



PERCEPTION & EXPRESSION

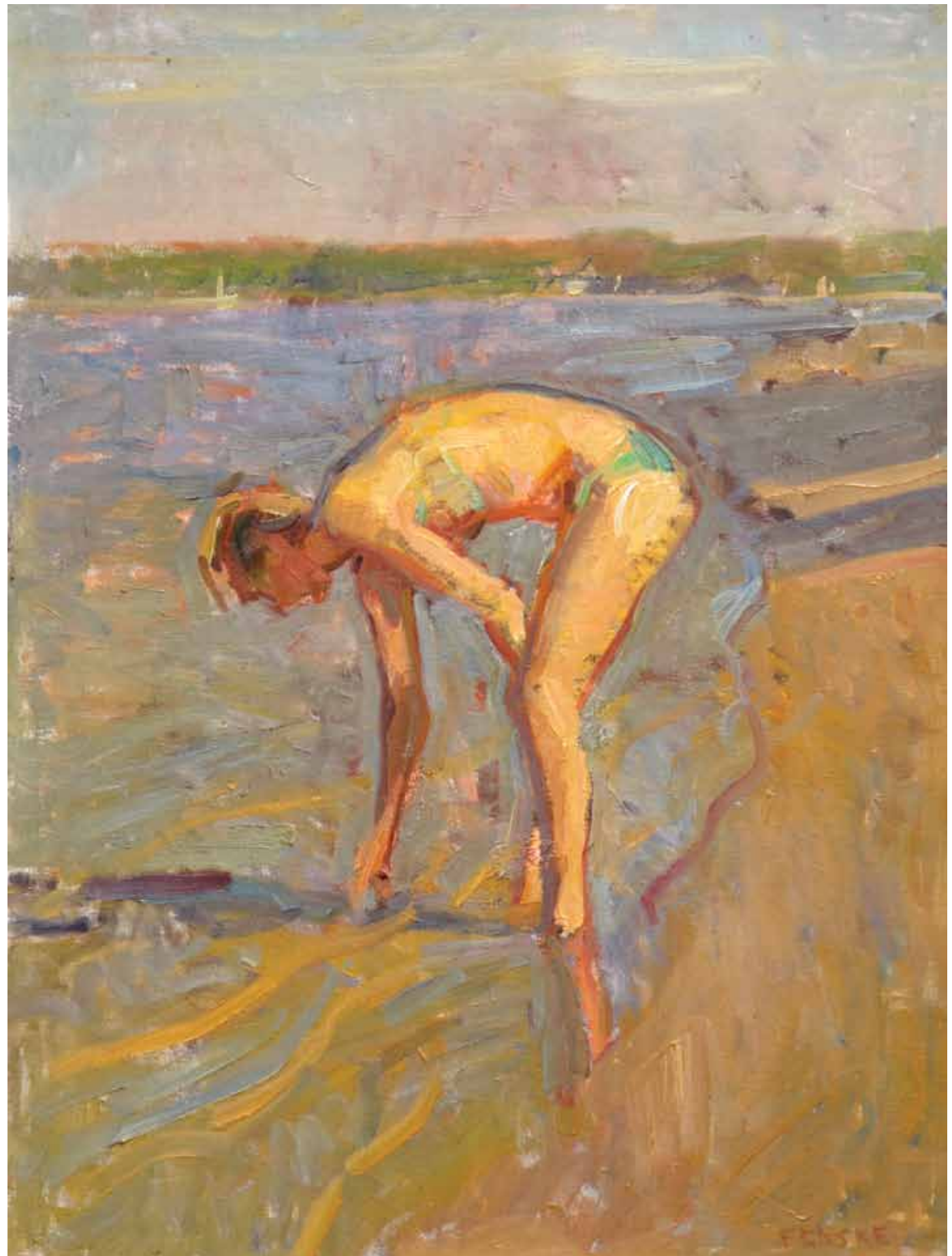
BEN FENSKE BEYOND TIME AND PLACE

There are certain artists who seem to see, feel, and paint outside of time and place, and Ben Fenske is one of them. When looking at his work, you feel as if you've been transported to moments of the past, yet you are profoundly aware that this artist is very much connected to the world we live in now. Fenske is an expressionist in every sense of the word, channeling emotion and confidence to orchestrate meaningful, moving representations. But there is also a reverent, traditional underpinning to his work, and in his brushstrokes vestiges of many of the great artists who have come before him.

It is not just Fenske's paintings that are timeless. He himself is sort of an old soul, someone I could easily imagine in the Parisian cafés of the late 1800s arguing with Van Gogh and Gauguin or as part of the Russian Itinerant rebellion, roaming the backwoods landscapes

with a band of like-minded brothers. His demeanor is both calm and highly charged—there is a quiet storm brewing internally, and although he presents a nonchalant outward appearance, everything surfaces in the fiery circus of colors, light, and poetry that are his paintings.

Fenske is a risk taker. While so many painters today play it safe, this young artist refuses to conform or stop evolving. He has a restless, determined drive to understand his purpose as a painter and to not settle for what the rest of the art world deems acceptable. In reviewing his work of just the last several years, you can see him wrestling to find his own voice and avoid stagnancy. From the academic figurative work created during his training at The Florence Academy of Art, to his subsequent paintings that broke free in form and color, to his more recent landscapes



LEFT
Picking Shells
2011, oil,
32 x 24. Cour-
tesy Grenning
Gallery, Sag
Harbor, New
York.

OPPOSITE PAGE
**Sleeping in
the Sun**
2010, oil,
24 x 26.
Private
collection.



RIGHT
**Johanna
Fixing Her
Skirt**
2011, oil,
31½ x 23½.
Private collection.

BELOW
Walking In
2009, oil,
40 x 49.
Private collection.



ALLISON MALAFRONTÉ
ON BEN FENSKE



“I’ve heard Ben Fenske’s contemporaries and former teachers label him a ‘genius,’ a ‘master,’ and an ‘unstoppable train’ in trying to define what it is about this young artist that is so unique. I think Fenske’s work resonates with so many people because he is both outside of his time and a defining factor of the future. Like all the courageous artists of the past who were pivotal in ushering in new ways of seeing and inciting new art movements—Turner, Homer, Van Gogh, and Hopper among them—I believe Ben is helping to build the bridge between all that has been in art and all that is yet to be.”



ABOVE
The Breakup
2009, oil,
36 x 43. Courtesy
Grenning Gallery,
Sag Harbor, New
York.

and single-subject still lifes, one senses that Fenske is pushing through some invisible wall to find himself. He may be on the brink of reaching a level that will finally feel acceptable to his high aesthetic.

I understand from several of Fenske’s former teachers that he was impossible to teach because he was so innately talented and advanced beyond his years, and also because he questioned everything and refused to accept rules without fully understanding them. Like many of the genius artists of the past, Fenske’s high level of seeing and discerning help fuel his curiosity and set him a cut above the pack—where he is left to compete mostly with himself. He seems confident treading that path alone and marching to the beat of his own drum. In the meantime, we are all keeping an ear tuned to that original sound and watching to see where this extremely gifted visionary will go.

For more information on Fenske, visit www.benfenske.com.

Written by Allison Malafronté, the senior editor of American Artist.

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