

THE WHOLE WORLD KNOWS of the seismic fault lines rattling the ground beneath Jeffrey Watts' feet. As a native Southern Californian, Watts will tell you that living among earthquakes goes with the terrain. But as a contemporary impressionist, Watt is hardwired into another kind of temblor, this one above ground and tied purely to aesthetics.

From the ocean cliffs that jut above La Jolla and Laguna Beach inland to the Mojave outpost of Borrego Springs, the tectonic plates influencing him, in flesh and soul, are sentient. They involve the contrarian twins of ageless beauty and modern blight.

Watts' observational powers of these anomalies—revealed in a broad array of landscapes, still lifes, nudes, and portraits—have gained notice from collectors and colleagues. Within the tradition of Golden State painters, Watts “is a throwback,” says painter Erik Gist, his close friend. “If someone were to describe Jeff as a romantic, I wouldn’t disagree,” Gist continues. “He perceives places and human characters the way they used to be, not necessarily the way they are now. It’s his means of responding to a rapidly changing world. In his landscapes and figurative work, he looks to find an inner beauty that may otherwise be hidden.”

Many see in Watts' work a distant reverberation of Russian immigrant-turned-Taos artist Nicolai Fechin [1881-1955]. It’s interesting to note that in the months before Fechin died, 50 years ago this autumn, he was honored with a major retrospective at art museums in San Diego and La Jolla, where he enjoyed his largest following—as Watts does today.

“There’s an unmistakable Fechin influence in what Jeffrey does, but he has his own originality,” says Mary Linda Strotkamp of Laguna Beach, whose private art collection was featured not long ago in this magazine. Recently, Mary Linda and her husband, Jay, purchased a moody portrait by Watts titled *TEAL SCARF* that was painted, *en plein air*, at the Laguna Art Museum. The



ABOVE: SASHA WITH FLOWER, OIL, 12 X 16.

BELOW: KRISTA, OIL, 20 X 16.

OPPOSITE PAGE: YOUNG PAINTER, OIL, 20 X 30.

