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# Today's New Old Masters Outshine the Avante-Garde

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When I told my art teacher I wanted to learn to paint like Caravaggio he informed me that all of the secrets of the old masters had been lost. He gave me a syllabus that included stitching a rug, throwing a pot, and silk-screening a T-shirt. I ditched class and failed art while at the same time I sat down by the river filling sketchbooks. Later, as a student of art at CUNY in New York City, I was kicked out of a life drawing class for drawing! No joke. The assignment was to rip up pieces of paint splattered paper while looking at the model but because I chose to use a pencil and do a representational rendering, I was asked to leave the class.



[Graydon Parrish](#) teaching at the Grand Central Academy in New York

Welcome to the art world. I was naïve in thinking that if I could only learn to draw and paint skillfully then I would "make it". Perhaps the art world at large wants nothing to do with skill or talent. Could this be true? Where does one learn to paint if the teachers say the secrets have been lost?

If you think that the big name schools nurture talent then have a look at the work from these schools who are proudly exhibiting their 2013 MFA graduates. I won't show pictures, I won't advertise for this kind of art but I will provide a couple of links so you can see for yourself, if you have the stomach for it. Personally, I am not surprised that [Columbia Universities 2013 MFA](#)

[thesis exhibition](#) is so extremely mediocre or that the [2013 MFA exhibition from Yale University](#), which claims a unique vitality, displays nothing of the sort. Even graduates of the [Art Institute of Chicago](#) offer artistic visions that are just plain dull. I have been around long enough to know what to expect from the Art world.

In order to remain positive and optimistic in the thick of this post-modernist mentality I focus on those things that I like and let the rest go. I do not look at a lot of modern art but enjoy seeking out beautiful paintings by painters whose work I admire and encourage you to do the same.

I follow several blogs, newsletters and facebook pages whose focus is on representational painting. The internet allows us to pick and choose what we fill our senses with, for the most part. When I was looking at art schools in the 80's I did not have this fantastic tool and thought I was completely alone in wanting to paint like the old masters. Now it is easy to seek out what you enjoy. Subscribe to the feeds and channels of the painters you admire. Buy the paintings that you love!

In order to not fall into the trap of complaining about what I don't like, as if focusing on what we don't want will guide us toward what we do want, I wish instead to direct your attention toward some alternatives to the ho-hum of today's avant-garde.

For those of you who either want to learn how to draw and paint, for real, or those of you who have children who you feel are skilled and whose talents you want to nurture I don't want you to give up hope. They say that children are our greatest natural resource but, have you seen what

they do to natural resources?!? Be careful here. There are alternatives to modern art brainwashing, even if art teachers say there isn't.

The [Grand Central Academy of Art](#) and the Water Street Atelier in New York have consistently produced work of high quality and provide their students with the tools necessary to produce classically inspired work. Also in New York, [the Art Students League of New York](#), while offering no degree program, does offer drawing and painting classes and their alumni include many accomplished painters. [The New York Academy of Art](#) and the [Teaching Studios of Art](#) also teach and encourage traditional methods. In Pennsylvania you will find [Studio Incamminati](#) and [Ani Art Academy](#), both of which provide classical training from master painters.

For those of you on the west coast the [Gage Academy](#) in Seattle and the [LA Academy of Fine Art](#) offer classical training by highly skilled professional painters. In addition there are smaller studios who also offer classical techniques and an intimate painting environment such as the [Rokoff Studio](#) in Portland, the [Center for Academic Study & Naturalist Painting](#) in Utah, or if you prefer to learn online then check out the [Zarolla Online Art Academy](#).

If you are able to travel to Europe to study then I encourage you to do so. I have lived in Europe for 12 years now and find the wealth of museums, paintings and culture in general to be the best of teachers. [The Florence Academy of Art](#), also with a school in [Gothenburg Sweden](#), [Charles H. Cecil Studios](#) and the [Angel Academy](#) all offer excellent programs for learning classical techniques in Florence Italy. The [Russian Academy of Art](#) has a program in Florence as well as the original school in St. Petersburg Russia.

There are others. Seek out your favorite painters and see if they offer workshops. Many do. In addition to instruction there is also financial help available for representational painters through organizations such as the [Elizebeth Greenshields Foundation](#) and the [Kassan Foundation](#), among others.

I myself did not study at any of these schools. Many of the schools mentioned here did not exist when I was a student. Instead I forged my own path. I spent 20 years filling sketchbooks, reading books about paintings of all kinds and traveling far and wide to see the paintings I most admired. That was a lot of work and effort but I think it was the best possible education I could give myself. Eventually, after painting for over a decade virtually in the dark, I stumbled into the studio of Odd Nerdrum in Norway and spent several years learning about painting there. [The Nerdrum Academy](#) offers something I do not believe is available in any of the other schools I mentioned. Only a few painters are accepted each year due to the unique nature of the studio and environment.

If you want to know the secret of the old masters I will share it with you. Draw and paint from nature, constantly! Soak up everything you can about the work you admire, from whatever sources are available to you, and there are many. Then, paint some more.

For those of you who are collectors, trust yourself. Research the painters whose work moves you rather than relying on the opinions of supposed art experts. Ask the painters questions to learn for yourself who has earned and is deserving of your patronage.

