

# THREE TO WATCH

There is a lot of superb art being made these days.  
This column shines light on a trio of gifted individuals.



NICOLAS V. SANCHEZ (b. 1983), *Folklorico de Guerrero*, 2020, oil on canvas, 10 x 20 feet, private collection

**NICOLAS V. SANCHEZ** (b. 1983) creates art that reflects his colorful cultural heritage, diverse urban environment, and eclectic influences and interests. He earned his B.F.A. from Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and then his M.F.A. from the New York Academy of Art in New York City, where he lives now. Not one to stay in a predictable lane, Sanchez explores and experiments beyond the borders of traditional realism but will just as quickly return to that tightly rendered style if a particular subject dictates.

Sanchez's oil paintings jump off both screen and page with swift, lyrical lines and a surety of skillful brushstrokes. In his mural-sized painting *Folklorico de Guerrero*, he boldly expresses years of childhood observations and memories while paying homage to the artistry of his mother's seamstress work. "My mom made these beautiful, elaborate, traditional Mexican *ballet folklorico* dresses," the artist explains in a YouTube video discussing this 10-x-20-foot piece. "The basement was always flowing with different colored fabrics and ribbons. There were many nights when she would stay up working, and I would stay up with her. Sometimes she would stop and ask, 'Qué color?', holding up two ribbons to choose from. I'd say, 'I don't know ... blue.' The next morning I'd wake up and see that blue ribbon sewn beautifully and intricately around the dress. Sometimes a small memory can lead to a big painting."

Created in both charcoal and ink, Sanchez's drawings may also derive from lasting impressions, or they can be fresh takes on familiar

subject matter. A recent solo exhibition of charcoal drawings at Sugarlift in New York City showed the artist taking back the camera lens and putting a painterly perspective on black-and-white imagery.

An earlier series of highly realistic barnyard animals created with multi-colored ballpoint pens was both an unexpected and impressively innovative take on the fauna genre. The artist recalls, "My dad always had a ballpoint pen in his pocket and he taught me to draw at a very young age. Much later in life, my subway commute from my apartment to the Academy was about 40 minutes. What to do with that time? I could have played video games, but instead I started sketching with my pen in my notebook, doodling and drawing whatever came to mind. And that's how it started to develop. Eventually I integrated it into my studio practice."

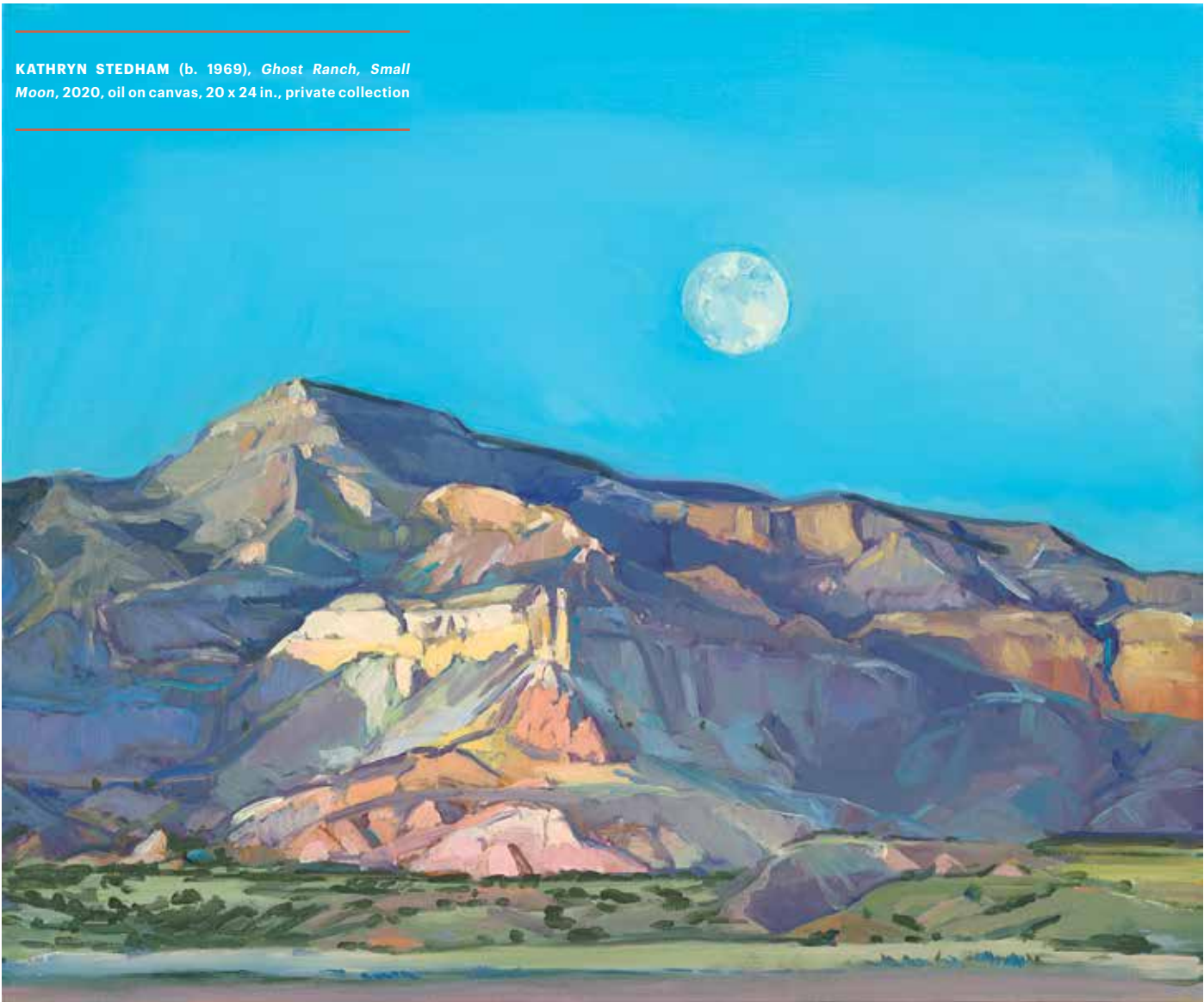
Sanchez remains grateful for the support he has received from others over the years. In 2018, he began donating an annual scholarship — along with his mentoring — to a Latino/Hispanic art student from every school he attended (\$500 for his high school, \$1,000 for community college, \$1,000 for undergraduate college, and \$5,000 for graduate school). Last year, he used the creation of the painting illustrated here to raise money for families along the Mexico/U.S. border in collaboration with the Young Center and the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services.

**SANCHEZ** is self-represented and shows with several galleries.

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**KATHRYN STEDHAM** (b. 1969), *Ghost Ranch, Small Moon*, 2020, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in., private collection

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**KATHRYN STEDHAM** (b. 1969) paints from reality, memory, imagination, and, most important, a place of curiosity and contemplation. Like many landscapists, she is fascinated by numerous elements of nature – visuals, sounds, and sensory experiences ranging from grand to subtle. Frequently spending time outdoors and making regular plein air trips to gather ideas and observations, the artist collects an array of imagery and notes to inspire future paintings.

Stedham considers her move to the Southwest in 2005 life-changing, as that was when she finally found her calling as a painter and her signature subject matter. The incredible sunsets, structures, and vistas surrounding her have offered a storehouse of visual material from which to choose. Now a resident of Santa Fe, she explores her immediate environs through hiking, painting, and horseback riding while also traveling throughout the Southwest and other parts of the country and world.

It is the American West, however, that she is particularly fond of. “Forever fascinated with stories about the West and Westward Expansion, I would happily board a time machine, if there were such a thing, to experience first-hand this important period in American history and our connection to the land,” Stedham writes. “I feel an urgency to portray this space . . . to excavate the bones of existence in this terrain

where the West is still wild and free – to be an explorer of this ineffable mystery?”

One of Stedham’s most frequented places for study and on-site painting is Ghost Ranch, a 21,000-acre retreat and education center in northern New Mexico that encompasses one of Georgia O’Keeffe’s former homes and studios. Stedham’s painting *Ghost Ranch, Small Moon* depicts one of her favorite views on the property. “On this particular occasion, I watched as the moon rose over the scene,” she recalls. “What began as a large-ish moon shape began to shrink as it went higher in the sky. This is how I sometimes see myself, amidst this vastness.”

Although Stedham was trained in classical realism, her style evolved when she experimented with various approaches, including abstraction. Finally she arrived at the *alla prima* style she is known for today, which still incorporates earlier influences. Through Stedham Atelier in Santa Fe, she teaches that a classical foundation will allow students to eventually find an individual style. She certainly has found her own.

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**STEDHAM** is represented by Blue Rain Gallery (Santa Fe), where her exhibition *Enduring West* will be on view August 27–September 18.

Viewers entering the world of London-based artist **HANNAH MURRAY** (b. 1995) come face to face with feminine power. Consider the painting of a lounging couple illustrated here, *Hearts of Gold*. The woman is poised, her eyes fixed on an unknown point in the distance, while her partner rests his head on her hip and stares into space. Seen from behind, a pug dog seems to be observing the couple's power dynamic from the foreground. Beyond their chaise longue we can glimpse a richly patterned wall—possibly hung with a textile—but little else.

Though the opulent textures, cool hue, and flashes of color are striking, it is the woman who commands our attention. “I wanted her to be ravishing,” Murray explains, “and so I created a dreamlike state that evokes Venus flying on a cloud or Cleopatra on her throne.” This woman knows she is in control—and indeed such self-confidence is apparent in most of the painter's scenes.

This year Murray earned her M.F.A. from the New York Academy of Art and won its prestigious Chubb Fellowship; before that transformative experience, she took a B.F.A. at Leeds Beckett University (England) and taught art to secondary school students. Recently Murray

has been making waves by re-examining the timeless, ever-shifting idea of the iconic goddess Venus: who is she today, and how has she developed over time? The artist infuses her scenes with subtle eroticism, depicting women going about their daily lives: eating, lounging, standing, even posing at home. She paints carefully, working layer by layer to blend light and shape, starting with the skin, until she achieves the right glow, or that confidently demure expression.

Murray notes, “I aim to convey feminine power in unexpected ways, such as with a temperature shift in the shadow outlining the figure, or exaggerated colors and surfaces. My influences range from Ingres's lush textures to Matisse's collaging of patterns. Through illusionistic spaces and subtly humorous moments, I want to show that the women in my work—who are my friends—are just fine relishing their own beauty. It's theirs, not a gift from a man's gaze.”

— Charles Moore

**MURRAY** is a member of the collective Contemporary British Portrait Painters.



HANNAH MURRAY (b. 1995), *Hearts of Gold*, 2020, oil on linen, 38 x 44 in.