

AMERICAN  
**art**  
COLLECTOR



*Now Showcasing Glass,  
Ceramics & Wood*







PAUL BÉLIVEAU

# Vanitas

Andrea Palladio would be amazed to see his *I quattro libri dell'architettura* painted nearly 5 feet tall and leaning against an even larger book about the Leaning Tower of Pisa—which had been leaning for hundreds of years before he was born. The 16<sup>th</sup>-century master of symmetry and classical form in architecture might wonder if the painter meant to show him giving homage to the famous tower, which is more famous than his own work—with the exception of the ubiquitous, arched “Palladian” windows in countless suburban houses. Or, is his sense of order so great that he would see his book leaning on the tower in an attempt to straighten it? Or...is the tower itself bowing to his genius?

Artist Paul Béliveau suggests the “I” in PISA emphasizes the entire “scenario of irony.” The painting is included in his series of works *Vanitas* at Arden Gallery in Boston, April 1 through 27.

In 17<sup>th</sup>-century *vanitas* paintings “the represented objects are symbolic of the fragility and brevity of life, the passing of



time, death,” Béliveau explains. “Among all these symbolic objects, the human skull, a symbol of death, is one of the most common. We find this *memento mori* (remember that you will die) in the symbols of human activities: knowledge, science, wealth, outrageous sexual pleasures, pristine beauty, etc. The vanities denounce the relativity of knowledge and the vanity of mankind submitted to the passage of time and death.

“...At a time when the book seems endangered, the *Vanitas* series testifies to the fragility of our media, like the book, and perhaps also to painting,” he continues. Béliveau invents his titles, “creating false books on real subjects.” The size of the paintings precludes their being perceived simply as accomplished still lifes. The viewer must enter into the dialogue among the book titles and images and can’t escape the relationships and “multiple references that reflect our current society.”



3



4



5

1  
*Vanitas* 13.07.22,  
acrylic on canvas,  
40 x 48"

2  
Artist Paul  
Béliveau  
in his studio.

3  
*Vanitas* 15.01.28,  
acrylic on canvas,  
60 x 40"

4  
*Vanitas* 14.01.08,  
acrylic on canvas,  
60 x 40"

5  
*Vanitas* 14.04.16,  
acrylic on canvas,  
40 x 72"

In another of the *Vanitas* paintings, a well-loved and well-worn copy of *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix* anchors a stack of books on historical artists. It is being threatened and pushed out of the 6-foot-wide frame by another stack of books on contemporary themes that may have been read once or not at all.

Norman Rockwell, the painter of modest American life, peers out incongruously from a line of books that includes an image of Toulouse-Lautrec's music hall dancers and one of Alphonse Mucha's voluptuous, bare-breasted beauties.

Béliveau stimulates with colorful visual impact and thought provoking, and often amusing, juxtapositions of images and text. Gallery director Zola Solamente comments that the paintings suggest "endless possibilities of historical relationships or personal memories within his viewers." ●