

FIVE TO WATCH

There is a lot of superb art being made these days.
This column by Brandon Rosas shines light on five gifted individuals.

The Cincinnati-based artist **BRAD DAVIS** (b. 1993) is drawn to symbols of change in his life and surroundings. “When I paint the city,” he says, “I look for places that are on the verge of demolition or renovation. When I paint portraits, they’re often of people with whom I interact daily and who operate as vessels for personal narratives. Painting has the incredible capacity to preserve, and I am at my core a preservationist.”

Davis inherited his gift for representation from his father, an elementary school art teacher. “I was always in awe of his ability to translate the visual world, and I remember him drawing with me anywhere we went,” he recalls. “At age 9, I saw N.C. Wyeth’s *Treasure Island* illustration series at the Brandywine Museum of Art [in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania], and after that I knew I wanted to be an oil painter.”

To that end, Davis earned a B.F.A. and M.F.A. in painting from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, respectively. “It was a difficult path to pave through the ocean of conceptual critique, but I feel that it made me a stronger realist,” he recalls, noting that he began identifying with the urban focus of Ashcan School painters such as John Sloan.

Much like the Golden Age illustrators who first inspired him, Davis is committed to delighting viewers with the material quality of his art. “For me, painting is all about the experience of the physical surface of a work in conjunction with the depth of an illusion,” he explains. “Half of my job is to get viewers to see the work in person so that its physicality can be understood. That is where a viewer is most in conversation with all the human-centric nuance that oil painting has to offer.”

Although many of Davis’s works feature lusciously rendered urban scenes, he has recently been exploring more symbolic figurative works, such as *Noumena*. “This piece is about presence in the midst of absence,” says Davis, explaining that the title is a term coined by the philosopher Immanuel Kant for that which exists beyond human perception. “I posed my wife, Alex, with a cast of Diana the Huntress, who is seen in mythology as a beacon of life and death. In this way, she references the loss of Alex’s mother, who passed away unexpectedly a year ago. In the dark recesses on the painting’s left side is an empty bowl symbolizing the cavity of loss that always remains, as well as an openness to receive.”



BRAD DAVIS (b. 1993), *Noumena*, 2024, oil on wood, 32 x 24 in., available through the artist

DAVIS is self-represented. His solo exhibition *Heirlooms* will appear at Studio Kroner (Cincinnati) May 10–June 1.