

ON THE COVER

Elevators by Max Ferguson

Portions of this article are based on an interview with Max Ferguson on January 24, 2022, email correspondence with the author, and information from the artist's website, www.maxferguson.com.

Now 2 years into the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) global pandemic, we are all unfortunately familiar with experiences of isolation, indecision, and uncertainty. This month's cover art is an oil painting, *Elevators*, that was created in 2020 during the early months of the pandemic by Max Ferguson. It is particularly timely and compelling in conveying themes related to the nearly universal emotional and social experiences of the ongoing pandemic.

Characteristic of Ferguson's work, there is a solitary figure in the painting. While the figure may seem self-contained, Ferguson pulls us into an internal dialogue with them to facilitate our engagement. The figure is about to do something (but what?) or perhaps what they have already done is more compelling? Did they just finish a meeting or an assignment? The picture portrays a sense of uncertainty and mystification. We can easily insert ourselves into this narrative—Who is this? Why are they in this building? Where are they coming from? Where are they going? What are they thinking about? What is next? Puzzles to solve with many possibilities.

The artist's background is interesting and illuminates the piece. Ferguson is married with three children and divides his time between New York City and Jerusalem. He was born and raised on Long Island. As an undergraduate

student at New York University studying animation, he spent his junior year abroad in Amsterdam. This experience led to a lifelong influence of Dutch artists on his work. Specifically, Ferguson is heavily influenced by Johannes Vermeer, the 17th-century Baroque artist whose work captures everyday life in detail with a highly realistic (photorealistic) style. *Elevators* reflects that influence in its composition, saturated color, and attention to light and reflection. Another influence is the American painter, Edward Hopper, which can be seen in the mood and subject matter, specifically alienation, in *Elevators*.

Ferguson describes his work as “striving for emotional universality.” He notes that the “more personal you get, the more universal you become” and he “targets the viewer's emotional solar plexus.” Much of Ferguson's art focuses on urban landscapes and scenes, specifically New York City, and on locations that portray older aspects of these city environments. He aims to “keep one foot in the past,” to preserve the beauty of older aspects of the environment for the future, attentive to the transience of life, while injecting collective and contemporary elements.

Despite the themes of alienation and uncertainty, *Elevators* succeeds in providing us with what Ferguson hopes it will—a sense of identification with the mundane and curiosity about an individual, their actions, and their environment.

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