



Louise Peabody Paintings Capture Life in Mid-Moment

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by Pat Rogers

There's something about the quality of light in Louise Peabody's paintings that makes it easy to conjure a memory. Yards dappled by shade and sun may evoke a secret moment of quiet; a pause before life interrupts. A velvet August afternoon sun saturating an ocean beach almost comes with a soundtrack of lapping waves and the cries of seagulls not too far in the distance. Sophisticated parties, bathed in the low romantic glow cast by artificial illumination, reveal people rapt in conversation and provide the chance to wonder about their lives and imagine what their discussions might reveal.



"Gala" by Louise Peabody. Oil on canvas, 56 x 97 inches.

Louise Peabody is known for her portraits. Based in Southampton, Peabody has been making them for decades. Her depictions frequently feature direct gazes, making the subject an active participant in the image's creation.



"Angela" by Louise Peabody. Oil painting on canvas, 40 x 30 inches.



"Best Friends" by Louise Peabody, oil on canvas, 60 x 38 inches

Louise Peabody's narrative paintings capture the looseness of life, but it is the faces of those anchoring the painting that make her art difficult to forget.

When making her narrative figurative works or landscapes, Peabody stretches out. For her people-

filled compositions, she combines the technical abilities of making portraits with her impression of a scene and her interest in creating paintings with an emotional life of their own.



“Emelie” by Louise Peabody. Oil on canvas, 24 x 74 inches.

All of her work—whether populated by people or devoid of them—portrays a slice of life in mid-motion, sparking wonder at what might happen next and what could have led to the scene revealed. This wondering adds tension to Peabody’s art, and the implication of time passing is a crucial component that increases the tension.

“I’m interested in capturing the moment between two moments,” she said in a recent interview. “It’s an action suspended; a snapshot of a memory and something you are never going to see again. It’s a memory.”



“Running Boy” by Louise Peabody, 2015. Oil on canvas, 38 x 65 inches.

Even her landscapes have the sense of the pregnant pause, capturing a fleeting moment in which light, shadow and shade come together to create a quiet world where people are unseen but their presence is felt nonetheless. Peabody frequently begins her paintings *en plein air* to capture the early light of day or an impending twilight. The way light is imbued in the artwork is just as important as the people or forms in the landscapes that anchor her compositions. Like her figurative narrative paintings, the sensation of conjuring a memory is equally strong in her landscapes.



“Sunburst” by Louise Peabody, 2014. Oil on canvas, 36 x 24 inches.

Despite this sense of capturing a moment, Louise Peabody’s paintings do not reflect actual memories or even reveal the life lived by the artist, she said. Peabody begins a painting with the idea for a scene and builds the composition and the artwork from there.

In discussing her work, Peabody describes her process as a meditation on reality that walks a natural path toward something new. Through painting, Peabody is led away from the initial source of inspiration until the painting achieves its own unique story. Drawing is crucial to making her work but so is creating intimacy born from realism.

"I'm also painting an atmosphere," she said. "How the air feels and how it feels to be there in that moment."



"Beach Games" by Louise Peabody, 2013 - 2015. Oil on canvas, 35 x 73 inches.

When finished, the painting feels personal and familiar: It's possible the beach is the one nearby; the sun-dappled side yard of the white house might be located on a nearby street; the people in Peabody's party scenes may portray someone known or reveal another part of a party attended.



Painting by Louise Peabody.

A personal connection that continues beyond the first viewing is what Peabody hopes viewers experience when considering her art. "I hope people can have a connection with the paintings," she said. "Not as a final impression but something like a conversation that goes on with the viewer. Hopefully, there's a narrative that goes on every time they revisit the work."

Louise Peabody's paintings are held in the permanent collections of public and private institutions including the [Portland Museum of Art](#) (Portland, ME); [The National Arts Club](#); the [Butler Institute of American Art](#) (Youngstown, OH), the [Smith College Museum of Art](#) (Northampton, MA) and others.

Her work has been exhibited at museums and galleries nationwide. Louise Peabody's paintings were the subject of two solo shows with Peter Marcelle, most recently at [Peter Marcelle Project](#) in Southampton. Peabody has also exhibited recently at The Century Association in New York City and the Southampton Cultural Center.



Self-portrait by Louise Peabody.

To see more of her work, visit our slideshow:

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BASIC FACTS: Louise Peabody's art can be viewed at www.louisepeabody.com.

Louise Peabody currently has work included in "Winter Light: East End Artists" at the Southampton Cultural Center. The exhibition remains on view through February 16, 2016. It is curated by Arlene Bujese.

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