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Robert Fishko, *Director*

**PAUL FENNIAK**

(b. 1965)

Canadian

Canadian painter Paul Fenniak joined the roster of artists at Forum Gallery in 1998, continuing the gallery's commitment to exhibiting the finest of 20th century figurative art. In April 1999, Forum Gallery presented Fenniak's first one-person exhibition in the United States. An established figurative artist and vastly talented painter, his work has been widely collected both in Canada and America.

Paul Fenniak paints detailed narrative portraits and figures in settings with implied action. Deep in thought, Fenniak's subjects are contemporary in setting but reminiscent of studied portraits that follow the tradition of the late artist Raphael Soyer, also represented by Forum Gallery. Paul Fenniak's paintings have luminous surfaces and compelling images that offer a combination of disquiet, uncertainty, urgency, calm, and spirituality. His painting style contains a contrast of inner light with his attention to detail, texture and atmosphere.

About Paul Fenniak's paintings, curator and art critic Donald Kuspit writes: "The best realism is not just about careful observation and descriptive nuance—in which Fenniak excels—but about discovery and insight. The best realism is not simply descriptive, however meticulous the description, but reflective – reflective on reality – and Fenniak's works are profoundly reflective." Kuspit calls him "a master of the psychological realism that has existed in secular North European painting from Dürer through Rembrandt to Degas and Max Beckmann."<sup>1</sup>

Writing in *The New York Times*, critic Ken Johnson said of Fenniak's work: "...there is a genuinely haunting, cinematic monumentality. It reminds one that the narrative as well as painterly possibilities of traditional, figurative representation are still far from exhausted."<sup>2</sup>

In thinking about his most recent paintings, Paul Fenniak notes: "It is popularly assumed that realist painting dishes up a common sense view of what is real by simply attending to appearances. It relies on our habitual perception. But another, stranger kind of realism, although it also pays close attention to 'normal' appearances, takes some further steps and ends up in an unpredictable place — not confirming our comfortable notions of what we already know but making us suspicious of them, making us aware of their inadequacy. My recent paintings have been influenced by my reading of short fiction in this vein, primarily by the British author Robert Aickman, as well as several others such as Arthur Machen and Walter De la Mare."

Fenniak's unique vision has been recognized with grants from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation in 2000, the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts in 1998 and the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation in 1993 and 1994. Recent solo gallery exhibitions were at Forum Gallery in New York (2016, 2009, 2004 and 1999), Galerie de Bellefeuille in Montreal (2002 and 1996) and The Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Canada (2000). Paul Fenniak's work has also been included in museum exhibitions at Arkansas Art Center's *Collector's Show* in Little Rock (2003), Arnot Art Museum's *Re-presenting Representation IV* in Elmira, New York (2000), and Indiana University's Grunwald Gallery exhibition *Slow Hand* in Bloomington (2015) and *Truth and Vision: 21st Century Realism*, Delaware Art Museum in Wilmington (2016). Most recently, works by Paul Fenniak were included in the Louisiana Art & Science Museum exhibition, *Contemporary Old Masters*, in Baton Rouge, LA (2016-17). His paintings will also be included in *Big Stories*, at The Bo Bartlett Center at Columbus State University in Georgia (2023-24).

<sup>1</sup> Kuspit, Donald, "Paul Fenniak, Psychosocial Realist", catalogue essay, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montreal, Canada, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Ken. "Paul Fenniak", *The New York Times*, April 23, 1999, p. B35.