

Michael Dvortcsak's *Museum Suite*

By Devon Pettengill / CASA

PENETRATING THE VIEWER'S REALITY in a way that few paintings manage to, Michael Dvortcsak's *Museum Suite* series, on display at Sullivan Goss, An American Gallery through May 31st, blurs the line between life and art.

"I do art because it is the most interesting thing I can think of to do," shared Dvortcsak. "I'm a visually oriented person, so painting paintings that I like to look at is the most nourishing thing I can do."

The *Museum Suite* series, which is ongoing, are paintings of people looking at famous fine art in museums. The images of the people and the art come from visits Dvortcsak has made to the National Gallery in London, the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Getty in Los Angeles, the Norton Simon in Pasadena, The Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the Louvre in Paris.

The origin of the series is in Dvortcsak's portraits of friends and family, which often featured recreations of famous paintings as their backgrounds. However, the true moment of inspiration came from a visit to the Met.

"I was taking photos of paintings for my own reference and I sat down on a bench to reconfigure my camera, and the camera went off inadvertently," recalled Dvortcsak. "When I returned to where I was staying and looked at the images, I saw this photo of a big room at the Met filled with people looking at paintings and I thought, 'That's beautiful.'"

Dvortcsak now has files of images of famous art and museum visitors gathered from museums around the world. When he creates a new painting for the series, he first creates an imaginary museum room, then chooses the artwork and its viewers based on how the two fit together.

The people he selects are often reflections of the piece of artwork they are viewing. For example, the painting *Dancers* features a sculpture of a ballerina by Degas. Considering the painting is a young woman in a skirt who caught Dvortcsak's eye because she was



Dancers, 2008, Oil on canvas, 24 x 18 in., by Michael Dvortcsak

standing as a ballerina would.

Dvortcsak's interest in art started in high school with cartooning. When he came to UCSB for his undergraduate degree, he discovered fine art and his mentor, Professor Howard Warshaw.

"I had never been to a museum before that, and had no notion that artists painted paintings as art," shared Dvortcsak. "To me, great art was Normal Rockwell painting for magazine covers."

Warshaw encouraged Dvortcsak to travel to Europe to see the great masterworks, and he did. When he returned, he decided to devote his life to painting.

The four master painters whose work inspires Dvortcsak the most are Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Velazquez, and John Sargent.

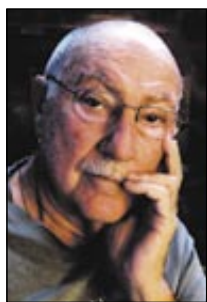
"When standing in front of a painting I get a feeling," he shared. "In front of those painters the feeling I get is of such grandeur and awe that it is a different quality than others, so therefore and I am inspired and moved."

Dvortcsak notes that the concept of painting people looking at art is not new or unique, and dates back to the 18th Century. What is unique is the blurring of the already hazy line between art and life that one experiences when viewing *Museum Suite*. Contemplating one painting and then another, you slowly realize that what you are

looking at and what are you are doing are one in the same.

"There is a relationship between the art and the people who live in the place where the art is," Dvortcsak shared. "I think the importance of the relationship is to feel the artist's feeling."

Sullivan Goss, An American Gallery is located at 7 E. Anapamu St. and is open daily from 10am-5:30pm. For more information, call 730-1460 or visit www.sullivangoss.com.



Michael Dvortcsak

