncertainty* was four pieces, each 60" x 40". They could have been hung and sold as four separate pieces, or as I hoped, all together. The first show they were exhibited in, they were separated, but in my show here in Florida, they hung them all on the same wall. Lucky for me, they were sold all together to a university as a public installation, and that was my

vision, to have them sell and hang as one collection.

There's something more about painting in series that relates the pieces to one another. You really get to develop the process. It is a lot easier to paint one painting than three or four that relate to each other. These little challenges that I put in front of me really make me grow, to push myself beyond wherever I'm at the time.

PA: What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in doing so many solo shows?

EC: Overall, the most important thing I've learned is to trust the process. In the



Simple Pleasures, 2012, by Brenda Hope Zappitell. Acrylic with cold wax on panel, 60" x 60".

beginning, I tended to over-plan and feel overly responsible for every aspect. The fact is, it's the gallery's job to hang the work and show it to its best advantage, and it's their job to sell it. My job is simply to paint the best work possible and be a professional and courteous partner to the gallery. If I do that, everything else works out fine.

JK: Worry is a waste of time, and you have to find ways to circumvent it. It may seem counterintuitive that you need to create joy for yourself in the studio and an environment that makes it safe to explore your materials and make mistakes. Perhaps that comes easier to other artists. I also believe that pushing may not give me the results

that I want. Allowing space for a flow actually accomplishes much more.

I don't want to sound like I have a secret formula for success or hitting the mark every time I step up to the easel. I can't imagine that such a thing exists. I do know that if I keep showing up, experience has informed me that things usually work out no matter what obstacle I am facing at the moment.

BHZ: One of the most important lessons I've learned is that preparing for a show is just a lot of hard work. If I'm going to do something, it's going to be to the best of my ability. It's got to be 100 percent. To become a professional working artist, I think this

is necessary. I think that's what I learned about myself from doing these shows.

There are so many other talented artists. The gallery has the opportunity to give a show to whomever they want. The serious artists I know work the way I do. It's a job. There is great joy in the process, and I am grateful to be able to experience that as well. I view each show opportunity as a huge chance to grow. Selling my work gives me the opportunity to be prolific and provides me with the ability to continue. **PA**

An artist and writer, Kim Hall is the Editor of Professional Artist. Kim can be reached at khall@professionalartistmag.com.