

## BLENKO GLASS

EUROPEAN QUALITY, CRAFTED IN THE HILLS OF WEST VIRGINIA

### FRANKFURTER KÜCHE

FORERUNNER TO TODAY'S  
BUILT-IN KITCHENS

### CARLO MOLLINO

ULTRA-CHIC ITALIAN  
FURNITURE DESIGNS

### MAISON JANSEN

CREATING LAVISH  
INTERIORS SINCE 1880

### STONEWARE FACE JUGS

QUIRKY, KOOKY  
AMERICAN FOLK ART



# EDITOR'S DIARY

## ART AND DESIGN — NO BOUNDARIES, NO BORDERS


**M**USIC MAY BE the international language, but art and design follow closely behind. Each month when I select the topics to be covered in the next issue, I don't intentionally set out to include a subject from Germany, another from France, and yet another from Italy, but it just seems to work out that way naturally. We who live for the arts consider ourselves an interconnected global community. We share our knowl-

edge, our history and our new discoveries with pride, which is why I, personally, take so much pleasure in presenting *Style Century Magazine* to you each month as an electronic canvas that has been filled, "brushstroke by brushstroke," with an internationally flavored mix of articles that you won't see in print anywhere else.

### EDITOR | CATHERINE SAUNDERS-WATSON

When Heidi Lux, our correspondent in Germany, suggested an article on the Frankfurter Küche, a 1920s "fitted" kitchen designed for small public housing units, I couldn't say "yes" fast enough. It was a subject about which I knew nothing, but wanted to know everything. As I would learn from Heidi, today's deluxe built-in kitchens owe their very existence to the incredibly ingenious "waste-no-space" concept that launched the Frankfurter Küche. Comparing the archival images Heidi had obtained to my own recently remodeled kitchen, I could definitely see the "family resemblance."

Next came the French connection. Natasha Thomsen, a Francophile who wrote the wonderful article in our December 2007 issue about the Sudanese artist Logang, asked if we'd be interested in a piece on Philippe Gourdon, an expat-Parisian painter whose medium of choice is marble. After viewing images of Philippe's breathtaking work, *SCM* had its second article locked in.

Karla Klein Albertson, who has a flawless eye for modern design, added Italian chic to the roster with her story on Carlo Mollino furniture. The international smorgasbord was complete with the inclusion of articles on Maison Jansen, stoneware face jugs, and Blenko art glass. We hope you'll enjoy your "travels" as you read this month's issue. Bon voyage! 





EARTH-TONE COLORS IMBUE  
A SENSE OF HARMONY  
BETWEEN STONE AND SUBJECT

*Meditation* is one of three pieces (along with *Reverie* and *Reflection*) demonstrating Gourdon's forays into marrying the serenity of the feminine face with the natural contours and veins of marble's hard surface.



DISCOVERY:

# PHILIPPE GOURDON

PAINTING ON MARBLE, FROM THE GROUND UP

Gourdon prefers to paint with warm colors (browns and reds), using blue as a highlight, as in this work titled *Alone*.





## FOR THE PAST 5 YEARS, GOURDON HAS BEEN CULTIVATING TEXTURES, COLORS AND NATURAL ELEMENTS

**H**OW DOES ONE leave behind 25 years as an artistic director of French magazines in a major advertising firm, a 1,000-square-foot apartment in the fashionable Marais section of Paris, and one's own publishing company in the French capital, to work the street market of Cannes?

"Very easily," replied 49-year-old Philippe Gourdon, a Frenchman who departed his fast-

paced life in 2007 for a more soothing

but uncertain one in the south of France.

Gourdon's lifestyle and choices challenge anyone's preconceived notions of a successful businessman or street peddler. Disarmingly humble, charming yet unassuming, he is now enjoying his complete and utter immersion as



a full-time artist. His goal? To bring together two unlikely media – marble stone as his "canvas" and traditional oil paints – to express his visions of beauty. In this effort Gourdon has not just succeeded; he has triumphed.

The force behind this inspirational and radical transition stretches back to 2003, when Gourdon began restoring a 13th-century priory in the heart of the Perigord Noir in Dordogne, which he inherited from his father. Gourdon discovered this process of oil on stone while working with a stone cutter, one of the tradesmen in a guild of artisans who came to work at the priory. Here in the heart of Aquitaine, a region in the southwestern corner of France made rich by its Bordeaux wines and Chaumes cheese, he installed his main art studio.

"I had a lot of encouragement to make this move ...," Gourdon said in a telephone interview with *SCM* from his home in Cannes, France. Since 1997, he has participated in sev-

**BY | NATASHA THOMSEN**  
**IMAGES | PHILIPPE GOURDON**



*The Dreamer* blends a human face within the veins of the marble slab.

eral exhibitions where he obtained numerous distinctions for his paintings on canvas—first prize in the 1997 Salon des Peintres Étudiants (Art Student Painting Exhibit) in Paris, 1998 XIXe Salon International Artistique de la Haute-Loire, and 2001 Saumur Festival, among them. He has exhibited in galleries and shows in Paris (Galerie Espace Libre and Salon des Independents, Fête des Peintres), and now is doing the same in Cannes (Exposition Les Week-end Aux Allées). His companion, Nathalie, a former editorial director in French publishing (Éditions Gallimard, among others) was equally game for making the transition with their two children to the south, where she now writes full time and teaches writ-

ing workshops.

For the past five years, Gourdon has been cultivating textures, colors and natural elements. His experiments shifted from painting animals and nudes, to humans in their meditative and emotional moments. “I mostly focus on the human body now,” he said, noting that he plays with natural and earth-toned colors to achieve a sense of harmony between the stone and his subjects, accented by blues and softly hued reds. “Working on stone is a bit like working with watercolors,” he observed.

Although his work is reminiscent of 16th century da Vinci (1452–1519) and 17th century Vermeer (1632–1675), he is wary about being too closely associated with the Master painters. “I hesitate to imitate or be inspired by a great painter. I don’t want to rely on them. I want to do more personal things—things that I feel,” he said.

Apart from his studies in the early 1980s in classical drawing at the Atelier Ravaux at the





Place des Vosges, a historical landmark in the center of Paris and meeting point for artists, his talent is raw, vibrant and moving. He does-

n't credit his training in musical composition and orchestration at the École Normale Supérieure de Musique de Paris with his abili-

ties as an artist, yet he admits to being emotionally sensitive. For more than 10 years, he composed and arranged music for French cin-

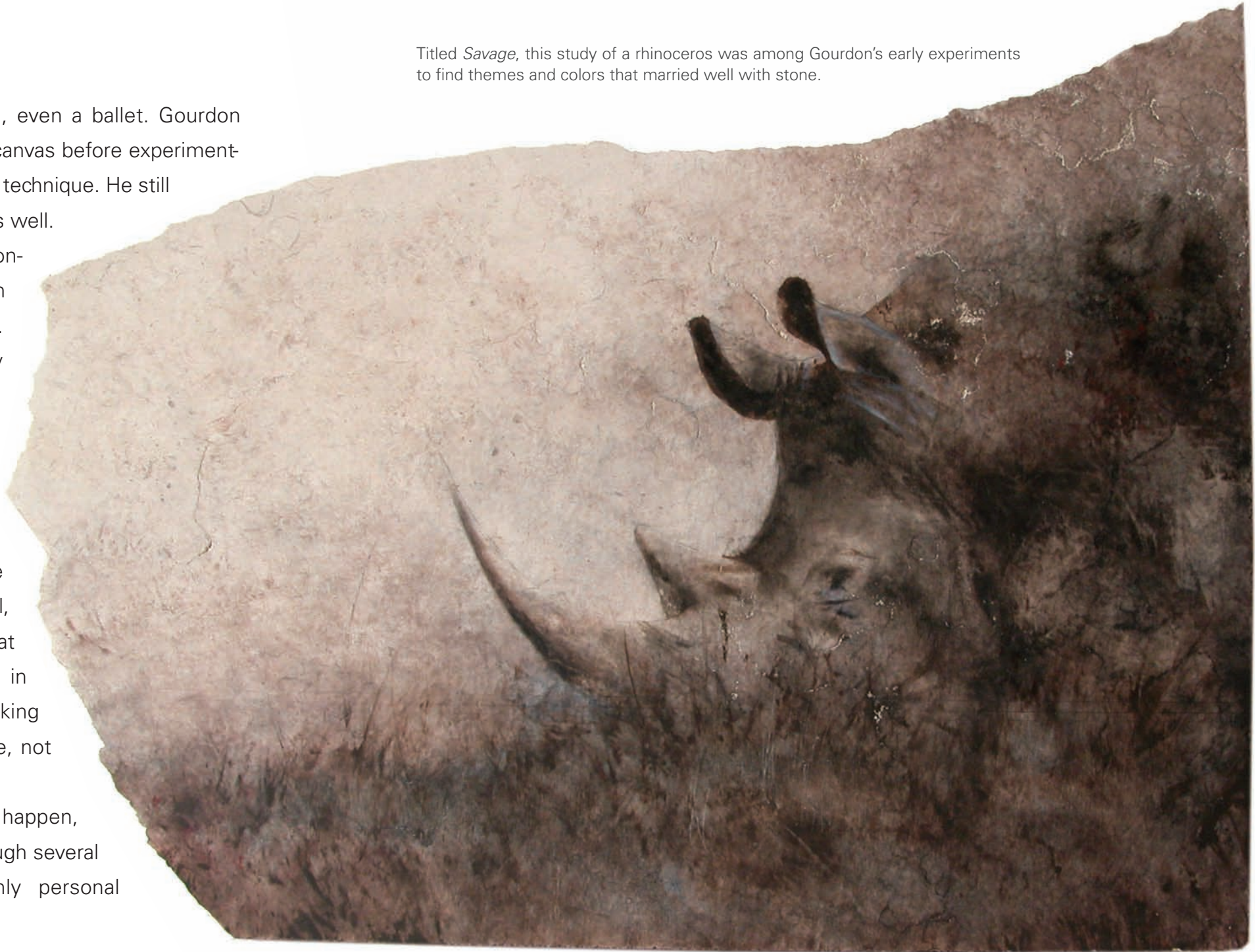


ema and television, even a ballet. Gourdon mostly painted on canvas before experimenting with the marble technique. He still works on canvas, as well.

"I wish to convey feelings through what I do," he said. "I went for many years feeling perplexed by what I saw in art. Art is not just about abstract notions; I wanted to create something beautiful, harmonious, and that stirs the emotions in the viewer—making them feel the piece, not just observe it."

For that to happen, Gourdon goes through several phases of a highly personal

Titled *Savage*, this study of a rhinoceros was among Gourdon's early experiments to find themes and colors that married well with stone.





process. He starts with a subject in mind and the quest for the ideal slab or fragment of stone to impart this vision. "It begins as an almost sensual contact between me and my material—sometimes happy, sometimes difficult, but always exciting."

The marble slabs are jagged so Gourdon cracks them to fit the image. "I study the veins and contours in the stone to see if it matches my subject," he said. Each piece is not only

subject to adapt to the stone, "which ends up with my morphing into a whole new project."

The final stage is the interplay between the artist and the marble, which creates the unique work. Here, the piece can be completed either in three or four days or it might take much longer, depending on that give-and-take relationship.

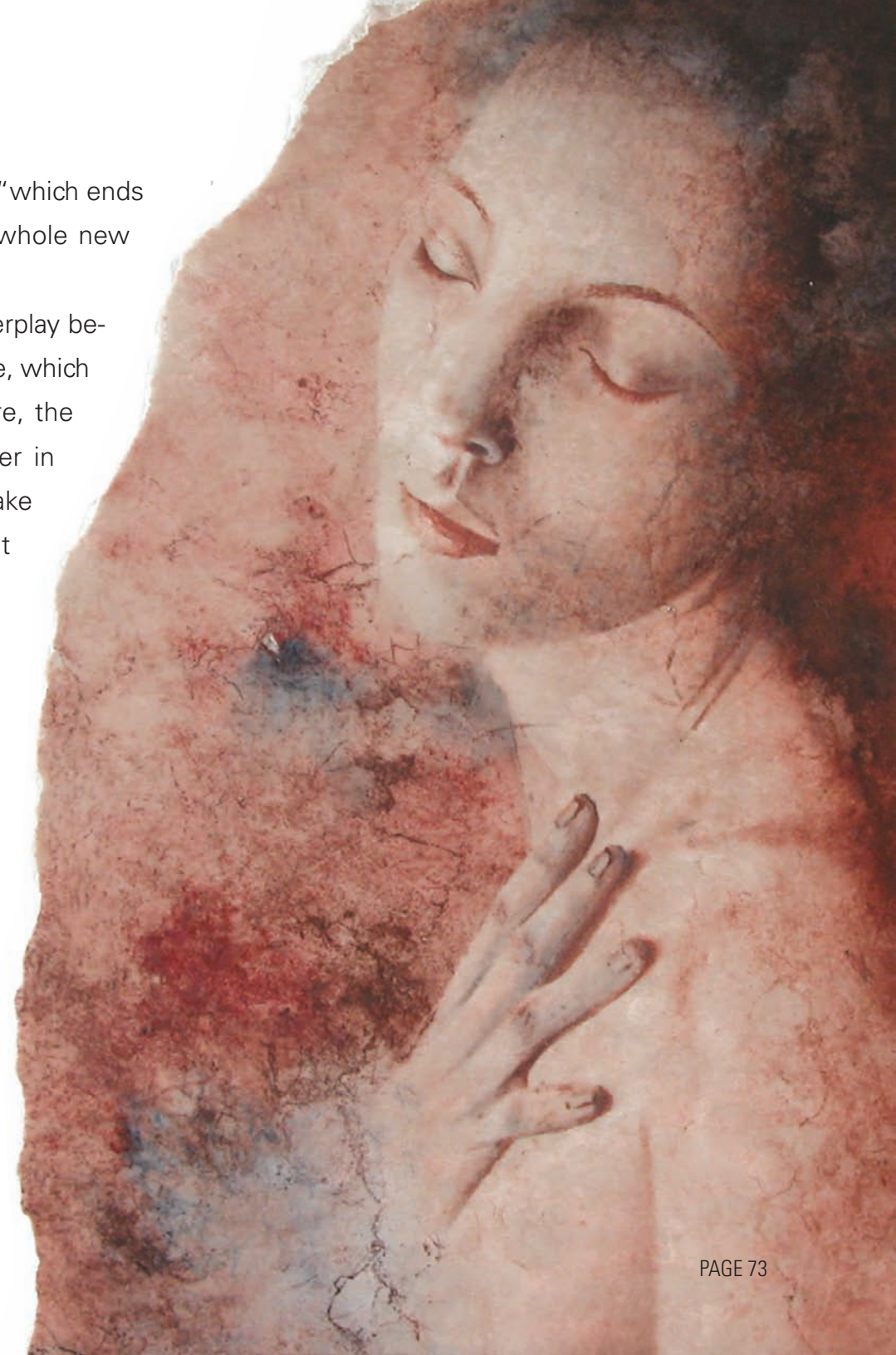
For his female subjects, Gourdon works with models or from photographs to produce works like *Reverie*.

naturally beautiful, but also truly unique.

The second stage is the preparation of the marble, which Gourdon guards closely, as it is a process that took him several years to perfect. Much like a painter who tests his paints on a canvas, he experiments with the stone's surface to anticipate and measure its reactions to the chosen treatments of oil, siccatives (paint and ink driers), essences and pigments. Sometimes he has to change the

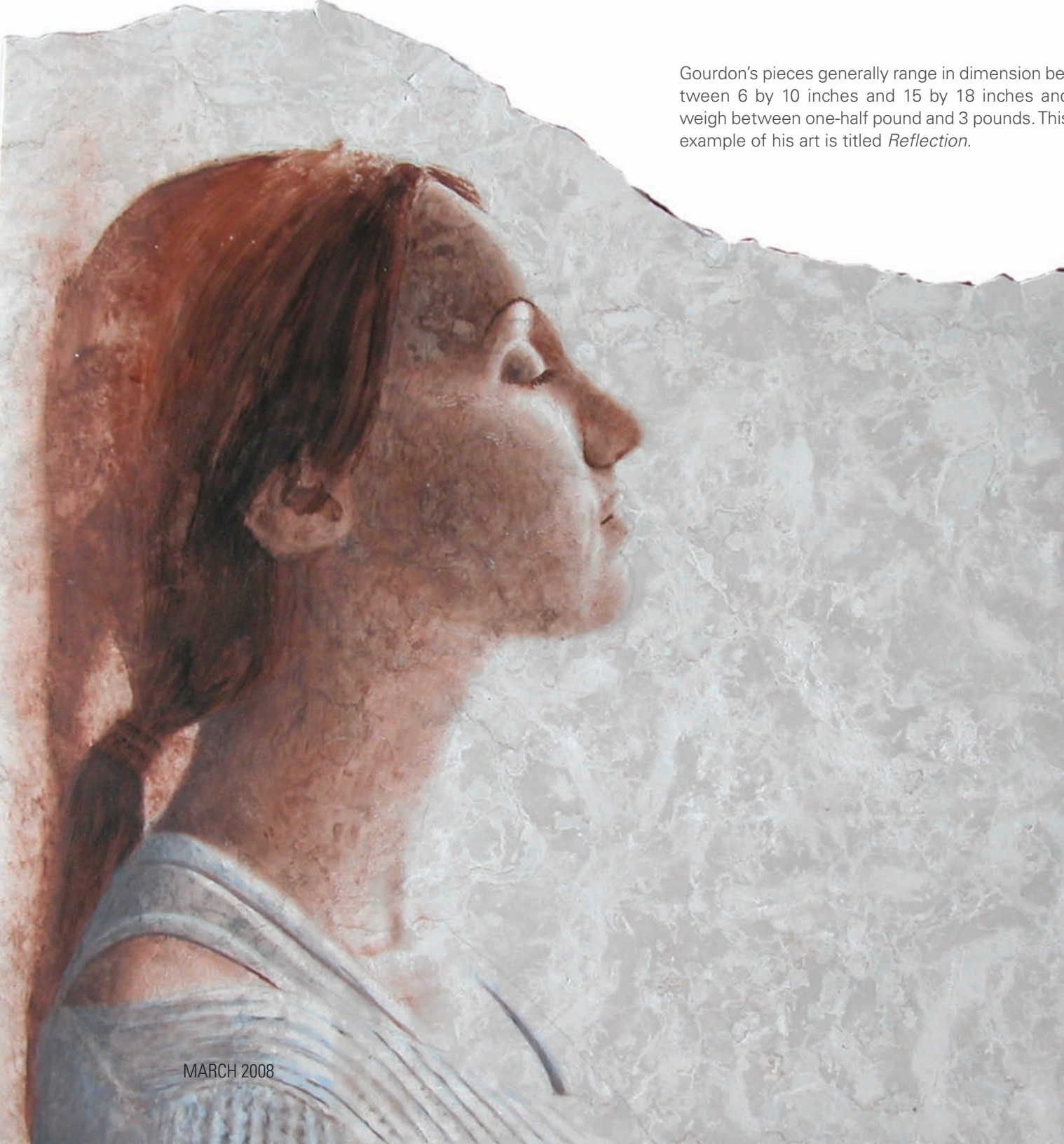
"Sometimes, it can be difficult when the elements change the subject I started with," he said. He now purchases a variety of stones, not just marble, from dealers in different regions of France and is learning to order them to size.

Interest in his work





Gourdon's pieces generally range in dimension between 6 by 10 inches and 15 by 18 inches and weigh between one-half pound and 3 pounds. This example of his art is titled *Reflection*.



using this novel method first came from a gallery in Paris early last year. They liked his ability to catch the moods and emotions of women's softness in meditative stances on a surface as hard but appealing surface as marble. Now, he is responding to buyers in Paris and Cannes. He sells his work every week at the street market on the port, which is where he met American art dealer Jesslyn James.

James was emotionally seized by Gourdon's ability to capture forms and figures on stone with such elegance, likening them to 16th-century Italian frescoes. She saw his potential—particularly in his treatment of women with serene, almost holy postures, akin to da Vinci's *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*—and felt his work was highly original. After commissioning three pieces from him, she is now planning to take his art to galleries in Paris, having fielded them among her clients there and in the United States. James believes there is a market for his portraits on marble and expects to showcase them in Stamford,





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LEFT: Like *Today*, *Two Sisters* was executed on a square-shaped stone. RIGHT: Nudes were among the early topics Gourdon attempted as artwork on marble. *A Man and a Woman* is an example of that phase.

Conn., and New York City. She describes Gourdon's female subjects as being reminiscent of the elegant women of the late-19th-century Belle Époque.

Gourdon's experiments with multimedia are expanding to metal with stone. "I'm fascinated with the human body—both masculine and feminine. My inspiration comes from there, although I'm aware of needing to respond to commercial trends," Gourdon said, somewhat reluctantly.

Nowadays, Gourdon meets his clientele face to face and is able to see how they respond to his work. At first, he was uncomfortable with being so close to his customers. "There are a few painters who exhibit at the market, and it's fascinating to see what people are interested in," he said. Collectors and decorators are attracted to his work, but so are



Gourdon 2007


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*Woman's Head* is a recent work by Gourdon that explores the finesse of facial anatomy and shadows on marble.

people whose purchases are influenced by their feelings. He receives commissions for subjects close to a person's heart. He has noticed young people are attracted to his use of mixed media.

For Gourdon, "art is simple ... to create something beautiful and harmonious, as a way for feelings to be felt," not just resurrecting abstract notions from the past. Gourdon sees and senses, firsthand, the harmony his clientele feels from his art, as a balm for their soul, and his. 

See Philippe Gourdon's work at the Hamptons Antique Galleries in Stamford, Conn., in April 2008

Artist representation: [jesslyn.james@wanadoo.fr](mailto:jesslyn.james@wanadoo.fr)

## DO MORE

-  Search eBay for paintings on marble
-  Visit Hamptons Antique Galleries
-  Buy *Brice Marden: Paintings On Marble* from Amazon