

# CULTURAL

Andrea Bowers: "Celebrating Wayne Thiebaud's influence as artist turns 101 at Manetti Shrem Museum"

By Tony Bravo

October 30, 2021



"Three Treats" is one of more than a dozen Thiebaud works on view in "Wayne Thiebaud Influencer: A New Generation" at the Manetti Shrem Museum. Photo: © 2021 Wayne Thiebaud / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. / Photos by UC Davis/Greg Urquiaga

In his celebrated seven-decade career, painter [Wayne Thiebaud](#) has created a [body of work](#) that continues to captivate and inspire new viewers.

A pre-Pop Art innovator and figurative artist known for his elevation of everyday objects, Thiebaud has intersected with generations of students, beginning in 1960 when he joined UC Davis' then-fledgling art department as a professor. Although he officially retired in 1990 (he continued teaching until 2002), he remains a professor emeritus at the school.

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

His larger reach in the world of painting is the subject of an exhibition at UC Davis' Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, titled "Wayne Thiebaud Influencer: A New Generation," on view through Nov. 12 — closing just three days before he turns 101. The Sacramento artist, who still paints every day, will be honored along with the Wayne Thiebaud Foundation, which will receive the Margrit Mondavi Arts Medallion at the museum's annual gala the weekend of Thiebaud's birthday.

For the Manetti Shrem Museum's associate curator, Susie Kantor, there was a desire that the exhibition not just look back at the 100 years of Thiebaud's life and work, but also "look ahead to the next 100 years" of art inspired by him. Of special interest to Kantor was work by students from his more than 40 years of teaching at Davis.

"He describes himself as a painter and a teacher, and I think they're equally important to him," Kantor says. "He gets so much from the teaching and from his students. He talked about it keeping him young, so maybe that's longevity's secret."

"Wayne Thiebaud Influencer" features work by 19 artists, 13 of whom have been his students, who have been inspired by different aspects of Thiebaud's canon. Their work is presented in conversation with Thiebaud's own, allowing viewers to make comparisons and connections and see the chain of influence from one generation to the next.

Among the artists presented are Christopher Brown, April Glory Funcke, Grace Munakata, Bruce Nauman, Vonn Cummings Sumner and Patricia Wall, who all studied with Thiebaud, along with Andrea Bowers, Robert Colescott, Alex Israel, Jason Stopa, Jonas Wood and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. Many of the artists featured became teachers themselves.

"A lot of the artists who studied with him talked about the idea of a daily practice," Kantor says. "Many of them still do sketchbooks. That rigor in the daily practice, this idea of process is really key, but the value that they place on it comes from working and studying with Wayne."

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Vonn Sumner, "Shopping," 2020. Oil on canvas. Photo: © Vonn Sumner

Sumner, who is based in Santa Ana and Palo Alto and has seven paintings in the exhibition, chose to attend Davis because Thiebaud was a member of the faculty. He earned both his bachelor's degree (in 1998) and his MFA (in 2000) with an emphasis on painting from the school.

"I wanted to study with him because I loved his paintings, and to my surprise and good fortune I discovered that he was a truly great teacher," Sumner says. In graduate school, he became Thiebaud's teaching assistant and developed a deeper creative dialogue with the older artist. The two have maintained a "close mentor/mentee relationship" for 20 years.

Among Sumner's works featured in the show is the 2020 oil "The Elephant in the Room II," a work in which Sumner sees Thiebaud's influence. It's a memory painting created with no photo reference, a practice Thiebaud also employs.

"Wayne teaches his students how to see, essentially," Sumner says. "This kind of 'seeing' includes critical thinking, developing our own questions, setting up tensions and problems to solve with paint."

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

Munakata, a mixed-media painter based in Berkeley who has three works in the exhibition, also studied with Thiebaud as both an undergraduate and graduate student in the 1980s and was his teaching assistant for his beginning color class. She still remembers seeing Thiebaud's painting "Yellow Dress" in 1974 and shows it to her students at Cal State East Bay "to help students see color within a single 'color,' and sense the human hand and intelligence in the choices he made."



Grace Munakata, "Sitka Colonnade," 2020. Acrylic and wax pastel. Photo: © Grace Munakata

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

Munakata's 2019 acrylic painting "Reykjanes," an abstract inspired by an Icelandic landscape, is one of two works of hers in the exhibition. She notes: "In Thiebaud's city- and riverscapes, impossible combinations of planes and scale converge, though unlike my work, his devices read as a single, crazily knit landscape."

Berkeley painter Christopher Brown, whose 2017 oil "Twice Over" is in the exhibition, says the influence of Thiebaud's "Cityscape" series depicting San Francisco remains meaningful even 50 years after he first viewed studies for the work in a show at the Davis student union. The tension between organization and chaos represented in the grid-like patterns of the "Cityscape" works is evident in the architectural subject matter of "Twice Over."

"When you're a young artist, you see the most obvious, alluring things in any other artist's work," says Brown, like technical skills you may not yet have mastered. "But, you learn by just looking at it: 'Oh, that's how he put that together, that's how he made the paint, look at the way he uses color.' His paintings are about those fundamental things. What's beautiful about his work is the way that he takes those things, those elements, and he intensifies them."



Christopher Brown, "Twice Over," 2017. Oil on linen on panel. Photo: © Christopher Brown / Berggruen Gallery

**"Wayne Thiebaud Influencer: A New Generation":** 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursday-Friday; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday. Through Nov. 12 (closed Nov. 11 for Veterans Day). Free; reservations recommended. UC Davis's Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, 254 Old Davis Road, Davis. 530-752-9623.

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508