

A conversation with Becky Yazdan, NYSS MFA '05

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Geoffrey Stein: We're here in Brooklyn with Becky Yazdan and Michael Tcheyan. We are in her warm studio on a snowy day. Can you tell us a little bit about your background Becky?

Background

Becky Yazdan: Sure. I was born in New Hampshire, and I went to college in Colorado at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Right after college I moved to New York City.

Michael Tcheyan: All the way from Colorado. That's a big move, straight out of college.

BY: Well, my sister was living here and my brother was living here. So I had an entry. And I had a job. I worked right out of school as a marketing assistant with Hearst Magazines.

MT: What did you study in college?

BY: In college I was a fine arts major. I got my BFA in painting and photography. And it was interesting, the program there was very conceptual at that time. I'm an abstract painter now, but at that time I was a figurative painter and really just wanted to learn to paint what I was looking at and how to use the materials. So I got a very conceptual education and then still it wasn't enough. I moved to the city and was working at *Town & Country* magazine and was feeling like, 'Oh my god, if I keep doing this I'm going to wake up and be 40 and be in a marketing job somewhere miserable.' While I was working at the magazine, my office was in midtown so I was going to the Art Students' League and drawing from the model, doing weekend classes and stuff like that.

I knew that I wanted to go on to graduate school but didn't feel like I had the portfolio. So I was taking classes in the summer - I did a painting session at SVA. And then I found out about the Studio School from my sister's boyfriend who worked at *New Criterion*. We would get into these heated painting discussions and I think he mentioned the Studio School at some point. So I looked into it and thought 'Ok, this is great.' I can just focus on painting and get a portfolio together. I also felt sort of disillusioned by most MFA programs which were still super-conceptual and that wasn't really what I was looking for.

MT: You said Colorado was conceptual. How did you manage to remain a figurative painter?

BY: Well, there were a couple teachers there that I studied with that I sought out. And I still did a lot of drawing from the model. But I remember one professor. I showed him this drawing I had labored over, a still life drawing for weeks and weeks and weeks. I got it just right and he saw it and he was like "So what? You can draw. Who gives a shit?" But anyway, the conceptual education was good and that came in later. I started applying to residencies too. I was planning to go to Vermont Studio Center, but then I ended up starting at the Studio School. I started in the certificate program before they began the MFA program.

Studio School

MT: And when was that?

BY: 2002.

MT: Because the first year MFA was 2003-05.

BY: I did a year in the certificate program and it was awesome... I learned so much about space, form, color, paint... just that first year.

MT: Who did you study with?

BY: Charles Cajori and Rosemarie Beck. I had painting with Rosemarie and Cajori, and then drawing with Paul Resika. I must have studied with Graham Nickson at some point. It must have been Graham for marathons and then Rosemarie and Cajori, maybe for both semesters? It's a little fuzzy. And then an interesting thing happened when I got to the Studio School, I immediately revolted against the figure.

MT: Really! How ironic.

BY: I was like 'I can't do this anymore.' And I basically just began the process of breaking down the figure. So all the work from my first semester starts out figurative and then they get more reduced, more broken down into shapes and lines. Still space and form but just sort of breaking it apart.

MT: What do you think caused that?

BY: Well, the Studio School at the time had a reputation for producing a very specific type of figure painting. That was what I experienced, and I was like, "Ok I want to learn from the school, but I don't want to be clumped into this." I don't want to just paint in this style that everyone else was painting in. So I started dissecting... and by the end of the first semester I was totally abstract.



The Emperor And His Court As Donors, oil on canvas, 72" x 108", 2003. Photo Becky Yazdan.

GS: Was it hard to work abstractly at the Studio School?

BY: Yes. And it was actually the best thing for me. Because I was one of very few people who were painting abstractly. So at every turn, people were like 'What are you doing? What is this?' So I was constantly having to defend myself. I had to have a reason for what I was doing. But, interestingly enough, the abstract paintings that I was making, they were almost like, the essence of Studio School paintings. Because they still were dealing with space, form and color. It was just without the figure. And the early stuff relied on landscape references, which I think makes sense. It helps, for the viewer and for the artist to have an entry point, to try and figure out how to go about it. Then in the summer after my first year, I did the Westbury Gardens summer marathon. And that I think taught me more about color than anything else.

MT: And that was with Graham?

BY: Yes that was with Graham. So I guess it was the end of the first year they said they were going to launch the MFA program so I applied for that and then started it.

GS: Had you been thinking about getting an MFA?

BY: I had been. The whole point of going to the Studio School was to get my portfolio together. I felt like I needed more formal painting education before I could even apply. So that first year was incredibly important to me. I needed to do that. I needed to also make a strong decision about what I wanted to do and what kind of pictures I was going to make. So it worked out really well.

GS: And it made sense to continue on to an MFA once you'd started the certificate.

BY: Exactly. It was also around the time Bill Jensen came to the school and I really wanted to study with him. The MFA program actually threw a wrench in that initially because everybody in the MFA program was going to be studying with Graham. I don't even remember how it worked out, but I think I made a fuss and then somehow I got to study with Bill and Margrit [Lewczuk].

I guess the first year I must have done it with Graham and then the second year I was supposed to study with Carol and then there were some hiccups and I was like, 'No, I really want to study with Bill and Margrit.' So they were my main people the second year. And they really helped me. My first year with Graham at the Studio School was all the formal education, and then Bill and Margrit really helped with developing my own emotional content. And how to take it beyond... I remember when Bill first looked at one of my paintings, I was saying "You know something's just not quite right. There's still a problem, there's something wrong over here." I was talking about it in a very formal, compositional way. And he looked at me and he said "No. A painting is not a problem to be solved." And that was a big moment. Ok it's not just making a picture that sort of works right and is balanced. You have to understand and get that emotional content into the work... a combination of those things led to the work that I'm making now.

MT: I don't really know how Bill teaches. What does he say painting is?

BY: Bill talks about making the space between you and the painting disappear. And having an exchange with the painting. So rather than exerting control over the painting, you allow the painting to become itself. He turned me on to a 17th century Haiku master, Matsuo Basho. The way he talks about Haiku is very related to the process of painting. He talks about keeping it simple and honest, not making too much of it. At least that's my interpretation.

There were fewer exercise type things, but he did have us do some stuff. Like we had to make a painting with just one color. But really it was a lot of talking and reading and talking *around* the work, which was another thing he would say. Rather than dealing with the specifics, he would talk about the smell of a work, or the taste of a work - different sensory experiences of the work.

GS: Have you been back to the Studio School since you graduated?

BY: Not that much. I think I went the first three years out - I would always try to go to the MFA shows. I think I've been back for a couple lectures and some openings. We did a panel discussion for one of the alumni shows. So yeah, I have not been back as much as I would like. And I love the lecture series. I did lecture crew, so I rarely missed one the whole time I was there, which was so great. And I was determined to keep coming, but life also happens.

GS: Do you teach?

BY: I don't.

GS: Would you like to?

BY: You know, I don't know. I had my first experience with it this fall. I did a visiting artist weekend in Denver with the Denver Art Students' League. I went and I gave a

lecture on my work and then taught a workshop over the weekend. And that was my first experience teaching. It was funny because when I was at the school I was bothered because there were times I felt like they were teaching us to be teachers. I remember it was one of our seminars in particular I got kind of pissed off. I was like 'I am not here to learn how to be a teacher.'

MT: This was at the Studio School?

BY: Yeah. There's nothing wrong with teaching. Teaching is great and maybe I'll do it some day but first I need to be an artist myself and be out working. And then I can bring whatever I've learned and pass some of this stuff on. I never wanted to teach but this was such an interesting experience for me because I loved it. It was great. I don't know. I still at this point wouldn't pursue it. I just don't have time to pursue anything. But it was a great experience.

GS: Did you always make art?

BY: I did. Yeah, in fact I have a great memory. I must have been five, and I had just done what I thought was my best drawing to date on the side of one of my parents' newly upholstered chairs. I still remember the drawing.

MT: You were already judging your work.

BY: Yeah and I was so proud of it. I remember calling my parents over and then getting in big trouble. But I never... it wasn't something I thought you *did*. I always assumed I would have some quote unquote professional job. My dad was a Russian professor at Dartmouth and my mom is a priest. So I grew up in a very intellectual community. And it seemed like art didn't really fit into that. And of course it does, more than anything else. But at that time I felt like, oh this means I should go to law school or something. I spent every waking hour in the art room in high school and when it came time to apply to college my art teacher asked me if I had my portfolio together and I said, "What does that have to do with getting into college? What does art have to do with college?" And so I

sort of scrambled some stuff together. But I wasn't looking at art schools. I ended up going to UC Boulder. I was desperate to go to Berkeley but I didn't have the grades and I was out of state. I ended up at Boulder.

I still remember my mom hearing my roster of classes and it was three studio classes, maybe sculpture, painting, drawing and then a women's lit and art history. I think there was an astronomy class in there too. But I just remember her saying “Beck, that sounds like an awful lot of fluff.” So I had to... you know they supported me ultimately but... I finally came to terms with the fact that I was an art major and that this was what I wanted to do.

GS: Did you get a lot of push-back from your parents about how you were going to survive after college?

BY: Not really. I always supported myself. I'm the youngest of four and out of all my siblings I was the only one that had a job for a long time. In college I would buy clothes at Salvation Army and then sell them at Buffalo Exchange. I had a pretty good little business going. I was always pretty crafty about making money. When I had the magazine job, they put me through a web design certification course, which was amazing because it was a totally novel experience to take some classes, learn a skill and then be able to get a job that pays you for this skill. After all my liberal arts education that prepares you a little bit for everything but not really enough for anything. I still do web design and programming today. You have to have something that you can do to make money while you make your work. You can't be trying to make paintings to fit what's going to sell or what you think is going to sell. You just have to make your work in an honest way and do your best to get it out there. Hope for the best.

Studio Practice

GS: Can you tell us about your studio routine?

BY: Sure. My current situation... I have two small kids. So I have three days to come in

here. I basically drop them off at school and then I come in here until I have to pick them up. Some days that's later than others - Wednesdays I have until 5:30. I work best in the morning. I like coming in and not having to turn the lights on. That's my best, freshest time of day. In terms of my routine, I come in, I have coffee. I sit and stare for a while and at some point something will compel me to get up and make my next move.

I had a little hiatus. We just moved, and with the holidays and the teaching thing, everything turned me upside down. So I just went through and prepared all these surfaces, so I started something like 14 paintings. I often work on the paintings for a long time and go over and over them, so having blank canvases around is sort of a shock. I'm always desperate to get something down right away. I'm having a show in May that I'm trying to get ready for. I'm represented by a gallery in New Haven - Giampietro Gallery – and he'd like me to have paintings all the same size (I'm usually all over the place with size). So I'm doing all 20 by 20 inch squares.

Most of the stuff here is just getting started. The top stuff, those are older. I'm doing a bunch of 20 x 20 inch squares and then a bunch of 12 x 12 inch squares. In some of them something happens right away but ultimately they all end up getting painted over. These are good examples of the early phases of the work where I get a sort of atmosphere, I get some history down, some shapes, something to work against and then as I'm working, the emotional content comes out. There will be a color relationship or a shape, something will, whatever I'm thinking about will come out. And then I know it's done when it becomes what it is. Suddenly there is no next move and I know what it's about.

It doesn't always happen that neatly. Sometimes it's great, every so often... like this little painting here was really just one or two sessions. I was working on it and then I stepped back and I was like "Oh my God" I realized it was about when I lived in Boulder, Colorado in college and I had a cat named Diesel. I moved into a different house that was right at the foot of the Flat Irons, which are mountains right there. My cat ran away. I went out looking for her and was traipsing around all this brush at the bottom of the foothills and calling the cat's name and getting thicker and thicker into these branches. It

was getting harder and harder to walk through it. And then I see fur. I look closer and it's a coyote curled up in a ball asleep. And I just sort of backed away...It was clear what had happened to my cat. I never found her, presumably the coyote got her.

Suddenly, with this painting, I was like 'this is that experience.' A lot of the paintings have that, there is a particular story to them. Some of that goes into the title. The titles are very important to me in terms of the work. I don't want to direct people to what it is specifically about. I mean obviously nobody is ever going to get that from looking at this painting, but it gives you a way in or a way of relating to it. And it's funny because this one happened so fast, and I'm always kind of suspicious of the fast paintings because I normally labor and labor and labor and they go on forever.



Looking for Diesel, Found a Sleeping Coyote, oil on claybord, 9" x 12", 2011. Photo Becky Yazdan.

MT: Beautiful grays. And that green behind it. Is this your first show with them?

BY: No. In 2013 I had a solo show there and then this show in May 2015 is with Katherine Bradford.

MT: That's nice.

BY: Yeah I'm psyched.

MT: How did you get to be part of this?

BY: Fred Giampietro saw my work on *Two Coats of Paint* and got in touch with me. I brought him some paintings and he hung a few pieces in his office - when he's testing new artists out he'll hang work in his office and then see what kind of response he gets. So he did that for a couple shows and then I got stuff in a group show with a great roster of artists.

GS: Can you remember some of them?

BY: Gregory Amenoff and Nozkowski... some of my painting heroes. He ultimately signed me on after several months of back and forth.

MT: Where was the show with Amenoff?

BY: That was at Giampietro. It was a big group show. There were maybe 15 artists. I had my solo show in 2013 and then group stuff, art fair stuff... so it's good.

GS: Has your studio practice or routine changed since the Studio School?

BY: I don't know, it's hard to say. I mean I would have to say yes, but I can't imagine that my practice was established then. I feel like I'm much more organized now because I have finite amounts of time. Especially when the kids were little and I could just sneak out for three hours at a time or something. I would just be like 'Ok, you have to do this

now. This is your time.' I feel like the time between school finishing and having kids, I feel like I just wasted time because my studio was still here but I lived on the upper west side, so I'd schlep all the way out here and then I'd be exhausted.

MT: Oh my God, that's like an hour trip.

BY: And then we moved to the neighborhood after a while, which was good. But, I don't know, that's a tough question. Because in the school environment, I mean it is so studio based but I feel like that was its own thing.

GS: Can you describe the work you're currently making?

BY: Sure. The last bunch of years have been, a lot of it has had to do with my dad, who died last year. He had a long illness - Parkinson's, dementia, macular degeneration. A lot of my work was mining that experience and dealing with all of that. I feel like the studio is where I come to work a lot of stuff out. And all of that goes into the paintings.

MT: How does it go in though? Because you don't get any visual references to that.

BY: No.

MT: Because that's pretty heavy and the paintings themselves are pretty joyous.

BY: Somebody was joking at our last crit group about how if these are the paintings I make when I'm depressed, what are they like when I'm happy? I came in and did these two little ones with the rainbow and I'm like 'Shit- I need to darken this! Break it down!'

MT: That's great! I mean it's not a bad thing at all, it's just interesting that you brought that up.

BY: I would say it's more about... I spent a lot of time focusing on memories of my dad. This one is called *Remington Portable* and this is about a very specific memory. Again,

when I was maybe five or six, I was at my dad's office unsupervised, God knows why. I remember I would go to his office and drink coffee and dump all this sugar and Coffeemate in there and then just wreak havoc. I was in his office, I painted all the keys of his typewriter with Whiteout. And then I was prank calling the operator. The operator finally said, "If you don't stop calling I'm going to send an ambulance. I know where you are, I can trace the call." So all that stuff is in here in some way.



Remington Portable, oil on linen, 24" x 20", 2013. Photo Becky Yazdan.

MT: And your dad's office was at Dartmouth?

BY: Dartmouth Hall is this beautiful building with these beautiful black chairs. There are typewriter keys and there are coffee stirring sticks and there is also a sense of that operator switch board. So all that stuff gets into the work.



Counting Breaths, oil on linen, 60" x 48", 2014. Photo Becky Yazdan.

This painting is also about my dad but closer to the end. It's called *Counting Breaths* and is about when we were sitting by his bed literally counting his breaths. Because if it gets to be this number then he's about to die or...



Bed, oil on canvas, 18" x 14", 2013. Photo Becky Yazdan.

There's another one that I don't have out called *Bed*, which has to do with his hospital bed at home and with his feet. The sort of physical and visceral body stuff – all of that goes into the work. In the last year my family lost a whole generation of people. My dad's brother died the year before and he was buried in Kansas where they grew up in this mansion designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright. We went to Kansas and were able to tour the house. My grandmother died there in a fire.

All this intense stuff. This is the stuff that... I don't know.

It occurred to me, when I was preparing my talk for this thing in Colorado, I was trying to collect images of artists that influenced me somehow. When I was in school in Colorado we did a couple of family Thanksgivings in NYC. On one of these trips we saw the Young British Artists show and it had a big impact on me. In terms of the work I saw there that really affected me, it was... hold your breath... the shark. I can't stand Damian Hirst, so why am I still thinking about this shark piece? I don't even like saying this out loud. But staring at this thing that's going to take you down, dissecting it, rationalizing it. I feel like that's what I do in my paintings now. I have a lot of emotional content, but then graphic stuff comes in and that feels like some way of containing it or controlling it or trying to understand it better. I also remember that little Ron Mueck sculpture *Dead Dad*, that little silicone ... remember that? It was hyper realistic. Those sort of intense, just getting right to the emotional punch... the fear and all the anxiety.

GS: Do you think that any of these issues come out of the materials that you're using?

BY: Well, oil paint, the accumulation of paint is very important to me. And all the different things you can do with it. I'm exploring dichotomies, so being able to have the thinner and murkier versus the solid... The different types of mark are important to me... I don't know if that answers your question.

GS: Have you experimented with different materials or techniques?

BY: A little bit, but every time I do I get impatient and want to get back to the oil. Even with drawing - I always want to be making drawings, but I tend to draw right into the paintings instead. I did a bunch of little gouaches for a while, but they made me feel like I just wanted to get right to the paintings.

GS: How would you describe your studio space?

BY: Great. I love it. I've been here for almost ten years. It's starting to feel a little bit crowded but I just cleaned the whole place up after we moved. There was so much stuff. Yeah, I'm very happy here.



Photo G. Stein.

GS: Do you think your studio affects your work?

BY: I think so. Being in this neighborhood has definitely affected my work. In Williamsburg, seeing all the old buildings, over the last ten years... everything that has happened in Williamsburg is insane. Being right here in this last old building standing is pretty intense. And looking out my windows and seeing things come down and go out. The Old Dutch Mustard factory was right across the street. It was this amazing old building. Walking by the Domino Sugar factory, the smells coming out of the grate, the hot wind coming from the depths... All this stuff goes into the work. The creation, destruction, the graffiti, and then these shiny new buildings. It all goes in there. Sometimes I will start a painting with things I've seen on my way to the studio, like an old pile of pipes or Domino. It's a good jumping off point.

GS: Do you think that your experience at the Studio School informs your practice?

BY: Yes I think so, I mean there's nothing more important to learn than just going to the studio every day. The work ethic, sticking to it, being there for the whole day working and continuing to work on stuff, not being afraid to move things or change things, not being precious about things. All of that is it.

GS: What artists are you looking at these days?

BY: Well Nozkowski is one of my heroes. I still love Amy Sillman. I've been looking at Clare Grill's work recently –

MT: Where does she show?

BY: She shows with Giampietro now. But she's a Queens artist. I've sort of been absorbed into this big group of Bushwick artists, which has been great. I have had a lot of shows with this group in the past couple years.

MT: Which Bushwick gallery?

BY: Not with a gallery, do you know who Julie Torres is? She is an amazing organizer and curator. She finds spots and will put up a show for a week or something. We just did one at Momenta that was up in between shows... the first week of January or something. So that's been fun and seeing all these different people working now. Who else? I always draw a blank with this question and then think of a million later. I'm also interested in people like Jonathan Lasker. Of course I love Forrest Bess. I wrote my MFA thesis on William Faulkner and Forrest Bess. I feel like I take something out of just about everything I see. Even stuff that I can't stand. At this point, if you're still making work after all these years, it's worth looking at even if you think it is awful.

GS: Do you have any projects you want to make in the future?

BY: Well right now I'm just focused on painting for the May show. And that's interesting for me because I don't usually work with specifications. I mean these are both sizes that I love and have a lot of work in so it's not really a stretch. But I don't generally prepare work specifically for a show. So it's also kind of... it's a little bit of a quick turn around because I'm just starting now.

MT: It does seem like you have a lot of questions about what scale you should be working in.

BY: Well you know what it is? I love the square format and the almost square format, like this one. And that's more of a square. This is more narrow than I usually do. This was a canvas that was here when I got the studio ten years ago - I finally finished it. A lot of the paintings are on claybord and that only comes in 8x10, 11x14 and the standard sizes. If the painting is on claybord it's a standard size. But if I stretch it I make it more of an off-square. So that's why there's so much variation by an inch. And that drives me crazy. I mean ideally I would have, you know, a small, medium and large.

GS: And do you like the clay surfaces?

BY: I have gotten over it. I haven't done any new ones in a while. Now I'm doing linen over panel, which I'm loving.

Conclusion

GS: You've been very generous with your time, Becky, I appreciate that. Do you have any advice for folks thinking about studying in the MFA program at the Studio School?

BY: I'd say do it. I think it's the best painting education. Obviously, you're not going to get everything from one place. For me it took my undergrad conceptual art education, plus Studio School formal training, plus the introduction of the emotional and spiritual content to find my voice and the tools I need to express it. It's an ongoing process.

And what I found at the Studio School, is that whatever you want, they are willing, if possible, to make it happen for you. I found that if I wasn't getting something I needed, I would ask for it. You have to go after what you want, go to the lectures. Participate. Because that's how it is when you get out. There's nobody telling you "you have to be here by this time, you have to do this or that..." and then I think also just learning how to look at work, talk about work - constantly looking and talking is hugely important during school and especially when you are out of school. That's what got me through all the times when I couldn't paint, when I was pregnant or back at work or whatever. I would still go to crit group and be looking at work and talking about it.

GS: Was there something you would have liked to have as part of the MFA program that was not offered

BY: When I was there, the first year was tricky because there were all these different people who had been there for different amounts of time. So it wasn't like you started with the same group of people and you went through as a whole. I think that was a problem for us in the first year. It wasn't a problem going forward. There wasn't the kind of sense of community that I think you would get when you start a program with a specific set of people and continue with them the whole way through.

And that it felt like there was no... I mean, at the time everyone was grumbling because it felt like there were no connections to engaging with the outside art world or gallery scene. Now I think it's ridiculous because you're not ready. But your connection and support going forward in a lot of ways is from the community that you establish when you're at school. Don't ever burn bridges. Because everybody that you meet, you can help each other. And everybody is finding their way. You help somebody here and maybe they'll help you later. A sense of community is hugely important.

GS: So when you're not making art, caring for your kids and being married, are there other interests that engage you?

BY: Well, I run a crit group. It's a group of artists that meets once a month. I've been managing that for the past few years. When I first was in this studio, the wall wasn't here and I shared this space with somebody else and David Gibson, who's a curator, (I don't know if you know him?) he was coming to do a studio visit with my studio mate and he left his card and said he'd love to have a studio visit. At that time he was managing the group, which originally began in '97 or something. The group would travel around to different studios and look at the work once a month.

MT: Are they Studio School people?

BY: No. He told me about this and I was like 'Great, I would love to do something like that.' Because I was just here working in isolation. I had been at Vermont Studio Center and I felt like I had met more people that lived in Brooklyn in Vermont than I did when I was here. So he told me about the group but you had to be invited. So I'm like waiting and waiting for the invite. And then after a few months he invited me so I started going. The schedule gets set up once a year, you set the schedule and everybody works out so that everybody gets a crit once a year.

MT: So there are 12 people?

BY: Well it's more than that because you do two people at once. Not everybody comes to every critique. You do it at one person's studio and then the other person brings their work. I think they used to, if they were close by, they'd go around. But now it's too difficult. Eventually David left the group. I emailed him to see if he was coming back and he was like "I just can't I'm too busy, can you take over?" He made me the moderator, which was great because it's just like doing lecture crew - it forces you to go every time. I always was so happy that I went but you know sometimes it is hard to get out of the house.

MT: So just to get feedback... I mean career wise as well...?

BY: Yeah there's some of that. Because some people in the group are very established showing at galleries and would talk about like 'well if you're going to show at a gallery, how are you going to hang them?'

MT: Like who?

BY: Amy Hill was in the group, Judy Simonian, whose work I love. She shows at Ed Thorp – I love all the artists that show there, big fan of Matt Blackwell who is also here in Williamsburg. David left the group and then a lot of people petered out. I started inviting people that I knew to join. Now I feel like the group is in a great place. It's a good mix of people. There are a handful of Studio School people now.

MT: Is it a mix of abstract and figurative art? Or is it mostly abstract?

BY: It's a mix but more towards abstract. Other people that have joined are people from the Bushwick group. And then other people like Alison Gildersleeve. Our kids go to school together and she's a great painter. She's abstract but still rooted in the landscape, I would say. Jason Rohlf, Ky Anderson, Vicki Sher. Noah Loesberg, a sculptor, and Deanna Lee, an abstract painter, are holdouts from the original group. But yeah I feel like we're at a good place. Gina Magid, another parent artist I met through the kid's school. It's a great mix of people. I didn't want the group to be all Studio School people. I really wanted to

bring in a big mix - different backgrounds, age groups. It's a really smart group. It's always a great discussion. It has been very important and helpful.

GS: Anything else you'd like to add?

BY: Not really. Just that I loved going to school there. When you're there and you're in it, there are a million frustrations and people that drive you crazy. In a lot of ways the school is like a microcosm of the art world and the New York City experience - people coming out of working in their little closet studios. I don't know. The crazy weird eccentric people. Every mix of person and personality and background. I loved so much being able to study with these kind of old school New York painters. There's such a difference between the artists, the "painter's painters" and the commercial art world.

I think it's very special that the school is the way it is. Even, like I said, when I was looking at other programs in the city, it just didn't feel like... I think what it is was that you need this body of work before you even go to the school. And I thought, you go to a grad program because you want to continue your education. So, if you have your work all figured out, why do you need to go to school?



Winter Complexion, oil on linen on panel, 20" x 20", 2015. Photo Becky Yazdan.

MT: And you don't want to force that style before it comes.

BY: Right. So I think the Studio School is very different and more realistic for preparing you for a life as an artist versus trying to get out and get your shot. Trying to get out there at like 25 or however old.

GS: Do you have a website?

BY: Yes I do. It's www.beckyyazdan.com

GS: Thanks Becky.