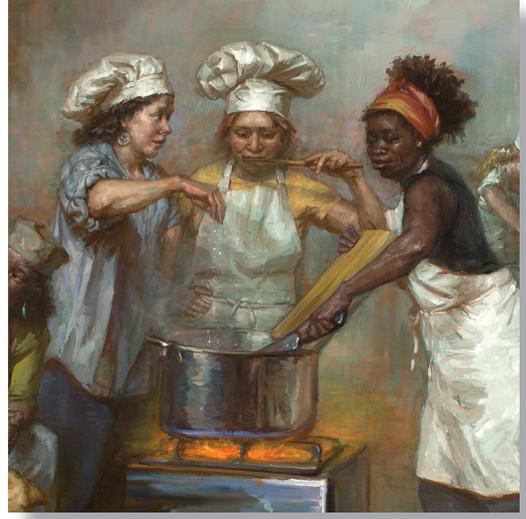




# LINES *from the* LEAGUE

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# It Was a Good Sell: Conversations with a Pastel Artist

by Rudy Bravo

“What should I wear to this thing?” asks Sam Goodsell, established pastel artist, long-time League student and member, and the subject of articles in periodicals like *The Pastel Journal* and *American Artist Magazine*.

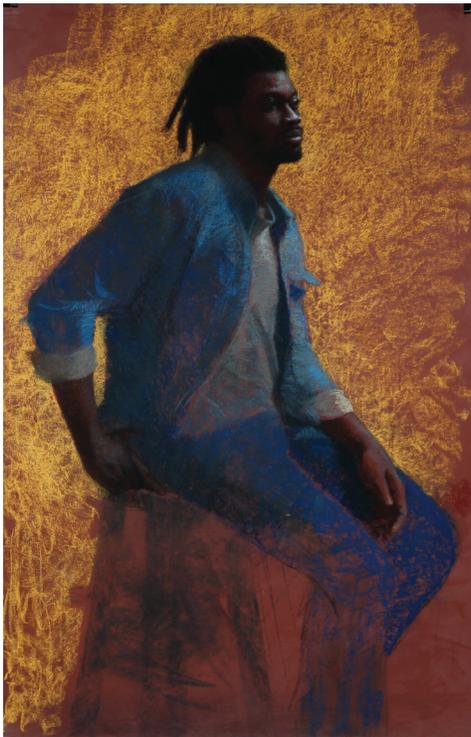
Sam has been studying at the League since his teenage years, as he candidly revealed in his May 2010 interview in the SundayArts profile of the League on Channel 13. His pastel *Evelyn* is in the League’s Permanent Collection. On this day he’s setting up his new website, redesigning his business cards, and figuring out how to dress for an upcoming reception. Sam has earned numerous awards and honors throughout his career, but there’s something a bit more special about this show.

“Oh man, I haven’t been in a suit in over 15 years!” he exclaims, wryly smiling at this realization. Sam has good reason to be overthinking his outfit; within a few days he’ll be attending an event to which fine artists aspire—the opening reception for his first acquisitions by a museum. Beginning in October 2011, the University of Southern California’s Fisher Museum of Art is exhibiting three pastel works purchased for its permanent collection. The pieces, *Andrea*, *Lost In Thought*, and *Tyrone*, perfectly demonstrate Sam’s mastery of pastel, an elusive medium that is richly intertwined with the history of the Art Students League.

William Merritt Chase used pastels during his tenure as instructor at the League at the turn of the 20th century and that choice was carried on by his students, most notably Georgia O’Keeffe. Other instructors like Robert Brackman and Robert Phillip used pastels to develop studies. Current instructor Harvey Dinnerstein has used pastels to create works of art that are as “serious” as his oil paintings. It’s no coincidence that Sam, longtime class monitor for Mr. Dinnerstein, took up pastels.

I look at the images of his work as he uploads them to the web. Each is equally distinct and evokes not only an appreciation of the artist’s skill involved but also a sense of curiosity about the subjects. “When can I meet these people?” I find myself wondering.

Sizing up Sam, I realize that his sense of style is similar to that of his subjects. Some wear clothing that match his—cool jeans, leather boots or shoes that shine—but overall there is a common feeling that unifies them. Whether standing or seated, the models have a certain soulful attitude to their pose,



Above (Sam Goodsell’s pastels, from top): *Tyrone*; *Andrea*  
Right: Sam Goodsell at the USC Fisher Museum with his painting, *Andrea*

enhanced by Sam’s palette. Colors are used in a blazingly high key, sometimes as part of the subject’s clothing. Other times the backgrounds are alive with vibrant colors like in *Threshold*, a piece that was featured on the cover of *American Artist Magazine* in 2008.

“This couldn’t have come at a better time for me.” Sam’s eyebrows arch in relief, thinking about the last few months that led up to the Fisher Museum purchase. It began last Christmastime at the *Holiday Show* that turns the League’s Phyllis Harriman Mason Gallery into a hot spot for art buyers. Sam sold a number of his works at the show. I remember visits to the gallery and always seeing yet another new pastel hanging on the wall.

One buyer ended up hanging her Goodsell, *Kennitta*, in her Los Angeles apartment. At a dinner party, one of the guests was drawn to the work. “Who did this?” she asked. The guest was Selma Holo, director of the USC Fisher Museum of Art. The museum soon acquired Goodsell’s work. According to museum curator Ariadni A. Liokatis:

“We are delighted with the USC Fisher Museum of Art’s latest acquisition of three compelling and beautifully rendered pastel drawings by talented New York artist Sam Goodsell. We came across Goodsell’s work shortly before opening our current exhibition *Posing Beauty* in African American Culture, curated by Deborah Willis, and we were struck by the fact that Goodsell’s works memorialize the idea of beauty and resonate with the concepts of the show. The artist’s works are currently on display in a small gallery adjacent to the main exhibition, and bring gravitas to the *Posing Beauty* show. The acquisition of these three new works also strengthens the museum’s collection of portraiture, which range from 16th century European to American contemporary works.”

“God bless the *Holiday Show*!” Sam exclaims. “I mean it’s all come full circle. Right before this happened I was



wondering how to get extra hours at my job. I mean the landlord was knocking on my door just a few days before this came through. He wasn’t banging the door, but he was knocking!”

But then, Sam made some good sells. 🎨

[www.samgoodsell.com](http://www.samgoodsell.com)