



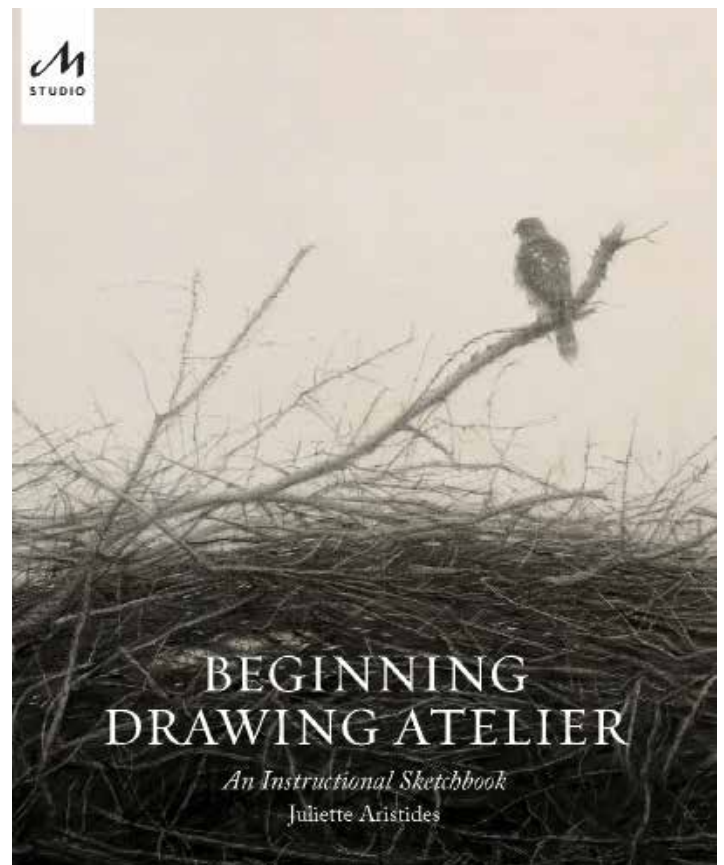
# JULIETTE ARISTIDES: SEEING BEAUTY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

An exhibition of 17 new paintings by Juliette Aristides (b. 1971) at Nashville's LeQuire Gallery this season (April 26–June 22) is an occasion to celebrate. On view are an array of interiors and still lifes that remind us of her ongoing contribution to the revival of classical realism and traditional art education in America. Aristides has been achieving this not only by conducting workshops nationally and abroad, but also by publishing books that are now mandatory reading in teaching ateliers nationwide. She has already produced four successful volumes on classical drawing and painting, and this year Monacelli Studio is releasing two of her instructional sketchbooks: first *Beginning Drawing Atelier* and then *Figure Drawing Atelier* this fall.

One of Aristides's broad goals is to help others rediscover the beauty in daily life. As an example, she cites a glass of water that we would “ordinarily walk away from and not see at all, because in the course of everyday life we subconsciously tend to identify objects by name within a millisecond of seeing them. But if our attention is focused, we can break down something that's instantaneous and begin to see it, and suddenly be able to recall all the different aspects of it, including the experience of it.”

This idea of seeing — truly seeing — is where Aristides wants her students to start, eventually finding their way to the creation of beauty, which she considers a “portal to meaning.” The ultimate objective is to understand and convey the human spirit through art, but none of this can happen without acquiring the technical skills necessary to make the journey. “It is craftsmanship that opens the door to self-expression,” she explains. “I am excited about teaching the methods from our artistic inheritance. I know that once this

The cover of Aristides's latest book, published by Monacelli Studio this April





*Brushes*, 2018, oil on panel, 24 x 18 in. ■ *Kitchen Table*, 2018, oil on panel, 18 x 16 in.. ■ *Pears*, 2018, oil on panel, 9 x 12 in.

knowledge becomes commonplace again, it can only enrich our cultural life.”

### **BUILDING SKILLS — AND UNDERSTANDING**

Born in South Africa and raised in Pennsylvania, Aristides recalls that, as a teenager, “I periodically crept from my home at night, the house silent as my family slept, to walk the neighborhood and woods. Sometimes I sat with dangling legs on the small bridge leading to a tiny island on the lake, enjoying the dark solitude. My shadow projected by moonlight onto the water, the thrill of a world asleep, the sky a trembling ceiling of a great cathedral. On my walks, I would often sketch the silhouettes of the trees: a sheet of black against a silver sky, the occasional home glowing like a lighthouse. Sometimes I would stay up all night and catch the bus to school in the morning. I didn’t know it then, but I was part of the great tradition of contemplation.”

Aristides says, “It was drawing that first submerged me in my thoughts and impressions, both sequestering me from the world and connecting me to my surroundings in equal measure. I found art an exhilarating source of meaning and a path that, once started, I never left. I went on to study drawing for many years with wonderful teachers who helped me build my skills and understanding.”

This journey got underway in earnest as Aristides pursued the drawing curriculum refined by the Pennsylvania educator Myron Barnstone (1933–2016). She enrolled in Philadelphia’s Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, then made her way to Minneapolis to study at the atelier established by Richard Lack. While at New York City’s National



Academy of Design she learned much from Jacob Collins and also Carlos Madrid, then became a founding member of Collins’s Water Street Studio in Brooklyn.

Now she shares what she has learned in Seattle, where she founded and teaches at her own atelier within the Gage Academy of

*Silver Tin*, 2018, oil on panel, 12 x 9 3/4 in.







*Trompe l'Oeil Portrait*, 2018, oil on panel, 18 1/2 x 18 in.

Art. As the “essential foundation for artistic expression,” drawing is at the heart of her curriculum there. Becoming a competent draftsman starts with slowing down to contemplate. “There are many people who, for a time, pivot from the world to discover the shape of themselves, to learn their own minds and what makes them feel alive,” Aristides notes. “They enter an empty room with a book, turn their faces to the woods, or crawl under a blanket armed with notebook and pen. Occasionally these sojourners, by withdrawing from the world, find a universe.”

She continues, “When I was a student, learning to draw was also referred to as ‘learning to see,’ because the pencil is considered an extension of the mind, which gets sharpened and challenged. The initial goal of drawing may be to capture a subject’s likeness with a pencil, but more significant is our ability to become better observers.”

Aristides’s new book, *Beginning Drawing Atelier: An Instructional Sketchbook*, is based on the principle that copying master drawings is one of the best ways to improve your work. She notes that “we learn to speak and gain social graces and basic life skills before we are old enough to remember exactly how it all began. This process of learning through emulation, which serves us so well in life, also once formed the basis of art training, with students starting as assistants in workshops.”

Looking back to the Renaissance, she observes, “When art academies were founded, students began by copying drawings, sculptures, and plaster casts, and only then drew live models. This progression of study — first copying works of art and only later creating original pieces — resulted in some of the finest works of art ever made. And so,



*Sink*, 2018, oil on panel, 24 x 18 in. ■ *Westlight*, 2019, oil on panel, 24 x 17 in.



the history of art education in the Western world is entwined with the practice of copying masterpieces, called ‘mastercopy.’”

Aristides’s curriculum in Seattle ranges from small sketches to powerful finished value drawings, some of which lead onward to paintings of still life, architecture, landscapes, and figures. She teaches the fundamentals of drawing with time-tested “methods from our artistic inheritance,” offering students a solid foundation on which to build. They are taught how to sight and measure the subject in order to reproduce it accurately, and early emphasis is placed upon contour, proportion, gesture, anatomy, modeling, and the shape of light and shadow. Aristides insists that students master their draftsmanship before moving on to color and oils.

Not surprisingly, Aristides’s books highlight the elegance of drawings and their simple beauty: she believes that “much of the lasting power of art comes not from the obvious content of the image, but from the more subtle impact of harmoniously arranged lines, values, and colors. A few structural lines in the beginning often make the difference,” and she encourages artists to “set the entire scaffolding before focusing on nuances,” meaning one should draw first with broad gesture, then add subtleties and detail. She argues that both are essential to the success of a drawing. Her strategy is a winning combination of solid technique and “emotional accuracy,” a unity she has long admired in the drawings of Michelangelo, Leonardo, Pontormo, Rubens, and Seurat, among other masters.

#### SPREADING THE WORD

Aristides has promoted these ideas far beyond her atelier and publications. She is vice president and cofounder of the Da Vinci Initiative, a nonprofit foundation that supports skill-based learning in K–12 art

classrooms. She and her colleagues there know that the most creative children are those with the most tools at their disposal for making artwork. Thus they provide atelier training and resources to art teachers to help them incorporate skill-based methods into their classroom practices. This work occurs through online classes, art education conferences, keynote speaker services, weekend retreats, and district-wide workshops. (For more about the Da Vinci Initiative, see the feature article in the October 2016 issue of *Fine Art Connoisseur*.)

In addition, Aristides shares her work — and that of her students — with museum visitors whenever possible. Having already exhibited her paintings at the Maryhill Museum of Art in Goldendale, Washington, she will return there this summer (June 1–July 17) with another show, *Works on Paper: Drawing Reality*. Developed in collaboration with her Aristides Atelier graduates and current students in Seattle, this show will examine the importance of developing drawing skills, as well as understanding drawing as a finished art form. The audience at museums like this are not only art lovers, but also collectors, whose appreciation and understanding are inevitably honed when they get opportunities to look closely at superb drawings.

Even sooner, art lovers in Nashville will get to admire Aristides’s oil paintings, including all of the works illustrated here. Rest assured that *Fine Art Connoisseur* will publish photographs from the opening celebrations in its August 2019 issue. ●

**Information:** [lequiregallery.com](http://lequiregallery.com), [monacellipress.com](http://monacellipress.com), [aristidesarts.com](http://aristidesarts.com), [davinciinitiative.org](http://davinciinitiative.org), [maryhillmuseum.org](http://maryhillmuseum.org)

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