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Party:
Catching up with
the cast of *Serigala*

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Down Under

Marissa Nasution
Sultry Starlet

Song Seung-heon
Seoul Sensation
in Sydney

DA MAN
MEN'S
FASHION +
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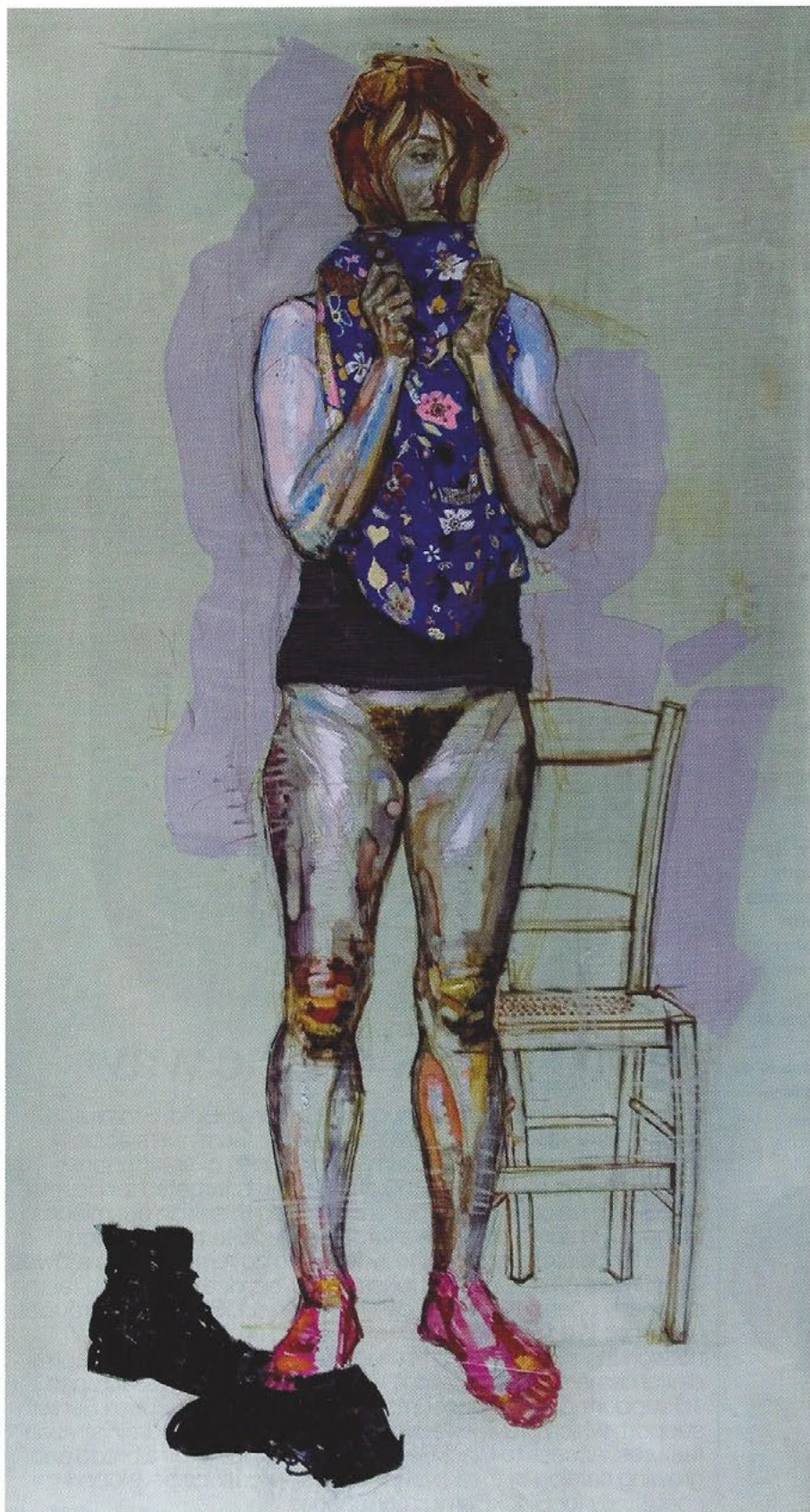
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Penn Badgley
Hollywood's Coolest 'It' Boy

Maxed-out gym sessions The Newest and Hottest SUVs

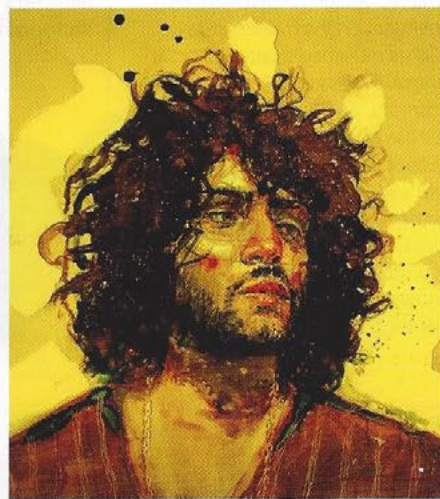


An American in London

Can I tell you... about H. Craig Hanna. I first met Craig at a fashion show back in the mid-1990s. At that time, I had just started my business and needed someone to model for me as a favor. He was not a professional model yet but he was so comfortable in front of the camera, and so photogenic that I urged him to pursue it. In no time, he was walking the runway for Marc Jacobs, showing up on the billboard for Kenneth Cole and frolicking in the Hamptons on the pages of a J. Crew catalog.

One day, Craig called me to return the favor. He needed help with some fabric panel he planned to install as a backdrop for a painting in conjunction with his solo show in a Soho gallery. Little did I know that he was a brilliant artist. Craig's style is bold, multilayered, complex and rich in context. I can stare at his paintings for hours studying every brush stroke and detail. I'm intuitively drawn to all styles and forms of figurative art, perhaps because I illustrate myself, but Craig's pieces are haunting, powerful and mesmerizing.

As time went by, we unfortunately lost touch—keep in mind that this was pre-Facebook. Years later, while I was in London, there on a window of a store was a painting that looked oddly familiar so I decided to take a peek. Lo and behold, it was one of Craig's paintings and it had his contact information. I immediately called him and we met up for a proper catch-up. Needless to say, we've stayed friends ever since thanks to Facebook and Craig has gone on to receive the National Portrait Gallery award in London and was recently voted by *Beaux Art* magazine in France as one of the top 10 up-and-coming artists of 2009. Recently, while I was in Paris, he invited me to drop by Laurence Esnol's gallery in St. Germain des Prés. He was busy setting up for his solo show. He needed an energy boost, so we went to the corner bistro and had a really long coffee break.



Rafe: You were modeling when we met. At what point did you decide to quit and pursue the life of an artist?

Craig: When J. Crew started booking me for jobs holding small children I knew it was only a matter of time before the Grecian Formula (men's anti-gray hair product) job. Seriously, the modeling thing was just a result of living in New York and was a good way to subsidize my income after graduate school.

As long as I can remember I was always drawing and sketching, were you the same as a child?

Yes, also I was a bit of a naughty kid (mostly for attention) so I was always sent off to my room. As a way of being stubborn, I would just stay in there for as long as possible even skipping dinner to make my mom feel really bad. Drawing was a good way to make time pass.

What was your earliest memory of deciding you wanted to be an artist?

I just always did, my teachers were always calling my house to talk to my parents about taking my talent seriously.

Were your parents supportive of your interest in art? It's not a usual career path that parents have in mind for their children.

My parents were very supportive, especially my father, because he was a very gifted artist himself. His own father unfortunately discouraged him from choosing it as a career and even took the step of inviting around a failed artist-turned-plumber to back up his argument. I think, to this day, he wonders what he could have achieved.

Whose work do you consider most inspirational?

That's very, very difficult to answer. Okay, here goes: Titian, Katsushika Hokusai, Edgar Degas, Diego Velázquez, Sigmund Freud, Chinese scrolls and calligraphy.

What made you move from New York to London?

I was offered an exhibition at the Groucho Club by a fashion designer who saw my work hanging at Bergdorf Goodman (men's store) in New York and the rest, as they say, is history.

Did you find it more challenging living in Europe versus New York?

Yes. They don't sell pizza by the slice!

How has living in Europe influenced your aesthetics and the way you paint? Has the change in lifestyle influenced you as an artist?

I think that despite growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, my aesthetics were somehow already European and it was this that inspired me to live here. My work has pared down since New York. It has become simpler and more honest. This might just be maturity as an artist though. It's hard to see the influence of your environment in the present. Ask an art historian in 200



years and perhaps they will be able to tell you.

I can always spot your work from a mile away but at what point in your career did you realize that you had a signature style?

The reason my paintings always have a certain look is because I have an enormous amount of integrity for the subject in which I choose to reproduce. All of my colors and all my compositions come from a huge amount of respect for the old masters.

Laurence Esnol is your permanent gallery and representation in Paris. Has that changed the way collectors and the art crowd perceive you and your work?

I think all artists need to be represented by somebody who completely understands and believes in them and who pushes them. If it wasn't for Lorenzo de' Medici, Da Vinci would have been unknown. I don't know how the art crowd perceives me, but it's not my job to care.

What inspires you? Are they always changing or do you have a checklist that you always go through every time you begin a new body of work?

It's crazy ... sometimes I can see a splash of paint on the sidewalk and it will have as much inspiration as having spent nine hours in the Prado. Every new painting I do has been eating away inside of me for months or years, it has to come out but sometimes I just don't know how. Sometimes, seeing that splash of paint is all I need to give me the go-ahead.

I've noticed that you keep a sketchbook with you always, as I do. Are these sketchbooks your visual diaries?

Yes, as an artist (painter) I am a visual person. A recording in words of an idea is not enough sometimes; I always keep oil pastels and watercolors with me to make little notes in color and compositional sketches for the future. Then they become a journal, almost incidentally. I'll write down thoughts and sketch almost every day. I have around 50 so far, I can measure my life in sketchbooks. T.S. Eliot once said he could measure his life in coffee spoons.

Please tell me your favorites... Museums?

Repin Museum in Moscow, Idemisu Museum in Tokyo, Prado in Madrid, Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Songs?

Right now, it's "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" by Gordon Lightfoot.

Bars?

The Bar at the Grand Hotel de Milan

Restaurants?

Odeon in New York

Escapes?

Fishing in Canada.

Quote?

Do what you are good at.

Colors?

All of them except maroon.

What's next for H. Craig Hanna?

The future ... hmmm. Well, I'm going to attempt a large triptych on plastic of a landscape depicting the cliffs of Dover. I was very inspired by the Corbett exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris and at the Met. He had several landscapes of incredible quality. I have never done a large landscape before. I always sketch them in my books when out in nature, usually to just sort of practice. But I think I'm now ready to take on the challenge of trying to execute a modern, sophisticated, grand landscape—something that Corbett, Corot and Xia Gui would be proud of.

Craig's artwork can be found in the private collections of actress Drew Barrymore, designer Marc Jacobs, cult filmmaker Paul Morrissey and, of course, myself. To see more of Craig's paintings, go to these sites: His work is represented by Amelia Johnson Contemporary (ajc-art.com) in Hong Kong, and by Laurence Esnol Gallery (laurenceesnolgallery.com) in Paris.



H. Craig Hanna