

infinite

DISCOVERY

Sean Diediker seeks the ideal combination of academic and intuitive in his paintings.

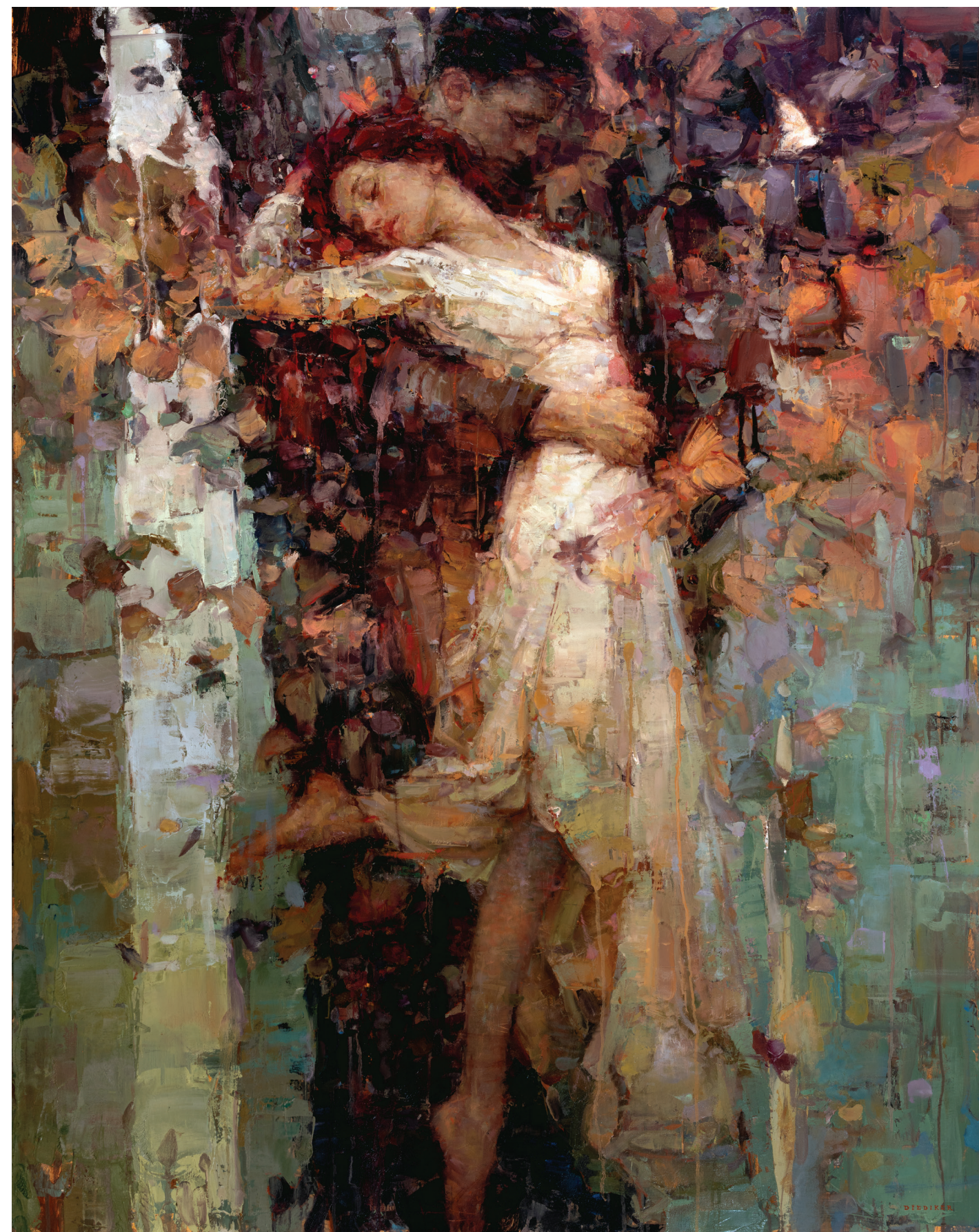
BY ELIZABETH L. DELANEY

SEAN DIEDIKER STRIKES a delicate balance between visual analysis and intuitive expression in his paintings, constantly seeking the ideal orchestration of naturalistic figures and abstract undercurrents that ebb and flow across the canvas. His grounded yet dynamic compositions communicate universal narratives of love, beauty, resilience and transformation while simultaneously extolling the medium that immortalizes them.

“My work lives somewhere between painterly realism and impressionistic atmosphere,” says Diediker. “I’ve always been fascinated by the tension between structure and flow, between the academic and the emotional.” So goes his journey of discovery—a multilayered exploration of the world around him in paint. It’s a road he has been traveling his whole life.

As a small child, Diediker lived in New Mexico where he spent time at his grandfather’s trading post in Star Lake. There, he was immersed in the Indigenous art

and culture of the Southwest as well as its vivid landscape. He quickly realized his passion for making art. He remembers, “From early on, I found myself deeply compelled to document my experience as a human being through the canvas, the places I’ve been, the people I’ve encountered, and the emotions tied to memory and landscape.” His family later moved to California, but after graduating from high school, he returned to the Southwest to attend Brigham Young University. He has lived in Utah ever



OPPOSITE
Root & Flower, oil on canvas, 60 x 48.



Flower Child #1, oil on canvas, 48 x 36.

since. “I will always call the Southwest home,” says Diediker, who has traveled the world but continues to paint the majestic landscapes, animals and people of his native region. *DIAMOND FORK BACKCOUNTRY* captures the vastness of the area’s wide-open spaces while at the same time evoking an intimate feel with tightly cropped borders and saturated colors that reach out from the foreground. The artist’s hand is apparent in the visible brushwork along with intermittent drips of paint, no doubt a nod to the act of mark making.

Imparting the enchantment of fallen leaves on the forest floor, *AUTUMN RIDER* is as much a study in color and texture as a realist visual narrative. By combining representational sensibility with impressionist paint applications, Diediker interjects movement and energy across the picture plane.

This approach represents the current apex of the artist’s discovery arc, and he continues to evolve his process with each painting. “To me, an interesting mark trumps an absolute, accurately rendered detail,” he says. Along those lines, his most recent work has seen an amplification of this discovery, as evidenced by even more pronounced brushstrokes, tactile swaths of pigment, heady textures and palpable emotion. It’s a destination he did not arrive at easily.

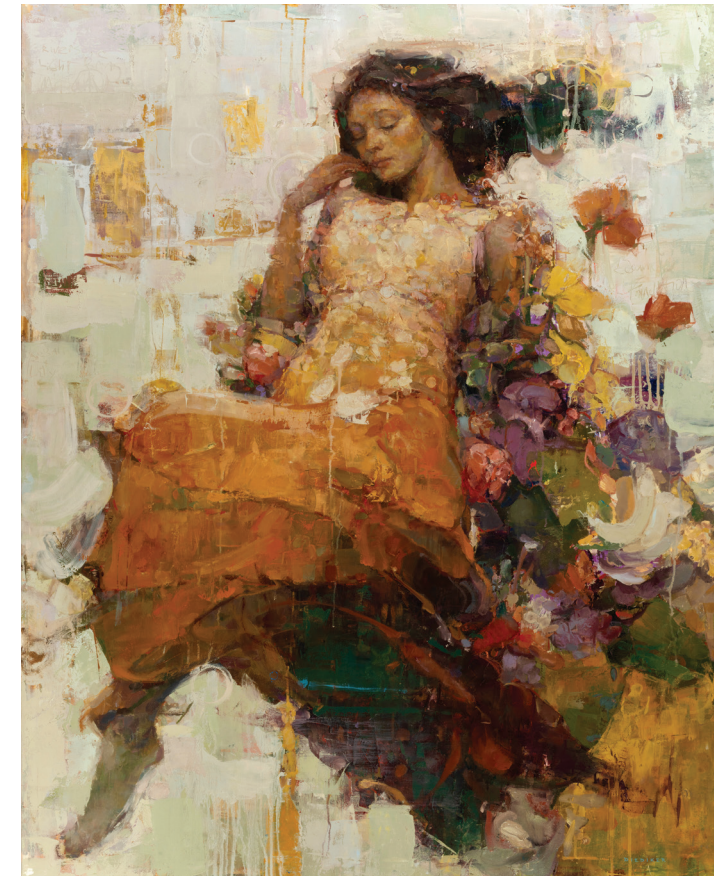
Although Diediker earned an art degree, his post-college, self-initiated learning and continual inquiry served as the foundation on which he built his career. He spent a lot of time studying the work of the Old Masters like Rembrandt and Vermeer both in books and in person, dissecting their compositional elements, copying them and layering their techniques with his own subject matter. He started out

with a decidedly academic approach, trying to reproduce reality as accurately as possible. “That becomes your religion in a way,” he says of his early practice.

Eventually, he felt pulled toward broadening his approach. He began to paint on a larger scale, which brought both physical and visual revelations. He laid down underpaintings from a standing position, prompting a more dynamic, gestural paint application and recalling the abstract expressionists of the mid-20th century. This technique allows a composition’s foundation to emerge as the paint dictates its own direction and Diediker follows it from one mark to the next. “I’ve deliberately let go of many academic conventions during this phase, allowing the process to unfold with a kind of intuitive chaos,” he says. All this sets the stage for his figures, which largely retain his



Diamond Fork Backcountry, oil on canvas, 48 x 48.



The Preponderance of Elsewhere #2, oil on canvas, 60 x 48.

realist point of view even as they fuse into flowing, expressive areas of paint surrounding them.

Thematically, Diediker's latest work complements the ideas he has embraced over the course of his career. It's his methodology that has evolved. He says, "The larger format paintings, especially, have transformed the way I think about process and composition. They've forced me to embrace more risk, more chance and more surrender within the work itself. I think that willingness to let go of absolute control has allowed the work to become more honest and alive."

Diediker's most recent paintings are the subject of a fall exhibition at Santa Fe's Blue Rain Gallery, where he has shown for nearly two decades. The show opens on Friday, September 11, with a reception from 4 to 6 p.m. and runs through September 24. "Much of the work explores my personal take on masculine and feminine energies and the tension and complement between them," says Diediker. "Many of the paintings examine grounding versus openness, strength versus grace, endurance versus surrender."

ROOT AND FLOWER is the third painting in a series the artist describes as exploring the sacred space between souls. "ROOT AND FLOWER considers the balance between forces that are distinct, yet interdependent," says Diediker. "The masculine root reaches deep to anchor, while the feminine opens toward the light, each relying on the other to fulfill its purpose."

The painting epitomizes the artist's mastery of the refined spontaneity he has worked to manifest. Infusing the composition with instinctual brushstrokes loosens his constraints and lets him relinquish control for a while. However, he doesn't abandon the cerebral altogether. The painting retains the artist's academic precision in the naturalistic rendering of the figures, their movement and countenance, ultimately creating a marriage of thought and feeling, head and heart.

This complex approach is on display in THE PREPONDERANCE OF ELSEWHERE #2 as well. Here, the woman seems to emerge from a burst of abstracted flora that move across the surface in a wave of rich, tactile color. The dynamic, expressionist surge juxtaposed



FROM TOP
Autumn Rider,
oil on canvas,
48 x 48.

**Under the
Turquoise
Clouds,** oil
on canvas,
23.5 x 23.75.



with the representational human form achieves the balance Diediker seeks while also conjuring a dreamlike reality.

"The newer paintings embrace a greater sense of movement, unpredictability and atmosphere within the process itself," says Diediker. "I've become more interested in allowing the physicality of the paint and the underpainting to participate in the

conversation rather than simply serving the image. In many ways, the application itself has become part of the emotional language of the work."

Diediker's creative process begins with a general idea sparked by an emotion, often encountered while having a conversation, observing interactions between people, reading, photographing or just spending

time in a specific environment. He travels extensively, which provides a wealth of situations for him to find his next muse. Many of his adventures are documented on his PBS show, *Canvassing the World*, where he chronicles his journeys in paint.

The people Diediker paints are loose interpretations of models that he has photographed over the years. His collection includes hundreds of thousands of images that now serve to channel an anonymous human form, or a concept of humanity. In this vein, Diediker can assign the figure its own personality and spirit, not unlike a character in a novel or play.

Diediker wants to make art that resonates with viewers on an emotional level, evoking both personal and universal experiences. "I want the paintings to create an emotional recognition and feel relatable to the viewer, almost as if they're being reminded of an experience or moment they've already had, or perhaps one they long to have," he says. "Ideally the work feels timeless, contemplative and familiar."

When reflecting on his favorite thing about painting, Diediker says, "I think the unknown." Every artist, every act of creation, has something unique to offer. That idea of infinite discovery appeals to him. "The possibilities are endless," he says. "Oftentimes, when I go down to the studio, it very much feels like I'm getting on a plane to a destination that I've never been. You just don't know what's going to happen next. That's what keeps me coming back."

Elizabeth L. Delaney is a freelance arts writer and editor.

Sean Diediker

September 11-24

Blue Rain Gallery
Santa Fe, NM
(505) 954-9902
blueraingallery.com



Sanctum, oil, 60 x 48.