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The artist with *Merge* (2014) at the opening of her group exhibit at the Nancy Margolis Gallery in New York in June. “I was astounded by her enormous gift,” says New York gallery owner Nancy Margolis. “This young artist, working quietly...away from the influence and pressure of the larger art world, was carving out a unique identity—powerful, edgy, sensual, intense, and imaginative...”

# Taking Flight

Artist Meghan Howland stalks wildness in nature, human and otherwise.

INTERVIEW BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

Making a living as a full-time fine-art painter in Portland is a trick Meghan Howland pulls off with quiet grace.

“I love Portland, I think it’s a great place for artists. I wish there were more of us,” says Howland, 28. Her work—oil paintings—took off in a group show this summer at the Nancy Margolis Gallery in New York’s Chelsea district. She’s been repre-

sented for three years by the Bowersock Gallery in Provincetown, Mass., where a show of her work runs through September 15.

“To be that young, and show that much depth already!” says Lisa Bernstein of the Bowersock Gallery, “Who knows how far she’ll go?”

Pretty far already, it seems. “Georgina Chapman and Harvey Weinstein have just commissioned their second painting from

Meghan,” says gallery owner Steve Bowersock. “She’s an artist who already has a clear voice. Most artists don’t develop this until they’re 40 or so.”

**How did you end up in Portland?**

I was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts, and I grew up in Kingston, New Hampshire. But my family’s from Maine; I have ties here. After art school, I headed straight here, about





"Her work is beautiful, stunning, and always ambiguous," says gallery owner Steve Bowersock. See *Birds* (2011), 24"x24", left, and *Folly* (2013), 34"x24", above. Opposite is *Warrior* (2014), 30"x40".

five years ago. It's my home now.

**You have family here?**

I have an ancestor who founded Howland, Maine. It's kind of a funny story. He came over on the *Mayflower*—he's the one who fell overboard. Howlands are traditionally klutzy.

**Do you mean you descend from John Howland (1592-1672), who was sent by Governor William Bradford to found a hunting and trapping outpost in the Maine woods on the Penobscot River? [See "Maine's Patron Stranger," November 2013.]**

Yup. But the only artist in the family before I came along was my great-great-grandfather, Russell Langley. He served in World War I. Instead of fighting, his job was to take pen and ink to the front, draw battle scenes, and send them to Washington. And he survived!

**Which brings us to you.**

I wanted to be an artist from the time I was eight. I was going to work for Disney, I wanted to be an animator. I painted a short cartoon—they still drew everything back then—my mother filmed each still, and we packed it all up and mailed it to Disney with a letter. They actually responded and said that I would need some art instruction first. So my mother said, 'OK, it looks like we'll be finding you an art school.' My family's always been very supportive. That's counted a lot. I have a BFA from the New Hampshire Institute of Art.

**How have you evolved?**

I used to paint from life. I started with landscapes—I'd get right out there and paint a view from start to finish. If it rained, I'd set up a tarp. I'm drawn to nature, so my paintings usually have birds or plants in them. Now I usually work from photographs.

**You sometimes put birds over people's faces—is this intended as malevolent symbolism, or a little Carlos Castaneda?**

It's not meant to be malevolent at all, but some people take it that way. I combine the chaos of nature with people's stories.

**Nightmarishly, beautifully. Take us closer.**

Well, my paintings sell in galleries for prices from about \$1,000 to \$15,000. I also get commissions to paint por-



traits. I have three commissions to do this winter. I have a small studio at the Mayo Street Arts Center. I've collaborated on fabric design with the Marchesa fashion house in New York, and I'm also starting to hand-paint commercial signs. I just like them—painting a sign brings a newness to an old thing but it respects the past. That's why I like oil paint. Some people say oil painting's dead, but it's not. Sacrificing aesthetics for convenience is a problem. A lot of people fall into that trap.

I was lucky. Nancy Margolis's assistant



found me on the internet. She arranged for Nancy to meet me when she was here at her Maine home. She came, looked at my work, and offered me a spot in her group show.

**Did you sell anything?**

I did!

But don't get me wrong. I'm still very much a starving artist. It helps that I've gotten a *lot* better at budgeting. Up until recently I was slinging lattes as a barista at Coffee By Design—I still pick up shifts now and then. I also did some landscaping, waited tables, and managed a small art store before I moved here. Being creatively frugal is, for me, part of living as a painter. Being creative is who you are. ■

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