

LandEscape meets

Brooke Major

American artist born 1979 and native of Atlanta, GA, Brooke Major has been living and working as a professional artist and sharing her time between the USA (Georgia) and France for the past 20 years. As a child, Brooke has always been top of her class in drawing and painting, as well as an avid equestrian, which led her to move to Normandy to breed and raise them for the sport of showjumping.

She moved initially to Paris to study political science at an American university, but felt herself drawn more towards the arts and followed auditing classes at the Beaux Arts school in Paris. Her political science studies led her to work for over a year and a half as an intern at the US Embassy in Paris.

Following her two childhood passions, art and horses, Brooke moved to Normandy and started her dream of breeding showjumpers and set up her art studio in a grain loft in a 18th century farmhouse on the beach where she creates her work and raises her horses.

Brooke sculpts oil paint, using pallet knives challenging both techniques of painting and sculpting and exemplifying light and shadow. She chooses all of her subjects from her childhood experiences: travelling, horses and architecture. Brooke also depicts her everyday life in her recent subject of her landscapes of the typical Normand

An interview by **Josh Ryder**, curator
and **Melissa C. Hilborn**, curator

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Hello Brooke and welcome to *LandEscape*.
Before starting to elaborate about your artistic production and we would like to invite our readers to visit <https://www.brooke-major.com> in order to get a wide idea about your artistic production, and we would start this interview

with a couple of questions about your multifaceted background. You have a solid formal training and after political science studies, you nurtured your education at the Beaux Arts School in Paris: how did those formative years influence your approach to Painting and your evolution as a visual artist? Moreover, how does your cultural substratum direct the trajectory of your current artistic research?





Reminiscing Fontainebleau, 80cm x100 cm, oil on canvas, 2020



Apple Orchards, 50cm x 60cm, oil on canvas, 2020

Brooke Major: As soon as I graduated from high school, it felt almost a necessity to live in Europe. I chose to live in France to be able to learn a foreign language as well as to live amongst some of the most beautifully built architectural edifices in the world. The political science studies taught me several things that helped me in my art career: the vital role artists play in documenting our history and more important, the transparency of using art

as a tool to document the truth in politics since the outbreak of WWI. While auditing courses at the Beaux Arts Paris, we were taught to master the techniques of mixing chemicals and paint, mounting canvases as well as the drawing of light and shadow. This was essential to then formulate the bodies of work I would soon embark upon as a professional artist. As I had always been a fan of European art: all periods from Renaissance



Walks in Springtime, 50cm x 60cm, oil on canvas, 2020

to Dadaism, and more especially the rebels such as Monet, Pissarro, Bonnard, Van Gogh, Millet and my allright favorite M Marcel Duchamp. Since the majority of my favorite artists and artistic movements were born in or inspired by the Normand landscapes: the light and shadows of the skies of Normandy, the landscapes of paisible rich French provincial farmland, I hence moved to Normandy to immerse my work in this environment . I chose

to use these master artists as references to my work, studying their work through my hand and vision while applying my techniques in search of perfecting my landscapes.

The utmost important thing that I learned after completing my courses, interning at the US Embassy and obtaining my Bachelor of Arts degree, was that I concluded the careers of the future lie in the visionaries and are limitless in terms of self rewarding gifts of



Summer Walks Normandy, 46cm x 38cm, oil on canvas, 2020



Poppies in the Valley, 27cm x 35cm, oil on canvas, 2020



Coquelicots and Mountains landscape, 70cm x 70cm, oil on canvas, 2020

life's pursuit of happiness only if we are creators. Becoming a full time professional artist was granting myself the opportunity of the luxury of freedom.

As being raised as an American, we have always been taught that everyone is equal, the only nobility lies within someone that properly and passionately cares for their work. The

divine are the creators, the saints and angels of G.od.

The body of works that we have selected for this special edition of *LandEscape* and that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article has at once captured our attention for the way you capture the beauty of Normand countryside, unveiling our connection with Nature: when walking our readers through the genesis of this stimulating project, would you tell us something about your usual setup and process?

Brooke Major: I inspire my work either through the influences work of great masters or through photographs of my travels and scenery that had recently inspired me. Travelling is also creating and is an essential for any artist to influence change throughout their work as well as meeting new people and experiencing new cultures.

I use "Mastertoiles" linen canvases that are pretreated with Gesso. I then paint the canvases with black oil paint black and wait about a week until they are dry enough to commence a work of art. I use Royal Talens Rembrandt paints, for I am fond of the richness in texture and colour it provides. The metallic series of this brand are definitely my favorite paints to work with and are very easy to use and apply either through brushes or palette knives.

Quite recently after completing a portrait I submitted that led to my nomination of the top ten artists chosen on the series "Portrait Artist of the Week" competitions during lockdown and organised by SkyArts, I have currently been working on a series of portraits of people I love and admire. Capturing them by photograph at moments that most show



Wheat Fields Summer Walks, 27cm x 35cm, oil on canvas, 2020



Coquelicots, 46cm x 38cm, oil on canvas, 2020

their personalities and things that make them happy help me in creating the best expression in their faces.

Your works — more specifically *Reminiscing Fontainebleau* and, with its powerful perspective view *Summer Walks Normandy* — seem to be laboriously structured to pursue such effective and at the same time thoughtful visual impact: what is your working schedule like? In particular, is spontaneity important for you?

Brooke Major: Being an artist can be compared to any sort of liberal profession or even to an athlete. Mornings consist of waking up at 6am, doing meditation for an hour then 45 minutes of aerobics. I like to listen to artistic documentaries on my headphones while painting which I can consider continuing education, Painting sessions last throughout the morning with a one hour lunch break, then recommencing my work until late afternoon when I take a break to train my horses for showjumping.

Most of my work has been created after being inspired by an event or a quote that has left an impression that needed to be visually captured in time on a canvas. In example, *The Reminiscing Fontainebleau* painting was made after winning the Grand Prix of the Town of Champagne and the Grand Prix Rene Clement Bayer, two super salons held in the vicinity of the city of Fontainebleau.

I consider that the only mistake someone can make in their art, whatever it may be, is to not make art. Some days are better than others, but the most important thing is to continue creating for it will always pay off in the long run. "The only thing to fear is fear itself"- Winston Churchill.

Your works drawn heavily from the peculiar specifics of the environment and we definitely love the way you capture such insightful resonance between the landscape of *Reflection* and states of



Snowy Day, 80cm x 80cm, 2020

mind: how do you select the specific locations and how do they affect your creative process?

Brooke Major: It is with great pride that you pose this question for the energy that resonated in me

when I saw the reflections of the trees of the great moats of the castle of Saint Pierre de Semilly in the Manche region near Saint Lo gave me such a positive sensation that I had to get this image down on canvas. It is when



Snowy Road, 80cm x 80cm, oil on canvas, 2020

you arrive at a place, you stop and it takes your breath away that you can capture this image by photograph and recreate what you amazed you as you stopped in amazement at it's beauty visualised in a precious instant .

We have really appreciated the vibrancy of intense nuances that marks out *Coquelicots and Mountains landscape* and *Fragments* as well as the thoughtful ones that provide *Golden Spring Morning* with such dreamlike atmosphere: how



Cathedral-Notre-Dame-100cm-x-100-cm-oil-on-canvas-2020

did you come about settling on your color palette? And how does your own psychological make-up determine the nuances of tones that you decide to include in your artworks?

Brooke Major: As following the Scriptures of Genesis 1:3 And God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness....



Golden-Spring-Morning-80-cm-x-80-cm-oil-on-canvas-2020

According to ancient Egypt and in their hieroglyphics (pf which I have studied in my former series of white sculpted oil paint, Since its earliest appearance, gold has fascinated

virtually every culture on Earth. Its reflected light, perpetual luster, unfading and invariable distinctiveness, and its connotation linked to the sun's eternity have until today been most



Neville in Snow, 30cm x 40cm, oil on canvas, 2020



Lusitano Stallion, 100 cm x 73 cm, oil on canvas, 2020



Amarpour-DADA, 100cm x 100cm, oil on canvas, 2020

likely at the quintessence of its symbolic value. "The sun itself, it is of pure gold" (Goethe, Faust II). I give light to the dark through the richness of gold. This discovery after many

hours of studying ancient history of the value of different colours . Since I am early to rise and meditation is of primordial value to me, watching the sunrise is the richness of gold



Landscape-Val-de-Saire-81-cm-x-54-cm-oil-on-canvas-2020

touching our fabulous landscapes, every new day is a new gift, the present is our present. All of my gold paintings have originated from these theories and philosophies: a divine inspiration.

It's important to remark that you are an avid equestrian, and that horses are the subjects of a part of your artistic production, as *Amarpour* and *Lusitano Stallion*: how do your memories and

your everyday life's experience fuel your creative process?

Brooke Major: As a child I have always had

two very precise predilections : showjumping and painting. I had always envisioned myself as a horsebreeder, for I am fascinated with the research of genetics in order to create top quality bloodlines. By creating my horses, not only am I creating and training top quality warmbloods for the discipline of showjumping, yet I also consider them my "ready made" living sculptures. By doing this I am forming a lien with the Dadaists, quite especially with Marcel Duchamp. I have currently began naming my horses all after the dadaist movement. Dada is initially the way that children call horses in French, and a way for a French adult to say that an object is cherished.

The question was posed what to do with them once deceased. I resolved this in maintaining that I should keep them in order to mount and stuff the deceased animal in order to eternally keep the sculptural presence. I have studied under a French master craftsman, Roland Brillot in Normandy, who has taught me the practice of taxidermy for whom I've stuffed and mounted a 12 point buck.

As for the training of my horses, I am proud to say that that my horses have excelled in showjumping thanks to a proper young horse education. Amongst my products, one won at the French young horse championships as a 5yo, another competing and winning at the 150 5 star Grand Prix level and most importantly Seringat, who brilliantly won twice the Nations Cup in Wellington, 3rd in the Hermes Grand Prix in Paris and placing 7th in the World Cup. I have been guided and influenced by professionals and champions of the showjumping discipline, all residing in Normandy, France's horse country and birthplace of the Selle Francais breed.



Apple Blossoms-Normandy-100-cm-x-100-cm-oil-on-canvas-2020

Captivating these horses in all of their splendour and glory on canvas is a true privilege for I consider them the most noble of all animals.

Some of your artworks — as *Poppy Fields* and *Wheat Fields Summer Walks* — feature unique combination between reference to real places with dreamlike ambience, that



Pommiers-80-cm-x-80-cm-oil-on-canvas-2020

provides your works with visual ambivalence. As a visual artist whose work is focussed on real images, how do you consider the relationship between reality and imagination

playing within your process? Are you particularly interested in arousing emotions that goes beyond the realm of visual perception?



Cherry Trees, oil on canvas, 70cm x 70 cm, 2020

Brooke Major: After learning the correct techniques of light and shadow, I no longer have to concentrate on the. How to paint, but why do I paint. I consider painting to be a

source of inspiration. When I speak of inspiration, I mean to say that we are “in spirit”, or inhabited by another force while creating. I try as little as I can to paint while

concentrating every time putting myself to the test to not focus on what I should do. I allow my hand to guide itself over the canvas and the palette, all the while letting my hand choose what it wants to do. Strange as it may seem, the results are what you see in the images produced.

A true work of art can be exemplified through all of our senses and emotions and it should be the objective of every artist to make a painting that stops people in their tracks making us contemplate on the who, what, when, where, why and how or a work of art. Whether the emotion be one of love or hate, desire or despise, it can be considered a true work of art only if it makes one talk about it.: “Don't pay any attention to what they write (say) about you. Just measure it in inches.” — Andy Warhol

We dare say that your visual language transcends the nature of our relationship with our natural surroundings, inviting the viewers to elaborate such a wide number of interpretations. French Impressionist painter Edgar Degas once remarked that Art is not what you see, but what you make others see: how would you consider the degree of openness of the messages that you convey in your creations and how open would you like your works to be understood?

Brooke Major: In contradiction with the phrase of Degas, I can only say in my experience that “Art is what you saw, but what the others didn't see.” Art is captivating that very moment in time that surprised you, inspired you or that you thought was beautiful., shocking or of value. Even when others passed by an image that you chose to exemplify in your work, lots of people pay no attention to the small pleasures, splendours or

surprises that give us the make of a small thing a great subject. Since we are all different our truths can be varied, all that we interpret what we read, see or hear and the work of an artist is to qualify and exemplify life little pleasures.

You often work with large canvass, that provide the viewers with such immersive visual experience: how do the dimensions of your canvass affect your workflow?

Brooke Major: No matter the size of the canvas, I try my best to adapt the image to the size. Larger works allow for people to better see your work, taking up more space and also allows the minds eye to see a greater vision by projecting a small image into a larger scale and is a real challenge as an artist. However, as an American, we are used to using larger sized canvas taking into consideration the spaces we must fill in order to accommodate the immense walls of the homes and galleries in my native country. I would do as large as 5m x 7m canvas if I was back in my American studio, however since the outbreak of COVID, I've been concentrating on small works for the European market as well which has been a nice change as well as really a joy to do . I also take into consideration doing smaller works to be able to create small works which in turn can be made into larger works facilitating the transportation of work.

You are an established artist and over the years, and your works have been exhibited in several occasions, both in France and in the United States: how do you consider the nature of your relationship with your audience? By the way, as the move of Art from traditional gallery spaces, to street and especially to online platforms — as



Printemps Walks, 100cm x 65cm, 2020

Instagram — increases, how would in your opinion change the relationship with a globalised audience?

Brooke Major: I am quite a traditional person and quite prefer the aspect of a gallery or museum over the social media aspect. Seeing a work of art in real life is the best way to be seduced by the image and has always been traditionally the way I sell my work the best. I feel that social media has turned artists into mass numbers.

Seeing the explosion of the number of artists is a positive experience thanks to these types of methods of communication, but quantity is not quality and that's where I feel it is tricky to be able to identify with these types of exploits. I do have an instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/brookeseart>) mainly just as a tool for a quick review of my portfolio to galleries art critics and customers, however I have been less and less interested in social media, and I have been actively signing up for and putting up my work in galleries salons and art fairs since lockdown has lifted in France .

I feel that an artist who wants to exhibit and sell their works needs a proper studio, a proper exhibition hall and a proper website highlighting the styles and career changes with an up to date CV and artist statement.

We have really appreciated the multifaceted nature of your artistic research and before leaving this stimulating conversation we would like to thank you for chatting with us and for sharing your thoughts, Brooke. What projects are you currently working on, and what are some of the ideas that you hope to explore in the future?



Poplar Trees Summer walks

46cm x 38cm, oil on canvas, 2020

Brooke Major: While I am constantly searching for new outlets and exploits to research and work with, I am happy with my current series of the black and gold paintings, especially the portraits of my family. My next vision is to take historical landmarks such as castles, churches and priors and turn them into exhibition halls and artistic residencies in the near future. I prefer to not go into detail on a project that is in the first stages of it's process, but architecture and it's history is a real passion for me. It would be a great blessing to other artists to be able to permit them to live and work in environments filled with so many past and present spirits. This would be the greatest work of art I could create for my fellow artists and I hope to achieve this goal in the next couple of years... To be continued !!!



Coquelicots, 100cm x 65cm, oil on canvas, 2020