

## Thomas Caleb Goggans – Growth of an Artist

**L**aunching a career in art can be challenging, even for those who are well-trained and highly skilled. Before giving a painting demonstration at the Portrait Society of Atlanta's September 24, 2013, meeting at the Atlanta Artists Center, Thomas Caleb Goggans described his own artist's journey.

From the time he was 6 or 7 years old, Goggans started showing a proclivity for art and was constantly drawing. His grandmother noticed it and bought him higher quality art materials to use. When he was 11 years old, he told his mother that he wanted to be an artist. So she called portrait artist Gordon Wetmore, who was a personal family friend, and asked if her son could come down and watch Wetmore paint.

From then on, Goggans started spending time at Wetmore's studio, watching him paint and doing odd jobs.

"I fell into this without realizing how incredible it was," Goggans said. He started out stretching canvas, cleaning Wetmore's palettes and brushes, and later moved on to be his full-fledged personal studio and business assistant.

When Goggans was 18 years old, Wetmore and others started the Portrait Society of America.



Thomas Caleb Goggans

*All photos courtesy of Thomas Caleb Goggans*

Goggans wanted to go to the first conference organized by the Society, but was too shy to ask. Afterward, Wetmore commented on how much work it had been and said they could have used Goggans there.

For the next 12 years, Goggans worked as part of the conference staff, getting a chance to meet established portrait artists such as Richard Schmid, Everett Raymond Kinstler, Burton Silverman, and many others.

On the advice of Edward Jonas, the Society's co-chair, Goggans decided to take advanced training in traditional art techniques at the Lyme Academy in Connecticut, beginning in 2003. At Lyme, Goggans studied cast drawing, long-pose figure drawing, sculpting, printmaking, and oil and watercolor painting.

It's a miracle anyone graduates in four years because of the

heavy course load, of which most involve studio work, Goggans commented. "Senior year, I would be at school all day, go home and sleep a few hours, get up, shower, then go back. I didn't cook or eat at home," he said.

Although Goggans took at least one portrait class a semester, and did lots of self-portraits, he devoted even more time to figure studies. "In four years, I had a minimum of 1,100 hours of figure drawing," he said.

During his sophomore year, back home in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Goggans realized that by being surrounded primarily by student work at school, the high personal aesthetic he had been striving for had sunk considerably, and that he needed to raise the bar again.

During his junior year, he transitioned from technical training to application of that training, but also had to confront the angst young (and old) artists sometimes feel: "The art world at large does not respect me, does not respect my craft, does not understand why I would want to paint something representationally, that it's largely irrelevant... So there's that challenge – what do I do with this?"

For senior year, Goggans took on an ambitiously large project: a painting just shy of 10 feet long



by 5 feet tall, with an architectural frame he built himself that measured 8 by 12 feet. That painting, of a woman laying a red blanket on the surface of a pond, was inspired by lyrics by Waterdeep, a music group from Nashville. The project also included a second painting, 8 feet by 3 feet wide, also with frame, of a woman with outstretched arms, holding a baby.

The two paintings were highly thought out. Goggans wanted to paint something that would push his ability and visual aesthetic as far as capable at the time. “The scope of what I was trying to say needed this huge emotional space reflected in visual space,” he said.



*A Metaphor*, Oil on canvas, 58" x 60"  
by Thomas Caleb Goggans



*A Symbol of the Way You See This Life*, Oil on canvas, 96" x 148"  
Senior project – frame and painting by Thomas Caleb Goggans

“The project comes down to how we react to difficult things in our lives, to sorrow.”

After he finished at Lyme, Goggans came back to Chattanooga. He planned to marry his long-time girlfriend, and wondered how he would provide for his family. He took a job in guest services at a 4-star hotel, and a few months later, got a job designing textiles and rug patterns for Shaw Industries. Over the next couple years, his wife’s father lost his struggle with cancer, her grandfather passed away, the economy tanked, and then Gordon Wetmore – his dear friend and mentor – died suddenly from a rare disease. Though these challenges greatly complicated Goggans’ plans, he continued

and solidified the pursuit of his painting career.

Lately, Goggans has been painting portraits and experimenting with landscape painting, still lifes, and figurative pieces. “Getting out, painting from life, is amazing,” he said. Landscape painting is one of the most incredible tools for learning about the physical act of painting. “You have to work quickly, everything is changing, and your drawing and value and color assessment have to be right on,” he noted.

During the last couple years, Goggans has also been teaching at Townsend Atelier and Covenant College, and has his studio on Signal Mountain above Chattanooga. Additional information about Goggans and samples of his work are available at <http://www.thomascalebgoggans.com>. ■