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ANDREA KONCH

# ACROSS A RURAL SKYLINE

Andrea Kowch uses scenes from small-town America to create surrealistic visions rife with suspense and mystery. **BY JOSHUA ROSE**



1  
Andrea Kowch  
in her northern  
Michigan  
studio.

2  
*Dawning*, acrylic  
on canvas,  
14 x 11"



One of Andrea Kowch's favorite things to do is to take walks alone around the small town where she lives in northern Michigan and take in the countryside and places she sees each day. The old barns, Victorian houses, antiques shops, family farms dating back to the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and large tree-lined spaces found here act as a starting point for her creative energies to begin to flow and she soon becomes overwhelmed with ideas for her next paintings.

"All my work is inspired by real things but they come from imaginary dream-like worlds, are snapshots of little stories that they appear in," says Kowch. "I've been

coming to this town for years and so to actually move here and open my studio here was a big deal. It has a wonderful historic district and is surrounded on the outskirts by family-owned farms and orchards. The inspiration is just pouring out of my head, just from being here."

For Kowch, a walk may take her to an old Victorian home at the end of a narrow street. Once she sees the home, she starts to wonder about its personal history. Who lived here? What families and events have occupied this space from generation to generation? Such thinking gets her imagination working and the visuals start appearing to her. "I love history and all this

serves as a catalyst for what follows," says Kowch. "The feelings and reactions to all of this just start mixing together."

"This will be my first show that has been entirely created in this new studio," says Kowch. "So, obviously, I'm really looking forward to having collectors see the new work. There's always a progression but I feel that now I'm really being able to explore my subject matter in greater depth."

Kowch began her studies at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit and has recently returned there as an instructor in the painting department. It was when she was still a student that she became fascinated by the works of American



A. Kowch



ANDREA KOWCH



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4

regionalist painters such as Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry. This early influence can still be found in her work today, especially in this new series.

"It's a deep love and respect for this genre of painting that I have," says Kowch. "So while most of my earlier pieces focused on women and portraits of women, this new series includes some with men as models. My newest painting, *In The Distance*, includes two male figures working in the fields and I see this as an homage to those historic regionalist painters."

But the work, like most of Kowch's paintings, is about much more than this connection to the artists who have come before her.

"You see the storm in the distance and that creates an element of suspense," says Kowch. "I want people to think, 'What is really going on in this picture?' And, like most of my work, this mystery leads the narrative element of the painting. It's that element of mystery that I really go after."

While Kowch's work is based in portraiture and includes somewhat classically conceived figurative work, this only serves as a starting off point for what can be seen as surrealistic images that come straight from her imagination. For all the detail she includes in the work—everything from blades of grass, fields

of sunflowers, branches and patterns upon patterns—it is the imaginative rather than the real that truly shines through. *Pecking Order*, for example, could quite possibly be seen as an ordinary kitchen scene taking place throughout middle America until one looks closely and sees eggs upon eggs—some broken others in their still-perfect state—roosting chickens, mismatched China settings and just-hatched baby chicks to understand the surrealism and also underlying tension of the painting.

Now finding herself in the role of teacher, Kowch is also looking deeply into her work and her methods and

3  
*Pecking Order*, acrylic  
on canvas, 20 x 16"

4  
*Open Window*, acrylic  
on canvas, 11 x 14"

*"Andrea Kowch is a painter of exceptional skill, unique imagination and a visionary knowledge of composition and color, which, when all combined, enables her to create works of extreme aesthetic value for her true collector of the rare and irreplaceable."*

— Richard J. Demato, owner, RJD Gallery





5  
*Through the Boughs*,  
acrylic on canvas,  
30 x 24"

6  
*My Heart Beside*, acrylic  
on canvas, 30 x 24"

6

analyzing everything she does. In doing so, she has decided that instead of working on one piece at a time, she can have multiple works in process continuously.

"I'm definitely getting more detailed as I go," says Kowch. "I enjoy painting several of these works at a time. I just feel like I needed to do that. I don't know why, but I get these surges of excitement and then just want to work on all of them at once. There's been a fever in me and I feel that this method is the best way for me to

attack these new ideas."

This new way of working has other benefits as well.

"It keeps you always busy," says Kowch. "If you get stuck on a certain part of one, then you can just start working on another. It lets me just keep moving at a very productive pace. I'm always challenging myself to not just finish a painting, but to see how I can elevate it to another level. There's an internal conflict going on always, but on the surface, that is barely noticeable." ●

## ANDREA KOWCH: ACROSS A RURAL SKYLINE

**When:** August 29-September 30, 2015

**Where:** RJD Gallery, 90 Main Street, Sag Harbor, NY 11963

**Information:** (631) 725-1161, [www.rjdgallery.com](http://www.rjdgallery.com)