

# COAST

A woman with long hair, wearing a vibrant red, strapless dress, is sitting on a vast expanse of sand dunes. She is facing away from the camera, looking towards a dramatic sunset. The sky is filled with large, golden-brown clouds, and a single bird is seen in flight on the left side. In the distance, a range of mountains is visible under the warm light of the setting sun. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

ORANGE  
COUNTY

GIVE THANKS ■ SHARE YOUR BLESSINGS ■ DONATE TIME ■ LAUGH



Jhina Alvarado,  
*Beach Bar*, 2011, oil  
and encaustic wax on  
panel, 10 x 10 inches

BY ROBERTA CARASSO

## CINÉMA VÉRITÉ

JHINA ALVARADO AND BROOKE SHADEN MELD PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY.

Jhina Alvarado's artistic journey began when a friend gave her a paper grocery bag filled with old photos from the 1940s. It became a trove for the painter who was already drawn to the idea of forgotten memories. Now she had historic evidence of activities, feelings and scenes of lives that were once filled with yearnings that may or may not have been realized. The photos became the source of Alvarado's latest painterly series on display now at the Joanne Artman gallery in Laguna Beach.

There were pictures of people who could have been family or the folks next door. Alvarado was touched by the haunting

images and close-ups, photos that reflected the best of the subjects' fleeting emotions. She sought to transform these forgotten people into our contemporary world, capturing the essence of life in the World War II era.

Alvarado looked for photos that had a sense of mystery and anonymity. Among her choices were a woman daydreaming, boys dangling playfully on monkey bars, four exuberant kids in old-fashioned bathing suits, and several women enjoying a day at the beach. She paints on panel using only two acrylic colors: white and raw umber. These limited colors give the impression of an old, faded, black-and-white photo, a

sense of stark realism. While she could not add memory, Alvarado could eliminate it. She placed a dark rectangular bar over the eyes so the viewer could not see the subject fully. She also removed any background, enabling us to focus only on the scene and its emotional impact.

Alvarado is also known to incorporate encaustics onto her painted surfaces, a laborious process that uses hot wax. When she covers the painting with eight to 10 layers of encaustic wax, it gives the image a creamy surface that looks yellow and faded, endowing the surface with texture and lifting the figure from the world of photography to the domain of paint.

Brooke Shaden's photography has an edge. It is surreal, whimsical, at times dark, and even otherworldly. Usually, but not always, images are of young women, and often include Shaden. Their dress is timeless and scenes are always slightly askew. Shaden takes us out of our day-to-day existence and lands us in believable yet enigmatic places that she orchestrates down to the most minor details.

Shaden's images do not follow laws of nature, but rather laws of her artistic reality. Figures romp in magical pastoral scenes, or jump enormous dream-like heights. They fly, or exist underwater where there is a sense of freedom and heightened imagination. The basis of all of Shaden's art is the question of what it means to be alive. Surveying all the elements that go into a shot – lighting, costumes, movements, shadows, layering, history, and surfaces, down to the cotton batting that become floating clouds – when all the cinematic elements are in place, Shaden remotely snaps the picture.

No wonder film director Ron Howard's new production, *Project Imagination*, selected Shaden as one of eight winners for a new project. Her winning photo, *Running from Wind*, was chosen out of 100,000 submitted photographs and was personally picked as the winner by Ron Howard himself. Howard's daughter, Bryce Dallas Howard, and Dan Charbeneau will be writing and producing a short film based on the selected eight photographs. *Running from Wind* was chosen in the category of Time. It depicts two girls running through the woods away from the early morning fog. Howard said "he was drawn to Shaden's piece because of its cinematic effect, suggesting another era and [giving a] haunting air of mystery and suspense, while encapsulating a very human element."

This is no surprise, as Shaden's photography emerged after she graduated from Temple University with a degree in filmmaking. First, she learned to create for the big screen, thinking in terms of film production, with its multiple dimensions and components. Afterwards, she taught herself photography, condensing the scope of a visually rich palette into a single completed image. This gives an unusual resonance to her photographs. Each exudes a sense of multiple layers, as she juxtaposes elements from different worlds and many realities, along with half-exposed secrets we long to grasp fully.

Shaden's cinematic photography looks much like painting. She may take different parts of the image and assemble them into a whole; or, meticulously, she may orchestrate everything in one shot. Then she removes the sense of film by using digital brushstrokes. Ironically, the results are neither paint nor brushstroke, as Shaden portrays how good it is to be alive, and gives us another twist on reality.



ABOVE Brooke Shaden, *A Storm to Move Mountains*, 2011, giclee on fine art archival matte, 20 x 20 inches; BELOW Brooke Shaden, *The World Above*, 2011, giclée print on fine art archival matte, 20 x 20 inches.



### SEE IT

■ **JHINA ALVARADO. BROOKE SHADEN.:**  
**CINÉMA VÉRITÉ** :: Through November 30 at the  
Joanne Artman Gallery, 326 N. Coast Hwy., Laguna Beach  
949.510.5481 ::  
joanneartmangallery.com

■ **PROJECT IMAGINATION** :: To see Brooke  
Shaden's image, *Running from Wind*, that was selected for  
film director Ron Howard's latest project, go to YouTube.  
Look under the category "Time."  
:: [youtube.com/imagination](http://youtube.com/imagination)