

# BRUSHES WITH GREATNESS

*W* visits the studios of eight women painters — and finds not a single wallflower in the bunch.

*Photographs by Stefan Ruiz*

Looking at the landscape of major museum shows last fall, the journalist Deborah Solomon couldn't help but note that "this is an art season that could make you think that the feminist movement never happened." Sure, plenty of women are enjoying booming careers (Cindy Sherman, Yayoi Kusama, and Marlene Dumas, to name a few), but gender disparity—in museums and certainly at the auction block—persists. Perhaps nowhere has that imbalance been more pronounced than in painting, long considered the domain of the macho male. But beginning December 14 (through April 5, 2015), that attitude will get some serious adjustment with the opening of "The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World," the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) first zeitgeisty painting show in 30 years. In casting her net for the survey, MoMA curator Laura Hoptman ended up visiting more women than men. It wasn't intentional, she says, noting, "It's just that that's where the interesting painting is coming from." Her show spotlights 17 prominent contemporary painters, nine of them female, who sample different styles, approaches, and art historical genres. Hoptman focused on the United States and Europe, where, as she sees it, painters are "beyond the idea that each innovation in art is a progress toward some goal. With the Internet, everything exists at once in culture. So the work reflects a horizontal time line, not a vertical one." In these pages, we salute many of the female painters changing the scene. And it's perhaps fitting that "The Forever Now" will run concurrently with a major MoMA retrospective devoted to Sturtevant, the pioneering female artist, who, in the '60s and '70s, anticipated the age of appropriation with her remakes of masterworks by Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Joseph Beuys. Like many of the women in Hoptman's show, Sturtevant, who passed away earlier this year at 89, remains relatively unknown in this country—at least for the moment. "Women artists," Hoptman says, "are defining our time now." DIANE SOLWAY



## MARY WEATHERFORD

Bakersfield, California, has long figured in Mary Weatherford's imagination as the place where her family's car would overheat during road trips to Yosemite National Park—the breakdowns were so frequent, they were memorialized in a 2011 short story in *The Paris Review* by the artist's late sister, Margaret Weatherford, who wrote of "the station wagon that smelled perpetually of vomit." Then, in 2012, Mary (*above*, with *From the Mountain to the Sea*, 2014) returned there for an artist residency and boned up on the history of the place, ultimately creating her breakthrough Bakersfield series—moody layers of paint lit by neon tubes affixed to the surface. "I'm about to start telling you about Bakersfield," warns the Los Angeles-based painter, 51, before

launching into a breakneck monologue that touches on the Dust Bowl, the oil rush, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Dorothea Lange, Merle Haggard, honky-tonks, the Tea Party, the Ku Klux Klan, and dinosaurs. Thrown in are an impression of Jackson Pollock and a rendition of a Beatles song. She does the extensive research, she says, to "get to my paintings." Since 2012, she has shown two other series of pictures of places (she prefers not to call them landscapes or abstractions) that incorporate neon fixtures. As with Bakersfield, in her depictions of New York and Los Angeles, the paint represents the sky; the lights the people that live—and have lived—there. "Don't get me started on the history of Coney Island," Weatherford says. *f.z.*