

...the other things happen  
...the other things happen  
...the other things happen

DESCARTE'S: THE SCARTES

A comment to the  
... of an  
... the

SAMUEL

BUCKETT

his physical appearance is black

OUTCASTS FROM THE CAPITAL



... the  
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... in a talk  
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It's what you make it.



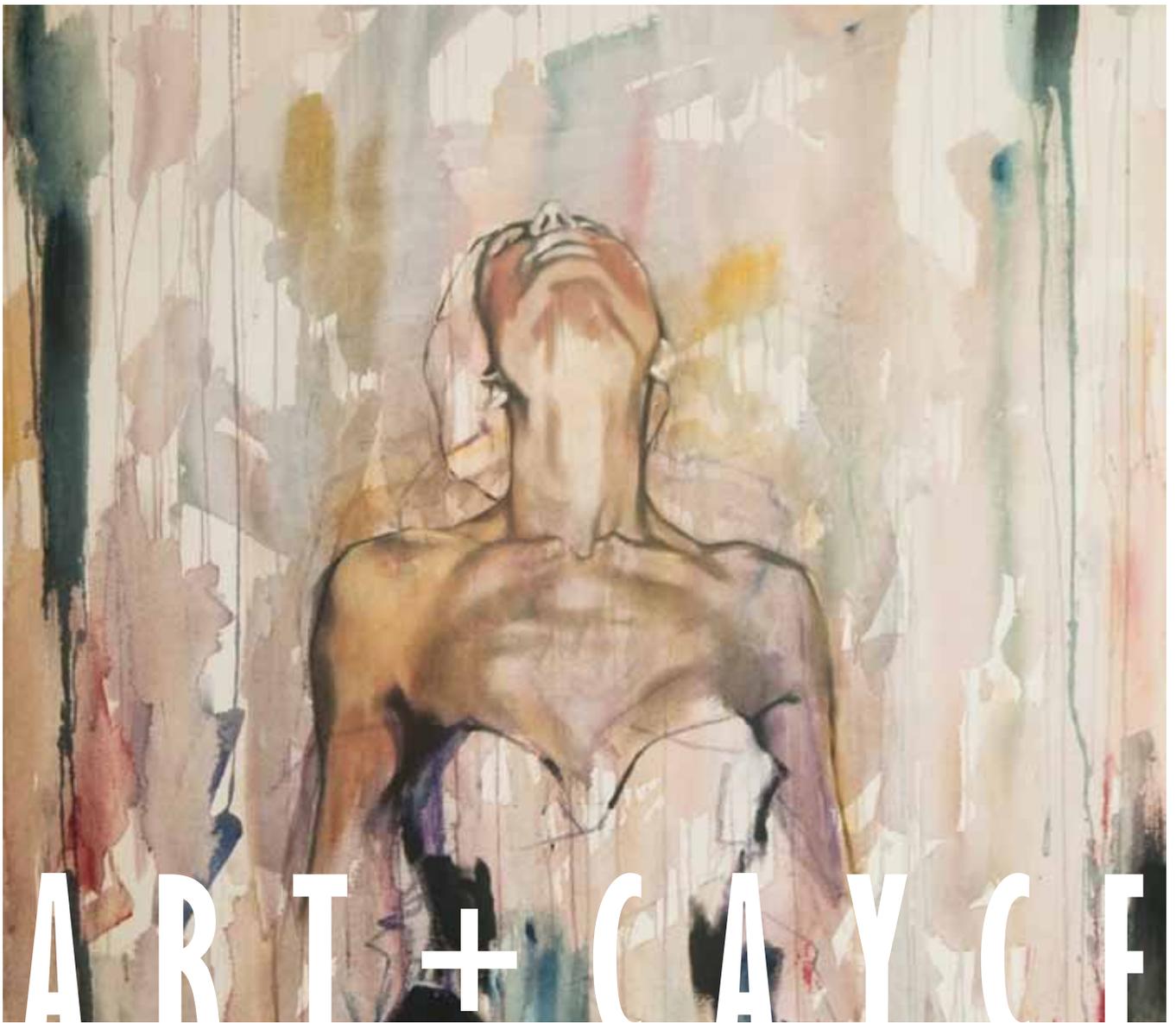
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*The Earth on the Back of the Giant Turtle*, Hollis Brown Thorton, acrylic, pigment transfer on canvas, 36 x 48", 2008

# Substance

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NEXT : BOOK 16



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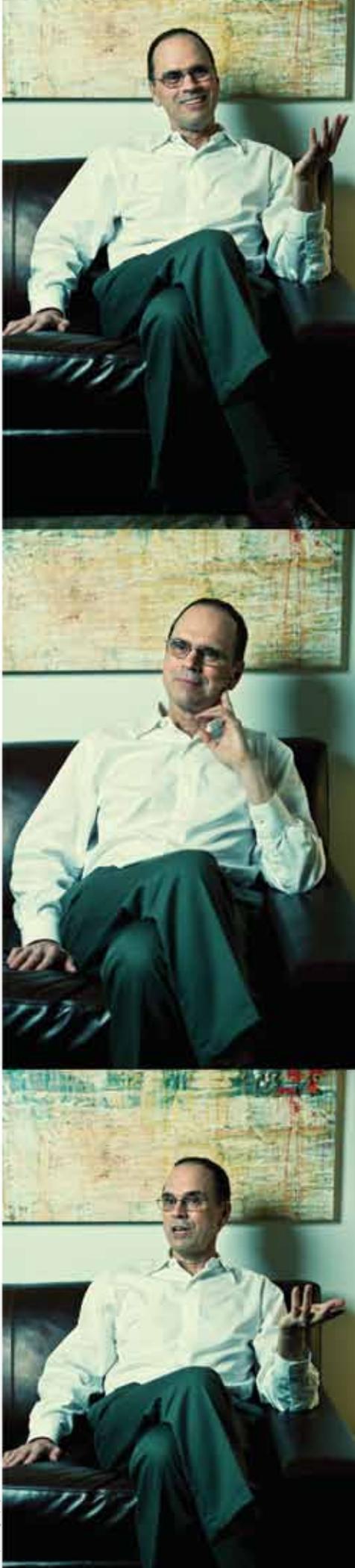
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UNDEFINED : It is what I make it. What a special experience it is to encounter a magazine or an art work that opens up a conversation without telling me what to think. I choose my magazines, my art work, and my artists because they initiate an exchange. Thank you “Undefined” and thanks to the artists in this issue.

We have all heard about the angry young artist who mellows with age. ALEX POWERS is the mellow young artist who angered with age and the angrier he is the stronger his work is. He has developed a natural fluid drawing skill so that his work seems as though it is still being made right before my eyes. Alex and I argue, we respect each other’s work, and it motivates me to make better art.

SIGMUND ABELES, of recent “An Artist’s Eye” fame, can sneak up on people. Sometimes he just does a skillful figure drawing or portrait that morphs into an analytical look at the subject and/or himself. In the drawing “Jane Seated” the model is in a wheelchair and probably has issues. Isn’t it nice when an attractive woman is more than just an attractive woman?

When I see DIANA FARFAN’S dolls it seems like Rod Serling, the Twilight Zone guy, is going to step out and remind me to keep an eye on them because they are not what they seem. They are better and far more complex. I always marvel at how common and extraordinary they are at the same time.

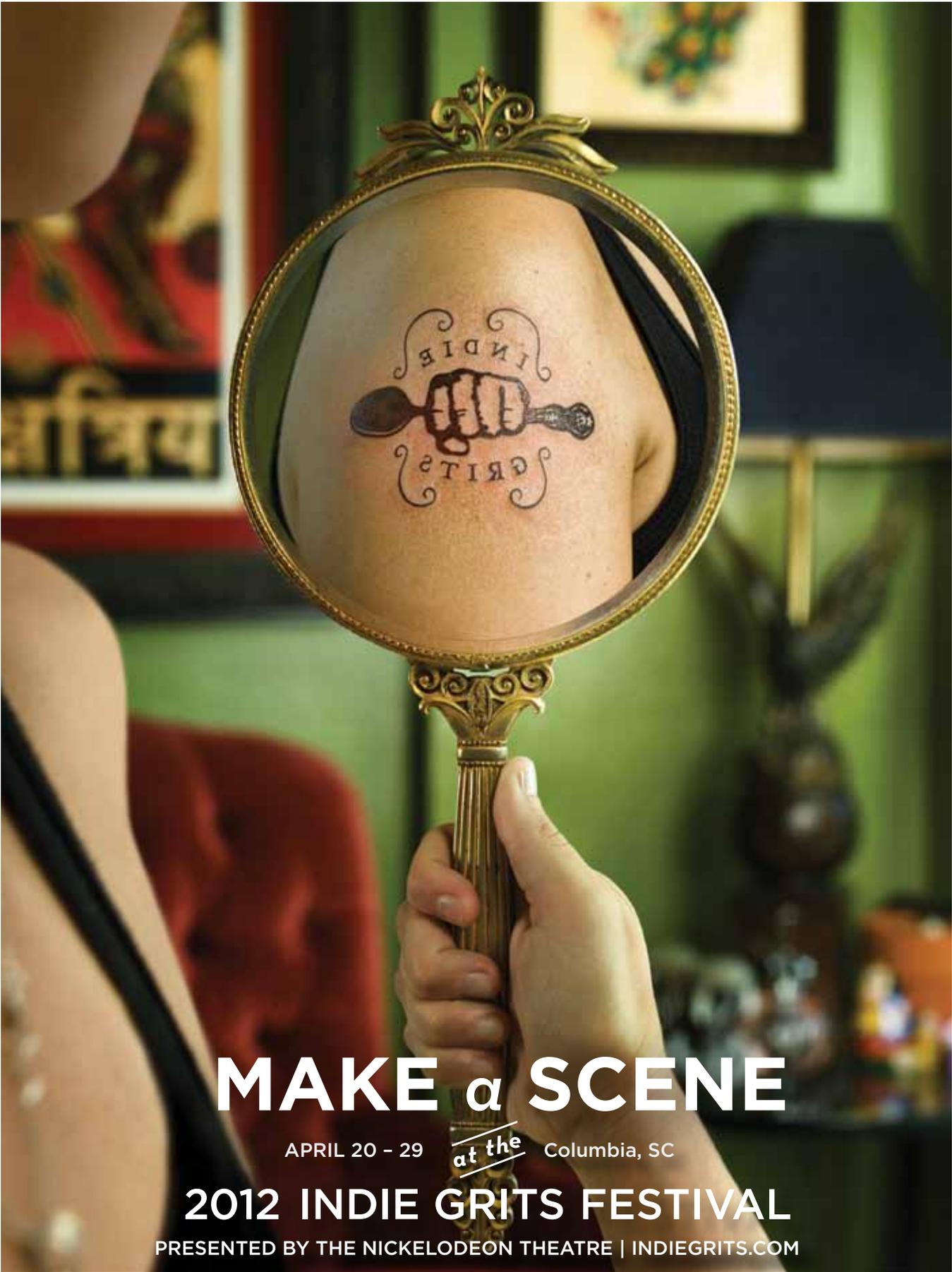
It was an awakening when DAVID YAGHJIAN, scene painter, became the creator of “Everyman”. It’s him. It’s not him. It’s us. Even a woman told me it’s her. It’s an exploration of our aging years. In my 70th year it is almost too much me and I love the company so I visit his studio often.

BROWN THORNTON told me that I would understand some of his new work it but that some of the images came from a different generation and I wouldn’t get them. He was right and that dichotomy lets his work exist for me and at the same time remain just out of reach.

Aristotle said, “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” Maybe it is the mark of a creative artist to be able to open up a conversation without establishing their own position. It certainly makes for art work that changes before our very eyes.

Philip Mullen





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## Art in the Open

### Thomas Phifer's North Carolina Museum of Art

In a recent presentation to the American Institute of Architects, at his newly completed North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, architect Thomas Phifer opened by saying “I love being an architect.” And standing in the museum it is easy to imagine why. A Tom Phifer building is always a study in harmony, deceptively simple in form and detail, restrained and expressive at the same time. The effect is one of serene clarity that can leave you feeling as if the solution must have been obvious to him from the beginning.

In fact, for Phifer, a Columbia native and Clemson graduate, who has practiced architecture in New York City for 30 years, the journey has been anything but obvious, and has always been very hard work. Architecture, of course, is demanding and most architects will tell you they work hard. But what set Phifer apart are relentlessly high standards and an abiding faith in process and craft.

Reflected most recently in NCMA and an addition to Clemson University's College of Architecture, under construction, is a trajectory that first appeared in the late 1980's as Phifer took on a significant role as design partner in the New York office of Richard Meier & Partners. Under his direction, the work shifted to a more elemental language. Simple rectangles and cylinders emerged, buffered by layers of free-standing planes, modulating light and framing views. Always striking, Meier buildings returned more clearly to their

Bauhaus roots and, gradually, white aluminum exteriors gave way to expanses of glazing and diaphanous roofs that delicately filtered daylight, bringing it indoors, responding to nature in intimate real time.

More than a decade later, NCMA carries forward this trajectory with a design that, experientially, far exceeds the sum of its parts. Upon approach, it is as if the building is enjoying its own understatement, waiting for you to get closer. What appears to be little more than a warehouse clad in pleats of brushed aluminum slowly reveals deep slices in the façade, lined with translucent glazing that reflects more than it reveals.

Moving closer, the aluminum skin suddenly flashes a reflective ripple in which you fleetingly see yourself amidst art objects set in the landscape. The main entry canopy, an open-air hall of semi-reflective glass, creates a monumental and increasingly mysterious effect, visually expanding while producing ghostly reflections of visitors moving in and out, a kinetic portrait gallery, superimposed over glimpses indoors.

Inside, the museum is a complete surprise, embracing the very site it had first appeared to turn away from. Spaces flow breezily, awash in softened, ever-changing daylight. Floating wall panels subtly organize exhibits, framing vistas and encouraging wandering. What had earlier seemed to be slices in the façade reveal themselves as a series of animated courtyards filled with fountains and art, nature's fingers

reaching deep inside the box, inviting you to come outside. There is almost a wedding tent quality. Art is everywhere and one gets the sense that a celebration is about to begin.

It is simultaneously relaxing and exciting to move through this building and yet at no point does it overshadow the art. It is, in fact, as if the building is there to gently introduce nature to art, step into the background and allow us to enjoy the result. Robust yet silent, it is minimalism at its best. This is not a building that demands that you notice it, and when Phifer calls it “the People’s Building”, saying he hopes that someday the landscape goes completely wild and engulfs it, you believe him.

Designing buildings that primarily serve their purpose by resisting architectural gesture in deference to a rigorous design process is, in fact, fundamental to Phifer’s work. At its core, it is a pragmatic approach, a matter of solving problems rather than indulging egos, creating art by asking the right questions, making good choices, and paying attention to detail. It is a process Phifer describes as humbling. He says the harder he works, the harder it gets. It’s clear that this is because he’s asking increasingly difficult questions, seeking increasingly elusive answers.

Inevitably, this results in even simpler, more subtle solutions. And in fact, what can be practically confounding, especially to other architects, is how simple it often does appear to be. Although Phifer, himself, does not emphasize the significance of his own sketches, watching him sketch with his design team is illuminating. There is an almost meditative quality to it, as if he has removed himself in order to give the



pen freedom of expression, outlining the margins and then slowly zeroing in on the problem. The result is invariably a few flowing lines that communicate much, a plan, elevation or detail that sets a direction, a light touch that says it all.

Phifer also discusses his building in simple terms. He says he wanted the museum to be one with its site and accessible to everyone, an open pavilion on one floor, set in nature. He says the fact that admission is free made it possible to enter the building from multiple points, hence the introduction of courtyards. He talks about hours spent in the Pantheon in Rome, observing the sun grazing the floor through its famous oculus above, and how that influenced his approach to the roof system. He mentions that he wanted the artwork to be free of enclosed galleries, visible from multiple points of view. And he refers to the technology utilized to achieve all of this in the most straightforward way.

This outlook permeates the design of the museum down to the last detail. Looking closely at the drawings, produced in partnership with Raleigh-based Pierce Brinkley Cease + Lee, the most overwhelming impression is that it all just looks so stunningly simple. There is almost no There there.

The design abounds with examples of this, but one detail is instructive. All buildings have “diffusers,” grilles through which conditioned air flows in and out. At NCMA this is handled at the top and bottom of the building’s primary interior partitions. Air is supplied through a very narrow, continuous slot at the top of each wall and is returned through a similar slot at the bottom. There is only the slot, no metal trim, no grille – just narrow





continuous gaps, separating wall from ceiling and floor.

On its own, this detail is ordinary, but it is one small part of an important domino effect. Subtly, these slots create the impression that these partitions serve no structural purpose. The walls appear detached, like freestanding screens, there just to hang art on. In fact, these screens hide a grid of columns and serve as air plenums, eliminating the need for conventional ductwork. The net effect is that the ceiling appears to literally float, free of columns, free of ducts, like a sheltering cloud detached from the building below.

There are many similar parts and pieces to this building, materials and systems that are well chosen, but unremarkable taken in one at a time. Yet, as with a Bach prelude, it is the way they are put together that makes all the difference, a few important choices to start with, combined repeatedly to tremendous effect.

Wandering through the building, touching its surfaces, staring at the ceiling, one is reminded of two famous phrases once coined by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the renowned modernist, and one of Phifer's heroes: "God is in the details" and "Less is more". A generation of architects has come and gone since then, and the great master's influence has waxed and waned. But Phifer still heeds his lessons well. One can almost see Mies standing in the lobby, his trademark cigar in hand, greeting visitors with a smile and saying "See what I mean?"



Note: This article is the first of a two-part series, to be followed by commentary on Phifer's addition to Clemson University's Lee Hall. The author worked with Thomas Phifer while at Richard Meier & Partners, from 1990-1995

*Tim Floyd*

Columbia artist Tim Floyd and his daughter Felicia teamed up and created a portrait of Matthew using cans wrapped in labels. The 360 can labels have the entire text from the gospel

of Matthew. The piece was created last year in celebration of the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible. The piece is currently on exhibit at City Art Gallery.

Can't see the face?

Hold you smart phone or digital camera about 24 inches from the page and view it that way. 📱





DESCARTES: DESCARTES

AMUEL  
BECKETT

his physical appearance is bleak

OUTCASTS FROM THE CAPITAL



... the world  
... here

... an idiot  
... nothing

... the plot  
... characters

samuel beckett  
gouache, charcoal, and pastel  
30x40"  
1996

# Alex Powers

## Inquiries into Being

**A**lex Powers' artwork may not be conventionally pretty, but there is a formal beauty in the lushness of his surfaces that goes beyond conventional prettiness, and the content of his work, while deeply challenging at times, has enormous critical relevance to the culture he lives in. Powers creates works with sometimes biting critiques of social justice issues like racial and gender inequality, but he also addresses a broad range of other societal issues from religion and politics to economics, history and literature. In every case his work is framed within the context of a heavily worked surface - usually of gouache, charcoal and pastel on paper or illustration board - that marries energetic expressive brushwork and mark making, strongly rendered subjects and fragments of text. Over the course of time, he has come to use his artistic skills to give voice to an array of political and social issues that have at their heart a concern for basic human dignity.

Powers is an artist who is difficult to categorize in an art world that loves neat and tidy classifications. He frequently uses traditional media like watercolor and gouache (he is one of the most popular watercolor workshop instructors in the country), but his work and workshops can hardly be described as traditional. Combining these media with collaged elements as well as charcoal and pastel, he creates large narrative pieces that are informed by current affairs, both social and political.

The artist is well aware of the trends in contemporary art. His style is a gestural realism grounded in drawing that is closely related to the work of Larry Rivers, a postwar American artist associated with pop art. Rivers' work combined the loose

gestural mark making of abstract expressionism with realistically rendered images drawn from history and popular culture. Powers' use of that visual language to address social and cultural issues, particularly issues of race and class, is his greatest strength.

Born in the mountains of Virginia in 1940, Powers came into the art world by a distinctly atypical path. As a young man he worked in his father's Virginia coal mine. He taught high school math for several years after college before he took a job as a computer programmer at the Kennedy Space Center. Powers had always drawn, but during this time he started taking art classes, studying drawing and painting in art schools in Florida, New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut.

His next position, teaching art in a black junior high school in Greensboro, NC during the height of segregation was a formative experience in a number of different ways. It's tempting to identify that time as a significant point in his journey towards making socio-political art. But Powers says that the actual process wasn't a dramatic one, but something that happened gradually as he worked to educate himself and then make paintings about what he'd learned. "As I educated myself when I was mature enough to do so, which unfortunately was after college, my opinions about life developed. And since I was a painter and, like all artists, needed an expression (content) to my paintings, it was a marriage."

A more immediate effect of his experience teaching art was a new level of self-confidence in his ability to manipulate his materials in service to representation. About that experience,



*\$8 Per hour*, gouache, charcoal, and pastel, 30x40", 2003

## I still remember standing in the middle of my studio, 'I will take

Powers says, "I would ask a student or teacher to pose after school for a portrait; propped the portrait on a table in the teachers' lounge the next day; school principal thought I possessed some kind of magic since I could capture a likeness."

In 1969 Powers moved to Myrtle Beach where he threw himself into working full-time on his art. That move is number one on his list of the biggest joys in his life. The other two flow out from the first – educating himself and making paintings of what he has learned. And for the past forty years Powers has done just that, building a successful career as a self-employed full-time artist and teacher. The artist made his early career dominating the Southeastern watercolor scene, taking the top awards in the juried exhibitions that are so much a part of that world and filling workshop after workshop with painters eager to pick up some of his skill in painting the human figure.

The move to more socio-political work gradually developed, becoming his dominant concern by the early 1990s. As a friend and fellow artist says, "Most artists are angry early and mellow later in life. Alex is just the opposite." A recent well-deserved

retrospective of the Powers' work from the past twenty years, *Alex Powers: Inquiries*, provides a critical focus on some of the artist's most powerful work. The exhibition originated at the Franklin G. Burroughs–Simeon B. Chapin Art Museum in Myrtle Beach and then travelled to the 701 Center for Contemporary Art in Columbia.

The title, *Inquiries*, is an apt description for the approach the artist takes. He is omnivorous in the range of subjects that he explores. Powers is not a didactic artist; instead he raises issues, asking questions that prod the viewer towards their own conclusions. It is also an appropriate description of his process. *Samuel Beckett*, 1996, is not only a portrait of the famous 20th century author and playwright, but also a visual record of Powers' study of him. The viewer has the sense of seeing inside the artist's private journals or sketchbook. The actual act of making the work is a way of developing understanding, of investigating Beckett as a man, as an artist and as a philosophical descendent of the French philosopher, Descartes. As in most of his work, text is a critical component



*and the skies remained empty*, gouache, charcoal, and pastel, 30x40", 1998

the prettiness out of my paintings and see if there is any art left.'

of the work – written, erased, covered with a wash of opaque paint and then overlaid with more text and images. The pencil and the brush are always searching for just the right line or contour to reveal the inner meaning of the subject. The piece explores the development of the modern world's concept of being, of existentialism, and the definition of reality.

His work teeters between representation and abstraction in a way that has the image merging and emerging from an ambiguous background. While the backgrounds, the negative spaces, may seem empty, they perform a very conscious vital role in the paintings and drawings, giving the viewer breathing spaces or rest areas in the paintings. The strategy is important compositionally, but also conceptually, providing a moment of silence in works full of ideas.

The contemporary art world has had an almost puritanical focus on political and social "relevance" to the exclusion of formal and aesthetic concerns. Artists have tended to selectively pick social issues that are in some way safe, either because of distance or the mainstream nature of the issue. For

these artists making work with a social or political message would appear to be more of a career choice than one of passionate engagement with community. Coupled with the tendency to make work that is so devoid of aesthetics that it is frankly visually boring, this has ironically had the effect of making contemporary art less relevant to the average viewer, increasing the distance between art and life rather than bringing them closer together.

The most successful social commentators in the history of art also created beautiful work, work whose formal qualities drew viewers to engage in the work long enough to look a second time, to perceive the message underneath. Those formal qualities border on the sublime and horrible in works like Delacroix's *Raft of the Medusa* for example, but those are the factors that embed raw images into unforgettable memories.

Powers is one of very few Southern artists — or more nationally known contemporary artists for that matter — who deals with issues of race and class, grounded in his immediate



*the time has come*, gouache, charcoal, and pastel, 30x40", 1993

culture, with such direct honesty. While his work is not pretty, there is more than enough formal depth, the true meaning of beauty, to carry whatever message he chooses to deliver. He creates work that is just as engaging formally as it is conceptually.

*The Time Has Come*, 1993, is one of his early pieces addressing issues of race. Text dominates the image, carrying most of the visual and conceptual weight. But the human figure is still present, delivered with subtle nuances – the edge of a figure on the left; a more fully outlined one in the center with head downcast, and a loosely rendered face on the right. The main text reads, “the time has come for this nation to fulfill its promise.” The phrase is repeated in several places, reinforcing the call to act, creating the feeling of multiple voices raised at the same time. The text plays the role of the artist’s voice, sometimes whispering subtle hints and questions. Sometimes that voice becomes thunderously enraged, taking center stage and commanding attention. In every case though, the words Powers uses are an integral part of the composition, not just a simple add-on.

Race is only one of the social issues dominating cultural discourse. Religion, particularly in the South, is a framework for approaching almost all social and political dialogs. Powers doesn’t shy away from critiquing religion anymore than he does politics. *And the Skies Remained Empty*, 1998, has biblical ring both to its title and its emphasis on the word. The top two-thirds of the composition is filled with a darkness that

really isn’t empty. The value is created from multiple layers of words and marks built up to create a “sky” that more solid than void. Below that weight are four views of the same head – the haloed image of Jesus from popular biblical illustrations - each turned in a different direction. The eyes of the first three are downcast, in either contemplation or disappointment. The fourth, tinged a darker value than the usual pure whiteness of Western iconography, gazes up at the title floating on top of the darkness.

A thoughtful consideration of social justice in this country includes issues of economic as well as racial inequality. The demonstrations of the Occupy movement have brought issues of class to the forefront so that they are finally being discussed in the popular media. But artists like Powers have been focused on the issue for much longer. *\$8 Per Hour*, dating back to 2003, incorporates text and image in equal measure in a composition laid out like a newspaper. Under a banner proclaiming “The Peoples News,” is a headline in bold type, all caps, “30% OF US WORKFORCE TOILS FOR \$8 PER HOUR OR LESS.” Powers literally puts a face to the issue by using a frontal view of a man of color rendered in detail in charcoal and dripping paint to hold the center of the composition. Four other faces drawn in fast gestural marks distributed across the bottom of the piece, overlaying columns of text. The artist creates tension in his work through several juxtapositions – realism and abstraction, text and image, form and content. Using implied and actual collage techniques, he pulls images



*the anatomy of a seascape (detail)*, gouache, charcoal, pastel, and collage 30x40", 1993

and issues from popular culture and reframes them within his "inquiry". Part of the meaning of the work comes from that transformation.

Not all of the artist's work has such heavy content. He uses a similar approach to explore more mundane aspects of the world around him. Living in Myrtle Beach means that he is surrounded by surf, sand and golf courses. So it's not surprising that these subjects show up in his drawings and paintings as well. But these pieces are not simply renderings of commercially appropriate subjects. *In The Anatomy of a Seascape*, for example, Powers creates a witty analysis of the proverbial seascape scene. The tired, old "beach scene" cliché is transformed into a conceptual analysis of the subject as well as the process of painting.

Powers' integration of expressive painting with vital, relevant content leads to very powerful and moving artwork. Like a modern Goya, Hogarth or Daumier, he combines a confident exploitation of his medium and dynamic compositions in service to a clearly defined message, making commentary on a broad range of relevant social and cultural issues. The viewer can't help but be moved. 🍷

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# Blake Faries

Blake Faries's early teenage years were filled with lots of hamburger meat and plenty of burned fingers. "I was always messing with stuff on the stove," he recounts, "burning my hand and all that good stuff." Now his days are spent with pork chops flavored in a marinade of sweet tea, or shrimp and grits seasoned with Korean spices and a touch of cream and brandy, or his own hand-crafted pastas—all prepared for Saluda's, the fine dining restaurant located in the center of 5 Points, where Faries is Executive Chef.

Faries discusses food like a bard with a faint southern lilt. His speech is casual, but his precise reflections on flavor reveal a distinct appreciation of taste and a clear devotion to his craft. "I'm a big fan of fish; it's one of the most beautiful things in the world," Faries says. About his favorite: "People always think I'm saying 'towel' when I say this, but I'm actually saying 'tile'—golden tile. It's really similar to grouper; it's very light. It's a flaky, beautiful fish, kind of buttery. If you like grouper, you'll like tilefish."

Freshness is imperative for Faries. To ensure that this trait always characterizes his dishes, Faries procures much of his ingredients from local sources. His lettuce comes from a farm right off of Bush River Road and tastes so crisp and flavorful, he swears it is good even without dressing. His fish comes from his buddy, Mark Marhefka, at Abundant Seafood in Charleston. "He catches it and then boom—the next day, I usually have the fish," Faries says. "He's been doing this sustainable seafood thing for a very long time."

Faries first picked up the trade of cooking at a hamburger place in Clinton, Mississippi at the age of fourteen. He bounced around between Rooster's and Domino's, eventually landing at Julep Bar and Restaurant, where a "bad ass" chef named Elizabeth with crippled hands introduced him to light-weight global knives, his current knife of choice. Faries studied culinary arts at Horry Georgetown Technical College. At Divine Fish House in Murrell's Inlet, he was mentored by a Danish cook who saw his potential and a near-silent sushi chef who taught him the exact way to use a knife. Though initially he got flack from the line cooks for his lack of gourmet experience, he left with a real love for seafood.

What does this committed gourmet eat at home? Mostly eggs, oatmeal, and Chef Boyardee. "You probably don't hear that from a lot of chefs," Faries says with a laugh. After cooking for nine to twelve hours a day, and sometimes up to sixteen hours, coming home is "me time."

The work of a chef is no food network special. "A lot of people ask, why are you going to work right now at 8 in the morning, and staying until 11 at night?" Faries relays. But the answer is simple: "Because that's what I love to do. I can't play guitar, I can't paint that well, but I can make something really pretty on a plate."

Nothing fishy about that. 🐟

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# Color the Arts

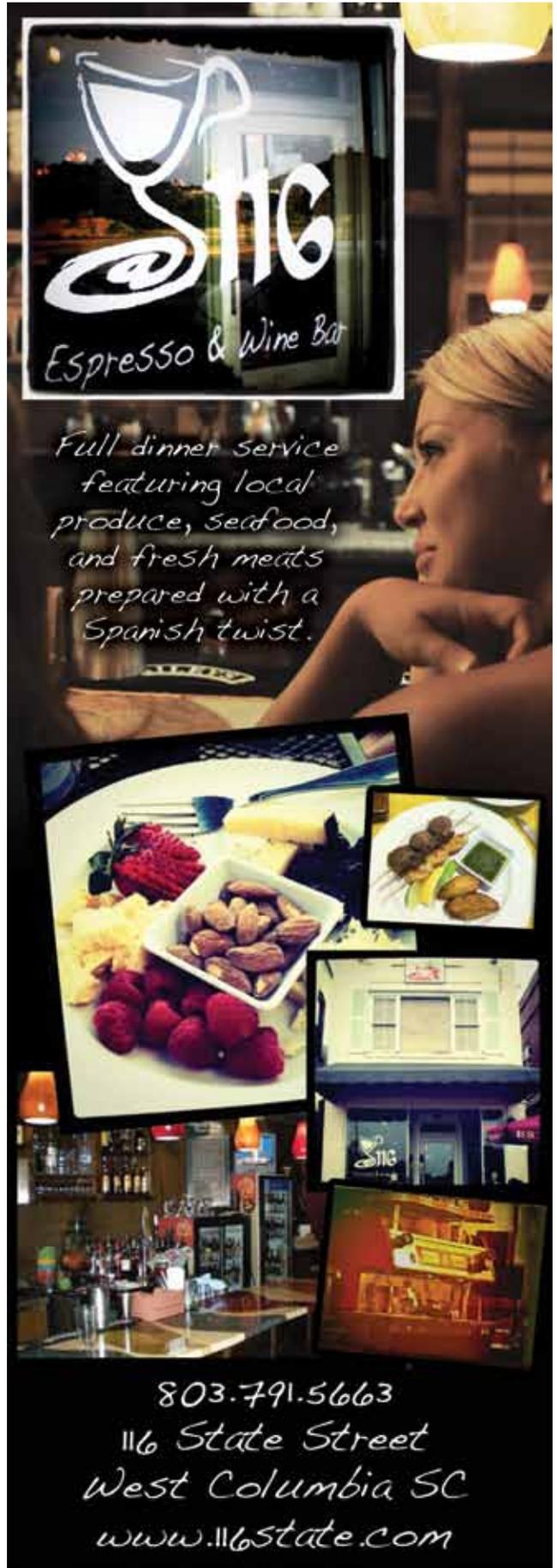
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The learner always begins by finding fault,  
but the scholar sees the positive merit in everything.

–Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel



*Jane Seated*  
charcoal  
30 x 22"  
1981

# Sigmund Abeles

## Drawing Lessons

Following his guest-curated exhibit at the Columbia Museum of Art, *An Artist's Eye*, Sigmund Abeles has resumed his active art life in New York. He spends part of the week in his art-filled residence in an historic building on Manhattan's Upper West Side, one originally built as residential artist studios, and the other in his spacious studio upstate in Columbia County. While in the city he maintains an active social life in art, and in and around my visits with him, he was either going to an opening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art or a reception at the National Arts Club.

He regularly attends drawings sessions at the Century Association, a private club that is the heir to the Sketch Club, an organization founded in 1829 and counted Winslow Homer and Asher Durand as members. He recently attended the opening of the newly refurbished galleries of the National Academy Museum and School. He was named a National Academician in 1990.

If the life of Abeles in the metropolis sounds like he's a bona fide member of New York's traditional art establishment, in many ways, he is a card-carrying member. In point of fact, during one of our conversations, he opened his wallet to show me his two favorite cards. One is his lifetime artist pass to the

Whitney Museum of American Art. The other, the more unusual one, is a card identifying him as a member of the New York Parks Mounted Auxiliary Unit, a group of volunteers that patrolled nearby Central Park and other areas on horseback. But with the artist's love for horses, a frequent subject of his artwork, this affiliation seems not so surprising. Certainly not surprising is that his lifelong body of figurative work has brought him many awards and recognitions, ones that open doors in the city.

Over the course of two visits at his studio in the city, Abeles talked with me about a range of subjects – his early life in Myrtle Beach and his self-taught lessons at Brookgreen Gardens, the art that most inspires him, and his regular drawing routines. Deeply connected to the long academic tradition in art, he finds much to admire in its contemporary practitioners such as Vincent Desiderio or the more post-modern painter Mark Tansey. We talked about the commanding use of color in the paintings of Willem de Kooning, also an artist whose work took a figurative turn. Ever courteous, gentle, and thoughtful, at turns playful and serious, Abeles shared with me several lessons on drawing and on what it means for him to have a life in art.

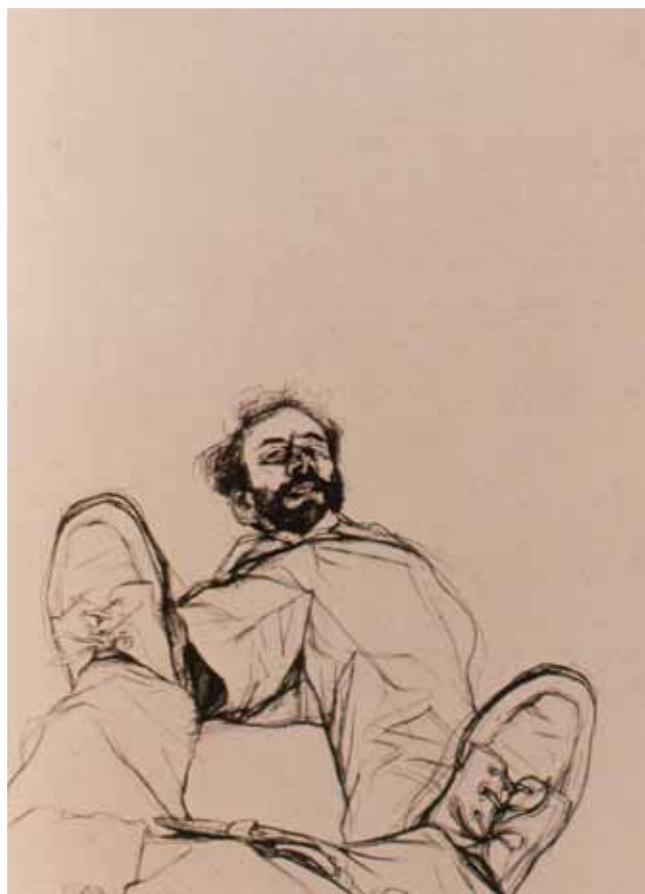
## Habits of drawing

While in the city, Abeles finds some time to work on art, but routinely he spends his serious studio time during his four days at his place upstate. "I think I have to - like most figurative artists - work with models. I'm a little off schedule." Yet, by our second visit a week later, he had found a promising new model and would soon be back in the groove. Asked about works in progress, he answered, "I work on things that are started, and I start things, some more rapidly." These days he works mainly in pastels, "a bridge," as he describes the medium, between drawing and painting. He considers his strongest work now to be in pastels.

As a young teen in Myrtle Beach, Abeles began drawing after he got his driver's license, teaching himself to draw by drawing the sculptures in Brookgreen Gardens. He also spent summers on the beach, renting umbrellas and drawing people in swimsuits. "It was always people or animals," he said, a figurative practice that continues to this day. Moving to New York in the 1950s at a time when abstract work commanded attention, Abeles persevered against the grain. "It was abstract or else," he said. Noting the sea change of our current era, "We live in a pluralistic and diverse time."



Yang, Charcoal Pencil, 22 x15", 1987



*Self-Portrait on Mirror*, Charcoal, 31 x 22", 1996  
Collection: Mrs. Joseph B. Barron, Boston, MA

"I was trained as a painter but with the sensibility of a sculptor," Abeles told me. Yet drawing continues to serve as the underpinning of all his work, whether it's painting, sculpture, or, more typically these days, pastels. "If I don't draw, I sit down where you are and every night I draw who's on *Charlie Rose*." He came over to sit next to me on the couch and showed me his small artist sketchbook, flipping through the pages. "There's Timothy Geitner...Paul Volcker...the Reverend Jeremiah Wright...I don't draw Charlie because he's not often that much on camera." The small drawings well conveyed the essence of these individuals. Indeed, this small book suggests some of the reasons why he makes art. "Drawing is my lifeline to all these things," Abeles said.

To the point, the body of drawings Abeles told me he considers his best works are the forty-four drawings he made while bedside of his baby son, born severely premature in 1983. He showed me several while we talked, heart-wrenching images of a tiny baby wrapped in bandages and connected to tubes. Known as "The Max Drawings," these sensitive and honest drawings depict the course of his child's fragile health from incubator to health. Abeles drew through his fears. When presented with the circumstance of his son's condition, he



*Alfred Brendel in Rehearsal in Jerusalem*, Charcoal Pencil, 11 x 15", 1989. Collection: Alfred Brendel.

reflected on the imperative to draw. "This is the opportunity," he said. The works won great acclaim and traveled to thirteen museums between 1985 and 1992. He evokes the word "vibrancy" to describe the life quality he seeks in all his drawing. "Being a lifelong figurative artist and an only child with only one parent, I try to bring things to life. I drew both my parents on their deathbed and my child."

After a long career teaching at the Swain School of Design, Wellesley College, Boston University, and finally, at the University of New Hampshire, Abeles left full-time teaching in 1987. This year he is scheduled to teach a weekend workshop in December at New York Academy of Art, one tied in with his experience in printmaking. As he has guided many students, teachers and visiting artists made important early interventions for him, especially in his formative days in South Carolina. One such artist was Gerard Tempest (1918 – 2009), whom Abeles described as "a Platonist who looked for beauty." When Tempest visited Brookgreen, Abeles showed him an article in *Life* magazine about upcoming artists. Singling out one of the featured artists, Tempest instructed Abeles to cut out the picture and paste it on his wall. "He told me, 'You get as good as he is.'"

## Drawing Lessons

As an accomplished draftsman and experienced mentor to other artists, Abeles has much wisdom to impart. For example, for those beginning a drawing, he advises, "If you ever wonder where to start, start with the nearest thing to you." While those of us who are learning to draw still struggle with the basics of perspective and proportion, I was curious what an accomplished draftsman like Abeles thought about the most. "I think a lot about placement," he said. "You are led to works and you stay with works that are compositionally interesting." Drawing proceeds as "a building and a map," he said, advising to also "start from the bottom up." He explained that he always sought out form, "trying to have all the parts fit."

Looking at individual drawings over this career, often so singular and varying that he describes them as "one-of-a-kinds," the viewer will notice that certain lines or spots are more worked while other areas suggest a lighter touch. He said, "My drawings have hot spots, places of focus and areas that are ignored." Unlike modern photorealist works, "where every inch of those places has attention, an even focus," Abeles said his drawings are strong on the face, hands, and feet. When



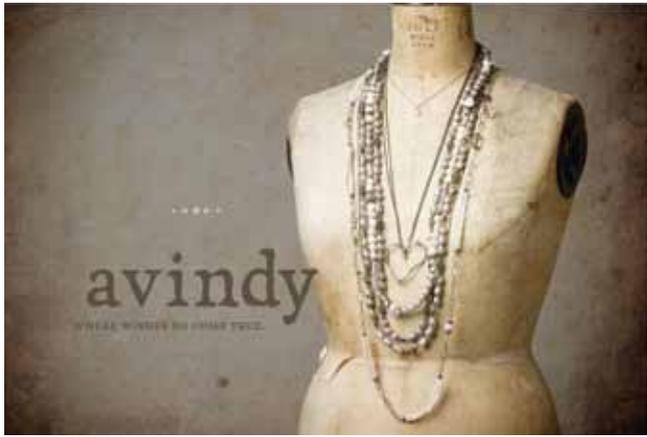
*Isreali Dancer*, oil on panel, 30 x 30, 1996. Collection: National Academy Museum

working with models, he advises to be aware of the poses: “Poses have an active side and a passive side. The constellation of the poses - unless it’s a Giacometti – have a more energetic agitated side and a quieter side.”

Abeles gave up painting for twenty years, from the early 1960s to the early 1980s. Thinking he was not a natural colorist, he turned his attention to printmaking, a medium that drew on his talents in line drawing and composition. Creating prints, though, had definite “democratic” advantages in the art market, as he noted, making his works more readily available. “An ordinary person could own one of my works. A student who worked for a weekend could own a work,” he said. For aspiring painters, he advises, “Try to keep drawing in

your painting. Use more round brushes. Give homage daily to Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas. Lucien Simon did wonderful figurative work with the drawing in the painting.”

A drawing by Abeles often invokes a duality between French and German artistic traditions, a prettiness tempered by psychological expression. While he enjoys what he calls the “delicious” qualities of Toulouse-Lautrec and Degas, he acknowledges that the psychological qualities of northern European art are more prevalent in his own work. “The most powerful influence on my life in the last two decades is Lucian Freud.” He greatly admires Käthe Kollwitz, too. “The darker, mystical side is stronger than the French side. That is for sure,” he said. 🍷



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*The Mayor of The Toy Republic*

# Diana Farfán

## Toyland or Nightmare: The Toy Republic

**D**iana Farfán was driven to her current body of work by a stint teaching art to underprivileged children in her hometown of Bogotá, Colombia. She now lives in Greenville, SC and works both from the garage of her house and from White Whale Gallery and Studios, where she hand-builds and displays her pieces. She credits strong coffee with getting her through her daily routine, often working in her studio until late into the night. The need to externalize stories and news that affect her soul and “burn inside” if she doesn’t, keeps her dynamic as an artist and person, and continually redirects and refocuses her passion for intrinsic humanity.

Farfán received her first ceramic training at the age of eleven, with Colombian ceramist Juanita Richter. She recalls classes in Richter’s brick studio, saying “I, naively, thought that I could build my own house if I’d learn how to make my own bricks.” Thought she admits she has not yet made a single brick, her exploration of clay has led to much more. Her education in art continued with a BFA at The National University of Colombia and more recently, an MFA in ceramics at the University of South Carolina.

Exposed as a child to her sister’s psychology studies, she became acquainted with Freudian terminology and theory. This opened her mind to human behavior and has been a

driving influence in her dreamlike creations. She says that in working with clay, she has “discovered the freedom and happiness that is play – a way of being that we have forgotten.” In the pursuit of this play, Farfán found that through the form of toys, she could communicate and represent a great deal about what she terms “the ambivalent human condition.”

Each doll, marionette, toy, and puppet that she creates has distinct and exaggerated humanoid qualities of emotion and physicality. Farfán explains “I see our bodies like containers that hold internal processes and emotional charges and our physicality responds reliably to it.” Each piece has its own presence and its own emotion to communicate, standing alone and together in their united imperfection.

All of the people that Farfán creates have surrealistic and often unsettling features which force a warring allure for the familiar human figure and a discomfort in the face of its distortion; among them dimpled potbellies, tangled limbs, lack of limbs, scowls, unfocused eyes, pointing fingers, and childlike pudge. Careful application and technique in the use of her surface glazes, in addition to color adapted to befit the toy itself and the new context in which it is being employed, finish the pieces in a whimsical way characteristic of a specific subconscious state.



*The Song of a Broken Music Box*

The figures, which range in scale from small to life-sized, work together in narrative groups to introduce stories of vulnerability and fragility, of carnival horror and discomfort, and of the workings of society itself. Psychologically and emotionally rich, walking through one of Farfán's exhibits is like walking through a broken nursery of hazy dreams or circuslike comedies of terror. The carefully laid storyline of each exhibit and figure brings the control of hierarchy and social structure to the forefront of attention. Nostalgia and a prickling discomfort war in this place between dreams, a by-product of the juxtaposition of the toys themselves as vehicles, and the weighty message that they are created to convey.

Farfán's Latin upbringing brings an important frame through which to shift one's view of society – a culture of

closely bound mysticism, fantasy, and reality. Looking through the lens of surrealism, and particularly, through such disposable and oft forgotten a subject as toys, we are forced to see in a much wider sense the globalism and brotherhood of the human triumphs and afflictions. Her art, without specifically ever seeking to do such a thing, holds people accountable for this globalism and the responsibilities that are incurred by it.

In her exhibition *The Toy Republic*, figures that represent those in power in a social structure, and those who function as the everyman are actually placeholders for the viewer. These pieces serve as points of reference so that anyone from any culture can fill in their own figureheads from their respective political and personal backgrounds.

One such figure, *The First Lady of The Toy Republic*, sits



Pochi, *Little Bry and Patrol*

impossibly high on a chair above the people together with her elitist companions. A menacing look and wrinkling born of years of scowling are unsettling when compared to her child-shaped body. Long, jointed legs hang from her sickly-colored and paunchy, nude body. In placement and physicality, she is detached from her people. She is armless, implying a purely psychologically exerted control over her subjects. Only in the shadows drawn on the walls does she lift a sharp finger to dictate her will. Subjects like *The Clowns of The Toy Republic* are low to the floor beneath her. These figures sit in a battered wagon, limbless and with stunted torsos. The largest of the three figures looks up at his rulers with a raw and anguished, open-mouthed expression. Bright paints selectively used on all of their faces appears garish, forgotten and out of place in this

sad context. The two smaller figures have less human features; they are clowns whose faces border on animalistic, representative of the loss of humanity that undoubtedly occurs under such a regime.

Farfán has a passionate drive to connect with the viewer through her work, to create narratives expose and question power structures even as they hover on the edge of nightmare. This sensitivity and respect to emotion carries through to her greatest hope for those viewing her work, “When my work makes someone feel intrigued or disturbed, I feel glad to have touched a nerve fiber, but when my work makes someone react emotionally with a smile or a teardrop, I feel successful to have hit the target.” 🍷



*The Clowns of The Toy Republic*



*The Stitched Up Toys of The Toy Republic*



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MUSIC



# THE MOBROS LOOSE FIT

**W**hen I asked Kelly Morris how long he and his brother, Patrick, have been in a band, he replied, “Since birth.” I noted no irony in his answer... understandably, since there are stories of the two boys, diaper-clad, atop a toy box, using cooking utensils and vacuum cleaner parts as instruments for their precocious performances.

The Morris brothers officially began their musical career with a public presentation of their talents at Cardinal Newman High School, at a talent show, no less. Kelly was a freshman and Pat was still in middle school. Penning a song the night before that they called “Shake,” The Mobros were on their way.

Their first bassist was their Drama teacher...seriously. The three wound up playing music before and after their classes. Patrick Boos not only shared their Trinidadian heritage, but also their love of the music indigenous to the West Indies. Although this trio seemed like destiny, Boos’ time as a member of the band was short-lived; he and his wife were having their first baby and priorities prevented his commitment to The Mobros. So, in stepped Zack Slaughter; a talented jazz musician, he remains their bassist while also attending school in Purchase, New York.

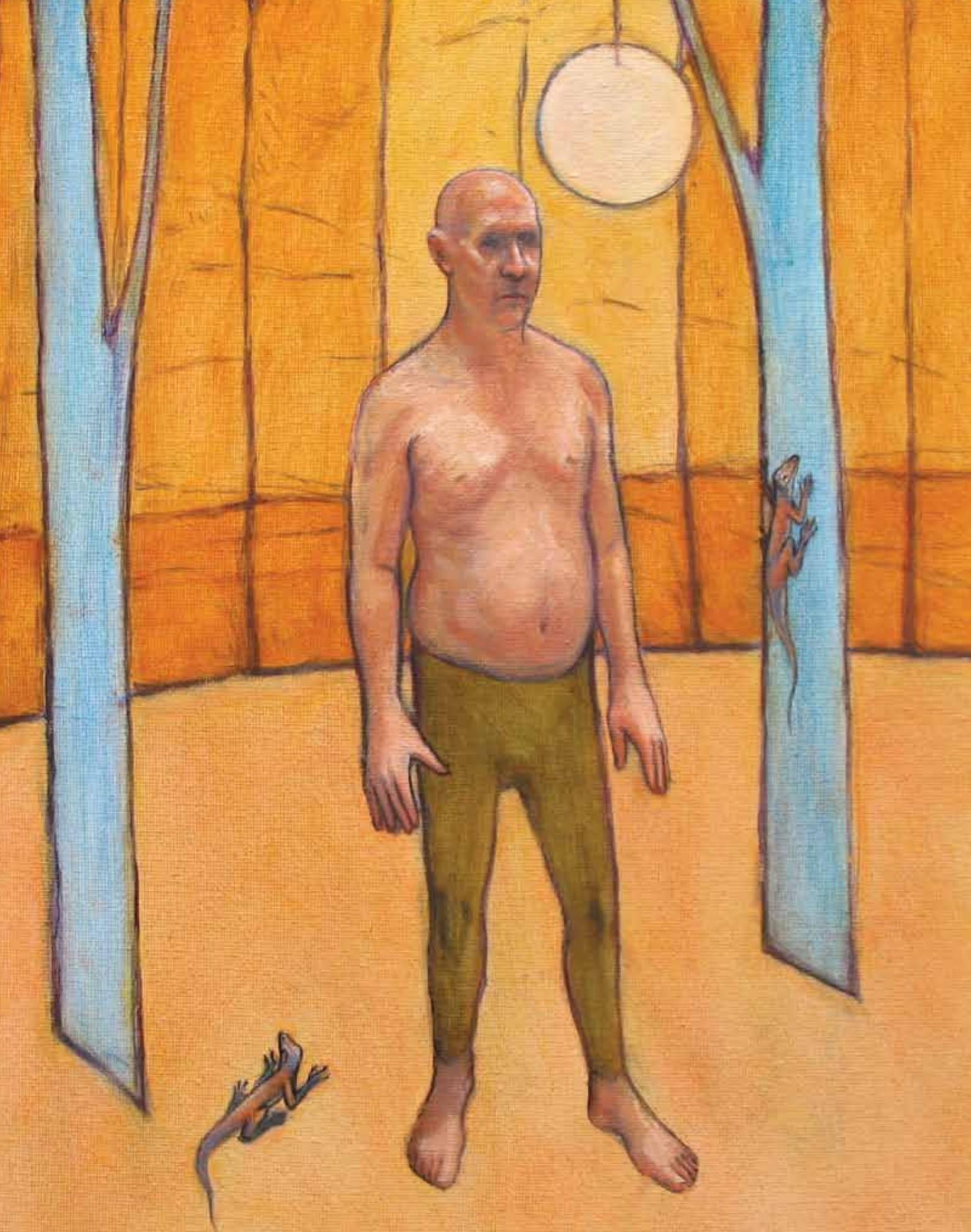
Their Calypso-infused upbringing was a jumping off point for both excavation and influences. They reached back into the past and began to connect these artists with those that they influenced...The Gipsy Kings, Harry Belafonte, and Buena Vista Social Club, to name a few. The two brothers draw from an abundance of cultural ingredients that produced Calypso and layer these with other influences to yield results that, on the surface, seem dissimilar, even mutually exclusive, but ultimately swirl together in an evocative mixture. Listen to their “My Baby Walked Out” for such a concoction; elements of rockabilly, Brazilian Baion and Samba, along with a heady dose of blues-tinged vocals blend together infectiously.

How does their music fit into the local music scene? “There’s a music scene here?” jokes Kelly. He bemoans the usual hallmarks of indifference among Columbia’s population, citing poor attendance and recognition for several local acts that are topnotch head-turners whenever they play out of town. “Columbia, SC is definitely not Austin, TX, and it doesn’t seem to be headed in that direction any time soon,” he adds with a grin. “But, whatever we are doing, it seems to be fine with everyone, so I guess, in a way, we fit.”

Patrick and Kelly want to reinvent what Otis Redding, Sam Cooke, and Wilson Pickett were doing in the 60s. Trying to distill and dispense the “soul groove” that this triumvirate concocted is akin to a calling for them. Reconnecting with the rich past of these giants, not just to stand on their shoulders, but to also channel their spirit in a fresh, new way, is their mission.

“Things are going very well and very quickly for us here, and we are thankful for that,” he says (sincerely). “Though, as a musician in Columbia, you can only do so much with your music. I don’t think there is much we can do here besides film and record more material. It’s great to play the venues around town, but we are focused on recording as much as possible. Honestly, Columbia is an odd place to be a musician.”

The brothers have an uncle in St. Lucia who also happens to be the Arch Bishop there. On a recent visit, they filmed a video for a new song, “Our Lady of Guadalupe,” and got to perform for audiences of children, nuns, and the elderly. “I have never seen people come alive and be so thankful for the music we played them,” Kelly recalls. “The fact that we were simply playing to play and not for profit, for people who love to listen, was a special occurrence for us.” 🍷



Scene XI Lizards, oil, 16x12", 2011

# David Yaghjian

## Everyman shows up in Germany

**S**triking out on his own for a hike into the verdant Palatinate Forest that skirts Kaiserslautern, Germany, artist David Yaghjian either caught up with, or outpaced, Everyman.

Patrons, collectors and art critics have speculated since the first appearance of the scantily-clad pauchy middle age man in Yaghjian's paintings, and as subjects for his cardboard and wooden sculptures, that the works are self-portraits. He is still not saying, but a half-smirk takes over his face at the mention of pundit Pogo's revelation: "We have met the enemy and he is us."

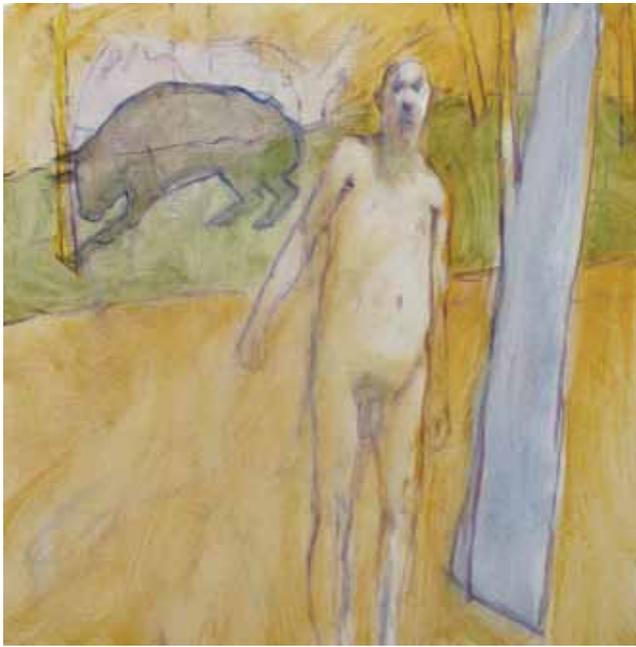
Everyman is no enemy to Yaghjian. Sitting, dancing, performing with a small dog or playing guitar, dangling from a trapeze or blowing leaves, Everyman has been Yaghjian's close companion for six years. In fact, Everyman was the artist's ticket to Germany. It had been Everyman images that got Yaghjian invited to Kaiserslautern in the first place. Wim Roefs of If ART Gallery, who coordinates the informal, ongoing cultural exchange with artists in one of Columbia's sister cities, transmitted a selection from recent Yaghjian works (along with images of Jeff Donovan's works) and, based on those pieces, the German artists chose the two colleague for this fall's swap.

When he left Columbia for this opportunity to paint

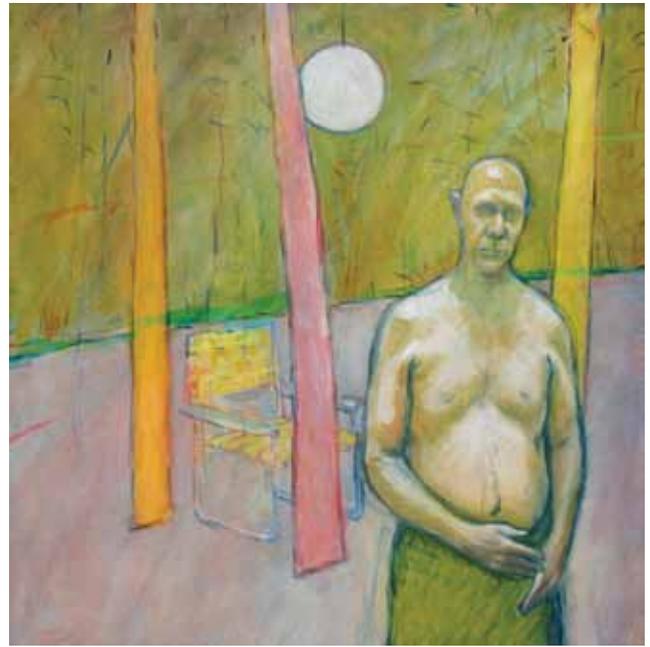
alongside a cadre of seasoned artists in a European city that has prevailed since the ninth century, Yaghjian had an entire overnight flight to think of what he'd create during the exchange. He could ditch Everyman and do something different, new. He didn't know what would surface from his cerebral recesses. "I wait for an intuitive notion," he said.

To give the two American artists a chance to walk off their jet lag, their hosts took them for a hike in the forest, one of their city's greatest prides, a UNESCO biosphere reserve. Then they got down to work. Half-way through the adventure, Yaghjian was well on his way to a productive week. Sculpting in cardboard, Yaghjian had created a canyonscape based on one of the natural wonders they had seen on Sunday's hike. There also were sculptures; the figures bore a striking resemblance to Everyman. One had the lower body of Everyman, but a tree for a head. Had the walk in the forest crept into the artist's subconscious?

Like Yaghjian, an inveterate walker who can name off tree species he strolls past, Everyman also was quite comfortable in forests, or woods. Leafless tress had figured significantly into stages on which this evocative subject was centered in the painting after painting in the series – as props. Everyman found support in trees, responded to them as passageways, transitions. But never in the works do the trees protect



*Scene XIII Bull*, oil, 18x18", 2011



*Scene III Full Moon*, oil, 24x24", 2010

Everyman from the Sun's glare or shadow him with moonlight. So mid-week with his output on pace, comfortable he would have a half-dozen finished pieces to enter into the group's Saturday evening show, Yaghjian took a break from the pleasantly-intense studio routine. He returned to the forest, this time solo. The lush Palatinate was not Everyman's forest, but the artist found the surroundings mirrored symbolism in the paintings back home.

In the painting entitled *Rope*, for instance, the figure Everyman hesitates in a psychological moment of decision. Here the trees represent an entrance, or perhaps even an exit, but the rope is holding the figure back. Some time after the painting was done, Yaghjian learned something interesting: "The Hebrew high priest would have a rope tied to him as he entered the holy of holies in case it was all too much in there," he said. Could be the light behind, or in front of the figure, anticipates something luminous beyond.

In *Scene X, House*, Everyman seems to be using the prop trees as support – or is he holding them up? The house appears to have been disturbed by a flood or perhaps wind. The crescent moon is a feminine element. Cool colors, like the greens in the forest Yaghjian is hiking in - refer to the emotional, and perhaps actual, temperature, at that static time of day.

In the painting the artist entitled *Lizards*, one of the trees bracketing Everyman has an inert lizard paused on its smooth bark; juxtaposed to another tree that casts no shadow to veil the lizard on the forest floor.

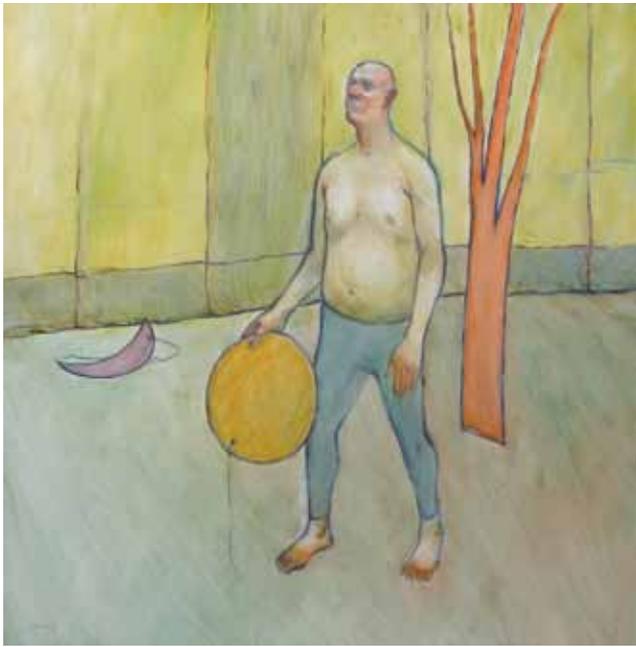
Yaghjian's walk through a section of the forest brought him

to cross paths. "For a moment or two, I was unsure which way to go. There were signs, but in German, and I had no German," said Yaghjian, who had made a hail and hearty effort with German language tapes from the library before departing, but to little avail. "There wasn't enough time. We only learned a month before we left that we were going."

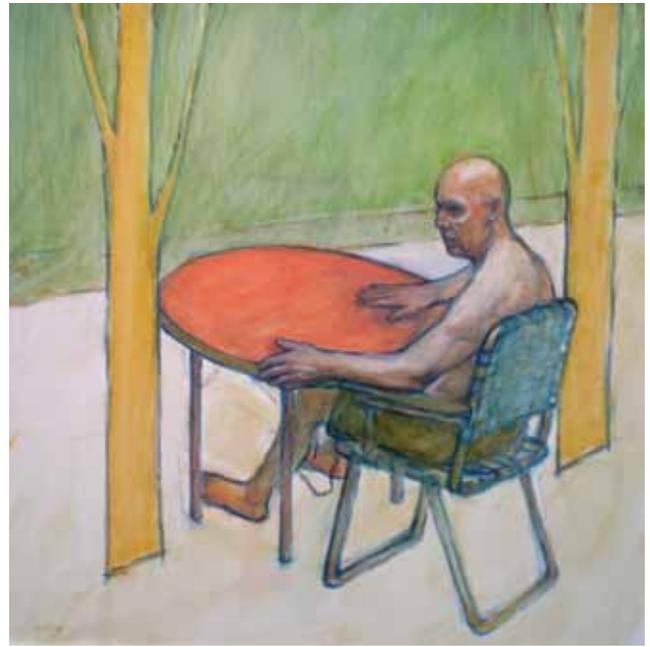
Eventually, his wayfinding instincts kicked in and he made it back out of the forest and down the cobblestone streets to *Kunstlerwerkgemeinschaft (KWG)*, the studio where the other artists were still working on their pieces. It was nearly seven and, as had been the practice all week, one of the host artists had prepared a communal dinner. "There was a kitchen at one end of the studio's open space, and the meals we shared were simple to them but novel – and always delicious - to us," Yaghjian said.

"Their breads were dense, their cheeses and butters richer than ours. Soups were full meals. Sharing those evening meals by candlelight pulled the cultural experience together," Yaghjian said. "The artists talked about their day's productivity. Their English was very good, but when they addressed each other, they lapsed into German. Jeff nor I felt left out, though. It was like listening to music; you can get the gist from expressions, tones and gestures and follow the conversation."

The table they hunkered around was a wide rectangle. Yaghjian thought about his painting *Round Table* at which Everyman is seated in a human construct, an aluminum yard chair – alone. And, here the artist is basking in the glow of candlelight, good conversation and food while his alter ego is



*Scene IX Yellow Disk*, oil, 36x36", 2011



*Scene VI Round Table*, oil, 24x24", 2011

back home, stuck in a painting, without a dining companion.

In *The Round Table* there is a curtain, but is there an audience? If so, the subject exhibits no apprehension of what is beyond it. There is a certain calmness in the color of the curtain, with a little tension added by the red of the table top. The table's shape suggests earth, life, eternity.

After dinner in Kaiserslautern, satiated with camaraderie, the Columbia artists begin their mile-long stroll back to their small hotel. They are backlit by a full moon reminiscent of a key element that shows up in a Yaghjian painting by the same name. In it, the moon is a ubiquitous symbol from man's mythologies. The light available from the moon lightens whatever heaviness may hover, countermands the darkness. The moon also contributes a feminine element to the piece. Yaghjian hopes at the hotel there'll be an email from his wife Ellen. There is no Wi-Fi at the studio, so he is out of touch throughout the day. He checks messages before collapsing into restful sleep.

The Columbia artists got up and moving in the mornings to the chimings of a centuries-old town clock that bonged out the quarter hours, a different sound to signal the top of each hour. "On our walks to and from the studio, we noticed there was an average of three bakeries on nearly every block. We discovered fabulous soft pretzels," Yaghjian said.

The culmination of the exchange was the Saturday evening group show for which all works had to be moved on Friday to *The Magazine*, an exhibit space the art group often used. About the work for the show, Yaghjian said, "Our mediums differed,

as did our ages, ranging from thirty-something to seventy-something. Reiner Mahrlein used old metal boxes with small music boxes hidden within them to play the romantic theme of the symposium. Klaus Hartsmann made a tongue-in-cheek model of a public plaza with several pools containing unexpected objects. Roland Alpert's layered cardboard sculpture had the look of a couple formed by erosion. Jeff made drawings and paintings of his 'malleable people' on canvas panels."

Yaghjian's crayon on cardboard sculptures provided evidence that *Everyman* had stowed away and followed him to Germany.

But he may soon be nudged out of the limelight.

"An experience like this cultural exchange to Germany certainly has loosened me up as an artist," Yaghjian said. "I imagine some of that influence will come through in new works I'll create for the annual Winter Show at Vista Studios, coming January 26 – February 7, 2012, with Mike Williams, Stephen Chesley and Edward Wimberley. I'll probably do more sculpture, more people, both male and female. Not just *Everyman*." 🍷



*Scene X House* oil, 16x12", 2011

Cole Haan  
 Butter  
 Kate Spade  
 Chan Luu  
 KORS  
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 Sacha London  
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*Han Solo*  
acrylic on canvas  
30 x 26"  
2011

# Hollis Brown Thornton

## Balancing challenge and reward

**W**hen asked what art means to you, there are countless available responses one could give; deep, monumental responses, but when presented the question, all Hollis Brown Thornton had to say was, “It makes me happy.” What more of a response could one ask for? Simple, straightforward, and heartfelt; no added fluff, just an honest interpretation. Thornton continued his answer by saying, “It is the perfect balance of challenge and reward.” But when it comes to actually producing the art, the answer is not so clear. “It is a spectrum of emotions,” Thornton said, “Frustration. Stress. Occasional success. But I think no matter how good or bad the work is going, I always feel productive. Even in failure there are many things to learn. So I’d say productive is the main feeling, which is a very good feeling.” If that is the case, Thornton must lead a life of productive happiness; “There really isn’t much to me outside of art. Pretty much every aspect of my life is wrapped up in it,” said the Aiken, SC based artist.

Thornton, who received his BFA from the University of South Carolina in 1999, has had an infatuation with art since childhood. “I more or less had the identity as the art kid. Not really the eccentric art guy, but someone who could draw a

cool picture.” He began in middle school with comic book drawings. “I suppose what took me beyond normal childhood curiosity was my obsession with each piece. I’d typically spend 20-30 hours on a single drawing. There was something about that process, which I suppose is largely the challenge of getting an image as close to another image as possible, that got me into the very basic level of attempting to be technically capable with the medium,” said Thornton. His technical capability turned from comic drawings, to precise representational graphite drawings of figures from pop culture in high school, especially that of R.E.M’s Michael Stipe who he regarded as his teenage idol.

“What got me producing art on an ‘adult’ level was college. Philip Mullen taught an intro painting class. I really didn’t have much experience with painting growing up and this was a typical lower to intermediate level class. The first project I turned in, I received either a C or C+. It was hard because not only was this the first C I’d ever gotten on an art project, but I really thought it was a decent painting. In retrospect it was not, but that propelled my determination to figure out painting. And it became almost obsessive over the semester,” Thornton



## “...inspiration comes from discontentment.”

admitted. After graduating from USC, Thornton worked as Gallery Director for Mongerson Galleries and then as Instillation Assistant at Russell Bowman Art Advisory.

Since graduation, Thornton has developed his techniques and work variety. “The work changes for a number of reasons, either by technical or conceptual influences. My work has changed a lot over the past 10 years since I’ve been out of school,” said Thornton, mostly attributing the change to the capability of making his own decisions with his work.

Over the past 4 years, Thornton’s range and use of mediums has expanded by the regular use of acrylic paint, pigment transfers, permanent markers, and Photoshop. His approach to his work almost always begins in Photoshop and continues with a pigment transfer which helps to directly produce a physical version of the computer work. Thornton then uses the markers to convert the original image and loosen it up which prepares the image for the final version as a painting.

“That idea of tradition [painting] as well as trying to do something with standard equipment, that is different than anything else I’ve seen, that is a main motivator or inspiration,” Thornton responded. A longer explanation of the process can be found on Thornton’s website.

From his process comes his inspiration. “There are both limitations and potentials in the work; I’ll see something I want to improve on. Then inspiration comes from discontentment” said Thornton. The process of learning what he can and cannot accomplish with certain mediums and within his own artistic capabilities present a form of modification and evolution.

If you really want a feel for how the work progresses, check out Thornton’s favorite piece, “Unexplained Mysteries of the Universe,” which has three variations. “This piece, it just has everything I’ve worked for over the years. The erasure works perfectly, the merging of that old photograph with the digital world and the eventual complete transformation to the pixel image. The erased photos are something I developed over a 2 year period. They truly feel like my own work,” said Thornton proudly.

Not only can you see Thornton’s work on his website at [hollisbrownthornton.com](http://hollisbrownthornton.com), but the artist has work all over the world. Currently, Thornton is showing at if ART Gallery in Columbia, SC, Linda Warren Gallery in Chicago, and Aisho Miura Arts in Tokyo. All of his work is available and might just bring a little extra happiness to its new owner. 🍷



*The Monarchs' Migration*, acrylic, pigment transfer on paper, 8 1/4 x 10 1/4", 2008.



VHS, permanent marker on paper, 22 1/2 x 30", 2010



*Jo Jo & The Overlook Hotel Wallpaper*, pigment transfer, oil on canvas, 26 x 30", 2010



*Toucan Sams*, oil on canvas, 26 x 30", 2010

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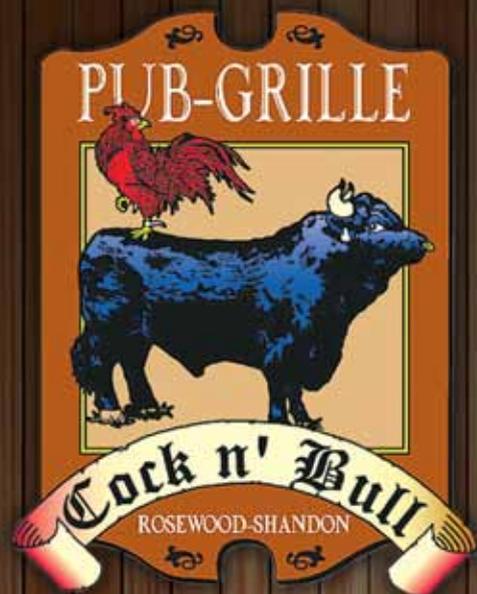


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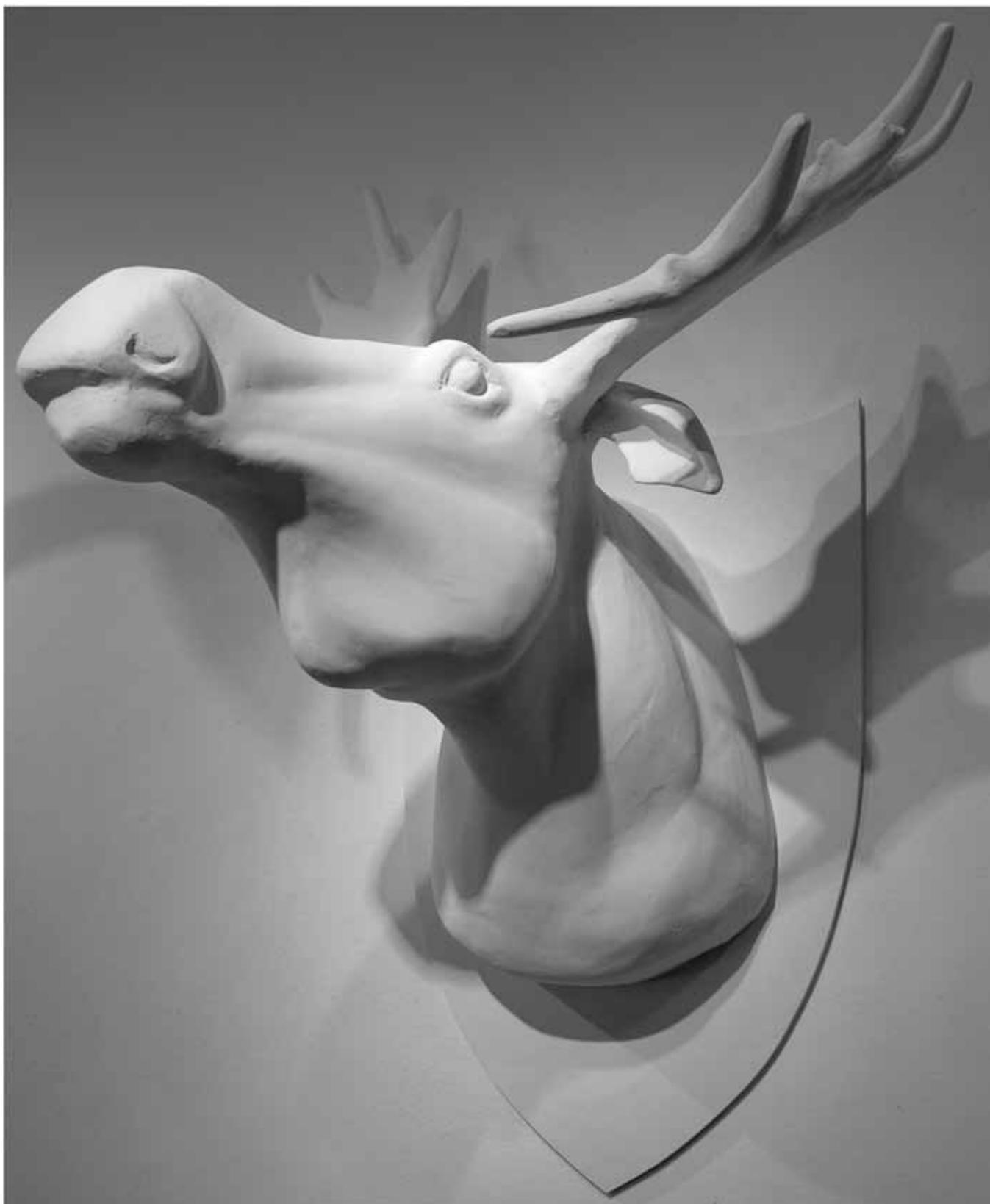
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*Matt Matter*



*Patrick*, foam, wood, paint. 24x36x40", 2005



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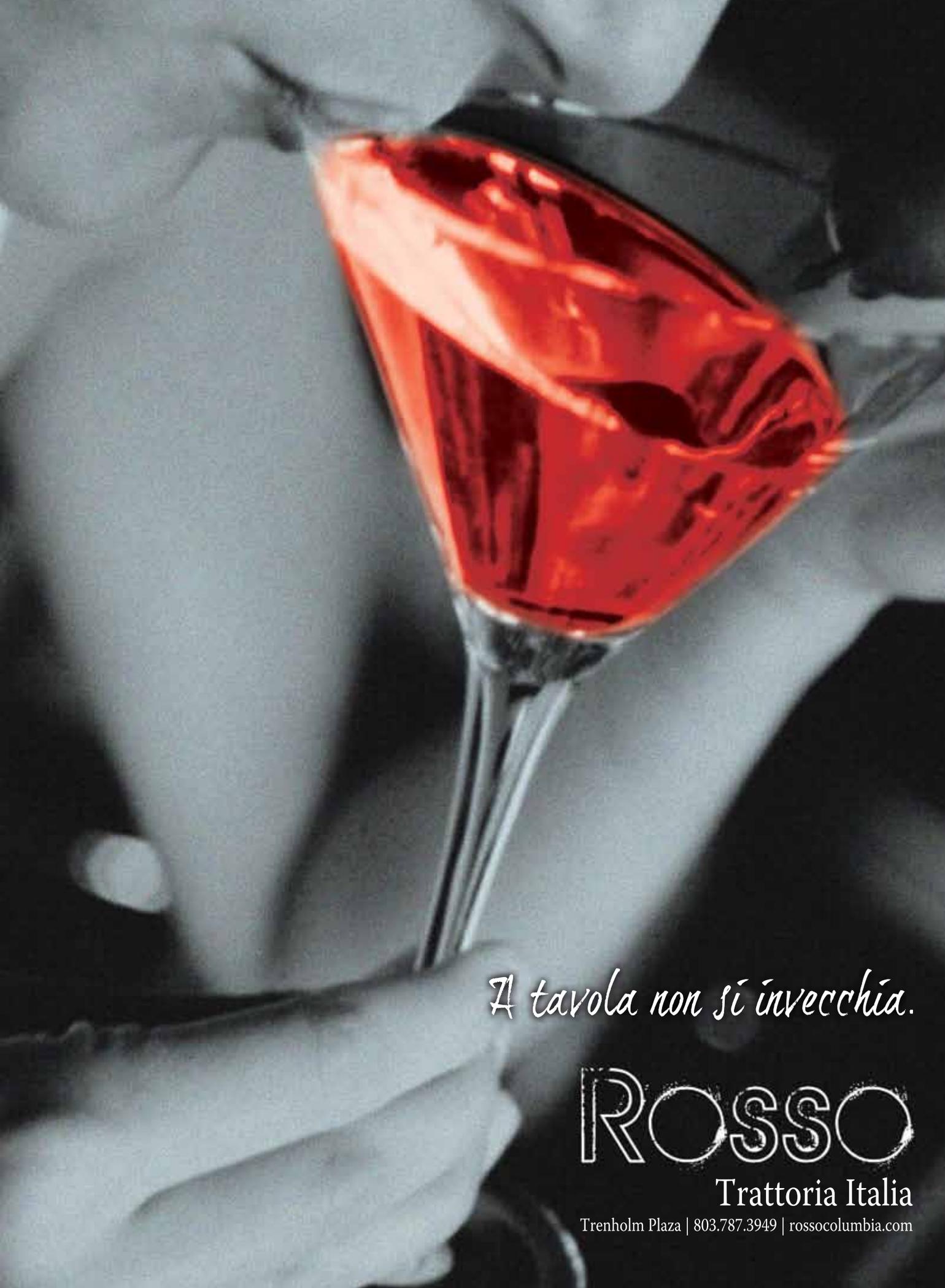
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