Greater Cincinnati ARTISTS as **ACTIVISTS**

Saad Ghosn

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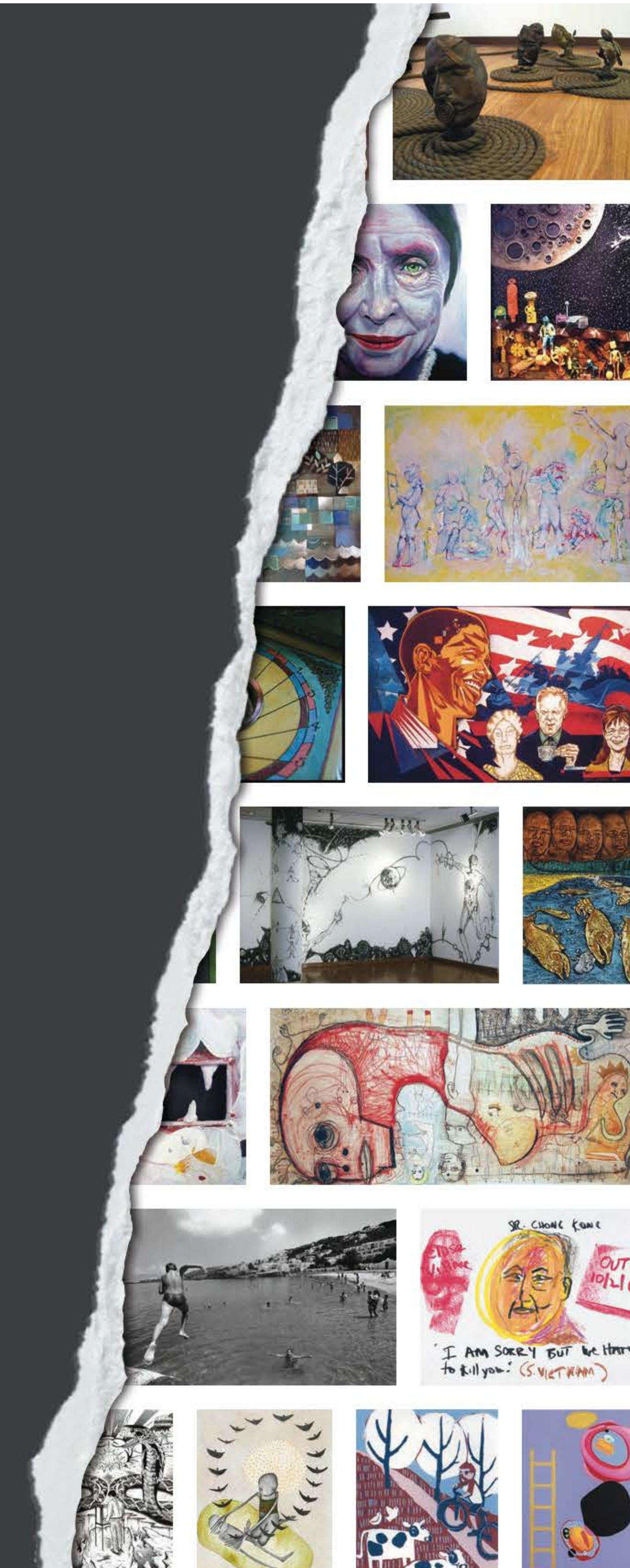

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To all the artists included in this book who kindly shared their personal story and their art

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ARTISTS as **ACTIVISTS**

Saad Ghosn

with artists portraits by Michael Wilson

Ghosn Publishing

"To all the artists who use their voice for a better world"

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Foreword

The Revolutionary Potential of Art

What does art do? What can it do?

Well it depends of course on the purpose of that art. Advertising art leads us to behave as consumers of goods and services. The photography, film or video that sells us lipstick, Viagra, cellphones or hamburgers entails artistic expertise, involves an element of creativity, and may be beautiful in its way, but its fundamental character is moneymaking. It reinforces our role and confirms us as consumers of commodities in a capitalist society. It is art at the service of consumerism, art dedicated to the sale of commodities and services for the realization of profit and the accumulation of capital by the owners of the means of production.

Whether the Madison Avenue advertisers or Silicon Valley computer firms are selling us peanuts or presidents, the process is much the same. We are surrounded day and night by printed and electronic images, music and words intended to make us into more pliant and complaisant consumers, more passive and accepting citizens, as we purchase the eye glasses, toilet paper, bathing suit, or wine appropriate to our income bracket. Or this commercial art may lead us to accept and accede to the image of a political leader–Republican or Democrat–whom we will be asked to support in imposing budget cuts and leading the nation to war. The talented painters, animators, illustrators, singers, dancers, actors, musicians, and photographers who do this work make a living and may find some personal fulfillment in their work; however, it still represents a process and a goal that is virtually the antithesis of genuine art.

Artists who don't work in advertising face a terrible dilemma in our society. They wish to make art, to express their feelings and ideas, and through their art to have an impact on society. They also need to make a living. Making a living through art often means making compromises. Art museums, private galleries, and wealthy collectors establish expectations that pressure artists to produce work that fits with the latest tastes, fashions, trends, and schools. This process leads to the highly successful few artists whose work is bought up by the galleries and collectors, reviewed in the journals, and finally collected by the museums; at the same time it also creates the all too common starving artist who true to her or his calling produces the art that springs from the soul.

Some fine art today also often takes on a completely commercial character. Some artists now produce paintings for multinational galleries that market to multi-millionaires and billionaires who buy up these works of art and store them in bank vaults. These works of art–boxed, sealed, and stored–are meant for no eyes, have no audience, no public. They are pure commodities bought as a hedge against falling prices of stocks, lower bond prices, and economic crisis in general. This is truly plutocratic art, not only because it is plutocrats who buy and then bury it, but because it is an art of Pluto's realm, art of the netherworld, of the underworld, of Hades, of the dead. It is anything but living art. And as Sigmund Freud (and later Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse) taught us, money is, psychoanalytically speaking, shit. This is art as shit.

Genuine art–struggling for autonomy from the market–has a different character. Art challenges to look at life and at ourselves differently. Real art shakes things up. It agitates us. It may exhilarate us or depress us. It may lead us to question our own values and feelings. It may threaten our ideologies, lead us to question our religious beliefs, or challenge our political shibboleths. Real art disquiets. It disturbs. It unsettles us. It brings up uncomfortable ideas and strong emotions. It may make us unhappy, restless, and sometimes even angry. Or it may fill us with joy and wonder at a new experience. But it never makes us into passive consumers and sleepy citizens. It invites or even forces us to look at what has been ignored.

Art that is intended not for advertising, the big galleries or the bank vaults but for people may simply by virtue of its beauty and its wonder have a radical character because it stands in such sharp contrast with the degradation of human beings in capitalist society. The sheer beauty of an object–whether an abstract or figurative painting, a melody, a dance movement, or a poem may lead us to look more critically at the world, a world of financial and corporate power, and at the accumulation of wealth to exploit and oppress which can only be called ugly. A novel that creates another world of human relationships–whatever those relationships may be–leads us to think more critically about the relationships we experience and that we live. All art then may have a radical character simply by virtue of its inherent beauty, a beauty all too often in stark contrast to our society.

The Revolutionary Tradition in Art

There is also a specifically social and even revolutionary art tradition that not only by virtue of its form, but also through its content, calls upon us to look more critically at society. The history of such modern art in all of its forms is a history of scandal and subversion. It leads us to look at–more important to see–those who were overlooked and neglected, those who were oppressed and exploited, and those who were sacrificed in war. Who comes to mind when we think of this tradition?

We think of European painters who, breaking with the tradition of painting the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, turned their eyes to the working people, painters like Jean François Millet and Vincent Van Gogh who led us to look at the peasants toiling in the fields who produce our food. These were not idealized peasants standing in the sunshine of romanticism or impressionism, but real peasants whose sweaty bodies we can almost smell. We think for example of Van Gogh's great painting of 1885, *The Potato Eaters*, the farmer's family at its humble meal.

We think of German painters like George Grosz, Otto Dix, and Käthe Kollwitz whose simultaneously wonderful and terrible drawings and paintings showed us the horrors of war and the economic and social tragedy of its aftermath in Germany in the 1920s. Militarism had produced the recruiting posters portraying radiant youth inspired by nationalism marching gun-in-hand to crush the enemy. These artists showed us the shell-shocked, the maimed, and the dead rotting in the field of battle, the destitute veteran, and the woman driven to prostitution.

We think of American artists like Jacob Lawrence, the working class painter, whose *Migration series* (1940s) transformed the African American peasantry held down by sharecropping and Jim Crow into the heroes of an Exodus, finally free to seek a better world–if still not a free world–in the North.

We think of Latino artists like Judith Baca, the chief artist of the half-mile long *Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1984), who, with 35 other artists and 400 community volunteers, painted a history of California that depicted the contributions of the Arkies, the Oakies, the Latinos, the African Americans, and the Asians–Chinese, Indians, Japanese and Filipinos–and of the native Americans, all of whom had so often been neglected in the official portrayals of the state.

We think of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* painting (1937) depicting the horrors of the Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy bombing of the village of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, a painting that remained so powerful an anti-war statement that when U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke to justify the U.S. war against Iraq on February 5, 2003, the painting was concealed.

We think of Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* sculptural ensemble (1979), which portrayed 39 mythical or famous historical women through images of the vulva, led the millions who have seen it to think differently about women and their place in society. Or we may think perhaps of the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, the artist whose show *The Perfect Moment* at the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center was closed by the police when its homoerotic images challenged society to recognize the gay culture in its midst. This sort of art, I would argue, art that forces us to look at and recognize what has been ignored, denied and suppressed in our society constitutes a genuinely artistic tradition. It is not only living art, it is art for the living and art for the preservation and enrichment of life.

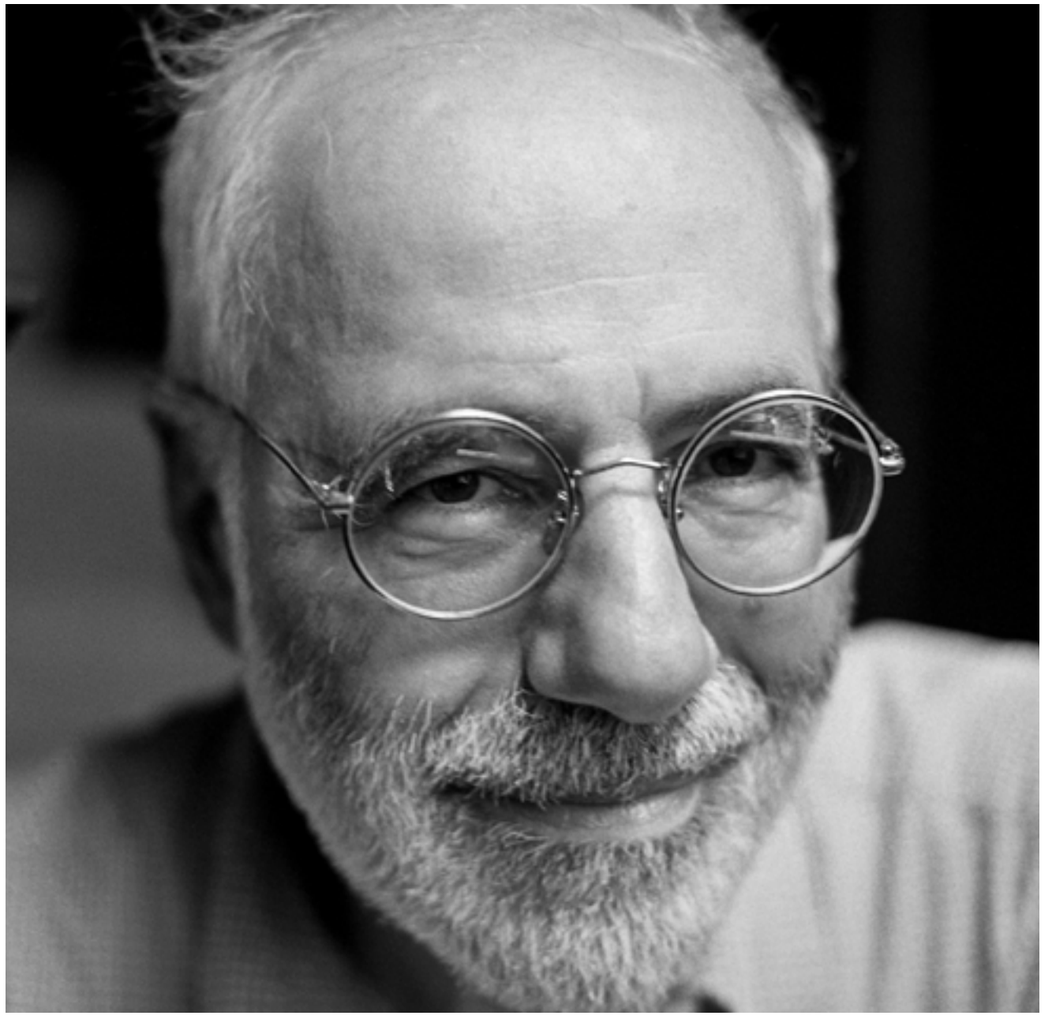
The SOS Art Show and Its Radical Tradition

The *SOS (Save Our Souls) Art* show, in my view, comes out of and is a local and contemporary expression of that social and revolutionary tradition. The artists featured in this book have almost all shown their work in the SOS Art Show, an annual event that began in 2003 under the leadership of Saad Ghosn, who is also the author of this book. SOS Art is not only a cultural event in the City of Cincinnati; it is also a demonstration of the social consciousness of the organizers and artists and of the public that participates in it. It is a kind of individual and collective artistic protest against militarism and war, against racism and sexism, against the discrimination suffered by the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, and against environmental degradation, climate change, and what one calls "animal genocide." It is a collective cry for social justice and peace.

Yet this art is also highly personal. The artists presented here create from their own experience (or out of their empathy) with those who have experienced abuse as children, confronted gang issues in their communities, or have dealt with the exclusion because they were women, LGBTQ, or because of their race or religion. The artists not only implicitly criticize, they also express their ideals and their aspirations for themselves and for us. It is not surprising that among the artists who display their works in the show and who are presented in this book are some who also march for justice. And not surprising that among the objects often displayed in the show have been simple handmade posters opposing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, condemning police brutality, and calling for shelter for the homeless.

The artists who exhibit their works at SOS Art including those whose lives and work are featured in this book ask us to view the world more critically, more compassionately, and more completely. They insist through their paintings, sculptures, photos, collages, and electronic and multi-media creations, and for those literary artists through their poems, writings and songs, that we look at what we usually overlook. They ask that we doubt what we have taken for granted. They invite us to feel–whether those feelings are disgust, anger, sympathy, tranquility or ecstasy–the feeling that we may have suppressed. They assert through their art that we must and can make a more democratic, egalitarian, just, peaceful and cooperative world. They implicitly insist that we take action to change this world for the better. Through this book Saad Ghosn introduces us to them, individually and collectively, inviting us to get to know better these radical re-interpreters of our society. It will be your pleasure to meet them or to get to know them better in these pages.

Dan La Botz
Teacher, Writer, Activist



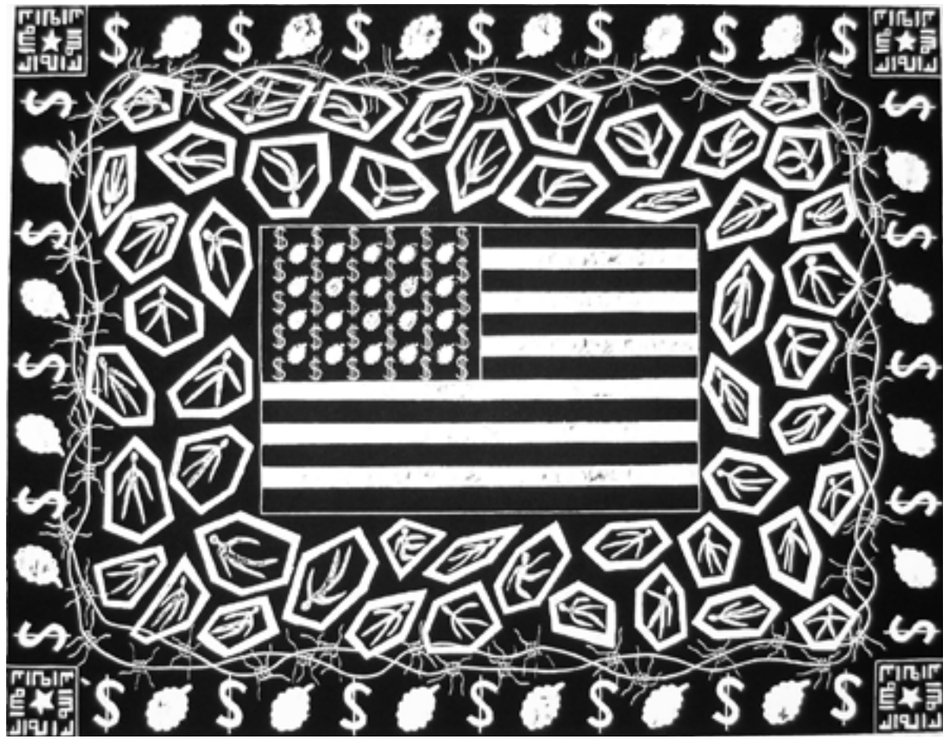
SAAD GHOSN

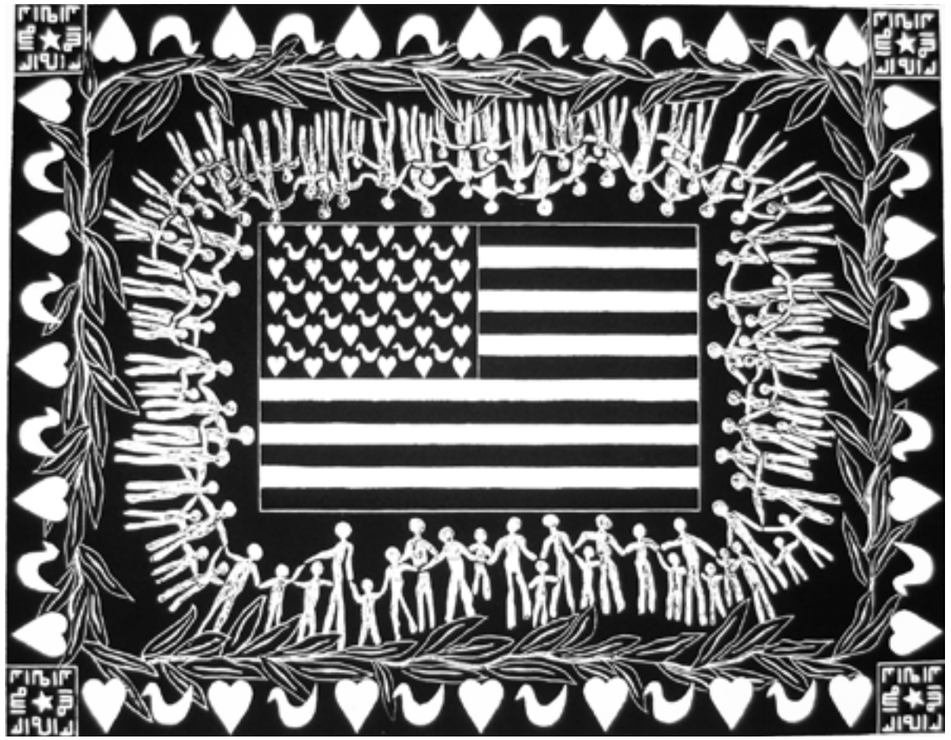
"Artists as Activists," Introduction

And may the artist activist live and grow in each of us

I have been blessed to become familiar with the personal path and reflective artwork of many of our local artists who use their art to speak of themselves; of their values, beliefs, and concerns; of their quest for peace and social justice; of their dreams for a better world. I have been honored to make their voice heard and share it with the many readers of *Streetvibes*, through a regular semimonthly column, "Artists as Activists," that I wrote between September 2009 and August 2011. The initial title of my column included in addition the subtitle, "Art for Life," an accurate qualifier that, however, I had to omit due to space limitation. These artists, in fact, perceived and created art not for the sake of art, but rather for their own sake, for the sake of their lives and for life in general.

Forty-four visual artists, four poets and writers and one singer/songwriter graciously accepted, through informal exchanges, to reveal themselves, uncover their past and present, and lead the reader through the meaning and purpose of their creative work. I am very thankful for the unique and personal perspective each offered us. Even though espousing different paths and approaches and using varying means and media, they all aimed through their art at enhancing our humanity, improving society, advancing our world. Their topics were diverse, yet converged in their focus on freedom, equality, truth, spirituality, understanding, individual rights… They spoke in various voices but also in unison for the protection of the abused child; the empowerment of the weak, the oppressed and the "invisible" in





above
Flag I, Money and Bombs
woodcut print

top right
Flag II, Love and Peace
woodcut print

our society; the equal and independent rights of women, gays and minorities; the abolishing of wars; an empathic solution to street violence and the negation of all violence; the respect of the environment; the well being of animals; the appreciation of diversity; the peaceful growing of communities… Most importantly, they pleaded for justice, peace and compassion for every living creature, also for the kind and loving treatment of our mother earth.

Preparing the articles about them, I had the pleasure, week after week, to listen to their thoughts, accompany them in their questioning and concerns, become moved and inspired by the strength and power of their creative expression. I also had the privilege to share my discoveries with the *Streetvibes'* readers. Encouraged by many readers and friends, I have since decided to put all my articles in a book, to make their voices heard even further, beyond the limitations of time and space.

Similar to the goal of my initial column, I would like my book and the living example of the many artists presented in it to open a little window, trigger a change, challenge the daily passive status quo and plant the seeds of an artist activist in each of us. I hope these anticipated transformations will grow and will let all of us become the committed persons who will use their talents, whatever they are, to make a difference and contribute to the bettering of this world. These artists, all along, reminded us that this was everyone's responsibility, that each voice counted, but also that it needed to be nurtured in order to grow loud and strong, and add beauty and harmony to the symphony of life.

Living in the United States of America we may be led to believe that our government is the sole actor in the shaping of our politics, and indirectly in deciding the fate of our existence. As engaged citizens, however, we should always be reminded that our active role can be crucial in determining the direction our country takes, the values and structure our society espouses, the goals we choose for our lives, the messages we send to the rest of the world.

We are each responsible in the molding of our flag. It can be a flag based on material values, money, military control, greed, class divisions and inequities; or on the contrary one reigned by the spiritual values of understanding, sharing, giving, equality, respect and love. The first sadly will lead us to isolation, violence and death, away from our inner self; the latter, on the other hand, to connectedness, community building, compassion for each other and the environment, justice, peace and harmony. It is our choice to make. It is definitely our call to become activists in the building and shaping of our lives and of life in general.

May the activist artist prevail in each of us! and always, ***for a better world!!!***

FARRON ALLEN

Farron Allen's Body of Work

Bits and pieces of humanity in a cry for freedom

Farron Allen grew up in the mountains of Southern West Virginia (WV), the product of three generations of coal miners. He was raised by loving and religious grandparents who imparted to him the rigorous and somewhat rigid teachings of their Southern Baptist faith. As a child, he helped his father build things around the house; it gave him a good sense for materials and constructions that proved important in his artistic direction. Allen is a sculptor who uses primarily fabricated or found metal objects, casted and welded together, thus given a new life.

"In my work I usually incorporate fragments–found, given, from my own history, of my creation–that I weld together in a final form that bears a special meaning," he says. "The finished product makes a statement and connects to me, my art, the history of the objects included, the people they represent."

Allen is also a popular art teacher at the University of Cincinnati (UC) where he teaches sculpture foundry.

Despite his early inclinations to art, reflected by his constant drawing as a child and throughout school, Allen did not pursue art education until in his late twenties. In college, he earned 2 degrees in social work, specializing in aging. He then worked in nursing homes and community programs, an occupation he enjoyed but that he interrupted, relocating to Florida for personal reasons.

above
Thirteen Connections
bronze, wood, and rope

bottom right
Jesus Tops
bronze, steel and plaster

When he returned a few years later to his native West Virginia, not finding a satisfying job in social work, he worked as a toll collector on the West Virginia turnpike. This allowed him to further his artistic interest: working on the midnight shift, he took advantage of its slow pace to re-immerse himself in art and create a whole body of drawings collected by friends, coworkers and regular truckers who came through his lane.

Eight years later and due to the tedious nature of his otherwise well paying job, Allen decided to quit it and pursue instead an art career. He enrolled at West Virginia University, received a bachelor of fine arts degree in sculpture and graphic design, then at UC for a master in fine arts degree in sculpture. Allen has lived in Cincinnati since then, creating his own art and teaching at the university.

The human figure always held an important place in his work. Abstracted life size at the beginning, it became progressively decomposed into body parts, hands, faces, incorporated in sculptures with found objects, tools, spoons, crosses... Skulls and bones were also often prominent.

This imagery, termed the *Attack on Innocence* by Allen, coincided with the emerging of the AIDS epidemics and Allen's experience of the death of many of his friends and lovers. It was his reaction to the physical disintegration of a large generation of young individuals, also to his anger at the negative societal response to the disease because it affected predominantly homosexual men.

Other concerns that transpired all along through Allen's works pertained to religion, its conflict with sexuality, its misuse for power and control; the moral hypocrisy that frequently rules society; the imposed conformist values that disagree with the individual's basic aspirations. Being raised in a poor area controlled by corporations, brought up in a religion that denied and denigrated his own sexual expression, and brainwashed with a set of rules contradictory to his thoughts and beliefs, generated anger that came out as a statement in his work. Allen's response, initially visceral and cathartic, later became message-laden, compassionate in its story telling.

"I want my art to speak to people, to trigger questioning and thinking, to generate a reaction, even if not always positive," he says. "I want the history behind my work and its implications to be communicated and perceived."

Commemorating those who died from AIDS, Allen did a series of altars with lights and mounds of bones, commentaries on death and life. Addressing the mixing of religion and sexuality, he did an installation that included a cross composed of thousands of small crucifixes and an altar made of waxed underwear having phallic lights inside them.

Reflecting on his own religious upbringing, childhood and sexuality, he did a series of *Hair Boxes*, incorporating his grandmother's jewelry, family bibles, crucifixes, his own hair that his grandmother had saved, casted body parts. He was thus enclosing his personal history with its conflicts and contradictions inside a box.

Hammered into Form, a bronze and steel black sculpture, represents a hand caught between 2 hammers, tools used to forge metal. He meant it as an allegory to how we're formed as human beings, forged by our upbringing, education, external factors, opportunities. The hand appears stuck, yet seems to reach out for change. A spoon, symbol of what is spoon-fed and forced down one's throat, but also of medicine and cure, is placed in front of

it. A twisted piece of metal rod welded to the side alludes to knotted and painful internal organs. The piece also addresses the boundaries and regulations set by government and laws, often to profit those in power, at the expense of the individual.

Reaching Out, a similarly themed sculpture represents a hand covered with nails, displayed on a heavy tall structure with a chain. The hand reaches out but is weighted down and imprisoned.

"Body parts are a frequent metaphor in my work," Allen comments. "They deal with the idea of attack, initially centered on AIDS - the rejection of a generation of people by government policy, morality, fear of contamination – but also attack on the essence and integrity of the individual by religion, politics, power and greed."

Through his art and teaching Allen continues his plea to liberate the human from all that ties it down, especially rules hypocritically condoned by society. The cocooned enclosed body that appeared in his earlier installations gave way later to free winged figures and angels. It is a transformation he would like to trigger and see happen in everyone, including himself.

"I cannot imagine myself not doing art," Allen says. "Art for me is everything. I make it, teach it, surround myself with it, use it to communicate and to hopefully make a change."

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top left
Reaching Out
bronze and steel

top middle
Red and Knives
bronze and
mixed media

top right
Hair Box
mixed media

bottom left
Hammered into Form
bronze and steel

The Opposite of Counterfeit

Andy Au's new money shows true values

ANDY AU

"As a child, if you're sensitive with a crazy imagination, the world can be a scary place and even the smallest things can affect you," says Andy Au. "You need to let them out."

This is why since, and as early as he can remember, Au has been drawing– and mostly monsters, creatures with many arms, legs, eyes, physical representations of what scared him and that he could not put a name on. At age five, after watching the movie *Star Wars* he spent hours trying to draw from memory what he had seen. In first grade, during spelling tests he drew dinosaurs eating the words; as a "reprimand," he had to do a "star wars" display on the class bulletin board. His parents and high school art teacher encouraged his artistic inclinations; they provided him with paper to draw, praised his ability, and exposed him early on to the world of art.

Au, an artist printmaker born in Chicago and raised in rural West Virginia, has lived in Washington, DC, and New Orleans; he recently settled in Cincinnati. Au attended Asbury College, in Wilmore, KY, and graduated with a bachelor degree in fine arts, then the University of Cincinnati, for a master of fine arts degree, majoring in printmaking.

As an undergraduate, his work had no unifying theme; it was mostly intuitive, focusing on skills and techniques. In graduate school, however, it dealt with content, looking at the big picture, connecting dots between the

whys and the whats. A recurrent subject in Au's earlier prints was "utopia," what life should be as opposed to what it is; also the truncated illusion of the ideal world American society wanted to project.

Utopia appeared as unrealized hope, ironically represented by twisted interconnected figures, fighting for space, for fulfillment, aiming at something different, hopefully better. Au wanted it to be a reflection on both world's situation–with its overwhelming growing population and conflicts - and the individual, his personal and spiritual space invaded and obstructed. Another topic he explored was the takeover by civilization of tribal life. Au pointed that thanks to its efficient organization, specialization, successful means of survival, control and domination, "civilization" was imposing itself and its "uncivilized" values, effacing worldwide the more humane communal ways of living.

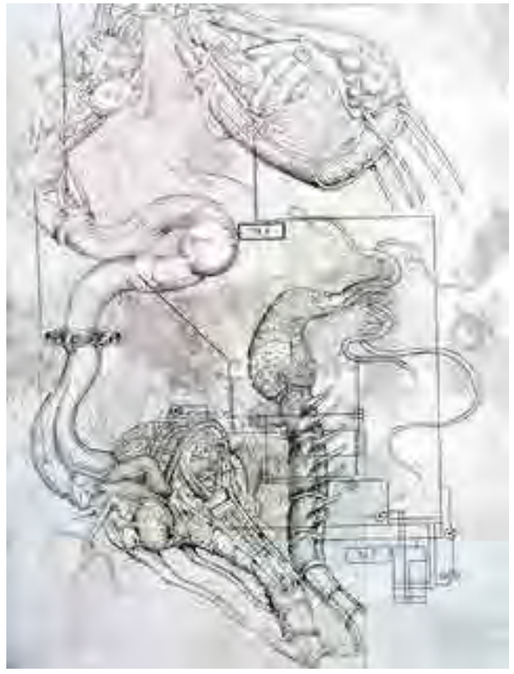
At the beginning Au felt ill-at-ease showing and sharing his critical work. Someone had told him he was only depicting the bad and not contributing any solution.

"My work addresses problems rather than providing fixes," he acknowledges. "I often do not have the answer. I think, however, that by pointing to the wrong I'm also pointing to the right… by showing what is, my art hopefully implies what should be. One cannot provide solutions unless knowing the cause of the problem. As with any education, consciousness needs to be raised first in order to generate action." After graduating and living with his wife in Italy then Washington, DC, Au's work became more political. His experience abroad exposed him to diverse political issues and opinions reflected by varying, more factual and critical news in the European media. Washington immersed him in a daily political bath and multifaceted reality that sharpened his awareness. This is also

top right
Bank Note #1, Project for the New American Century
digital print

bottom left
Meme
etching

bottom right
Five Evils, Consumption
etching and mixed media



unaware of its consequences. The images referenced the clockwork mechanisms of oppression, conquest, power and war. *Mechanical Animal #2* for instance, titled *Civilizer, Pyramidicus Societus*, depicts civilization's pyramidal system of organization with a ruler at the top controlling and subjugating the masses of individuals underneath, using them to perpetuate domination and self benefit.

Au's *History of Thugs* was an extension of his research on historical perspectives, influenced by Howard Zinn's *'A People's History of the United States.'* Following the premise that history needed several perspectives–not only of those in power–to yield a complete view, Au researched and pictorially depicted 70 American History figures heralded as brave vanguard elements of a Democratic Nation. Examined from the side of the oppressed, marginalized and minorities, the actions of these "heroes," however, proved base and corrupt. Au drew them as grotesque monsters.

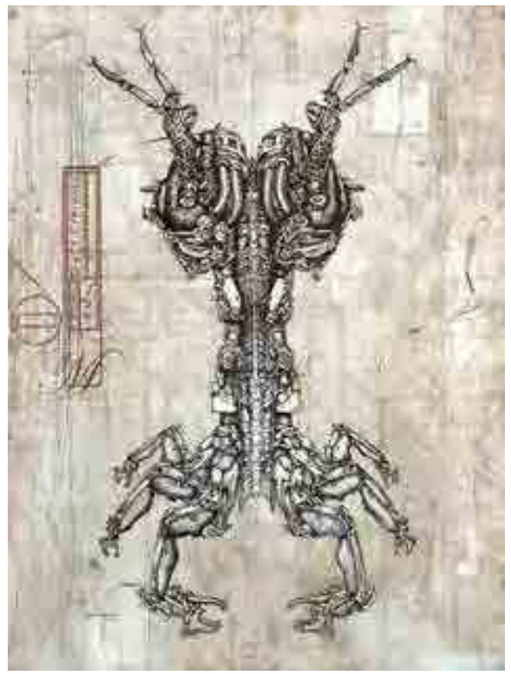
when he became acutely conscious of excess in the midst of poverty in the world.

He has since created numerous politically-themed print portfolios, all connected, each addressing particular concerns of societal life.

The *Five Evils* inspired by the book, *God's Last Offer*, by Ed Ayres, consisted of 10 etchings addressing the 4 primary alarming increases on earth identified by Ayres as threats to humanity: overpopulation, carbon dioxide emission, consumption of resources and extinction of species. Au added a fifth enactor, war.

The *Mechanical Animals* represented sociopolitical creatures acting mechanically, without much thinking, regardless of their knowledge of the problem. They each contribute individually to the creation and persistence of a dire situation,

Realizing that what is displayed on money bills states what is valued by the system, Au wanted to create alternate currencies illustrating the negatives society has created. *The Banque d'Epoch Eclipse*, a play on the words 'Bank of the Apocalypse' was his new currency. *Bank Note #1: Project for the New American Century*, a print from the series, represents a bill displaying a rhinoceros, with a lighthouse for a horn, standing on top of a government building. The rhino, an extremely nearsighted, powerful animal will charge at things not knowing what they are. Au used it as a metaphor for the actions of our might-driven government, which stands defiantly above the offices it holds, acts as a beacon for the world, yet follows a short-sighted self-confident approach. A moth in the background, alludes to those who do not see the truth, just follow the simili light and burn themselves.



left
History of Thugs
etching and chine colle

right
Utopia
etching and mixed media

bottom left
Mechanical Animal #2, Civilizer, Pyramidicus Societus
digital print

bottom right
DLC 1
etching and silk screen

Au's latest print series, *Memebiotics* and *Binarians* address "memes," broad-based sociopolitical views, possibly false, that one is taught from a young age, passed on by parents, rarely questioned. They become transmitted like genes, spread like viruses, strengthening each other's effects. Many have binary functions of polarity within a culture, "either/or" truth claims that divide and separate individuals. One example is literal interpretation of the Bible versus scientific reality.

Au uses his art to reflect on the world, express his knowledge and thinking, state his beliefs; also affirm himself as a human being. His images are meant to push buttons in the viewer, aggravate a response, trigger thinking, raise consciousness.

"My art is my communication," he says. "It is my means to express and share who I am, my values, convey ideas difficult to put in words and state them poetically."

LAURI AULTMAN

Saving the World One Life at a Time

Lauri Aultman uses her art and art teaching to foster peace and social justice

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"Art has to be a social commentary," says Lauri Aultman. "To me art and activism have always been connected. Throughout history, artists have used literature, music, visual arts, to open dialogue about areas where society needed change. I myself am a concerned citizen, and my art reflects my frustrations with the political system and my desire to make our community a safe, peaceful and better place."

Whether through her personal art or through her art teaching Aultman has always wanted the creative process and its product to touch people, trigger thinking, encourage social change.

"I accept that it might be just one child or person at a time," she says. "But YES, I want through art to save the world; I also want others to help me do the same!"

Aultman, a visual artist, grew up in a liberal family, in progressive Yellow Springs and Xenia, Ohio. Early on her mother exposed her to visual arts and crafts, her father to literature and writing, her grandmothers to music; she loved to draw, sing, dance and act. When selecting a career, however, she opted initially for psychology, "a practical field" as she says, but soon added to it art history. This led her to work in museums, to travel to Glasgow, Scotland, to help with an international exhibit on *"Glasgow Girl,"* and finally to join the John F. Kennedy University in San Francisco, California,

where she earned a master degree in Museum Administration. She wanted museums to be less elitist and more inclusive, welcoming all.

After few years in San Francisco, Aultman moved to Columbus, Ohio, to be near her family. Employed at the Columbus Museum of Art she started a preschool multicultural program titled *WOW Art*! It became very popular and put her in touch with a large number of kids and their family. They often confided in her, sharing their various problems; they indirectly prompted her enrollment in art therapy classes.
"I felt a calling for at-risk youth," she says. "So I left museum field, worked for few years at the Homeless Families Foundation Educational Center, then moved to Cincinnati to teach art and yoga at Cincinnati Recreation Commission (CRC)."

Aultman loves to work with kids as they look at the future with hope and uncensored perspectives. She involves them in various art activities using art as a vehicle for their self expression, confronting their own issues and those of society, also reflecting on diversity, peace, justice, on how to better the world. Her students and those of other CRC centers, as a result, regularly added their voice to the yearly SOS Art community art show for peace and justice in Cincinnati, thus contributing to its open dialogue.

For several years, however, Aultman just focused on teaching art to children at the expense of her own art.

"I had become so busy *teaching* art that I stopped *creating* my own," she says. "It caused me a breakdown and I realized it was important I do art every day."

Responding then to her sister's request to create an art piece for a fund raiser for a shelter for abused individuals, Aultman started delving into art for social issues; she has not stopped since.

She has created works for various causes, international, national and personal. Through her church, Ginghamsburg United Methodist, in Tipp City, she got active in the Sudan Project, helping raise money for its various programs in Darfur (implementing sustainable agriculture, building schools, training teachers, constructing water yards for safe water…). Aultman contributes to the Project by making art for the yearly fundraising art exhibit "*heART4SUDAN*." *Do They Know It's Christmas*, a mixed media sculpture, was based on the song from the 80's about famine in Ethiopia; it incorporated the lyrics with pictures of toys made out of tin cans and photos of malnourished Sudanese kids, thus reminding of the dire reality.

top left
Water Cross: Ireland
mixed media

top middle
Water Cross: Darfur Sudan
mixed media

top right
Water Cross: China
mixed media

Her series of *Water Crosses*, one each for Sudan, China and Ireland, meant to call attention to the different conflict areas and to their need for prayers. The crosses, made of painted water bottles, have added and somewhat hidden, words, statistics, pictures, objects… all related to the conflict. Each sits on a Bible referencing the importance of prayer and spirituality. *Water Cross: Darfur Sudan*, painted silver alluding to the importance of water, included material related to water, agriculture and education. *Water Cross: China*, painted red, related to human rights and censorship and used Chinese stamps for decoration. *Water Cross: Ireland*, painted green, included a handkerchief that belonged to Aultman's great-grandmother originally from Ireland, also crucifixes and elements related to the religious and ethnic fighting.

Recently Aultman did works pertaining to the Congo conflict minerals. Through an activist meeting, she learned that portable electronics contained the 3 Ts (tin, titanium and tungsten) usually mined in Congo, in areas where people are murdered and women raped every day. Her mixed media *Cell Out/Healing Mandala* consists of a wooden circle representing the world on which was added information and images addressing the minerals issue, juxtaposed to a globe mandala as a peaceful solution.

"We have no idea how our daily use of cell phones in America effects women in Congo," says Aultman. "I can't help feeling like a sellout each time I use my phone. We all need to know about it."

Her ongoing *American Girls* series consists of dolls with no head, themed after important American issues: religion *(Hope*

top left
Cell Out
mixed media

top middle left
Healing Mandala
mixed media

top middle right
Proceed with Caution
acrylic on canvas

top right
American Girl #3
mixed media

bottom right
Wishful Sign of the Times
mixed media

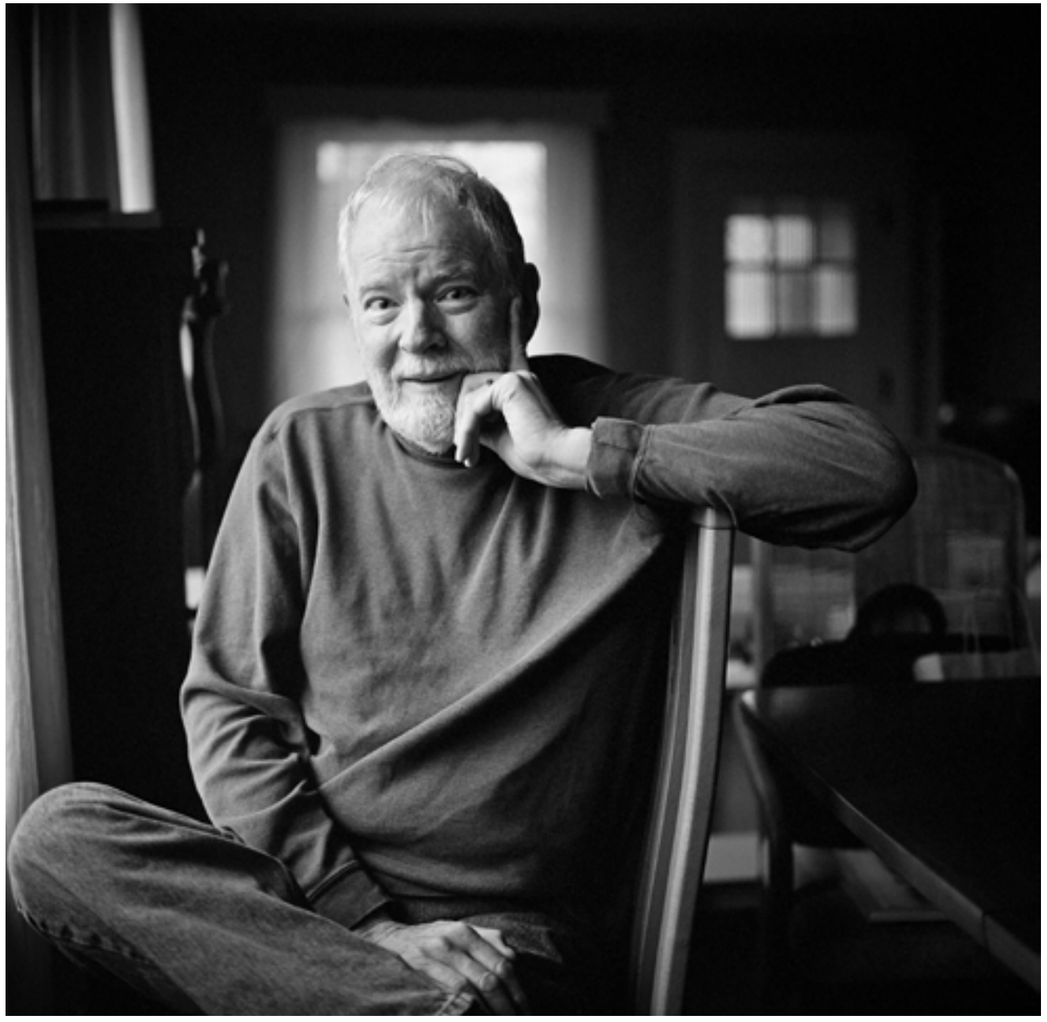
Nkonde), environment *(Terra Hart)*, patriotism *(Betsy R. Imnot)*… She picked girls due to her interest in women issues, also because young American girls nowadays are obsessed with dolls, often used in our society as means of escape. Aultman resorted to their symbolism instead as a way back to the reality of the country.

"Their themes represent me, my current concerns, issues I and Americans struggle with…" she says.

Aultman has always had at heart issues of violence and abuse directed at women; she makes it part of her life to tell people about them. *Yes* and *Proceed With Caution* are body prints in acrylic that address sexual abuse and rape; they are meant to give hope to abuse survivors.

Peace, another omnipresent topic in her works, owed her the title of "peacenik" by her students. In *Wishful Sign of the Times* she arranged buttons in a peace sign, each button representing a prayer for one of her students and his/her family. *Peace Dove* and *Peace Dreams*, 2 mixed media pieces, reflect her inner path to reach and communicate true peace.

"Art is not just 'in my blood'," says Aultman. "I actually ***need*** it to survive. I am an artist for peace and social justice. I use my art to educate others on causes they may not be aware of. I want to raise consciousness and make a difference. I am proud to be an artist activist."



GORDON BAER

Photos in Service of Justice

Gordon Baer's enduring effect

Mississipi 1, Mississipi 2, Misissipi 3… These are the words that introduced Gordon Baer to photography.

Baer was eight years old when, on a Saturday morning, accompanying his father to a meeting at the high school where he coached football, he heard these words coming from a room in the basement. He found out they were spoken by Brother Josephus teaching a student camera club, using the words to time the exposure of his photographs. Brother Josephus would then remove a piece of white paper, put it in a water-like liquid, and an image will progressively appear. Baer was mesmerized.

Baer, a photojournalist, was born in Louisville. As a child he had an old box camera he used for assignments at the YMCA activity club he belonged to, and later for the yearbook in his Junior high school. Very early on he was also developing and exhibiting his own photographs.

Baer attended the University of Kentucky at Lexington, initially studying chemistry, then went on to the University of Louisville, focusing on fine arts and photography. At both places he documented life on campus functioning as the student newspaper's photographer.

Baer's attraction to photography was initially driven by his desire to organize and control people, telling them what to do; he soon realized, however, that

above
Autistic Child
film photography

top right
Strip Mining, Eastern Kentucky
film photography

bottom right
Vietnam, Kentucky
film photography

what he sought would be more powerfully achieved by controlling viewers' emotions through the images he would create. His photos became full of feeling, focusing on social issues and ills, the human always at their center.

While a student at the University of Louisville, Baer interned as a photojournalist at the Louisville Courier Journal. One of the editors at the paper took him to visit her family in the Appalachian foothills of Eastern Kentucky. He witnessed there the battering and destruction of the rugged landscape by careless companies who had acquired the rights to mine the coal-rich area. The landowners had been lured to sign deeds allowing the underground exploitation of their land, not having been informed that new extraction techniques would make the hillsides unstable, causing the mountain tops to slide down into the valley. The residents were angry, rebelling at the rape of their land and the pollution of their streams, and wanted to bring their plight to the state governor. Baer's photographs spoke for them.

Not only were his 25 photographs of the ravages exhibited in the Kentucky state capitol, they were also flown to Washington, DC, and shared with the US Congress and the National Governors' Conference held there at the time. They helped accelerate passage of legislation controlling strip mining.

Baer also participated actively in the civil rights movement, attending marches, demonstrations and protests, documenting them and spreading their images. He had met Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who often visited Louisville, where his brother led a parish. Baer followed King to Washington, DC, and captured in his photos the freedom march of 1963.

In 1965, Baer joined the Cincinnati Post as a photojournalist. He was given a variety of assignments, encompassing all types of photography. One assignment was to photograph a family with an *autistic child*. Parents of such children often blamed themselves for their child's condition, Bruno Bettelheim, the renowned child psychiatrist, having theorized that the disease was linked to cold uncaring parents. Aware of the often unjustified sense of guilt this theory was generating, Baer's photographs showed instead the humane family environment of the affected child, depicting affectionate, loving, yet powerless parents.

In the late 60's, Baer was called to active military duty with the US Air Force and was briefly stationed in South Korea. There he used his photography to call attention to American soldiers' often insensitive and disrespectful attitude toward the local culture. He documented the abusive treatment and shattered lives of the many "comfort" women which the unnatural military conditions had helped create.

In the late 70's, Baer captured the enduring effects of war on returning Vietnam Veterans. He attended group therapy sessions of vets suffering from what was later to be called 'post traumatic stress disorder;' he visited their homes, shared their family lives, experienced first-hand their persistent nightmares. He quickly found out that the war had not ended for many of them, that it had forced itself into their living rooms, dreams, relationships. Baer reflected their situation and daily turmoil with eloquence and moving images. His

top left
That Day He Had a Dream
film photography

top middle
I Prayed for Survival, but Forgot Peace of Mind
film photography

top right
Bankruptcy for Breakfast
film photography

bottom left
Veterans Allegory, Memorial Dedication, Washington, DC, Veterans Day, 1982
film photography

photographs, exhibited in Washington, DC, as part of the Vietnam Memorial dedication, earned him the prestigious Nikon World Understanding Award, an "award given to the photographer whose work best serves the common purposes of man."

When visiting Louisiana, Missouri, for a workshop, Baer focused his photography on a group of workers hired by corporations to farm Stark Apple Orchards. He called attention to their exploitation and poor treatment, worse than that of previous prisoners of what used to be a German prisoner-of-war camp.

In 2000, he did a moving series of photographs of his dying aunt Beck, a reflection on the frailty of the aged human being, on mortality, also on the potential neglect of the elderly in impersonal and understaffed nursing homes. In 2008, he was the moving force behind "*Shattered Myths*," a powerful exhibit involving many local artists; the exhibit dealt with the Iraq war and its damaging effects on human beings, military and civilians alike.

Baer's work has always advocated for the poor, the exploited, the abused–for the human in general; it has also powerfully portrayed the tragic effects of violence. Baer was able to develop a strong photographic arm with which to touch the viewer and draw him into the essence of his images. His camera has always served as his voice.

"I was able to use the power of the photographic print to successfully transmit my messages, make people feel the things I feel," he says. "I know that whatever I do I will always use my work to focus on the individual's rights and on peace in this world."

KEITH BANNER
BILL ROSS

Freaks and Other Artists

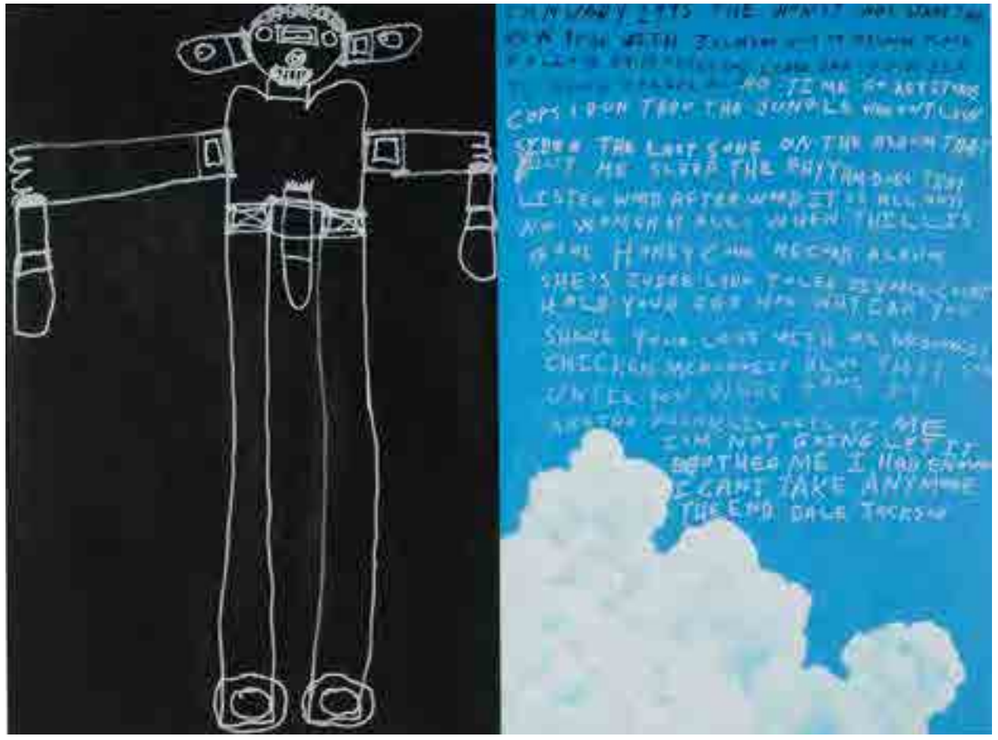
Bill Ross and Keith Banner celebrate possibility

Influenced by Flannery O'Connor's works, which always gave voice to those who were shunned, Keith Banner, a well-published Cincinnati writer, started in his mid 20's to write about freaks. They are, in his words, "forms of our essential displacement."

"Putting the reader in the point of view and body of someone who is denigrated and marginalized is always a deliberate political move," Banner says. "It is my way to make the reader identify and connect with the other, accept and humanize the other despite the difference, realize we're all equal and beautiful, that the world is bigger than we are, and that we need to be at peace with each other."

"Art saved and shaped my life," says Bill Ross, a well-exhibited local artist. "It helped me find out who I was, also what was my mission. It let me explore social venues I would not have otherwise. It empowered me, and through collaborative work, allowed me to empower others."

Ross and Banner met in the early 1980's, studying art at the Herron School of Art and Design, at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Ross graduated with a degree in painting, Banner shifting later to English and graduating in creative writing. They have been together since, partners in life and work. Together they founded in 2003 Visionaries and Voices (V&V), an art studio that provides artistic and cultural opportunities for



above
X-Ray and Sky Writing
(with Donald Henry and Dale Jackson)
acrylic on wood panel

top right
Amazing Chaos
(with Becky Iker)
acrylic on wood panel

artists with disabilities, and in 2009, Thunder-Sky Inc, an art gallery that showcases and supports unconventional artists from the region, aiming at keeping Raymond Thunder-Sky's legacy alive.

Professionally, both Ross and Banner applied their art background to the field of social work. They worked in group homes, mostly with mentally handicapped individuals, providing them care and managing their needs. Artists at heart, they merged art with social work, combining and enhancing the powerful effects of both.

"We are culture workers and not only social workers," they say. "We use our artistic skills to help individuals grow and develop."

This is how Ross one day discovered Thunder-Sky and his wonderful creative world. At a meeting set up to discuss his health concerns, Thunder-Sky brought along a tool box that he opened with a smile; it contained hundreds of his amazing drawings, unseen until then. A disabled Native American and gifted artist, Thunder-Sky would always dress in a clown collar and construction hat, and walk the streets of Cincinnati drawing demolition and construction sites.

Ross and Banner quickly organized a show of his drawings; it was 2000. This opened the gate to many other disabled artists, starting with Antonio Adams, now a well known and well represented Cincinnati artist. It also led to the progressive establishment of a venue for individuals with disability to explore and develop their artistic talent, at the same time using their creative expression for their well-being. This venue, later known as V&V, gave artists ownership in an inclusive environment where they felt valued, a chance to

beginning–changed their focus few years ago; they became collaborative with disabled artists creating composition and content, and Ross adding pattern, colors and depth.

"Collaboration took me to places I was not able to go on my own," he says. "It also helped build confidence in the disabled artists showing them someone else takes them seriously."

Ross has since collaborated with six disabled artists, among them Kevin White, known for his elegant designs; Max Weber, for his abstracted images; and Donald Henry, for his robot versions of himself and of his friends.

Amazing Chaos is a collaborative piece Ross did with Becky Iker, who has Down Syndrome. With minor editing, Ross shaped in color Iker's pencil drawing, the final result reminiscent of a cave painting with its mystery and hidden subtleties.

create and show their work, an opportunity to collaborate and celebrate with other community members.

Five years later, to avoid potential conflict of interest with its source of funding, Banner and Ross left the then well established V&V and immersed their energy in the creation of a new gallery, Thunder–Sky Inc. The new gallery focuses on art, exhibitions and literary publications; it is meant as a collaborative, non segregated space where both disabled and non disabled artists work side by side, with no real difference, triggering each other's vulnerability and letting go of their ego.

All along and despite their otherwise heavy engagements, Banner and Ross continued their own creative endeavors.

Ross painted non stop. His paintings –surrealistic, fantastic, personal at the

While Ross was painting, Banner kept writing. He published several short stories and a novel, all with strong social messages. He is working on a new novel relating the death of a 7 year old disabled girl killed by her stepbrother. Ignored, pushed away and debased while alive, her sudden disappearance makes everyone realize her inner beauty, her true innocence, how much she touched each of them. Meant as an empowerment of the weak and rejected, the work stresses the importance of every individual, even those initially perceived as useless and insignificant.

In *The Wedding of Tom and Tom*, from his book *The Smallest People Alive*, Banner tells the story of 2 disabled gentlemen living in a group home, in love with each other. Caregivers, braving the rules of the agency running the home, assist them to get married. The story reflects Banner's rejection of rules, codes and regulations that

negate the human essence and mar its potentials, imprison the individual, obstruct his good and poetic nature. It ends with a liberating act, the vision of hundreds of stigmatized individuals running over the officiator to get to their freedom place, a celebration of universal spirit asserting itself and coming to life.

Both Ross and Banner use their own art and various art involvements to equalize people and link them together.

"Society wants to frame us and categorize us," they say. "One is retarded or not, intelligent or not. …One's free potential as human being is often ignored. We want to make it hard to categorize and differentiate people; it is our political statement, and art helps us achieve it."

top left
Donald Henry's Self Portrait
(with Donald Henry)
acrylic on canvas

top middle
Bottle Water Advisory
acrylic on canvas

top right
Islands in Stream
acrylic on canvas

bottom right
Golden Ladder
(with Becky Iker)
acrylic on wood panel

The Officiator in The Wedding of Tom and Tom

*(from **The Smallest People Alive**, by* Keith Banner*)*

"Bring them over now. It's time," he tells Raquel, and Raquel brings Tom and Tom over in front of the podium. I run over to the lights and flick switches to make it more intimate, turn on low music.

"This big hanger building," Dad says, from the podium. Tom and Tom are right there in front of him. "Pink light, like exploding roses. The red-light district. Ha ha. No. A stampede. You gotta hear it. A thousand-plus feet. I am on the other side and I look up and all these shaved-headed people are running right at me in the red light. It's like they just got freed, you know? Like the concentration camp just opened its doors and they got out and they're running. They don't know where they're going or nothing. They're coming right at me. And I want that to happen. I want them to run me over."

My dad is smiling with glassy eyes.

"I want them to run me over," he says, looking right at Tom A. and Tom B. "And they do. They stomp all over me. They gotta get somewhere, don't they?"

He's asking the Toms, and Tom B. goes, "Yes."

"They gotta get somewhere," my dad says, and he closes his eyes. Then he opens them real quick.

"That's love," he says.

MARY PIERCE BROSMER

Translating a Word into the World

Mary Pierce Brosmer helps women find their own voices

"Heartstory of childbed marriagebed sickbed deathbed
so many sheets stained by pleasure and pain
then bleached pale and hung in the sun to fade…
Mystory of women's lives… all too often,
packed away in a chest without hope."
writes Mary Pierce Brosmer in her poem *"History, Herstory."*

Brosmer, a Cincinnati writer and poet, is the founder of *Women Writing for (a) Change (WWF(a)C)*, an organization that uses writing to empower women and help them find their voices.

Born in a working-class family to a first-generation Italian mother and coalminer father, she grew up in Crawford County, Ohio, studied theatre and music, but majored in literature because she "loved to read." Her parents exposed her very early on to reading; they bought her a set of the classics at her birth, and her father, an avid reader, would tell her, as a child, stories about various literary characters. Brosmer favored historical novels but also books about women's lives, biographies that gave her a sense of who she might be.

Women's identities, their roles and place in society have preoccupied her all along. Her own mother, an articulate person, made it only to sixth grade and neglected her own needs in order to keep the family together.

Her voice was often silent in the presence of a verbal and domineering husband. Over the years she lost her spark and slipped into depression.

This is when Brosmer resorted to writing; it became her outlet and an important part of her expression and of her activism on behalf of the silenced feminine. She started a journal, a means to define and assert herself; and wrote poems about family connections, motherhood, the light and darkness of life, the paradox of silence and voice. Silence, she felt, was necessary for any voice to listen to itself, grow and be heard. As a full-time public school teacher and single mother, Brosmer understood the difficulty women have in creating for themselves the "good kind of silence," the kind necessary for knowing what they know, feeling what they feel and resisting others' definitions of who they are. Women, "the mules of the world," she says, quoting Alice Walker, rarely have this space because their lives are usually so full of other people's needs.

In graduate school, one of Brosmer's teachers discovered her poems and invited her to read. This was an empowering experience, one that also connected her to others, particularly women who, like her, were searching for themselves, for their space and for their authentic role in a male-dominated world.

After obtaining her master of arts degree in literature, Brosmer continued to teach high school English, waiting for her son to graduate from high school before she could move to New Hampshire to pursue a doctorate degree in the teaching of writing.

One night she had a dream that proved decisive: She was in a room with many women sitting around a table covered with a lace tablecloth; all were writing, telling their truth, especially as it relates to their sexual abuse and oppression. She felt inspired, but also terrified of "what would happen to us for telling," she says. She woke up and wrote the first brochure for WWF(a)C. This was in 1991; 15 women joined the first class. The next semester she quit her teaching job, abandoned her graduate school plans and devoted herself entirely to what became her new organization.

The WWF(a)C agenda has since remained the same, to create, through writing, a space for every person, in particular women, to find their voices and assert themselves. Writing, usually triggered in a class by a reading, a topic or a prompt, serves as a tool to get in touch with oneself, self-reflect, reach for truth, feel free, and most important, connect to others and build community.

Despite her heavy involvement with her new organization and the time demand it placed on her, Brosmer continued with her own writing. Her prose often related to the growth of the WWF(a)C community, reflecting on its practices, sharing what she learned with others. She completed a book documenting her journey; she wrote it as a legacy for women and for her organization.

"Women Writing For (a) Change: A Guide for Creative Transformation" was published by Notre Dame University Press in October 2009. Crafted as both pragmatic and spiritual, it includes poetry, journal entries, essays, reflections, dreams, and writing exercises.

Brosmer's poetry has also abounded all along, published in various journals and feminist periodicals. Her topics naturally pertained to womanhood and women's role in the world, but also to family, politics, wars and society.

Watching the Dead on Television While Eating Supper
October, 2006
for Tom

It is difficult to get the news from
poems, yet each day men die
horribly from lack of what is found
there. (William Carlos Williams)

You lay down your fork and come to attention.

Someone not paying attention would miss it,

but I attend to your
no-fail attention, so frail
in the realm of what can be done.

Each evening the line of faces grows longer.

My attention falters and I mutter
'sweet Jesus, only 19. . .
that one could be a grandfather...'
impatient for it to be over.

You lay down your fork,
food cools
time deepens
October is closing.

We are closing in on four years
of a war to bring freedom to Iraq.

Bodies stacked in Baghdad morgues
and loaded in secret onto troop planes
are free of souls, the only mission accomplished.

Each evening the line of faces grows longer.

Impatient for it to be over,
I remember other missions:
wars to end all wars
ones to stop the spread of communism
the one in Afghanistan to find Osama bin Laden,
protect women from the Taliban.

What would my father think
of his war, the one to thwart fascism
if he could see our president on television.

Our president's attention falters,
he says he never said
'stay the course.'
he 'does pay attention
to critics'
to 'the need for a new direction
in Iraq,' that 'his mission is now,
and always has been
freedom'

Each evening the line of faces grows longer.

We eat fall foods: soups and stews,
ripe pears, an apple cake,
Soon Thanksgiving recipes will appear
in newspapers.

Each evening the line of faces grows. . .

I see your mission, my love,
how it is now and always
has been, attention.

Each day men
and women
die horribly for lack
of what is found there.

1. History

litany
of
bloody dates

shouted
by
fat coaches
at
good girls
in
white blouses.

We take
careful notes
of
pogrom, with hunt,

enshrine
beefy heroes
in our
museum minds

telling
their stories
instead
of our own

to
pass tests
win grants
get jobs

surviving
by memorizing
our own
exclusion.

2. Herstory

rising
in the smoke
of
washtub
cookpot
witch burning
holocaust

Heartstory
of childbed
marriagebed
sickbed
deathbed

so many
sheets
stained
by pleasure
and
pain

then
bleached pale
and hung
in the sun
to
fade

Mystory
of women's lives
written
stitched
plaited
quilted, patched
and painted,
and all too often,
packed away
in a
chest
without hope.

Cancer Poem: a Liberal Lament
November, 1988

(In exit polls those who say they voted for George Bush describe themselves as satisfied or pleased with their financial situations under Republican administrations.)

These days I am jumpy,
even my dreams are lumpy
with the faces, the voices
of all the satisfied people

surely you've seen them--
that rush of genial cells,
eating and multiplying,
converging on malls.

See how they flourish
and thrive: blissfully blind,
cheerful and benign.

It may be unwise,
politically incorrect even,
to use cancer as metaphor,
but God! how I fear them:

all the happy consumers,
as they gather in solid
prosperous tumors,
shop for the best buys,
grow malignant, and metastasize.

Her satirical poem, "*Cancer Poem, a Liberal Lament,*" was triggered by the comment of an acquaintance and of many who in exit polls said they had voted for Bush because under Republicans they had more money. This evoked to her the robotic nature of people; the generalized, conscienceless and mindless growth of commercial malls, spreading like cancer, and the decaying materialistic values of society.

Writing remains an essential tool for Brosmer. "I use it to translate the world into the word," she says.

This surely applies to her, but also to all the activities she has pioneered through her organization. In addition to classes for adult and young women, WWF(a)C has translated its approach into homeless shelters, classrooms, prisons, radio and internet programs, and retreats. In 2004 Brosmer created the Feminist Leadership Academy to train and teach others how to use her practices in various settings.

That's how Brosmer would like now to spend her own time. She instituted *"Consulting for (a) Change,"* a business that offers her services to empower, though writing, diverse groups, most recently into efforts to transform health care, into business innovation, into efforts to help girls in the Baltimore City juvenile justice system find healthy ways of expression.

"Instead of being a traditional activist working on the outside, I use writing to make a place in which we practice feminism as I understand it and believe in it, from the inside out: an active liberation of women, and therefore of men and children, by bringing the feminine more fully into the world," Brosmer says. "This is transformation of consciousness."
She adds, "My approach has a universal intention; it can apply to any individual, group of individuals, or situation."

CARMEN BOWEN BUSH

Respect and Nurturance

Carmen Bowen Bush paints to promote life

"Art is my lover, my friend, my companion," says Carmen Bowen Bush. "It is my everyday life. I cannot give individuals the time I devote to it. My artworks are my people and my communication."

Bowen Bush, a Cincinnati artist, grew up in Walnut Hills and Evanston, raised primarily by her loving grandmother. Her childhood was full and colorful, surrounded by many talented individuals: her father was a successful boxer; her aunt, Sadie Birch, an influential jazz singer; her grandfather, Samuel Birch, a muralist and a virtuoso piano player; her godfather, Wallace "Bud" Smith, the famous world lightweight boxing champion.

Bowen Bush did not receive a formal art education; she is a self-taught artist. Art, however, has been part of her life since her early years. Already at age 13, in fourth grade at Hoffman elementary school, her art teacher, Mr. Orr recognized her talent and entered her work in an exhibit. This acknowledgment stayed with her all her life, gave her self-confidence, and still encourages her to always strive for the best.

After high school she entered the University of Cincinnati and graduated in social work, but only many years later, her studies having been interrupted by marriage, childbearing, parenting, and living abroad, in Germany, for a while.

When she returned to the United States due to death in her family, Bowen Bush decided to settle back for good in Cincinnati. Art deep-seated inside her and dormant until then reemerged. She started painting again, initially landscapes from images stored in her memories during her European trips, then socially-themed paintings mostly dealing with cityscapes, youth violence, the erosion of society.

"All my art comes from my heart, from experiences I've had, from what I know," she says, "also from what's going on right now in society."

A recurrent theme in her work has been the young society, its violence, its lack of respect of the elderly, but also its need for stronger foundations, stable families, love, nourishment–all that builds one's character. *Problem*, a mixed media construction painting, is her statement about what is wrong. A dark-skinned baby doll representing childhood and also teenage, is in the center of the piece. It is threatened and being attacked by two guns aiming at its head but it is also attacking, two pistols brandished from its sides. It serves as an allegory for kids' current violent and destructive behavior, killing and being killed, and for society's indirect negligent role in favoring such a situation. By not providing the required education, the parental, secure and supportive needed structure, the caring and all that it takes to shape a solid and responsible individual, society is contributing to the youth's death; and the youth, not knowing better, are furthering the damage by killing each other, thus favoring societal demise. In addition, Bowen Bush purposefully placed a gun pointing from between the doll's legs, where its genitalia would be, alluding to the prevailing lack of respect and also to the wide-spread permissive and unprotected sexual activity of teens–in her mind, another killer. She also added on the child's face, red, yellow, white and green colors stating that the problem is not only limited to blacks, but affecting all ethnic groups; and around his head, a halo of bullets, an ironic glorification of death.

top right
Who's to Blame Now
acrylic on canvas

bottom
City Scape I
acrylic on canvas

In *Solution*, a companion mixed media piece, Bowen Bush wanted to provide an answer, addressing what should be done as a remedy. She represented a growing tree with a baby doll at its root. The tree, shaped as a person, has a face outline and rings composed of black-eyed peas looking at the viewer; they seem to invite all of us to join in and participate collectively in fixing the problem. The child at the roots of the tree is being nurtured by society and at its turn fulfills its role contributing to society's life and growth. Bowen Bush dispersed in the branches small birds, symbols of rebirth, and various bean seeds implying diversity and potential for change.

Bowen Bush has since designed another painting depicting a baby coffin surrounded by older individuals in wheelchairs, pointing to the ironic reality of youth dying first, leaving behind, uncared for, a disabled society.

"My heart goes out to the youth," she says. "I have a young granddaughter, 11 years old. We need to provide them with stability and support. We need also to impart onto them the love, nourishment and moral principles essential for their healthy development. We need to plant good seeds. That's what I got from my grandmother. That's what I want to give back."

This is precisely what Bowen Bush did when she taught art to children at Peaslee Neighborhood Community Center, giving them love and appreciation, but demanding at the same time respect and responsible behavior.

top left
Problem
mixed media

top middle left
Solution
mixed media

top middle right
Creator
acrylic on canvas

top right
Creature
mixed media

bottom left
Where Is He
mixed media

Another subject that appears often in her work is that of *Cityscapes*. Bowen Bush associates the tall buildings sprouting everywhere in her paintings to chaos, to the rigid, tight and somewhat inhumane bureaucracy that governs our world, a bureaucracy she experienced first hand working for the city for over twenty years and which, like these big structures, is difficult to move or change.

In a past solo show, *Peace and Chaos*, held in Covington, Kentucky, she contrasted on one side her paintings of tall, dense, oppressive and labyrinthine buildings to those, on the opposite side, of abstracted landscapes–references to freedom, harmony and peaceful escape.

Bowen Bush will continue to use her art to speak loudly, express her feelings and values and contribute to a healthier society.

"I am passionate about what I feel," she says. "My art always comes from my heart; it conveys and communicates my emotions and beliefs. I do not want it to stop there, however; I want it to provoke a response in the viewer, to lead the viewer to think and ask: what can I do to help, to make things better?"

JEFF CASTO

Using Art to Build Understanding

Jeff Casto's work documents and focuses on the spiritual dimension

"I grew up in a small town in rural West Virginia," says Jeff Casto. "Art was not part of my daily existence there; however and as early as I can remember, I had a kind of exotic attraction to art; and whenever offered in grade or high school, I really absorbed it and wanted more and more of it."

Casto, a visual artist who holds a bachelor of fine arts degree in painting from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and a master of fine arts degree also in painting from the University of Cincinnati, creates constructed 3-D paintings and sculptures with found objects–discarded material, scraps, recycled junk parts–to which he gives a new shape and a new life. His pieces are a good metaphor for his general approach to art, recreating his own world in order to communicate his views and messages.

In his work Casto addresses a variety of social, political, environmental and personal issues, often in a metaphoric, poetic and whimsical way. When addressing racism, sexism and homophobia for instance, he constructed a six-foot-tall sculpture representing a giant skyscraper, metaphor for an isolating tower, with slang, slurs, derogatory words, written on its walls and a large heart made of stone inside it. It attracted viewers, some reacting negatively to the writings, prompting thinking and awareness of reality.

His social interest started as a child, seeing a lot of unfairness, even in the most privileged places of the world. When he first came to Cincinnati in

1982 to attend college, Casto was shocked to see a man sleeping in a car for several days. He later realized that this was not an isolated instance and that many people in the city did not have a home or could not afford one to live in. He encountered poverty in many places and became increasingly aware of the many social and political problems facing our society.

Creating powerful images with a strong visual impact, Casto uses his art to tell a story, express his ideas and opinions, communicate and move the viewer. Art is an essential and important part of his daily life, cathartic in its making, but also communicative of his concerns, hopes, fears, whether personal, social or political. He uses it also to state what he thinks is wrong, and what he considers is right. Casto wants his art to make a statement and trigger change.

"I want my art to express messages with relevance today and tomorrow, a human relevance, things that keep resonating hundred years from now. I want my art to bring about a greater understanding of our world and contribute to its betterment."

Casto's construction painting *Folly of the Fearful* was created in 2007 in response to the fear-mongering climate of the country following the September 2001 terrorist attacks and what he thought was the short-sightedness and self righteousness of the Bush administration's reaction. He based it on Aesops' fable, *"The bald man and the flies,"* in which a man, attacked by flies, and in order to protect himself, hurts his head by swatting at them. Casto saw an analogy between the moral of the fable and the might-oriented, fear-based, military answer of the administration to the so-called threat of "terrorism." Instead of intelligently analyzing and addressing the root causes of the problem, Bush's response was based on fear and overuse of power–detrimental and self injurious, as proven in the Iraq war.

To convey his message, Casto constructed his piece like a home interior. He used an inverted exterior window frame as an allegory for a home world turned upside-down, and put in its center, constructed from discarded objects, the large figure of a frightened metallic cowboy surrounded and attacked by mosquitoes and flies. The man stands tall displaying his strength, much bigger than his opponents; but in reality, very vulnerable, not knowing how to deal with them; he ends up hurting himself more. In the background, Casto added a clock, a metaphor for fleeting time, and a reminder of the need for a quick change in approach.

"My dream is to live in a harmonious, peaceful and just society where negative issues would not need to be addressed in art," he says. "Art then, instead of fighting the material, would address, document and focus on the spiritual, on what I consider is the real important dimension of humankind."

Casto's art is an intricate component of his daily living, reflecting his views and his philosophy of life. To paraphrase Andre Maurois, the renowned French novelist, it is his "effort to create beside the real world a more human world."

top left
Folly of the Fearful
mixed media

below
New Eden
mixed media

top left
The Crackpot Crusaders
mixed media

top right
Eminent Elimination
mixed media

bottom left
The Portal to Propaganda
mixed media

bottom right
The Greedy Dog and His Reflection
mixed media

JAN BROWN CHECCO

Collaborating, Creating, Changing

Jan Brown Checco's art is about spirit and community

Until her mother's death in 1987, Jan Brown Checco, a successful 2D artist, illustrator and graphic designer, used her art primarily as a commodity, mainly for commercial purposes; this is what her conservative parents expected her to do in order to earn a living.

"When my mother died, I suddenly realized that my biological clock was ticking and that I needed to start expressing myself, investigate who I was and make a statement through my visual art," she says. "It was as if I gave myself permission to move in a different, more personal direction without having to explain or justify why. My mother had a tragic death from terminal cancer; to survive my own despair, I began my grieving through my art."

Brown Checco was in unspeakable pain that she could only express in images; it lasted 15 years. At the same time she was raising 2 daughters and pushing against prevailing antifeminist ideas found in the *Bible*. Her art became increasingly focused on her family, on coping with parenting, on womanhood and indirectly on herself. It was cathartic and therapeutic and helped her move on.

"If you're so formally removed from the art you're making that it is not helping you, lifting you up, resolving something you cannot understand,

or bringing up something to the surface, then it is a pity," she says. "For me, this is a fundamental function of art."

In 1987 Brown Checco came across Joseph Campbell's views of the world and how philosophy, religion, art history, and cultures throughout time and space are interwoven. It led her to a different appreciation of spirituality and discovery of the Tao and Buddhism. This new perspective started transpiring into her art.

Brown Checco has been making art as long as she can recall, already finger painting at age 4 at her grandmother's kitchen table. An art career was a natural path for her. She attended Miami University, then the Art Academy of Cincinnati for her bachelor's degree in fine arts; and the University of Cincinnati DAAP for her master's degree. She is a painter and a sculptor versatile in many media and techniques that she uses for her own artwork, and for her art involvement with others.

Over the past 15 years Brown Checco has been using her design and management skills to create community-based art projects and cultural exchanges involving artists. Her aim is to help strengthen artists' collaborative abilities, give a voice to individuals who otherwise are not heard, educate, inspire and facilitate communication.

In 1993 Brown Checco founded *"Art in the Square,"* a visual arts festival aimed at bringing the region's visual art talents out of their studio to connect with the public. In 2005, she created the *"Vine Street Murals and Can-paign"* project in Over The Rhine, a five-month community-building project employing local children. These were the first public murals to appear downtown, accompanied by 30 colorful trash cans. One of the murals, *"OTR Map Flag,"* currently hangs outside of City Council chambers. The young involved artists worked side by side and created collaboratively. The activity strengthened their self esteem, developed their sense of responsibility and sharpened their group interactive skills.

In 1999, Brown Checco started facilitating artistic and cultural exchanges between Cincinnati and its Sister Cities, arranging for Cincinnati artists to present their work in Munich and for Munich artists to come to Cincinnati. In 2002, she invited master ceramic artists from each sister city to come to Cincinnati to create public art for the pavilion in Theodore M. Berry International Friendship Park along the Ohio River. Over 150 local volunteers participated in assisting and learning from the artists and by providing homestays for the international visitors. The Cincinnati artists together designed and fabricated for the hearth, a *Double Phoenix*, mythological creature common to all the cultures participating in the project.

In 2004, Brown Checco organized an innovative drawing exchange including nine artists from Cincinnati and nine from Munich. The artists each made an original drawing which was reproduced and given to each of the participating artists from the other city who, at their turn, were allowed to do whatever they wanted to the drawing to create their own new work of art. The same formula was repeated in 2007, including six artists from Cincinnati, six from Munich and six from Liuzhou, China; and in 2011, six artists from Kharkiv, Ukraine, and six from Cincinnati. These projects led to a visual dialogue and exchange of ideas among the participating artists, creating friendships and a sense of trust and respect. At the same time they illustrated a rich diversity of individual expressions and a desire for mutual understanding and tolerance. The 2007 project received an award from Sister Cities International for Innovation in the Arts and Culture.

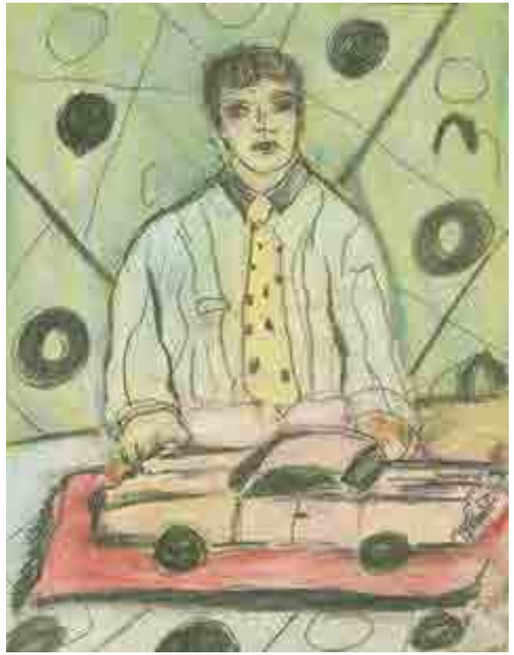
above
Clay, Color and Fire, Hearth Insert, Double Phoenix
ceramic mosaic

Brown Checco has also been the lead designer for five Butterfly Shows at Cincinnati's Krohn Conservatory, interpreting the cultures of China, India, Japan, Brazil and in 2012, international peace with *"On Wings of Harmony."* These shows serve to connect people culturally as well as to butterflies and unusual plants. In preparation for the show, Brown Checco leads a design and culture committee that identifies important cultural stories that need to be conveyed to the visitors through the use of art, craft and architectural elements.

Brown Checco was art administrator for *"The Black Brigade Monument,"* the first piece of public sculpture in the new Cincinnati Smale Riverfront Park dedicated in Spring 2012. The monument tells the story of the first recognized black company of volunteers who, during the Civil War, organized to defend Cincinnati from Confederate attack. A team of black and white designers and artists worked together to reflect the dynamic of the story, its spirit of social justice, of righting of wrongs, of responsibility in protecting one's home and family.

Despite all the energy and time she devotes to organizing and facilitating community and art exchange projects, Brown Checco still produces her own art which reflects her social and political views, also her philosophy of life, her spiritual connectedness to nature, to her family.

"Social activism is just an outward expression of one's inner beliefs and values," she



top left
Clay, Color a nd Fire, Colonnade
ceramic mosaic

top middle
OTR Map Flag
mixed media

top right
A Change of Perspective
(Original drawing by Arno Backhaus, redraw by Jan Brown Checco)
mixed media

bottom right
Balance
ceramic and wood

says. "I practice it when I shop locally to support my neighborhood, work in my garden, play with my grandchildren, when I work in the studio on projects with others or alone. All ends up being connected; it is seamless to me."

Thanks to visiting Chinese teachers she has hosted, Brown Checco learned about Taoism and Confucianism, two of the guiding philosophies in China. Her ceramic piece, *Balance*, is a reflection on the Confucian Li (Code of Ethics), the Chinese equivalent of our 10 Commandments. The Code consists of eight principles, the first five concerning individual conduct to be managed by oneself (humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, trustworthiness) and the last three, the refined individual's conduct within the group (respect, loyalty, reciprocity). If all principles are practiced, it is thought they will lead to balance and harmony. The artwork includes two small ceramic figures, one representing *"Excess*," bending under a burden, and the other *"Lack*," looking at symbolic empty hands instead of at the things one has. Its message pertains to compulsive consumerism and greed and to the need for a simpler, grateful and reflective life.

"Finding your authentic self, playing your role in community and being helpful, having a righteous motive, being responsible and responsive–these are the things that should matter," says Brown Checco. "They do matter to me and that's how I try to live my life and what I try to express in my art."

SUZANNE CHOUTEAU

Confronting Genocides of the Conscience

Suzanne Chouteau uses her art to address planetary issues

Suzanne Michele Chouteau is the youngest in an artistic family of eight children. Her father is an artist and retired professor of art, her mother, a vocalist/pianist, her brother, an interactive kaleidoscope maker, two of her sisters, designers and illustrators. She grew up surrounded by art, the walls of her home covered with original prints done by her father and his artists friends.

"These works held my attention for hours from a very young age," she says. "Drawing and printmaking were somehow always part of my artistic yearning. I was born with an inclination, art became part of me, like another limb attached."

Chouteau, a printmaker, got her bachelor's degree in art from Saint Ambrose University, Davenport, Iowa, and her master of fine arts degree in printmaking from University of Iowa (UI). She is currently Professor in the Department of Art at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Chouteau has also been a social activist all her life, her awakening starting as a child watching the Vietnam War broadcast every night on TV, also accompanying her parents to war protests and civil rights demonstrations.

"Growing up during the socially active 60's and 70's influenced my worldview beyond my little town of Davenport," she says. "I did not have frivolity

about life and knew early on there were grave and serious issues facing our world."

In undergraduate school Chouteau was exposed to comprehensive traditional teaching, studied anatomy, life drawing, design, and acquired solid skills. In her junior year she studied abroad for a semester, in Italy; it affected her approach and the content of her art. She realized that in addition to their beauty, the Renaissance works made important and powerful statements, carrying meaning behind their figurative representation.

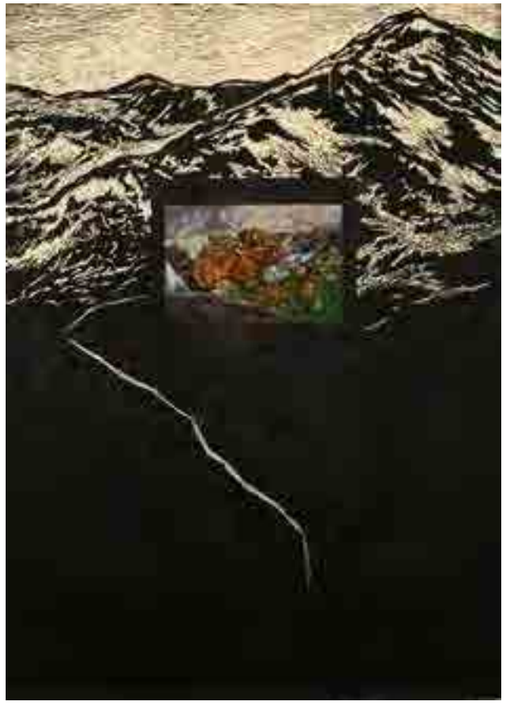
Art could then be used as a tool to say something, she felt. This was reinforced by a show of Mauricio Lasansky's *The Nazi Drawings* she saw when she returned home. Lasansky's figurative prints representing people, said a lot about them, also about himself, reflecting with outrage on the brutality of Nazi Germany. This prompted her to start a series of lithographs connecting her technique to people she knew, meditations on her brother, family, friends, revealing some hidden aspect of their personality.

For graduate school Chouteau specifically selected UI because Lasansky taught printmaking there. Under his guidance, she focused increasingly on content and communication, not just technique. Art became a tool for her self-expression and her work drastically changed.

Involved in the antinuclear proliferation movement prevalent in Iowa at the time, she did a series of multicolor etchings based on her *Childhood Memories of Nuclear War*, expressing the fright she had as a little girl going through nuclear bomb drills. She complemented them with images of the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, also by writing journal articles, designing for student protest papers, getting involved in "on the street" activism.

"I started putting in my work the activism I wanted to do," she says. "It allowed me to connect with other artists who felt like me." That's how she became involved in protesting the US-backed Contra War against the Sandinista revolution and traveled

right
Polar Bear
reduction woodcut



top left
Genocide, Darfur Sudan
reduction woodcut

top right
American Pika
reduction woodcut

to Nicaragua to help harvest coffee, the economy of the country being decimated by the US embargo and ongoing widespread fighting. Upon her return she did a series of lithographs pertaining to her experience, also to Nicaraguan children in time of war, deprived of their well-being and dreams, affected in their daily living, victims of adverse conditions imposed by adults.

When she became a teacher the focus of Chouteau's activism changed, shifting more to artwork and classroom. In the classroom, she helps her students develop, in addition to skills and technique, concept and content, insisting they say something, make meaningful work. She encourages their awareness for social justice and challenges them to use their art, according to Xavier University's mission, as citizens for others not only for themselves.

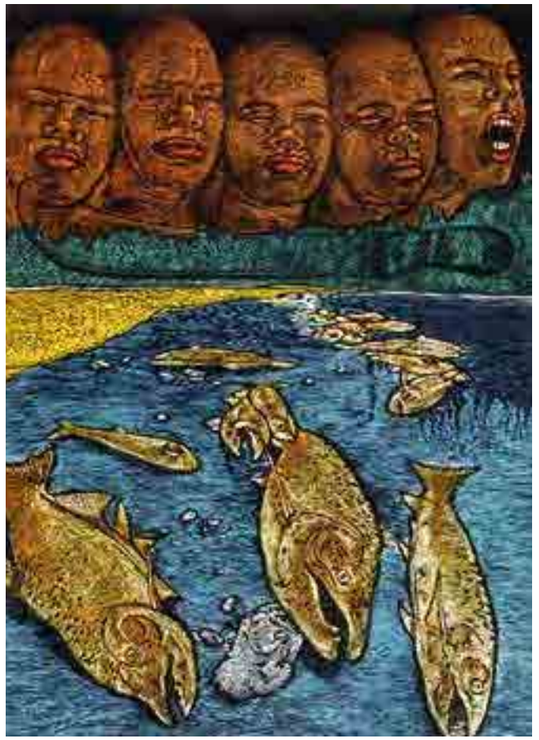
Being in academia, not having to peddle her art, she also has been able to devote her work to what she believes in, is important to her. For many years now she has been working on a continuous series of reduction woodcuts titled *Genocides of the Conscience*. The series explores what she considers the root of contemporary ruin on the planet, a loss of conscience/conscientiousness in humanity. It addresses the challenges of climate change, also of human population growth with its attendant pitfalls of resource consumption, land development, proliferation of extraction industries that put in peril a myriad of species' survival, including our own. It also depicts specific historic and contemporary events in which creatures were subjected to actions that undermined their survival.

The Chinook salmon of Klamath, California, the American Bison, the gray timber

top left
Generation, Twinleaf (Seedlings)
multiplate color woodcut

top right
Genocide, Rwanda
reduction woodcut

bottom
Black Water Horizon
reduction woodcut



safe place, guarded from potential capture. A line of fire, metaphor for devastation, separates them from a Dinka village where they once happily lived. A young boy in the foreground appears to grasp for a star on his shirt alluding to every child's right to 'wish upon a star,' be able to dream, have a future and not be held hostage.

In her *Black Water Horizon* print, Chouteau depicts a vast black mass moving toward the shoreline at sunset, commenting on the Deepwater Horizon tragedy that spilled 4.9 billion barrels of oil in gulf waters, sealing the accident as the worst of its kind in history, the reverberating consequences of which may never be fully revealed.

Chouteau concurrently has an ongoing series of prints titled *Generation*; they represent such subjects as California's endangered trees due to global climate change, the foxtail pine, sequoia, and redwood among others… She means her series to be 'constructive,' each print embodying hope for a conscientious life towards the beauty and well-being of all creatures.

"My art is a journey to the center of my being and back out again. It reflects me, responds to a need within me," says Chouteau. "I make pictures to address my private and social concerns. I want to use my art to dig, explore, experience, grow, become more human... I want it a focus for human interactions as they affect other humans, other living creatures, the environment."

wolves, the threatened Polar Bear, endangered American pika, as well as the people of Darfur, Rwanda, Armenia, all victims of various genocides, are featured in her prints, pointing to the ruinous acts of recent generations.

"Giving these *genocides* a visual presence is my way to force recognition and encourage action," she says.

Her *Rwanda* print is divided in two by an image of a machete, symbol of destruction and deforestation; the upper part depicts numbered heads of Rwandan victims of their genocide, the lower one, dying salmons in the siphoned off bed of the Klamath river.

In her *Darfur, Sudan* print, she calls attention to the children of Darfur in need of protection from the abuses of war. It shows children sleeping on the floor in a

HALENA CLINE

The Liberating Power of Art

Set free by art, Halena Cline portrays what could be

"Art has always been part of me," says Halena Cline. "It has been my inner resource and rescue during bad times I lived through, also a great means for expressing the good things in my life. At three years old I was already painting with my mother's lipstick."

Cline had a stormy childhood. At age 5 she and her five sisters were placed in an orphanage, then in foster homes. At age 16 she dropped out of high school, studied art for two years at what is now Antonelli College, got married, had a baby and worked as a waitress. Two years later, she divorced and joined a religious group that served as her family. She met there her new husband and had another child. When her kids started grade school she decided to pursue her art education and enrolled for two years at Northern Kentucky University, studying printmaking, photography, drawing and painting.

Becoming religious provided Cline with the security and stability she needed. She was taken care of and did not have to make any pressing decisions on her own. After the death of her father, religion, however, did not hold back her depression or her sense of loss; unknowingly, art then served as her therapeutic escape.

Early on she painted mostly "anatomic" landscapes with figures added. Where she lived, nature was being cut and destroyed to build a highway.

Cline responded visually to the physical aggression, the earth in her mind similar to a fecund feminine individual, assaulted and made barren.

Femininity has always been an important and recurrent theme in her work. One of six daughters to a father who suffered from not having a son, Cline, fond of her father, reacted strongly and emotionally to the gender bias and feelings of being disposable. *Bearing the Dog*, a large mixed media piece incorporating ceramics, represents her as a lifeless angel, symbolizing the negation of her identity as a woman, giving birth to a dog, a statement questioning the difference between a boy and a girl. Another ceramic piece, *A Live Dog Is Better off than a Dead Lion*, links womanhood to her personal family history. It represents her mother as a martyr and saint. Cline's mother had a difficult and tormented life, witnessing as a child the death of her own mother, raised by a physically abusive stepmother, experiencing a violent conjugal relationship. Cline depicted her, arms amputated outstretched, as if crucified, a dog's collar around her neck, a saint's spikes on her head. She is stepping on a snake, reference to the feminine symbol of the Virgin Mary, and from her womb escapes a dove, allusion to the children she gave birth to and who flew on their own.

A ceramic sculpture she created during the same period, *The Last Shall Be First and The First Shall Be Last*, pertains to the ambiguity of her life and the contradictory feelings she experienced growing up. The piece has two replicas of her face, one light-colored, the other dark-colored, and an animal tail at its base. It addresses the darkness and lightness one encounters in the same person and also reflects on the raw, instinctive and complex emotions Cline lived all along. Her artistic creativity during all that time allowed her to

top left
A Live Dog Is Better off than a Dead Lion
ceramic

top middle
The Last Shall Be First and the First Shall Be Last
ceramic

top right
Chloe's Playtime
water color and mixed media

bottom right
Cassandra
water color and ink

above
Our Time
watercolor
and ink

right
Bearing
the Dog
mixed media

get things out from inside her, neutralize painful feelings and experiences and heal.

Twenty-six years after joining her religious group, Cline decided to separate from it. This coincided with the birth of her first grandchild and of a new mission she gave herself to care for him and provide him with a secure and stable environment. This approach changed her life and her art.

Cline started painting about her grandchild, visually documenting his progress and joyful moments, about her family, individuals and animals important to her. Her art was thus connecting her to good memories, the happiness of a harmonious and loving life, the kind she missed before and the one she wanted to ensure for her grandchild. It took away her depression and made her feel energetic, positive, and productive.

"My grandchild gave me a new focus," Cline says. "He filled my life. My art followed and reflected it."

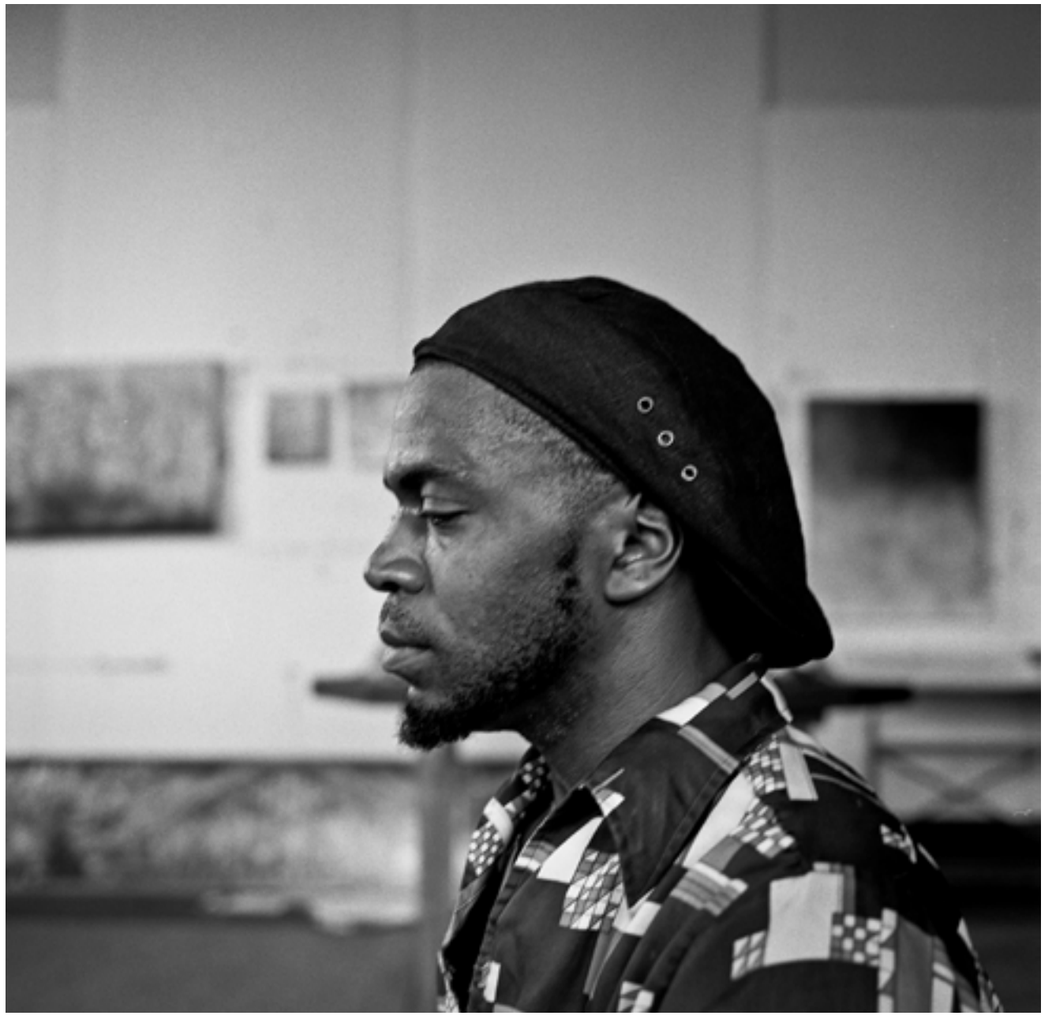
With the start of the Iraq war, Cline's works took a political twist as she was very affected by the unjustified violence and the resulting death and destruction. She created a series of large watercolors on which she stamped images alluding to war, might, and hegemony. Most of the paintings were diptychs with direct references to American politics, often showing opposites, positive negative, good bad, man woman. They included images of puppets, marionettes, the American flag, an American eagle, cowboy and military boots, money elements; but also feminine imagery implying reason, wisdom, and a more humane approach.

With the end of the George W. Bush administration, the war series gave way to works focusing primarily on femininity, stressing the beauty of women, their important role in society; it was a connection to the feminine soul, a statement asserting womanhood, its quality and equality.

In the past years, Cline has been painting watercolors including outline drawings of people who are part of her life, her sister, daughters, grandchildren and friends, also of her dog. It is her way to express her vision of people she loves and cares for.

Chloe's Playtime is based on the outlines of her granddaughter Chloe and Rachel, her friend. They are both playing, worriless, surrounded by images of butterflies, slippers, hearts, flowers. At the bottom, represented pictorially, is the progressive march of a baby. It is Cline's nostalgic look at the peaceful and harmonious world of a little girl, the innocence of childhood that she did not know but would like to protect and maintain for her granddaughter and the children of the world.

"I felt all along the need to do art for my own sake," Cline says. "I suffered growing up and saw my womanhood negated early on. I want my art to contribute to a change, to the respect and appreciation of women and of their important role in society, to the beauty of harmonious families. I want it to promote the importance of a stable and secure environment for growing children, girls and boys alike."



CEDRIC COX

Art to Empower

Cedric Cox's work celebrates the positive

"The more personal you make your work the more universal it becomes, and the more it will resonate in others," is what Terrence Corbin, then professor at the University of Cincinnati (UC), told once Cedric Michael Cox studying under him. Cox never forgot this advice and all of his artwork since has been a genuine reflection of his life, of who he is, of what he believes in, of what he would like to achieve in this world.

Born in Dayton, Ohio, Cox, an African American visual artist, lived most of his life in Cincinnati. He attended Indian Hill Schools from first grade on and later UC, graduating with a bachelor's degree in fine arts, majoring in painting and drawing. Art from the beginning was his refuge, his mode of expression and of self-assertion. Growing up as a minority individual in a predominantly white community made him often feel estranged and somewhat out of place. He responded to the challenge by using his creative energy to communicate, meet others and go beyond divisive prejudices.

During art school, Cox produced work related to the African American experience and culture; he felt an obligation to do so. He was, however, at the same time constantly questioning how to use his art to speak of himself, of his history, to become empowered, and empower others. He discovered his own voice studying internal anatomy, looking from the inside out, his anatomical drawings helping him answer who he was and where he fits. But his real artistic direction took shape only after he graduated

top left
White Oak on Elm
acrylic on canvas

top right
Stella's Garden
acrylic on canvas

bottom right
Underground
acrylic on canvas

and moved to Over The Rhine (OTR), downtown Cincinnati, to live.

"Coming from the suburbs, I was mesmerized by the graffiti on the sidewalks, on the buildings, by the coexistence of boarded up vacant houses side by side with palatial architecture," he says. "Some buildings were being rehabbed, others not, still wearing their history. There was a rhythm to the neighborhood, a dynamic pattern of shapes and forms, all like in a jazz symphony."

Cox, a musician himself, playing bass in a hard rock band, *Morticite*, since the age of 17, had been using music and songs all along to reflect on himself and his views.

"In the band we write songs about injustice and prejudice, what affects us," he says, "also about human struggles, love, doing the right thing to other fellows, making this world a better place."

Cox decided to put his visual art at the same service, to produce work that speaks of his new neighborhood, its architecture, its beauty, its rich potential, emphasizing its positive, the goodness of its people, not only the bad that media usually portrays. By deconstructing and reinventing architectonic configurations, he created densely fragmented abstract drawings and paintings that forced the viewer to step in, connect with their spirit and reexamine material culture. His series *Underground* juxtaposes horizontally the 2 worlds of uptown and downtown OTR, uptown represented by the distant and somewhat cold cityscape, downtown by the boiling underground visceral reality of the neighborhood with its rich history and vibrant soul.

"I wanted my paintings to pay tribute to the area, to show what it is really about, its guts, its beauty, away from the stereotyped images of violence and decay usually associated with it," he says. "It was my attempt to empower it, also its inhabitants."

In *Horizon*, he connected directly with the urban architectural landscape of the place and its inner spiritual dimension. In his *Mud Cloth* drawings, related to the creation story and to Obatala, a deity central to the creation myth of the ancient Yoruba cultures of West Africa, he emphasized the role every individual plays in the creation act, in the betterment of this world, in his case, constructive contributions to OTR. His painting *White Oak on Elm* shows in its center a tree overlapping and espousing various architectural details from OTR, columns, church windows, rooftops… He meant it as a symbol of rebirth and hope, a source of continual inspiration and faith. By its organic form contrasting with the linear geometric elements of architecture, the tree brought a human quality to the painting, connecting to Cox's feelings, experience and emotions about the neighborhood.

In addition to his art, Cox has also contributed to OTR as an organizer and an educator. With Robin Harrison, a filmmaker who had directed a documentary on the Cincinnati civil unrest of 2001, they produced *The Blast Urban Arts and Cultural Festivals*, bringing to the area events that showcased themed art exhibitions, popular art collections, films and music; they all intended to depict the local culture in a reputable, respectable way, making people aware of the richness of their heritage and diversity. At the same time he created *Art Shapes Us*, an art teaching program for high school and middle school students from various institutions and backgrounds. He also taught after-school art classes at the YMCA, served as a studio coordinator for Visionaries and Voices, volunteered

top left
Polyphonic Monuments
graphite on strathmore

top right
Mud Cloth
graphite on paper

bottom
Horizon
acrylic on canvas

as guest speaker at various elementary schools, participated in educational art projects at the Public Library, Art Museum, Contemporary Arts Center.

"I try to provide outlets and services to others, to lead them to positive change," Cox says. "Working with kids, I encourage them to follow their dream, reminding them that it can be achieved. I share with them my own struggles, my fears, my bad experiences, but also that with commitment, hard work and honesty, I am being rewarded, that good prevails, that inner beauty grows even in the midst of ugliness."

Cox perceives art as a tool of empowerment for himself and others. It helps him become a better person, persevere through difficulty, assert himself. His art comes from his heart, at the service of his life.

"My art is about beauty from within," he says. "It allows me to be the best I can be, to project my fullest human potential and share it with others in positive ways. I hope it can move others to realize their own dream. When I hear a song I like I always envision myself performing it on stage and sharing it with people I love so they too may be touched by it. I would like my art to resonate the same with the viewer."

SCOTT DONALDSON

Painting to the Point of Truth

Scott Donaldson speaks through his art

"Art has always been part of my life, as early as I can remember," says Scott Donaldson. "I failed second-grade reading because I spent all my time drawing. Art is my expression, my communication. It gives me an outlook on my life and on life in general."

Scott Donaldson, a local visual artist, graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College in St Peter, Minnesota, with a bachelor's degree in studio and theatre arts and from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis with a master of fine arts degree in theatre arts.

Donaldson had a longstanding interest in theatre. As a child he mounted plays in his backyard for the neighborhood. In college, in the early 1970's, he worked with David Olsen and *The Cherry Creek Theatre* to develop shows that involved the community. After graduating from college he worked for five years as a set designer for the Kalamazoo Civic Players, then for fifteen years as an exhibit designer for various museums, including the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati.

Donaldson also did his studio art all along–abstract landscapes in the beginning, then more socially engaged paintings, with a sense of black humor reminiscent of the theatre he likes.

above
Abraham Lincoln
oil on canvas

His social and political interest and liberal views started at an early age, initially witnessing his father's political move from a conservative to a progressive stand, working on George McGovern's presidential campaign when he was 18, then getting involved in the political and socially-based experimental underground theatre of the early 1970's.

When he first arrived in Cincinnati, Donaldson participated in "Ahimsa," a show on non-violence. His 3D piece in the show, *A Beautiful World*, represented a figure of Buddha facing the violence of the city. He cut a hole and put a light inside the piece, a reference to his belief that light has to come from within and not from the outside violent world and that peace is only possible through a deeper understanding of the inner being and a peaceful self.

In 2005 Donaldson received an Individual Artist grant from the city of Cincinnati to visually interpret stories of the Underground Railroad in modern times. He wanted to illustrate 'how all changes but remains the same' and how fear and paranoid feelings are always prevalent.

Boxed, a colored pencil drawing from the series, represents a black woman hiding in a confined space; Donaldson meant it as a modern allegory for how we cut ourselves off from the richness of the world by our fears, prejudices and obsessions. In *Hide and Seek*, two men hide in the dark among trees; they depict the fearful hider with whom we sympathize and the frightening seeker, whether a government agent or a criminal, from whom we fear ambush. This series served also as a statement about slavery and its history.

Donaldson then became involved with the Artworks summer teen program, designing and facilitating the painting of neighborhood murals. He remembers, while painting a mural for the Melville school building, the intricate involvement of the community in its progress and the pride at seeing portraits of different kids and members of the community being displayed.

"It gave identity to these people," Donaldson says. "Nobody had done this before for them."

In designing the murals, Donaldson always involves the community, bringing it together, strengthening its bonds and giving it a voice. He also often inserts in his murals symbols with a message. A *Camp Washington Mural*, for instance, includes, next to a picture of George Washington in a dress, a picture of a cow, reference to the cow that escaped from the Camp Washington slaughterhouse and ran free for 12 days. Donaldson wanted it as a symbol of freedom and courage.

below
J. Robert Oppenheimer
oil on canvas

In 2009 Donaldson had a portrait show of celebrities he selected because they made a statement through their life or had personal integrity. He painted them in a realistic but twisted way, using an odd color scheme; this often revealed something hidden or intriguing about them. A new series of portraits includes, for instance, *Oppenheimer*, because of his guilt feeling at having facilitated the creation of the atomic bomb and of how he lived afterwards trying to limit its further use. Donaldson painted him with gold eyes, the color of enlightenment; and a rust background, color of remorse. He also included *Helen Keller*, who, despite losing her eye sight, was able to overcome her limitations and spoke up.

The portrait of *George Carlin* is in homage to the man who never gave in and always pushed the envelope of free speech. Carlin, a stand-up comedian, always said the truth. He was audacious and anti-establishment. Donaldson painted his face blue-grey, related to his recent death; his piercing uncompromising eyes gold for knowledge; and his beard fiery red in reference to his outspoken mind.

Over the past years Donaldson participated regularly in SOS (Save Our Souls) ART, a yearly art show of sociopolitical expressions for peace and justice. His pieces in the show generally communicated his critical views of what hinders peace in our society, also his messages for a better world. *American Happiness*, his 2007 painting, was in reaction to the Virginia Tech shooting and about America's love of guns and violence and our inability to pass effective gun laws. *The Anarchist*, a painting from the same year, depicted Jeff Monson, a Freeform Martial Arts Champion, a non violent anarchist and pacifist made notorious for wearing, at a press conference, an 'Impeach Bush' T shirt.

In addition to his personal art, Donaldson still does exhibit designs. He designed, for instance, the permanent display of *"The Freedom Summer"* exhibit at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. The exhibit documented the story of individuals who, in the summer of 1960, trained at Miami University in order to go South to register black voters, at the risk of their own lives. Carlyle Brown, an African-American playwright who teaches at Miami University and whose plays are an unapologetic avocation for justice and equality, wrote the story.

Donaldson's works, be it his paintings or his exhibit designs, always reflect who he is, what he believes and the values he cherishes. His themes are universal, always in favor of integrity, freedom and justice.

"I am true to my heart," he says. "I paint to the point of truth I see, and I am not afraid of saying what I think. Of course, I am not interested in getting in a fight, but one thing is certain: I will not back down from what I believe."

top left
Helen Adams Keller
oil on canvas

top middle
George Carlin
oil on canvas

top right
Campy Washington
mural painting

bottom:
American Happiness
oil on canvas

ANDY FAUSZ

A Father's Fight, a Father's Art

Andy Fausz's struggle for justice

"Art is a part of me," says Albert Andrew Fausz Jr, also known as Andy. "It is like the heart that beats to keep me alive or the brain that activates my body. I cannot live without it; and when I make it I am fulfilled." Art is also Fausz' conversation, his way to communicate with others, to convey what he thinks and believes, what preoccupies him.

Raised by principled, highly ethical and religious parents, Fausz has been since his childhood very sensitive to the bad and evil in this world, also to the potential power in each individual to make a difference. He uses his art as a guiding light to interpellate the viewer and trigger a better change.

"Our world has a lot of pain, destruction, problems," he says. "We need to work out our differences, make earth a better place for all. Art is a potent tool in this respect. It can get the word out on various issues, create communication, lead to answers and favor transformation."

Fausz, a visual artist, born and raised in Northern Kentucky, attended Grandview Elementary and Bellevue High School; he excelled in art all along. After high school he took a break for few years exploring life, working different jobs, then joined Northern Kentucky University graduating with a BFA in drawing.

Even before art school Fausz drew all the time and exhibited his work; it consisted mostly of images out of his head, many related to rock and roll, popular at the time.

In college his art became more personal both in imagery and content. It was often religious-based, questioning the reason for evil when we're all given the ability to be good spirits and well-doers; it was dark reflecting the darkness in the world, but also always included elements of hope and beauty.

"I was being an activist, speaking to the world of what I felt was wrong…," he says, "but also pointing to the beauty available, to the fact that we can share and help each other."

In college, Fausz started a relationship which brought him a daughter; unfortunately the relationship soon derailed and he had to fight in court for the right to see and spend time with his child. From that moment on all his work focused on the pain caused by a broken relationship, his longing and concerns for his daughter, his dealing with a judicial system often insensitive to the needs of fathers.

"Our family court system is failing fathers," he says. "I had to prove I was the father of my child, that I was drug and alcohol free, that what I was being accused of was wrong, and this despite an impeccable past. I had to hire lawyers and lost all my life savings. Most important I wasted precious time I could have spent with my baby."

Sweet V, a large mixed media painting he created around the time he split up with his child's mother shows in its center a big ominous head representing the mother, a dominating, powerful and controlling force in this instance, in its left lower corner, a small portrait of himself being pushed out of the page, and in the background, a fading ghost-like image of his daughter as he remembered her the night before, sleeping peacefully. He depicted the mother's face with eyes and mouth closed, as if unwilling to see or talk, thus unresponsive to his helpless and hurt feelings.

In *Judging Me*, a very large mixed media painting on paper, Fausz shares his experience battling the court to gain the right to see his daughter. He drew the judges as skeleton referees surrounding him and accusing him. He is in the middle of the picture, his mouth wide open screaming to defend himself, and in the right half is the mother of his child, her head upside down radiating thick lines of aggression; on one side of the painting are knives being thrown at him. To add hope to his situation, Fausz also incorporated a little house, flowers floating in the background, a sacred heart, allusion to him, a good person wanting a good relationship.

In *Protecting Our Eggs*, also a very large painting on paper, he states that even when one is the father, the rightful provider of the "egg," the current family court system often denies him all rights, as if only mothers matter for a child's healthy development.

Fausz' recent paintings have all included self portraits, portraits of his daughter, of her mother, images of good and evil, all interacting in different fields of color, line work, stylistic imagery, to reinforce emotions and feelings. They contain both beauty and pain, and incorporate stories, poems, conversations. They can be hard to see, uplifting at times, but always trigger conversations with the viewers and an opportunity for Fausz to talk about his struggles and the family court system he has been experiencing, thus clarifying his message.

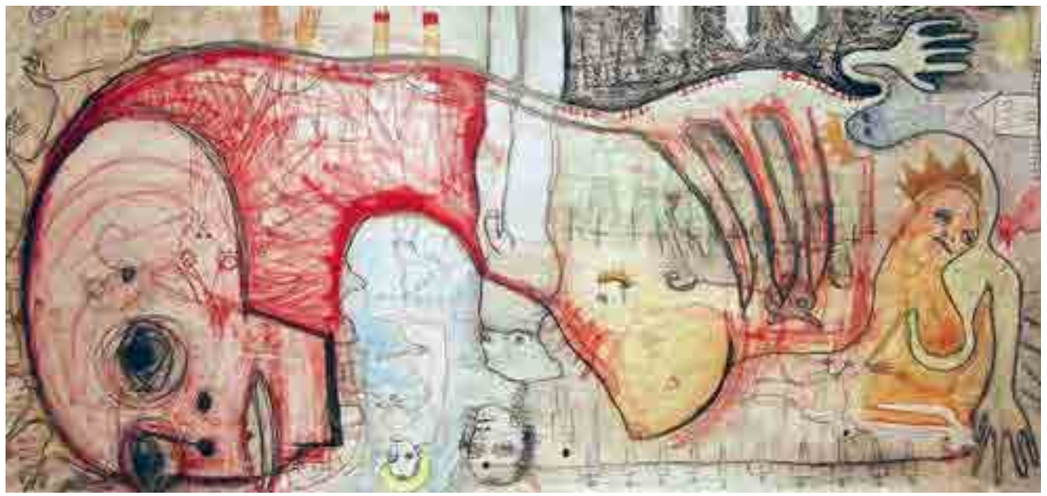
"Artists and art shows provide a vehicle for conversations, for people to meet and talk," he says. "They get thoughts and exchanges started, vital to any change. My work right now focuses on my situation as an estranged father, also at shedding light on our family court system in order to make it more humane. It will always deal with the pain I see and feel around me, thriving for a better world."

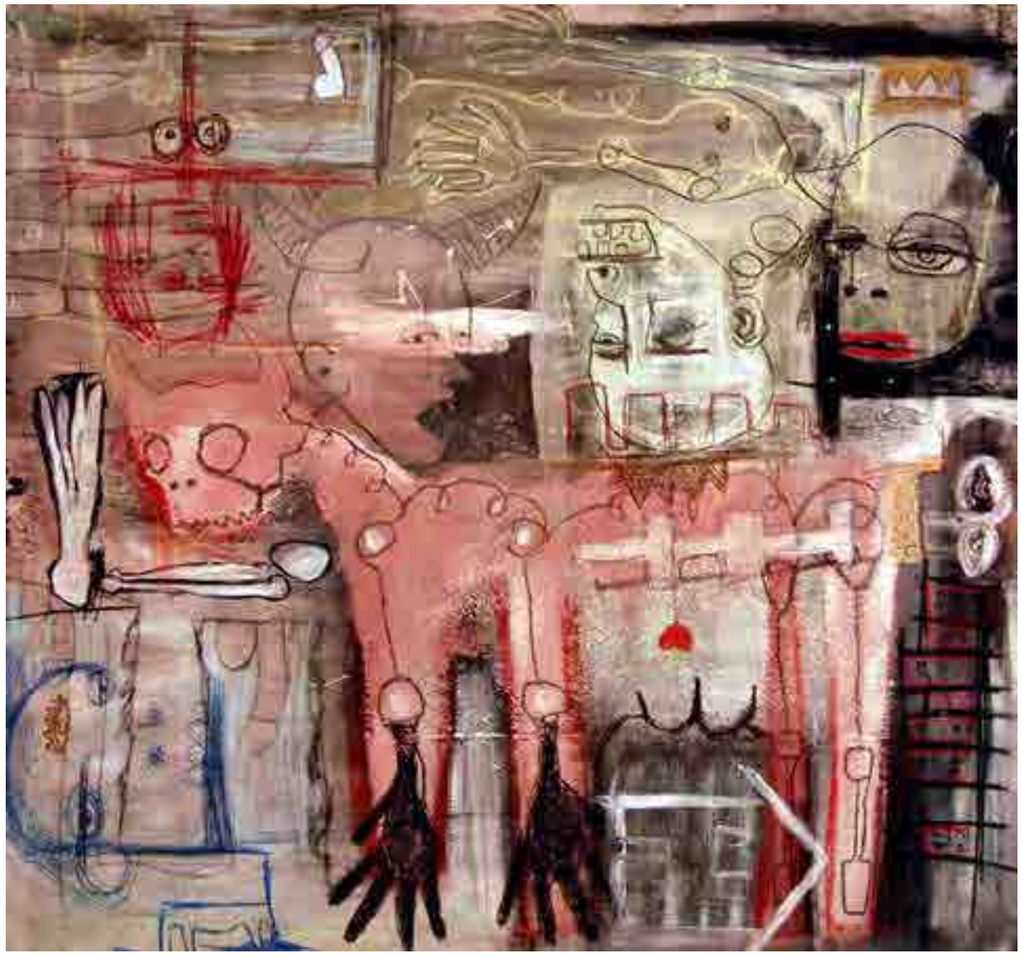
Now that he is able to spend more time with his daughter, Fausz hopes that the beauty of their relationship will start to transpire into his art. He would like to continue addressing religion and its good values, the power of love, ongoing social issues such as fighting greed, food and famine, the futility of wars.
"For me, the best aspect of art is sharing it and sharing myself and my feelings through it," Fausz says. "My images come naturally and subconsciously; they reflect what I had lived, thought, experienced. My art breathes on its own; it urges me to partake in the goodness of life."

(Note: Andy Fausz passed away unexpectelly on November 10, 2012 at the young age of 36. His friendship and beautiful values are being missed).

bottom left
She's on Top
mixed media
on paper

bottom right
Alone
mixed media
on paper





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top left
Saving You for Me
mixed media
on paper

top middle
Protecting Our Eggs
mixed media
on paper

top right
Sweet V
mixed media
on paper

bottom right
Judging Me
mixed media
on paper

STEVEN FINKE

Putting Life and Death into Perspective

Steven Finke's art is a meditation on loss and mortality

"I have been aware of human pain and suffering from a very young age," says Steven Finke. "Growing up I was introduced to the Holocaust and often reminded of its horrors as it directly affected my family and the many families in my community. As a child I did not understand the ramifications of what I was told but was horrified that people could act towards each other in such destructive ways."

Pain, suffering, death, the meaning of existence have all along permeated Finke's thinking and art. His work, initially dealing with personal issues, progressively and naturally delved into the human, the universal, the generality of life in this world.

Born in Queens and raised on Long Island, New York, Finke belonged to a middle class family which placed strong emphasis on education. Interested in the sciences, he was at first leaning toward a career in forestry and wild life management, but shifted later toward the arts, earning a bachelor of fine arts degree from Ohio University, Athens, and a master of fine arts degree from the University of Miami, Florida, both in ceramics.

"I wanted to do pottery and live in the forest," he says. "I became, however, quickly taken by sculptures as fine art objects and started creating them in outdoor and indoor settings using various materials."

Finke currently teaches sculpture at Northern Kentucky University.

Right after graduate school, married and with two kids, Finke experienced the breakdown of his marriage and, in his mind, the disintegration of the myth of family. His artwork, raw and expressionistic, became a narrative about his life, telling real stories with a mythological twist. It reflected his personal feelings and the issues he was dealing with, questioning where he stood and the part he played in the human condition.

George and the Dragon, a large mosaic piece from that period, depicts George holding a sword, and a dragon, with human attributes, falling toward him. It alludes to the attraction to the unknown, to danger, to the unexpected path one often takes when dealing with uncertainty, in this case to Finke's confused handling of his new conjugal situation.

Divorced and settled in Cincinnati, Finke met his new wife, ceramic artist Ana England. When asked to have a joint show, both interested in the science/art relationship they decided to produce works on the theme of Creation. Finke resorted to the book of Genesis and illustrated in mixed media sculptures each of the creation's story seven days.

"I approached the work from both scientific and religious aspects," he says. "I wanted it universal, asking the fundamental questions of how we got here, why and for what, thus parting from my egocentric concerns."

His Day 1 sculpture, *Let There Be Light*, consists of a cone of stacked sections of glass, held at an angle by a metallic structure. The cone reflects light and serves as playground for interacting lights and shadows. *The Creation of Humans*, the Day 6 sculpture, depicted the three phases of life: birth, reproduction, death. Finke included in it personal elements, his father's knee, his grandson's navel, a vial of his and his new wife's blood, thus indirectly commenting on his own journey.

"Working on the *Creation Stories*, I was already reflecting on mortality and dissolution," he says. "After birth comes death, and it was natural that my work progress to address the impermanence of life."

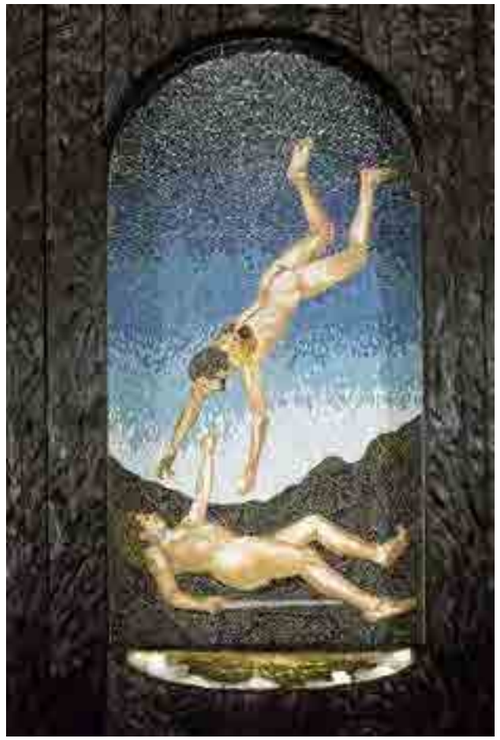
This is when Finke discovered the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and embarked on visualizing its content. He tackled its first day, which focuses on the Cessation of Breath, the moment before death. He created a *Breathing Machine*, a metallic structure that opens on a pair of mechanized lungs moving forth and back when cranked, letting air in and out. The cycled air sounds like breathing, and feeds a small fire started by burning a significant item brought in by the viewer. By cranking the machine, the viewer symbolically controls his own breathing and willingly parts with what may be considered important. Meant initially as a travelling piece, Finke later decided to include it in a permanent site specific artwork, *The Cessation of Breath: A Mechanical Meditation on the Moment before Death*. The installation stands in the midst of a forest on 38 acres he purchased in the watershed of the Ohio River Valley. It consists of four separate sculptural elements, a *Cabin*, a *Bridge*, a *Pedestal* and a *Vault*, all connected to trace the journey before death, integrating forest, sculpture and human in an aesthetic meditation on impermanence.

"I wanted to provide the serious visitor a place for reflection on mortality, loss and grief, hoping it leads to greater insight into the nature of life, connection with

top left
Breathing Machine inside Vault
mixed media
installation

bottom left
Peaceful and Wrathful Deities, Cardinal
mixed media

bottom right
Pedestal
glass and bronze



top left
George and the Dragon (detail)
mosaic

top middle
Let There Be Light, Creation Day 1
mixed media

top right
The Creation of Humans, Creation Day 6
mixed media

bottom
Bridge
mixed media

the environment, inner peace," states Finke, "and at the same time call attention to our responsible role in this world."

Starting the journey alone in the forest, the viewer first experiences the solitude of the cabin, a metaphor for one's house, reminiscing on the inevitability of death, and then borrows a path over a sculpted bridge, leading to a pedestal composed of glass, metal skulls, a cast bronze cranium on which is engraved the Tibetan text describing the moment before the last breath, and lastly enters a sculptural vault which shelters the breathing machine.

"The impermanence of life is prevalent," says Finke, "and we need to face it. Things come into being and others come out of being. We constantly die to the last moment and are reborn to the following one, and every moment affects the next. We have to be reminded that each of our actions affects our future and that of the earth."

This is why Finke also wanted the forest to be the setting for his meditative artwork, the forest through its constant living and dying a metaphor for life and a link to the ecological protection of the land.

Finke will be working next on sculptures for the *Cessation of Pulse*, the second day of the book. In the meantime he is creating a series of small bronze pieces he calls *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*. Most have the recurrent image of a skull and include moving objects reflecting the mechanics of life. They allude to death and the nakedness of human beings and are meant to be used as meditative toys during the viewer's journey.

"A root cause for our inability to live at peace with each other and our environment is our avoidance or lack of understanding of the impermanent nature of existence," says Finke. "By reflecting on mortality, we can learn to live in a more sustainable way with our environment and a more compassionate way with each other. This is what I would like my art to achieve."

DOROTHY FRAEMBS

A Lifetime of Art and Moral Outrage

Dorothy Fraembs: Illustrating injustice for decades

"Drawing is such a part of my life that I can hardly speak without a pen in my hand," says Dorothy Fraembs. "When I make lists, I often use little sketches instead of words."

Fraembs is an illustrator and a visual artist. Her early memories of art are watching her mother artistically cooking, baking and setting a beautiful table. Her own introduction to art was in kindergarten and succeeding years when she received encouragement for her drawing skills in school clubs, Girl Scouts and at home. Her high school years, 1942-1946, were the World War II years and influenced the rest of her life. At a high school club conference, she heard a teenage Japanese girl tell of her internment at a post–Pearl Harbor camp, describing the prejudice and hardship she and her family endured. That awakened Fraembs to the injustice in life.

Fraembs studied illustration and worked in a Chicago advertising agency, and then in Urbana, Illinois, for *"Our Wonderful World,"* a young people's encyclopedia. When she and her husband moved to Cincinnati, she joined the publications department of General Electric where her husband worked on reactors.

In 1959, because the turmoil in China, people were increasingly fleeing to Hong Kong and the city became teeming with abandoned children. From

overcrowded orphanages, she and her husband adopted a baby boy who had been abandoned on a beach, and a year later, their daughter who was found on the second floor of a hospital. At this point Fraembs opted to become a stay-at-home mother. Her parenting years coincided with the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War and their associated injustice and violence. The events of those tumultuous years, in addition to the experiences of her children, inspired her to start making social commentary assemblages.

"I had little free time," she says, "but whenever I could, I would go to my art room to draw, paint and work on my assemblages. Art was the outlet for the pain and frustration I was feeling."

In the 1960's and early 70's, Fraembs created many statement pieces. *Who Cares* was sparked by the many killings of innocent people due to racism, discrimination and thoughtlessness. It shows a wall on which are written names of the many victims such as Emmett Till, a black youth murdered for whistling at a white woman; civil rights workers, Viola Gregg Liuzzo, Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney, slaughtered for volunteering to help with voter registration in the South; Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carol Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, four little girls killed when a church was bombed. At the bottom of the wall is a blood-spattered page from the Bible and an enlarging lens to emphasize the passage, "What you have done to the least of these, my brethren, so also you have done to me" (Matthew 25:40), a reminder of Christ's teachings. A rodent and a crumbled can, also included, suggest the neighborhoods where these victims were most painfully remembered and mourned.

War incorporates sculpted Vietnamese people, plastic figures of soldiers and other elements of life going through a meat grinder, all being smashed and destroyed, to demonstrate the annihilation and waste brought by wars.

"That's the way it is," a viewer commented. "People don't want to face the gruesome reality of war. We want to believe that good guys always win and innocents don't get hurt."

God's Favorite Child was a response to the racism of the time and to the discrimination her children experienced due to their non-Caucasian origin. The front shows similar-looking grey shadows against a translucent background and the question, "Which one is God's favorite child?" The other side consists of the sculpted figures of children of different colors standing side by side with Fraembs' answer to the question of the piece, "All the children God shaped and styled." This theme was also produced in smaller, silk-screened versions.

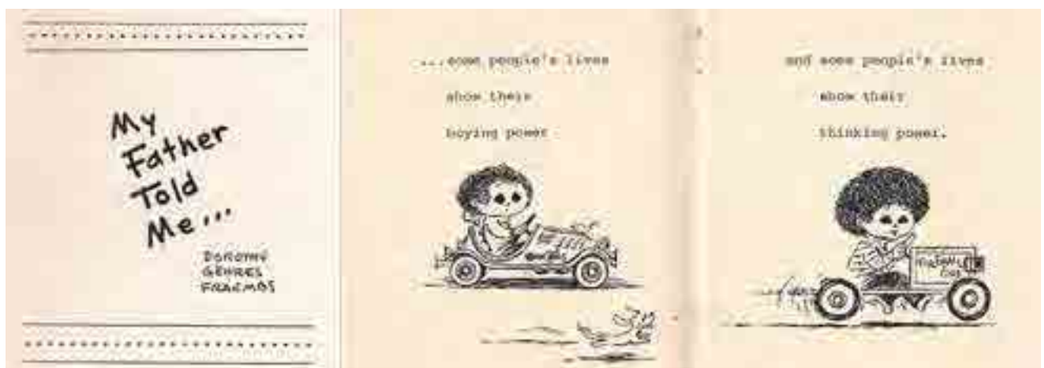
Thoughts about the terrible happenings of the time kept coming fast, so Fraembs began a weekly human-relations cartoon panel that appeared in the Rochester, New York, *Times-Union* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The drawing and text were social commentaries presented under the heading "*My Mother Told Me...*" and voiced by two small children. Examples include: "My mother told me... with what we do and what we say, each of us makes the world the way it is today," "...Words can be bridges between people" and "Sometimes someone who seems to be looking for a fight is really trying to find a friend." Later, selections were compiled and printed as booklets.

In 1973, Fraembs' husband died suddenly of a massive heart attack. Although she had never dreamed of being a teacher, concern for the financial well-being of her children led Frambs to teaching commercial art to eleventh graders at a Great Oaks Vocational Campus for over seven years. It is an experience she treasures. But all that time she continued doing her panels. After retiring from teaching, she started a new series, based on family experiences, dealing with the absence of loved ones. The series included: *When My Father Died*, *When My Mother Died*, *Someone Special* and others, all intended as conversation starters between grieving adults and children, with the purpose of fostering sharing and understanding of thoughts they might not otherwise express to each other.

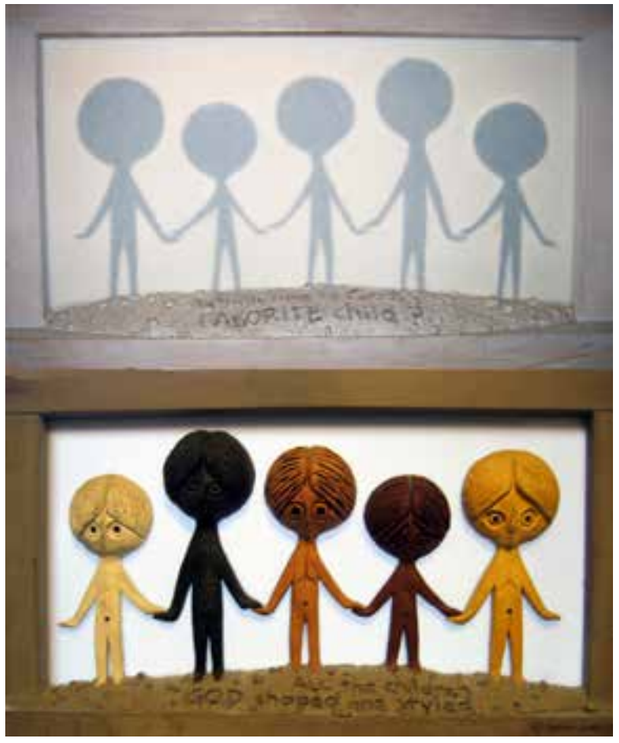
In 1996, Fraembs' son, grown and a police officer, was killed in the line of duty. She and her daughter again found themselves coping with untimely death, the revived awareness of the many affected by murder and how important it was for children to have good beginnings.

Fraembs' commentaries also have been channeled through yearly holiday cards in which she conveys her thoughts about world happenings and her hopes for the coming year. They have dealt with the Oklahoma City bombing, the Berlin Wall, 9/11, oil and the environment, famine in Africa, etc. They are not traditional but there are people who collect them. In the past few years she has also been a regular participant in SOS Art, exhibiting some of her old assemblages which are still rele

above
50 Years Ago (front and back)
mixed media



below
My Father Told Me
booklet



vant, also new ones reflecting her thoughts on recent world conditions.

In her eighties, Fraembs continues to express her thinking through her art. She would like her social commentaries to be used as thought-provoking discussion starters in places such as The Underground Railway Freedom Center and similar institutions that try to engender understanding.

"My mother wanted me to become a nurse. My husband thought I would have been a good engineer," she says. "I can't imagine myself, however, doing anything other than trying to communicate with people through art."

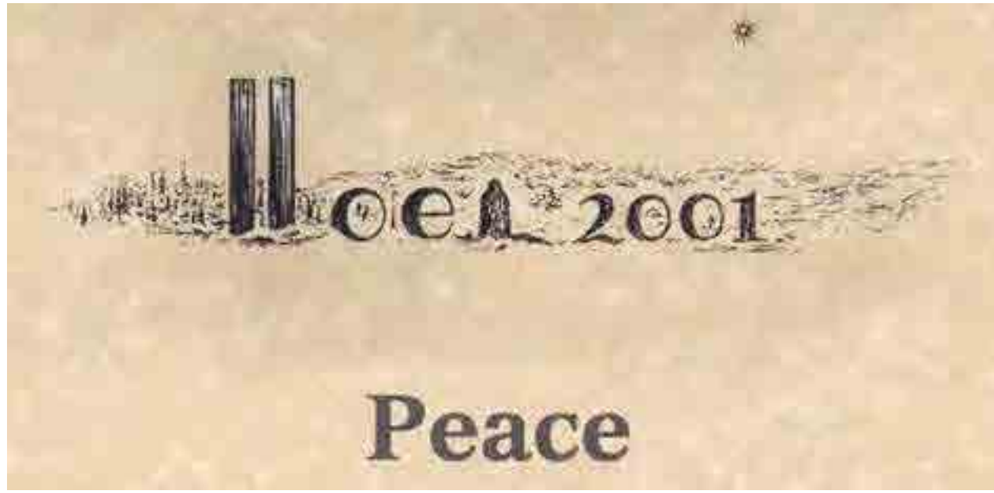
top left
Who Cares
mixed media

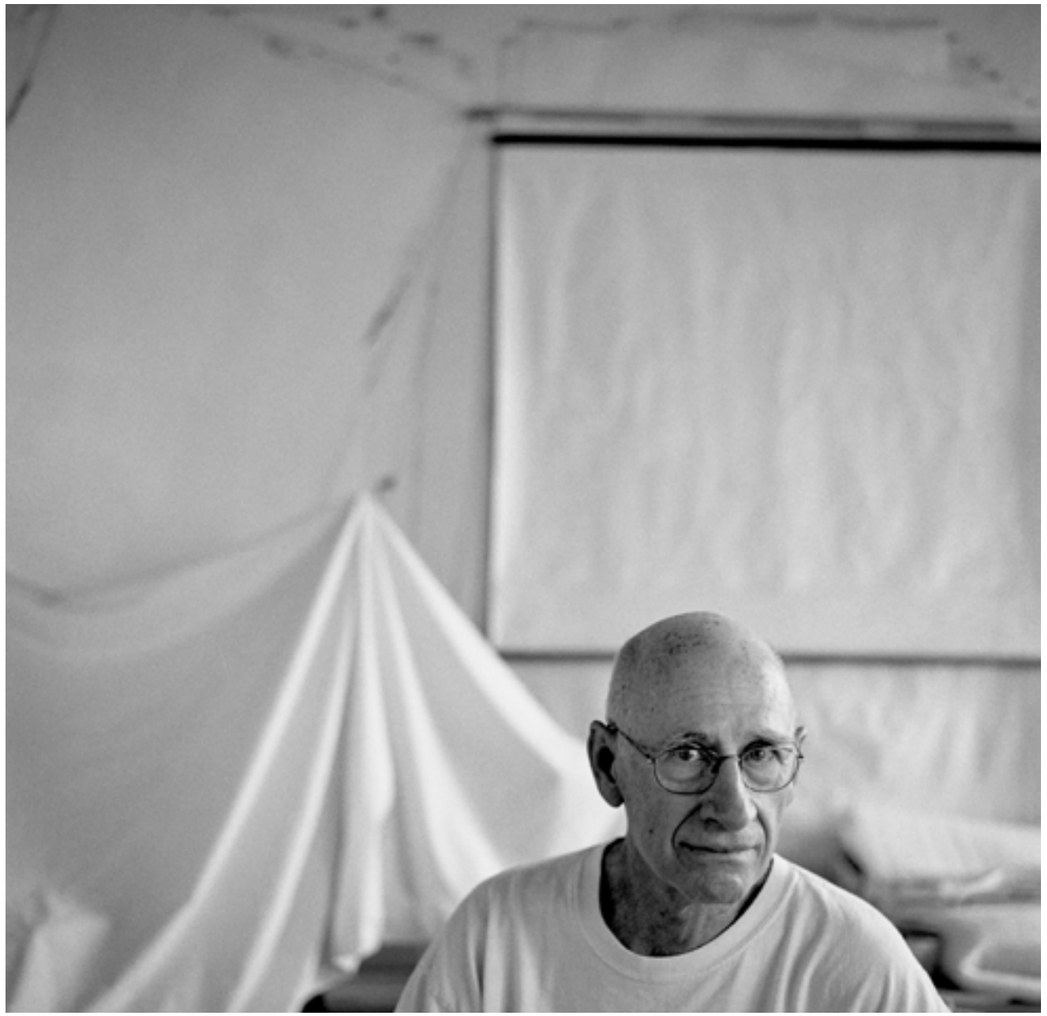
top middle
God's Favorite Child (front and back)
mixed media

top right
Birds of Peace II (detail)
mixed media

bottom left
War
mixed media

bottom right
Noel (911) 2001
card drawing





GARY GAFFNEY

What It Means to Be Human Now

Gary Gaffney's art connects matter and spirit in the world

"When is your humanity palpable?/Does justice make any sense to you?/Is peace possible without your participation?/Is power more seductive than compassion?/Can art change a life?," asks Gary Gaffney in his poem *Mil Preguntas (a Meditation in 1000 Questions)*.

Visual artist, poet, writer, and Professor Emeritus at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, Gaffney always resorts to his artistic creativity to reflect on these questions and many more, toward a deeper understanding of life and the world in general.

He was born in New Orleans, grew up Catholic, studied mathematics to the completion of his PhD qualifying exams. Later and because "art most expanded (him) as a person," he changed course, enrolled at the University of New Orleans, then University of Cincinnati, earning a master of fine arts degree in drawing.

As a graduate student in fine art, Gaffney developed a mix of technical skills, at the same time forging a personal esthetic language. It was initially influenced by his mathematics background, focusing on well organized, skillfully crafted patterns and organic shapes occupying the flat surface of his page. He progressively added to it elements reflective of his catholic upbringing: ornate and religious images, Dutch metal, red and black colors, pictures of saints, of birds alluding to the soul… His artwork became

iconic, showing borders with layers of full decoration, carrying meaning, like in a sacred and spiritual environment.

Consisting primarily of drawings, his imagery, for many years, dealt with nature forms, referencing trees, plants, flowers, and their intrinsic and metaphorical meanings. Absent initially, the human figure progressively reimposed itself.

"I enjoyed drawing nature," Gaffney says, "but wanted my work to be about something bigger. I felt an obligation for people around me; we're all connected. I wanted my work to make sense of it, to show our central place and essential role in the world."

This is when his series *Man and Woman* emerged. It reflected his concerns with humans, not only isolated skin-bound individuals, but beings integrated in the universe, products of centuries of history and interactions with the cosmos. Men and women thus transcended their purely material nature to become spiritual entities, bearing the wisdom of generations, adding their part to it, playing a contemporary role.

Man Resurrected, a large mixed media drawing on paper, shows an iconic central human figure, intimately connected with and merging into its surroundings of various symbols and objects, keys to the way we understand the world. These elements, ceasing to be external, flow into and out of the figure, like through a permeable membrane and not an obstructive skin. The drawing is meant to state that we, humans, are rooted in history and culture, connected to each other and the world, and as such, with our collective experience, responsible for what we know, think and do. The adjective *Resurrected*, in the title, points to the spiritual dimension of the "new" human, often represented in Gaffney's works, like a soul, floating in the universe.

After his large drawings of *Man and Woman*, Gaffney resorted to more intimate, smaller collages. Reminiscent of icons, they continued his search for spirituality. They included carefully selected images placed side by side: religious figures and angels, cosmos elements, all connected to each others by guiding lines, as if leading the way, creating direction maps and diagrams. Birds,

below
Be Amazed
billboard quote

top left
Anatomy Lesson
mixed media
collage on paper

top right
Many Worlds
mixed media

spiritual symbols, often appeared in them, flying between the realm of earth and that of sky, linking matter to spirit. Gaffney wanted his collages to trigger questioning about the world and our role in it, and also to generate awe.

"In the 21st century we think we know everything, have control, are safe, in no need of connection," he says. "I want to break down these passive ways of thinking; there's more, there is still mystery, and our collective experience demands our direct involvement and commitment."

With time, however, Gaffney found his collages limiting his messages to only a narrow gallery audience. He initially expanded their content into installations, creating thus a real spiritual space, one directly experienced by the viewer, not just an illusion on a flat page. Then, in his search for different means to reach larger audiences, he branched into words, performances, interventions, aiming at messages more direct and more accessible.

To that effect he received a Cincinnati City Arts Allocation grant to make bumper stickers, yard signs, magnet cards, billboards, all including words of wisdom, ideas towards a more humane approach to the world. Using simple and straightforward sentences such as: 'Ask for Less,' 'Practice Being Human,' 'Integrity Always Costs More,' etc. he wanted individuals to stop, think about experiences and situations in their lives, about what it means to be human nowadays.

When The Art Academy first moved to downtown Cincinnati, he designed a short survey to engage the local community, communicate with its members, discover their philosophy of life, their likes and dislikes. Using numbers and

statistics gleaned from the Internet and that reflected current social and political reality, he generated *STATart*, data he distributed at an SOS Art event in order to educate and persuade.

Gaffney is also a poet and a writer in his own right. *Mil Preguntas*, his poem with 1000 questions, reflects on various issues facing the planet and the role of humankind. His Short *Lives of 100 Persons*, in progress, features imaginary characters to be visually rendered, thus shedding light on stereotypes and prejudice, on how one sees things, how one thinks a person looks like.

He is currently seeking to implement his *Wisdom Project* in various settings. The project consists of individuals who share the same environment, to display,

top left
Tangeman Gallery
wall drawing

top middle
Man Resurrected
mixed media drawing

top right
Woman Resurrected
mixed media drawing

bottom left
Aviary
mixed media collage

written on neck badges, their thoughts of wisdom for the day, the goal being to interact with others, express and exchange deeper ideas, generate richer discussions.

Gaffney has always held the human in the midst of his concerns. His work consistently points to humans' essential role as active and responsible, and also spiritual participants in the world; it involves direct engagement with the viewer.

"I use art to make sense of the world, to test my vision of it, to find my place in it, to share it with others," he says. "Art has transformed my life; I hope I can offer that possibility also to others."

BARBARA GAMBOA

Barbara Gamboa's Life-Canvas

Freedom fighter wages art

As a teenager Barbara Gamboa was known as "the freedom rider." The youngest person in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), she would spend her free time designing signs and posters to be used in marches and demonstrations. This was in the mid-1960's, when segregation was prominent and the civil rights movement expanding.

Gamboa, of African-American origin, was born in Selma, Alabama, a city the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. put on the activists' map. At age 4 she came to Cincinnati to join her parents, who had preceded her, leaving their fields in the deep South for a new and free life, working in the kitchen of downtown's Mills Restaurant. In Cincinnati, she lived in many places, and as a child, art would always busy her hands.

"Art came to me very early," Gamboa says. "I would draw pictures in the sand, paint with nail polish and charcoal pieces, make dolls and clothes from paper bags, create designs from chewing gum foil …"

In high school, art teacher and well-known Cincinnati artist Jack Mueller recognized her artistic talent and encouraged her to attend the Art Academy. Tuition was high, though, and not knowing what to do, Gamboa, 17, joined the army to become a surgical nurse. She worked mostly in the operating room, in an orthopedic treatment center in Fort Gordon, Georgia, witnessing many limb amputations due to the ongoing Vietnam war. The violence

above
Backyard
acrylic on canvas

bottom right
The Greeting
oil on canvas

she encountered then has stayed with her ever since.

After three years in the army and an interlude living in California, Gamboa returned to Cincinnati, now married with children. She decided to pursue her education and attended the University of Cincinnati, earning a master's degree in education, focusing on developmental disability. As a result and for more than 25 years she taught disabled and emotionally or behaviorally impaired children in the Cincinnati Public Schools.

Whether in high school, in the army, unemployed or teaching children, Gamboa always used art as a means for self-expression and as a tool to achieve her social and educational objectives. In high school, she used her art for justice and equality. In the army, her paintings addressed problems of poverty and malnutrition in Biafra, also the colonialist wars in Africa at the time. While teaching, she used art to engage her students, introduce important concepts, address timely issues and illustrate history. To help her students learn to read, she drew images, connecting them to words. Teaching black history, she used collages from old newspapers creating artistically attractive bulletin boards to capture kids' interest and attention. For each subject taught she would organize her art to coincide with the topic, art becoming itself part of the learning.

During that period Gamboa received 4 teacher art grants from the *"Keep Cincinnati Beautiful"* program. The grants funded her use of photography to teach kids about the environment, recycling and community values. She and her students traveled the city, taking photographs about environmental issues. The grant also helped start school gardens, teaching children about foods, their origins, their role in a healthful diet and a green environment.

Eight years ago Gamboa retired from teaching. The violence she had experienced both in the army and dealing with kids' problems resurfaced as post traumatic stress disorder, causing her heart arrhythmia. Having more free time, she started making art daily. It helped her recovery.

Gamboa's art addresses timely and important issues, including race, slavery and other societal problems.

"All issues are whole, interconnected, generalized," she says. "Their causes stem from the same well. It is not only black and white; it is most often good and evil, right and wrong."

Good Ship Fidelity, a mixed media sculpture, represents a small boat in which she positioned, naked, hair cut, and chained, Barbie dolls she painted silver. It reconstituted, based on historic diagrams, the physical reality of a slave boat.
"While making this piece, I was always in tears," she says. "It made me relate directly and emotionally to the fate of thousands of my distant relatives; it also put me in touch with the bigotry and injustice still prevailing in our society."

Gamboa features dolls and baby figures in other installations. She uses them as innocent, vulnerable indicators of neglect, violence and other societal problems.

"When i was young, I thought more in terms of race," she says. "Now I realize that in our male-dominated society, gender, with control and domination of women, is often the real issue."

Her painting *Guerlain, the Song of Haiti*, is about the poor indigenous living conditions of Haiti, perceived otherwise as an ideal tropical paradise by insensitive tourists. *Upstream* is about Katrina

and the wiping away of family structure as a result of the physical ravage. In *The Greeting*, a woman in the background, a humming bird and lush vegetation, depict her longing for a welcoming garden.

When not doing her own art, Gamboa curates shows bringing together artists of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, connecting them by ideas and themes. The shows emphasize her philosophy and concretize her views of a reconciled, tolerant, happy world.

I see Africa, Perceptions, Reality and Imagining, a show she curated at the Kennedy Heights Arts Center, allowed a group of diverse artists to bring forward their concept of Africa, contributing to a multifaceted reality not only of the continent but also of life in general.

Gamboa is presently involved in the study of Tai Chi, a peaceful art she perceives as a healthy activity and a centering force. She expects it to bring new directions into her visual work.

"I am an activist through my own art," says Gamboa, "also through my use of art to empower others. There are things I won't bear and I respond to them. For me, life is what counts, and kindness and good human qualities are the essence. There is no separation between my life and my art. My canvas becomes my life; both blend together."

---

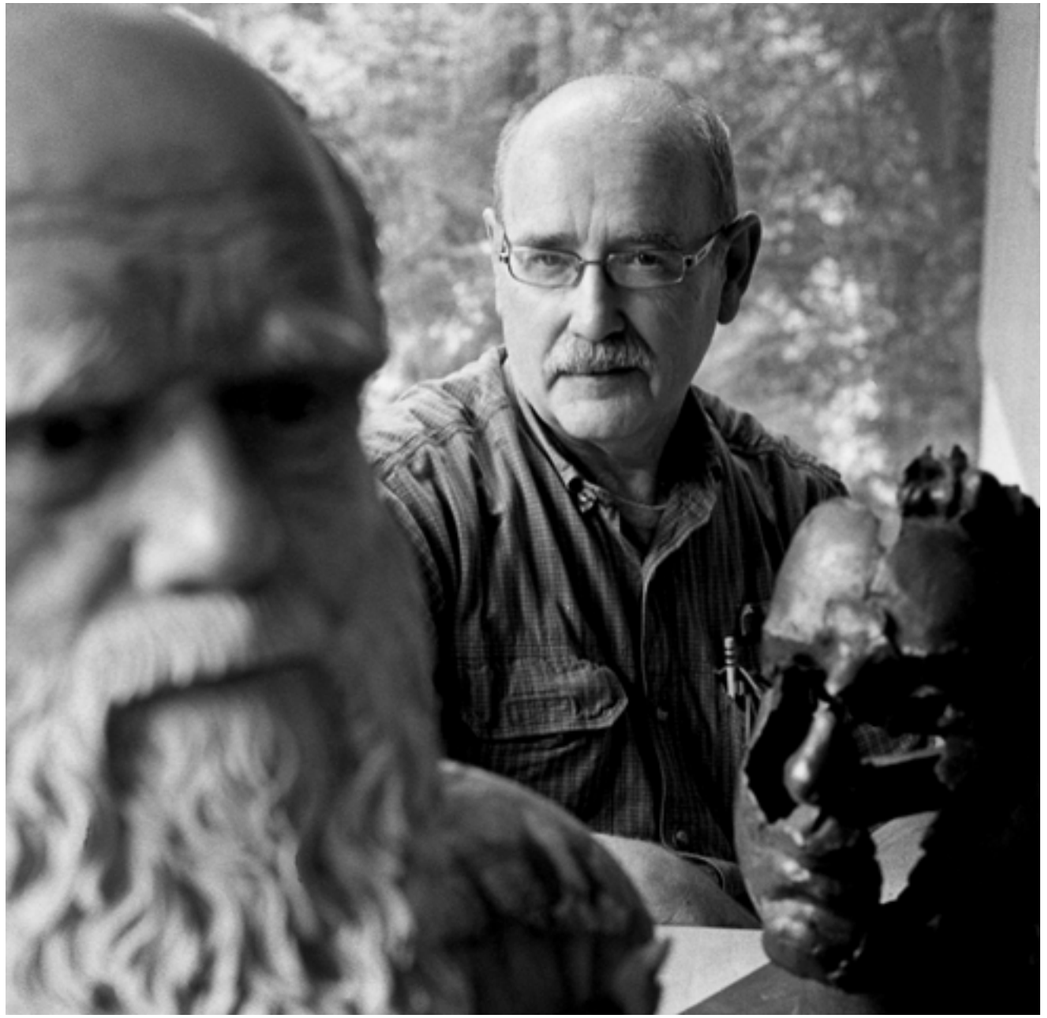
top left
Good Ship Fidelity
mixed media

top middle
Good Ship Fidelity (detail)
mixed media

top right
Finally
acrylic on canvas

bottom left
Guerlain, the Song of Haiti
oil on canvas

bottom right
Witnesses
acrylic on canvas



STEPHEN GEDDES

Re-shaping Ideas and Forms

Stephen Geddes' sculpture challenges conventional perceptions

Stephen Geddes grew up in Wisconsin in a small rural community. He always wanted to be an artist. As a child he was good at painting and liked to carve wood with his pocketknife. His mother, whose own grandfather was an artist, and art teachers at his school encouraged his artistic inclinations.

Geddes attended the University of Wisconsin at Lacrosse, earned a bachelor's degree in art education, then a master's degree in sculpture at Ohio University. He intended to become a full-time college teacher. But due to limited available positions at the time, he worked instead as an artist in residence for the Kentucky Commission on the Arts, then as a toy sculptor for various companies and later as a freelancer.

Geddes' art education emphasized both formal technical considerations and judicious use of ideas in order to give life and purpose to a product.

"I am between a craftsman all about material and an artist all about ideas," he says. "Ben Shahn's writings, especially his book, *The shape of content*, influenced me greatly. They taught me that successful art needed content and that content needed to be shaped well."

Geddes has always been concerned about perfecting the form of his work in order to give it visual authority and thus become a strong vehicle for his viewpoints, most often social commentaries.

top right
Roller Rhino
mixed media

bottom left
Cylinder Head
wood

bottom right
Fundamental Church- State Descrimination Test
wood

In college at a time when minimalism was very popular, Geddes, critical of the movement, created sculptural pieces that included hard edges, curves, sharp angles, masonite, welded steel, elements and materials that composed a strong mechanical image in which human figures would be embedded, subjugated and trapped. He also worked on carousel imagery, replacing the traditional horse with beautifully carved and painted fanciful figures such as a muscle man centaur or a sphinx with a lion's body, alluding to the fantasy and escape into new identity that one usually lives during the ride.

In the mid 1980's, influenced by his job as an industrial toy sculptor that required frequently reassembling body parts, he developed a sculptural technique of splitting and fragmenting the human head, afterwards mismatching its various sections. Geddes used the approach to comment on the misdirection that corporate structure was imposing on citizens' life. In a time when all was becoming very fast, he also thought to slow down the viewer's eye to scrutinize the non-conventional, non-immediately recognizable form and to reflect and, as a result, see more.

Other works concerned the prevailing societal preoccupations with spectacles and contrived sports and the emphasis placed on superficial show business lacking content. *The Roller Rhino*, represented a sculpted body of a rhinoceros on roller skates; influenced by the last gasp of roller derby as an organized sport, it was also partly based on Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros*, a parody of the Nazi takeover in Germany and Austria. *Hindu Wrestlers* depicted wrestlers, each with four or five arms, stressing the exaggerated production value of the sport.

While in college, Geddes was against the Vietnam War and did not want to be drafted; he was not an activist, though, and all he desired was to be left alone in the studio to do his art. The Reagan presidency, however–with its cowboy mentality, the significant social changes it imposed in favor of the wealthy at the expense of the poor, the wretched excess and entitlement it allowed–greatly offended him and served as a turning point in his political involvement and the direction of his art.

Geddes's works since then have dealt with violence, the role of religion in politics, the hypocrisy of philanthropists, wealth and the domination of the poor. *Cylinder Head* is the simplified image of a revolver shaping into a human head, the bullet points of the chambers becoming the eyes.

Fundamental Church–State Discrimination Test includes the sliced and fragmented heads of Christ and Uncle Sam positioned on a checkerboard. Geddes intended their loose parts to be mismatched when reassembled, his reflection on the dangerous

and blurred overlap between State and Church during recent administrations and the powerful intrusion of religious zealots and extremists into politics.

Carnegie Dreams, a meditation on the nature of philanthropy in the American culture, represents a tower, its base referencing industrial steel mining that made Carnegie's fortune possible; and its top, a bedroom-library depicting Carnegie in bed surrounded by books. Books and libraries were how Carnegie tried, as a philanthropist, to buy his way back to heaven, having built his money at the expense of poor workers. Another sculpture is of *HC Frick*, a coal and coke magnet and partner of Carnegie, sitting in a coal car inside a carousel with a golden dome. Frick holds a frame of a painting, reference to the huge art collection he had amassed while exploiting the poor. Geddes uses both businessmen to also reflect on the permissive and

top left
Pachyderm's Progress
wood

top right
Jurassic Ark
wood

bottom left
H.C. Frickousel
mixed media

bottom right
Carnegie Dreams (detail)
wood

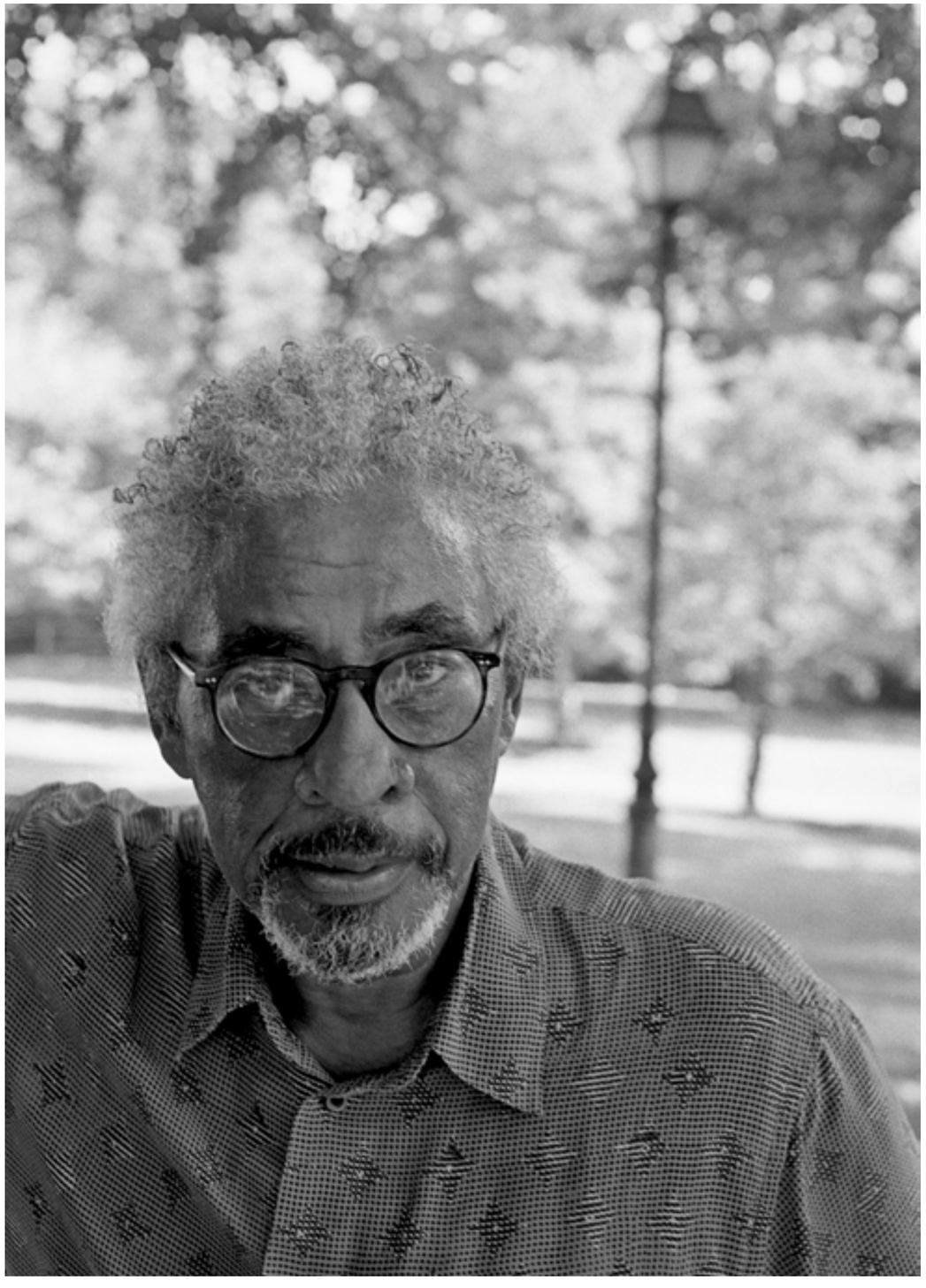
empowering role that government imparts to the wealthy.

Pachyderm's Progress, a finely crafted wood sculpture, represents an ornate sedan chair in which an oversized elephant is seated, alluding to both wealth and republican affiliation. At its front and back, a scroll cage contains powerless mice expected to constantly run and move it forward. Geddes carved on its sides ornamental motifs taken from $1 and $5 bills, thus directly connecting money to privilege and politics.

Jurassic Ark or Noah Saves the Dinosaurs was in response to the recently built creation museum. It is a sarcastic comment on how religion and fear are always used to trap, control and keep vulnerable people ignorant, providing simple answers and formulas, dismissing any critical thinking.

Geddes's works always strike by their refined craftsmanship and elegant beauty. They also challenge by their thought-provoking, strident and often ironic, social and political viewpoints. They transmit his messages with potency and eloquence.

"I do not expect my art to change many people," says Geddes. "I expect it, however, to have formal authority, speak by its quality and clearly convey my ideas. My art is directly connected to my life; it wakes me up in the morning, it keeps me going."



MELVIN GRIER

Capturing the Moment so It Will Last for Ever

Melvin Grier uses his camera to document both news events and daily street life

Melvin Grier likes to quote African American civil rights writer James Baldwin who, reflecting on Richard Avedon's photography, said: "For nothing is fixed for ever and ever… Generations do not cease to be born and we're responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have."

This is the role Grier chose for himself. For over 30 years and as a photojournalist he has witnessed and recorded his time's events paying special attention to his native city's street life and to the life of his fellow African American Cincinnatians.

Born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, Grier graduated from Martin DePorres, an all black boy's high school in the West End, and joined the Air Force. Trained as a medic and based in England, he worked in an obstetrical hospital at RAF Mildenhall. There and during his off-duty time, he picked up photography and learned its basic skills and technique at the photo hobby shop of the base. With a camera in hand and a stainless steel developing tank to reveal his images, he experienced the power of pictures, discovering at the same time the potent social works of Cartier-Bresson, Gordon Parks and W. Eugene Smith.

When discharged from the military and back in Cincinnati, Grier decided to work as a photographer. He joined briefly a commercial studio, worked for eight years for a printing company and finally landed at the Cincinnati Post as a full time photojournalist.

top left
Colonial Color Guard, Downtown Cincinnati, 1985
film photography

below
Memorial (from Unfinished Lives Project 2005)
color photography

"Working for the Post was a great experience," he says. "I would be given different assignments, some more fulfilling than others, but most importantly the opportunity every day to be out on the streets and explore things on my own."

Grier actually likes to call himself a street photographer. Driving the city on many of his assignments, he would encounter and capture through his lens the ordinary and the less mundane, documenting regular black people's lives and activities, also the societal ills that affected them. In the face of violence and increased homicides among black youth, he photographed, for instance, the many street memorials spontaneously erected for gun victims in various neighborhoods. His series *Unfinished Lives* was published in Cincinnati Magazine; it meant to make readers reflect and become involved in the problem-solving process. Grier also took pictures at vigils Cease Fire Cincinnati held at the sites of the shootings, sharing them with the deceased's family and friends, and printing them at some point in the Post, raising awareness about the issue.

Sensitive to the displacement of poor people caused by the rehabbing of urban neighborhoods and having seen himself many of his childhood places, including the building where he grew up, demolished in order to "serve progress", he took many pictures of the changing status of Over The Rhine and the resulting effects on its inhabitants. He wanted thus to state history and resist, even if only symbolically, the ongoing gentrification of the area.

"Progress comes and poor people move on," he says. "Parts of Over the Rhine are looking very up-scale these days, unfortunately at the expense of the disadvantaged, mostly African Americans, who, in the process, lose part of their past."

For the same reasons, Grier documented the deteriorating condition of Washington Park. Initially a welcoming green space for the neighborhood, the park had become, in the few years prior to his recent make-up, a neglected, littered and dangerous place to frequent.

"I was convinced this was deliberately allowed to happen," he says. "The agenda, as we know it, is to uproot the poor, hiding behind the name of 'improvement and progress.' It was important to be a voice for them."

Homeless individuals and panhandlers also often found their way in his photographs. Grier considers them part of what makes the city, and their begging to earn a living similar to a job. His photograph *Pokemon* represents a homeless man of the same name, sitting under the snow, holding a blessing sign and asking passer-bys for charity.

"Pokemon would sit there every single day, a constant feature of the city," Grier says. "He surely was not lazy; something else must have been going on in him. But if anything, he added daily compassion and humanity to the busy urban life."

Thanks to his job at the Post, Grier was also able to travel the world. He visited, among other countries, El Salvador, Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya, Vietnam, Cuba, Haiti… and at each of his abroad assignments captured the human, social and political issues of the place, amazed by the cultural diversity, connecting with the local people.

"There are obvious differences between

top left
Street Memorial
color photography

top right
Pokemon
color photography

top middle left
Ceasefire, 13th Street
color photography

bottom left
Mykonos Jump 2009
film photography

below
OTR, 12th and Vine at Night
color photography

cultures," he says. "If we ignore them and do not reach out to understand them, we become prejudiced and develop a racist attitude."

His statement relates well to his own experience, having encountered wide spread racial discrimination, intolerance and inequity growing up as a black child in the 50's, training as a medic in Montgomery, Alabama, and witnessing the racial violence of the 60's.

Even though his personal and private work dealt primarily with African American subjects, the majority of Grier's assignments as a photojournalist related to white people and resulted in photos exclusively depicting them.

"I often would be the only black person present and the one taking the pictures," he says. He recently showed, in an exhibit titled *White People*, sixty of these pictures taken at different times. Seen with the eyes of a minority individual, they again remind of diversity and of the need to reach out and learn about others.

"Everything to me is about photography," says Grier. "I used it for my job, but also to document things I care about, the human condition in my city, its street life, the problems facing the African American community, jazz, store front churches… It served also as my voice when I needed to make a statement, for instance when opposing the zoo's expansion at the expense of its residential neighborhood…"

Now retired, Grier continues his love affair with the camera. He still wants his photographs to touch emotionally and connect with the viewer, also capture the present moment and life as it goes on.

GENA GRUNENBERG

The Interplay of Fear, Love, Light

Gena Grunenberg re-creates the world

"Early on I realized that art was the only thing I needed to maintain sense of myself–also to make sense of the world," says Gena Grunenberg.

Grunenberg is a Cincinnati artist who, as a child, constantly drew and painted. In fourth grade she won an award for best drawing in her school. Her talent was recognized and encouraged by her mother, also a painter, and by her art teachers.

After high school, Grunenberg studied graphic arts, switching later to fine arts. Graphic arts did not satisfy her, the emphasis placed principally on how to create a sellable product, successfully advertise and manipulate the masses. This was at a time when other planetary and personal concerns were preoccupying her and that she felt she needed to express. The world was a frightening place to be, the cold war going on, nuclear threats imminent, global warming pointing, the AIDS epidemic emerging; and she was also directly dealing with issues of violence, peace at home often disrupted by an alcoholic father, abuse frequently encountered in her workplace.

Grunenberg decided to study independently drawing and painting and enrolled under art teacher and artist Hugo Valerio. At the same time she learned various techniques, including pottery, silkscreen, jewelry and stone setting. Her aim was to develop good skills and draftsmanship to use to address the many issues she was facing.

"I was witnessing corporations mistreating their workers, battering of the environment, racism, war, ethnic and individual violence," she says. "I wanted to use my art as a message."

For few years, however, Grunenberg did not paint or draw, afraid to confront the problems she was encountering, but which were simmering inside her. This changed when she was asked to paint a pig for the Big Pig Gig event organized by Artworks. She was then living with a man who was controlling and physically abusive; he did not want her to partake in the project. Determined, she fought him back and completed a pig on the theme of pollution. This gave her the courage to assert herself and move forward. Soon after she left the abusive relationship and started a whole body of work addressing the issues that had affected her until then.

Domestic violence and violence in general became prominent topics in her work.

Every Woman, an acrylic painting she did at the time, is about all women. The painting depicts them as parents, as abused and oppressed, carrying their burden into their old age, but also healing thanks to their inner power. *Ice Tree* addresses the plight of global warming and the insult large oil companies inflict on nature; it contrasts an oil can with a tiny sprig of hope growing next to it.

"There is a progression in the violence that starts at home, within the individual, within families, then permeates society and spreads like a web," Grunenberg says. "It becomes like a spiritual disease manifested in hatred, bigotry, disregard to others, rampant abuses by our capitalistic system, wars, global environmental destruction… I want to understand its causes and address them in my work in order to create awareness, make a difference, render the world a better place."

Few years ago, Grunenberg started building puppets to tackle and personalize the same concerns. Her puppet *Fear* deals with the prevalent sense of anxiety and fearful living conditions one increasingly experiences in violent modern society. She wants it, however, balanced by a counterpart, *Love*, that she would like to see take over.

Another area of interest is metaphysics and the science of light. Researching the field, Grunenberg discovered that what scientists believed and postulated ended up for the most part being true. Extrapolating to the world of art, she concluded that, by molding a world according to what the artist thinks and believes, and by expressing it, the artist renders it real and transmits it to others. The work of art thus becomes an empowering part of the creation and an important vehicle for change. She emphasizes, however, in *In the Beginning*, that to effect this change it is important to be honest and truthful. The painting illustrates the need to remove

top left
In the Beginning
acrylic on canvas

top right
Ice Tree
acrylic on canvas

bottom left
Global Warming 2
acrylic on canvas

the mask that conceals one's identity and obliterates one's true potential.

Grunenberg also did a series commentary on the ambivalent duality of individuals, holy through their spirit, full of deficits by their human nature. In *The Thinker*, they are represented like pawns, fixed and paralyzed, full of holes; they are lonely even when in couples. They are connected by a smoke ribbon emanating from a passing train and ending at a skeleton thinker, alone, isolated and immobile despite having legs and arms. Grunenberg meant the thinker as a reminder to every artist to go beyond the apparent limitations and be the connecter, the transformer, the infuser of life. That's what she would like her art to do.

Six years ago, Grunenberg joined Visionaries and Voices, an art studio for people with disabilities; initially the studio coordinator, she also worked as the exhibit coordinator and curator. She helped the disabled artists grow, develop and assert themselves through their art. Listening to them discuss politics, religion, events that have affected their lives–such as prejudice, racism, abuse, rape–she challenged them to express their feelings through their work, to make a statement and share it with others in an exhibition she titled *Black and White*.

top left
In Captivity
mixed media

top middle
Fear
mixed media

top right
The Thinker
acrylic on canvas

bottom left
Every Woman
acrylic on canvas

More than 30 participated side by side with invited community artists; their voices found echo in each other's, resonated, became amplified and multiplied. The show was moving, a visual unfolding of the timeline of ills and violence in our society. Inspired by the artists with disabilities she served, Grunenberg left Visionaries and Voices in 2010 to pursue a formal education in the health sciences.

"I want to be an activist with my own art, also get other people involved," says Grunenberg. "We need to fight isolation and fear and affirm ourselves. Art has a healing and spiritual power; it gives strength and courage. It helped me making tough decisions; I want to use it now to help and empower others–like for the scientists, it can help us create the world we dream of; it can make it real. I also believe that my current study of science and health will inform my art making in the future. By expanding our knowledge, we artists and creative people can benefit society as a whole."

TERENCE HAMMONDS

Art Inspired by Race, Riots and Rap

Terence Hammonds' sub-cultural view

In his first year of college, Terence Hammonds was asked to do a cultural portrait of himself; he did not know what to do. The assignment, however, stayed with him and raised many questions in his mind about cultural identity and belonging, questions that have since then determined the content and direction of his art.

Hammonds, an African-American artist, born and raised in Over The Rhine, Cincinnati, always drew as a child. Recognizing his artistic inclinations, his mother enrolled him in the School for the Creative and Performing Arts. There he met two teachers who greatly influenced him. Kathleen Carothers, a drama teacher, regularly took him to the museum, asking him each time to write a paper on an art piece of his choosing, triggering early on his critical thinking about visual images. John Brengelman, an English teacher and musician, gave him records and books, introducing him to underground art and the subculture of music.

Throughout school, Hammonds got good exposure to various art media and developed skills in many of them. He was then obsessed with John Lennon and drew many times the Dakota hotel where Lennon died. Hammonds also painted homeless people and alcoholics in his neighborhood, connecting to city life and its social ills.

After graduating from high school, Hammonds received a full scholarship to the School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston at Tufts University, where he

above
Quiet Riot
mixed media

later earned a bachelor of fine arts degree. His college years helped him refine his visual language; they also made him think culturally about the world and where he fits.

Rap music was very popular at the time and somewhat synonymous with black urban youth; Hammonds listened to it all the time. He did a series of silkscreen prints, titled *Temporary Tattoos*, representing tattoos of famous rap stars; the prints could be temporarily transferred onto someone's skin. It was also his take on the idea of original and real, a tenet of the hip hop culture. Along the same line, he made fancy-looking, fake *Certificates of Provenance* for commonly used slang terms, pointing to ownership.

"I was very interested in what mainstream culture thought of differing subcultures, of their relation to race and class in history," he says.

Questioning the fixed and framed identity one might give a diverse subculture, in this case associating rap music to black race, Hammonds covered his studio floor with subway tiles on which he printed the first reproduced image of a break dancer. By not cleaning the screen between printings, the images became intentionally blurred. They served as his commentary on the change the hip hop movement underwent, progressing from the Bronx in New York City to other parts of the United States and also on the various multiethnic influences it incorporated.

In his last year of college Hammonds did a large installation, *A B-Boy's Breakdown*, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. It consisted of silhouettes of rap dancers and images of the first 250 rap artists to record music, all silkscreened on a wall paper patterned after the plantation in *Gone With the Wind*. Exhibited at the same time, displayed in a broken antique cabinet, were old Haviland Limoges plates on which he printed images of the first break dancers. The cabinet had a broken leg, propped up by first edition books from the Civil Rights movement, books of slave songs containing coded messages, books by Leroy Jones and Langston Hughes. It was his reference to the origin of hip hop culture, fed at its base by the cultural history of the African-American people, also an allusion to it being a precious, yet poorly handled, gift.

Returning to Cincinnati after six years in Boston, Hammonds continued to examine in his art the identity and history of subcultures in the USA, the role of protest and rebellion in the Civil Rights Movement and its importance for freedom and democracy.

"I am reaping the benefit of the Civil Rights Movement, of the fight so many undertook, at the expense of their own lives, to allow each of us freedom in this country," he says. "I went to an Ivy League school with full scholarship just based on merit; I can freely express myself… This was unheard of 50 years ago for African Americans."

Quiet Riot, his first show back in Cincinnati, was based on a real story that followed the death of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Fearing riots, the mayor of Boston invited all Boston residents to protest King's assassination and mourn together by watching a concert by James Brown, the "Godfather of Soul," on TV. Boston remained riot-free, with popular music a factor. In his show, Hammonds played a video of the concert on a 1960-era TV. He printed images of the riots that happened in Cincinnati and all over America on a set of Russel Wright dinner plates called "*American Modern*" and displayed two min-

right
Quiet Riot (detail)
silkscreen relief print

top left
A B-Boy's Breakdown
mixed media installation

top right
B-Boy's Pattern
silkscreen print

iature dance floors, each 4'x4', covered with silkscreened images of riots.

Further illustrating the Civil Rights Movement and its influence on American life, Hammonds later did four additional dance floors. One of them, *Get Up on the Down Stroke*, is titled after a line from a folk song. It consists of a wood board decorated with graphite drawings and prints of images from the 60's and 70's counter-cultural movements, riots, draft card burnings, scenes from the Rolling Stones concert in Altamont and from the Kent State massacre.

"My images meant to evoke an era now gone, a time when youth was idealistic, not afraid to change the world," he says. "The dance floors represent spaces where cultures are exchanged."

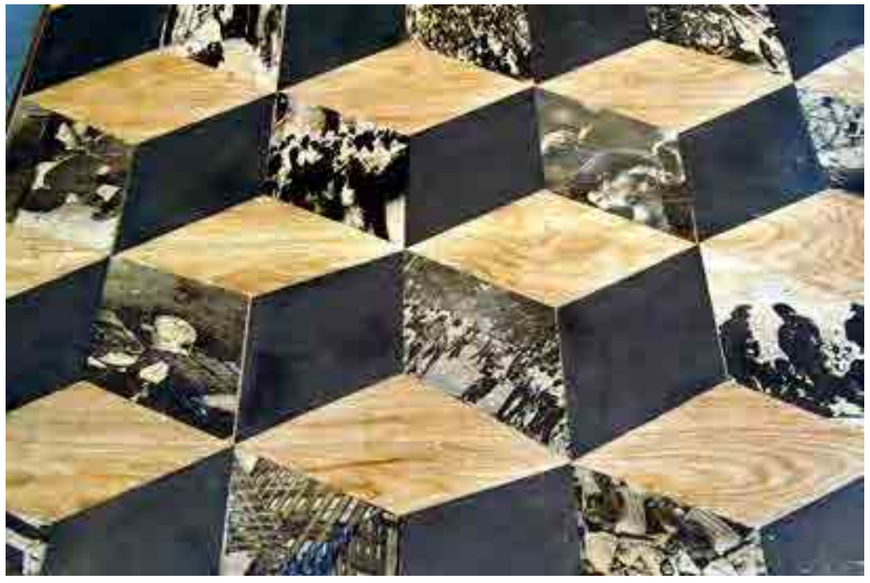
In his work, Hammonds will persevere, addressing subcultures, protest and authority. He views his art as monuments celebrating the activist movements of the past and hopefully the present.

"I want my artwork to remind of a time when people fought for the better good of the entire humanity," he says. "I want the youth to look back, realize that history existed and that it can be reinvented. Raising me, my mother always stressed the duty to give to society, to contribute positively to life. It is a lesson I will never forget."

top left
Sugerhill, B-Boy's Breakdown
print on Haviland Limoges plate

top right
C'mon Everybody, Get Up!
mixed media installation

bottom
Get Up on the Down Stroke (detail)
dance floor, wood, graphite, silkscreen



KYMBER HENSON

The Art of Rescue

Kymber Henson's art gives voice and hope to abused children

"I count my blessings every day because I am an artist," says Kymber Henson. "I was given the ability and the will to create and express myself. Art is an intimate part of my life, essential for my well being. It is like air; it helps me breathe, expand my lungs; it also helps me to exhale and let life's toxins out."

Henson, a Cincinnati artist, knew from an early age that she was good at drawing and that she wanted to be an artist; she also knew that she wanted to help people. She graduated from Edgecliff College with a major in fine arts and a minor in sociology, worked as a waitress for a while, then started her own business creating handmade clothing. Her clothes were initially fashion and design-oriented; later edgier incorporating painting.

In 1999, she made a jacket that proved to mean more than just aesthetics. It had painted scenes from nightmares she had as a kid, including skulls, devils, snakes, scary and desolate images. It made her realize that subconsciously she was moving to a place where she had more to say. As a child, Henson had lived with abuse that she had silenced all along but also had known not to be right. Her childhood events were simmering, incubating inside her, and finally were getting out. Her art from there on became self expression, cathartic, also geared to help others.

In her artwork Henson always seeks a strong aesthetic quality. Beauty is her way to draw viewers in, to get them closer to notice the thought-pro-

above
Mourning (for Esme)
mixed media

voking and sometimes sinister content of her themes. When she discovered batik painting on egg shells, an ancient art form called pysanky, she used the technique to create an attractive but also a fragmented world that often included–at first glance hidden–words reflecting her concerns, feelings and emotions.

Henson's pieces deceive by their beauty, yet heavy in meaning and messages when scrutinized. Usually triggered by an issue or a problem she has, they often end up taking a universal, larger than personal, quality. *I Surrender*, for instance, a 3D construction piece, started from a personal situation in which she felt no recourse and having to give up. The completed piece, however, identified easily with a large proportion of individuals who, during the Bush administration, did not stand a chance and were helpless, powerless and marginalized. The piece consists of a naked child covered with fragmented white egg shells, implying innocence and vulnerability. The child holds in its hand a flag made of colored broken eggshells displaying the words 'I surrender,' and stands inside a box carpeted with batiked egg shells with the same words written everywhere, underlining entrapment and the inability to escape. Henson outlined the box with a soft green fabric trim, creating the feeling of a theatrical stage, thus alluding to the then prevailing oppressive social and political conditions.

Loving Arms Lift Me Up, another piece made using eggshells, depicts a standing little girl, her arms up, waiting for someone with kindness and compassion to lift her up and save her. It was triggered by Henson's personal experience and her feeling of abandonment, but also by the hope she wanted to communicate not only to the abused children of the world but to all individuals who are trodden upon because of poverty, racism, prejudice or politics.

The theme of child abuse recurs often in Henson's work.

"I want to raise awareness about it," she says, "but also give hope that despite all the bad, if you look for it, there is always light and good at the end; otherwise one cannot live on."

On one occasion, she received a gift box with a Plexiglas lid; it served as a metaphor for all she was keeping inside her and that needed to get out. It opened new horizons and gave her energy and courage to connect more directly to her problems, to her sense of loss and isolation, and to reach a hopeful closure. She bought eight additional boxes, used each of them to tell a particular story from her past events and closed with the last one on a redemptive note. It was her personal statement but also her reaching out to others who might be dealing with similar issues.

Henson's art is also a reflection of her life with its daily surprises, its happy and tormented moments. Using batiked eggs that she painted one each day, she created, for instance, a complete 12-month calendar. The painted images became her journal, telling the stories of moments that touched her, of unexpected events she encountered, of reflective and meditative connections she established with herself.

Getting once very angry at someone she loved, she painted on canvas a series of birds, linking each to a feeling she had. In addition, she painted each bird on an egg that she encaged and displayed next to the canvas; it was her way to neutralize her own negative feelings, to get rid of them.

Social issues have always interested Henson. The best of her is usually drawn out by people she meets who are kind, generous, compassionate, and who view the world in an equal and inclusive way. They resonate with her and incite her to actively perpetuate their values through what she does. She then volunteers her time for various causes, working on social, political and environmental campaigns, hoping to make a difference. These concerns and beliefs usually find their way into her art.

Art allows Henson to get in touch with her own self, also to make a statement about who she is and what she believes in. It is also her means to reach out to others, to provide the light and the hope that might be needed on certain darkened days.

"Art is my rescue," she says. "I do not want it, however, to end with me. I hope it can also serve as a rescue to others."

bottom left
Loving Arms Lift Me Up
mixed media

bottom right
I Surrender
mixed media

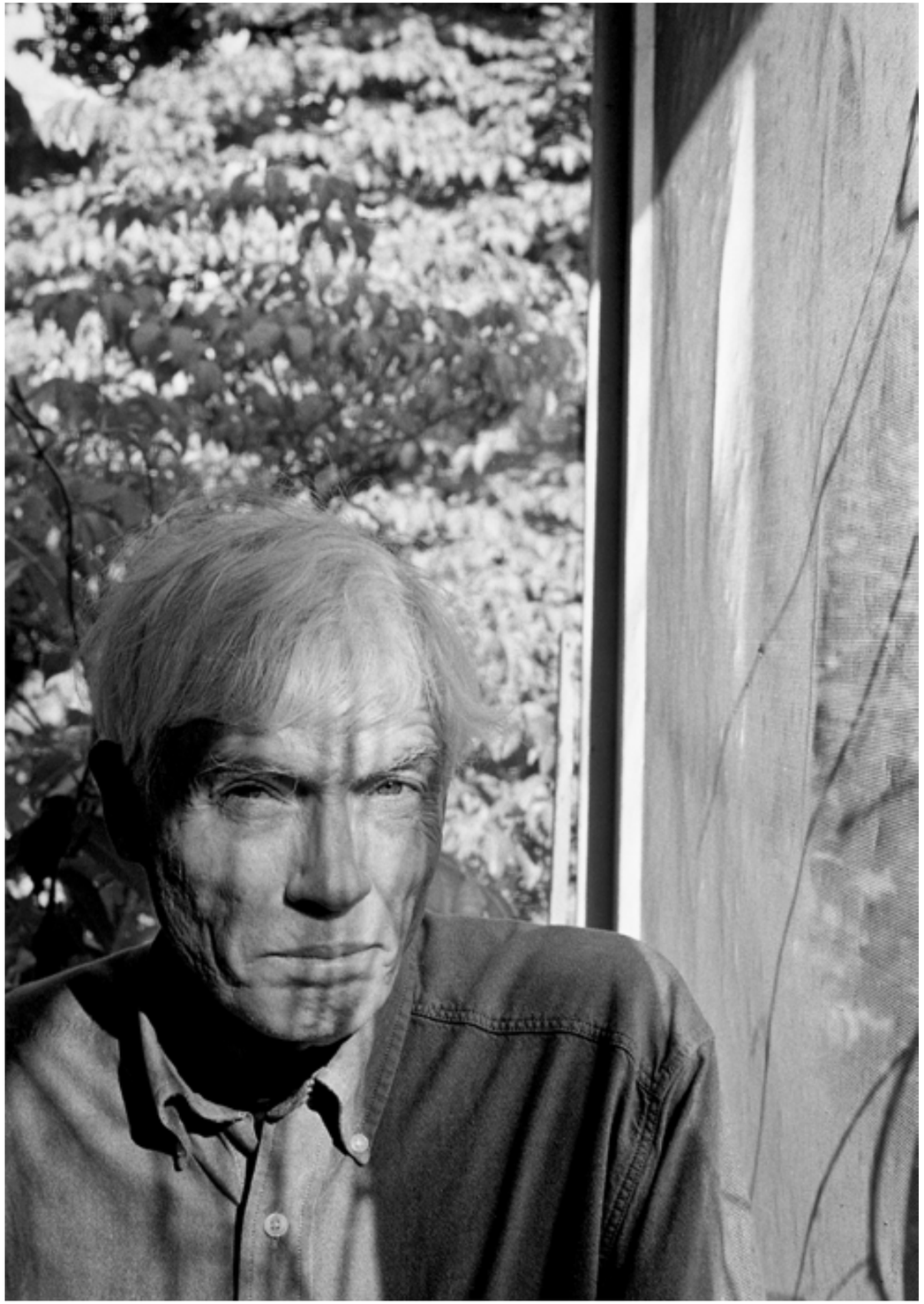
top left
Waiting for the Wolf
mixed media

top middle
Waiting for the Wolf (detail)
mixed media

top right
May 20, 2006, The Bluejay Lost His Nerve
acrylic on canvas

bottom left
Can't Seem to Face Up to the Facts
mixed media

bottom right
January, Egg Calendar
mixed media



MICHAEL HENSON

The Healing Power of Writing

Michael Henson's poems and essays state the only law of Love

"Everyday when I come home from school my dog Sparkles comes to greet me," is what 8 year old Michael Henson wrote in 3rd grade as an assignment for a complex sentence. It impressed his teacher who praised him and asked him to copy it on the board. This boosted his self confidence and made him realize the power of writing; it indirectly cemented his fate as a writer.

Henson, a local well published poet and writer, was raised in a small town surrounded by people from Appalachian, Midwestern and African American origin, all speaking different dialects of English. He also experienced the language mix at home, his mother, an Irish Catholic from Massachusetts and a teacher, speaking "proper" English; his grandparents, from the South, a dialect. Henson, a small, non-athletic, and lonely kid, was as well an avid reader, who tried to validate himself through various experiences from the literature. His love for words grew quickly and early; he did not start writing seriously, however, until after college.

In high school and college, Henson leaned more towards journalism and served as student reporter and editor of the student newspaper. He graduated with a master of art degree in English from the University of Chicago, taught for a while in Adams County, and has worked mostly as either counselor or community organizer for Talbert House and the Urban Appalachian Council. Henson also taught part-time at Xavier University and other schools, and recently retired from Paths to Recovery, working with homeless alcoholics, to devote more time to writing.

As a country boy transplanted into a big city, Henson, from the start, connected deeply with the Cincinnati Appalachian community.

"They were like me; like my people, my grandparents, neighbors," he says. "I could identify with their story; I felt I could tell it."

This was the trigger for his first novel, *Ransack*, published in 1980. It was a story of Appalachian migrants, their experiences, their dealings with various social issues, poverty, housing, jobs, bruised identity, drugs. *Ransack* has since been translated into Russian and taught in some English classes. A second book, *A Small Room with Trouble on My Mind*, dealt with similar issues. A third book of fiction, *Tommy Perdue*, came out earlier this year (2013).

Henson is now working on a collection of stories related to the impact of the addictive drug Oxy-Contin on Appalachian people. The drug has permeated the community, destroying many lives, but also bringing people together.

"I am very concerned about addiction and poverty," he says. "As a counselor, one is trained to work with alcoholics but not with poor people. Poverty and chemical dependency, however, affect very much each other. This is rarely addressed; I want to raise awareness about it."

In addition to fiction, Henson also writes poetry. He found his voice in poetry when his close friend grassroots activist Buddy Grey was murdered. Deeply affected, Henson was literally unable to speak. He started instead jotting down his feelings in poems that constituted later his book *Crow Call*. The poems were about Buddy, his mission, a vision of the city, poverty and exploitation, destruction of the environment, homelessness, various street scenes. Crows kept intruding into them, symbols of migration and displacement. In *Prostitute at Walnut and Liberty*, a poem from the book, Henson says regarding the main character: "but I know/she has a golden brain/and a rapid heart…/and her history which was utterly cruel/have brought her to this corner…" thus shedding a sensitive light on the reason for her fate. Henson in fact is very concerned by the various societal ills he encounters; he addresses them in his writings.

"Because of my life experiences, I became early on aware of class, how some people get privileges and some don't," he says. "I was small and shy and took a lot of beatings, just because people could. I often felt humiliated; but I was able to turn my bitterness into compassion; it made me a different person. I can understand what it is to be humbled, beat down, discriminated against, why an African American or a poor person feels that way."

Henson's concern for others also started at home. He was raised by liberal parents, socially conscious, strong voices against racism and for communal inclusiveness.

His poem *They All Asked About You*, with which he usually starts his public readings, is an empowerment song for the common individual in an ideal world of human connectedness. *A Teaching* restates the importance of love and forgiveness for a better happier world, essential values taught by the great spiritual teachers: "There is no law/but that of love./That takes courage/and we often fail./Because we fail/forgiveness is basic as bread."

For several years Henson wrote regular essays for *Streetvibes*. They emerged from his work experiences, based on issues he faced, individuals he met. They were often stories that reexamined, in an individualized context, problems marring our society; they dealt with homelessness, alcoholism, drug addiction, poverty, inequality,

A Teaching

I have been so often mute
when I wanted most to have
you hear me.
But I have studied speech
with the mole and the crow
and the unsilent dead
who speak to us daily
with their mouths of clay
and their tongues of grass,
as they drill us in the old and
necessary lessons.
And what do they teach?
I have no trick for telling you
all of what I think they say,
but I believe it comes to this:
There is no law
but that of love.
That takes courage
and we often fail.
Because we fail
forgiveness is basic as bread.
We fail there too.
And so the world is sad.
If I could have the voice
I wanted once,
I would be your bard.
I would bind you to me
with firelight tales
of struggle and discovery
that would drive back your
darkness for an hour.
But I have only this small voice
with which my father voiced me
a voice with the reed and rasp
of the crow.
And I fear it is much too small.
Even so,
I tell you
There is no law
but the law of love.
Take courage.
Take courage.

Postcards to America

America,
I'm writing from a very far place
called America,
One of us is in the wrong place.

America,
I'm steering an eight-cylinder Conestoga
down the Trail of Tears.
There are no exits.

America,
I'm blind and deaf and my heart is breaking
but if I touch the hem of your garment,
I might win the Lottery.

America,
The walls of the abandoned factories
are slathered with graffiti.
I can't read a word of it,

America,
Is it me?
Each part of you looks the same.
Your elbow looks exactly like your elbow.

America,
What's up with these angry waves of grain?
These toppled mountain majesties?
These out-sourced fruited plains?
America, I think the suburbs
Are very close to hell.

America,
I can't argue anymore.
When I hear the blonde men bicker on the radio,
I want to go someplace and die.

America,
I don't think I can bear
the weight of your sins any longer.
I'm letting Barabbas carry this cross.

America,
You can tell the pin-stripe Goliaths
I've gone home to America.
You can tell them
I'm out in the yard with David,
counting stones.

Prostitute at Walnut and Liberty

She stands her corner,
squares her shoulders,
and scans the streets
with a professional, fire-hardened eye.
There is much for her to watch.
Cars nurse at the pumps of the Shell
station.
Carpenters glance back at her as they shoulder their
lumber.
Dope boys, arrogant shadows on the opposite corner,
study the noonday traffic.
And so does she.
A BMW passes an aging Toyota,
a patrol car spreads blue light
across an Audi with tinted windows,
and a pickup truck stops short,
cut off by an SUV
the size of a small Midwestern town.
And on it goes.
Impatient,
she strides one way,
then another.
Some cars cruise slowly round her corner
and the men who drive the cars
turn their eyes from the traffic to gaze at her.
She stares them back
with a question in her brow
and sometimes a word
and sometimes a shift of her shoebox hips
(She has gone, you see, so very slim.
She has that hollow in the jaw;
she has that shadow below each eye.)
I do not know what these men see when they see her
but I know
she has a golden brain
and a rapid heart
and internal organs shapely as fruit
and silver nerves
that have been frailed and fouled by crack cocaine.
And I know that
when she was small
she was greeted with joy
and she was greeted with dismay
and when she cried she was comforted
and when she cried she was ignored
and she was fed and coddled
and she was not-fed and she was cursed
and her life which was perfectly normal
and her history which was utterly cruel
have brought her to this corner
where she studies the passing cars
and the glances of the men in the cars.
She sweeps the street with a hungry eye
and she is not satisfied.
She strides one way, then another,
down one street and back.
Her arms swing like hammers
but she always comes back
to her post on the corner
where, quickly, she looks right, she looks left,
then right and left again,
like a hawk on a rail.

A Woman at Kroger's Explains Her Tattoo

Long story short ---
her grandbaby didn't live.
A net of veins gone wild
rare disease
operations
procedures
runs to the hospital
internal bleeding.
Four years old
and he drowned in his own blood.
She turns her leg to show me:
his perfect image
inked into her calf.

injustice… Biblical themes occasionally found their way into them, thus reinforcing their universal appeal.

"I do not have a solution for world peace or for economic crises," he says. "I am good, however, at telling the story, and stories are healing. If we share and understand each others' stories, we can connect even when different."

Even though a social and political activist, Henson wants his literature distinct from political propaganda.

"I try to keep the artist separate from the activist," he says. "If I get a political thought or message I write it down as a letter to the editor. As a writer, my first allegiance is to the truth I can capture. The poem, or the story, happens at a different, deeper level." He is, however, also quick to acknowledge that with profound vision and whole humanity, content is often bound to be political.
Henson likes to read his poetry in public; he wants to be heard, and spiritually connect, communicate, bond with his audience.

"I write because I have things inside me that I need to let out and share," he says. "I write because I want peace, because I want the world to change, because the world refuses to change, because there is so much suffering because the world will not change. Everything I write is a story of grief."

BARBARA HOUGHTON

Women Helping Women

Barbara Houghton's photographs are about her as a woman, and about women in general

"I am a person alive who looks at and questions our humanity," says Barbara Houghton. "I do not see the people in my photographs as ***other*** but as people who could be me. In the beginning all my work was about me, who I was and my place in the world. Later, it naturally expanded into addressing womanhood and women's role in society."

Houghton, an artist photographer and art professor at Northern Kentucky University (NKU), grew up in Chicago, the second child in a family of 12, many with strong artistic talents. Always creative herself, drawing and painting as a kid, and enrolled in all art classes in her high school, she was destined to become a commercial artist. As an undergraduate at the University of Illinois, she discovered, however, her love for photography and ended up graduating from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a master of fine arts degree in photo. She taught photography for eighteen years at Metro State College in Denver, Colorado, then came in 1992 to NKU as Chair of the Art department, and more recently as art faculty professor.

Houghton's photos have always been personal, initially self portraits and pictures of people from her family, allowing her to explore and be who she wanted to be. While in Denver, she did a series of self portraits in infrared, then a series of large photograms of her clothes, of old and ripped underwear.

"I was putting myself out on paper," she says, "also wanting people to think and laugh."

When she first got to NKU, she did a series of photographs on the unknown, *Terra Incognita*, examining boundaries and where she fit in the world, using images of navigation instruments as metaphors. It was followed by *Journey*, a combination of photographs and objects about one's personal experiences, revelations, interactions, relationships in life.

Dancing with Galileo, a multimedia installation including modified photographs, objects, text, music, dance, video, was about her affinity and love for a brilliant scientist, a man who like her was free-spirited, unconventional, and willing to fight for the truth. Galileo, raised Catholic, did not hesitate to battle the ignorance and hypocrisy of the church, supporting on the other hand its principled spiritual teachings. To document and create her works, Houghton traveled throughout Italy, visiting places where Galileo lived, his house, the institutions where he made his discoveries and taught, the convent where resided his beloved daughter. She took many photographs that she later manipulated, adding to them researched elements from books, text and images, composing the all like a montage.

When confronted with political upheaval and violence, Houghton witnessed and reflected through her photographs. In her *Popular Culture* series, she used images about the war in Iraq and the Abu Ghraib case, popular images she noticed or reacted to wandering the streets, thus using her camera to speak not only for herself, but also for the common individual, stating what she felt both would condone or

below
Journey - Where Are You Now
mixed media

above
Sports - Illegal Use of Hands
mixed media

condemn. In *Learning the Sport/ Unsportsmanlike Conduct*, she commented on the intricate relationship between sports, sex and violence, on how sports had become religion-like in our country.

All along Houghton had also been concerned by the unequal condition and neglected role of women in many parts of the world. She became very interested in *SEWA*, Self-Employed Women's Association, a trade union of poor, self-employed women in India, started in 1972 by Ela Bhatt. Bhatt, a young female Indian lawyer, had experienced the economic exploitation and lack of power of working Indian women and wanted to organize them so they would become protected by labor laws and self reliant. *SEWA*, essentially a women helping women organization, grew quickly to form its own banks, build trade cooperatives, trade facilitation networks to connect local and global markets, social security networks for maternity needs, health care and life insurance. Houghton wanted to travel to India to experience first hand their work, meet the women members and document in her photographs their various supportive activities.

After seeing the movie *Water* by director Deepa Mehta, she had also learned about the abused situation of widows in India, often chased from their husband's house after his death, forced into poverty and left begging on the streets. Researching the matter, she came across the work of Dr V. Mohini Giri, a social activist and leader in the Indian women's movement, of her organization *Guild of Service* which helps the displaced widows, and of the new shelter *Ma Dham* she had built in Vrindavan to lodge, feed, train the destitute widows and help them lead a healthy dignified life. Houghton contacted Dr Giri and headed to India, traveling many places, photographing women: mothers, wives, workers, widows… depicting their condition, yet their beauty, their potential power. Her photographs gave birth to her series *Changing India, One Woman at a Time*, exhibited in 2010 at NKU.

Widows of Ma Dham, a photo from the series, represents widows rejoicing, singing and swaying at the news that they will be finally receiving their government's pension, now that they had a home and not considered homeless anymore.

"I wanted to photograph women helping women, and empower them in the process," says Houghton. "India was a good place as women there are often ignored. But this was also true of America where women are frequently valued mostly based

top
Terra - Looking Out from the Flat Earth
mixed media

middle
Galileo - Constellation, Observation
mixed media

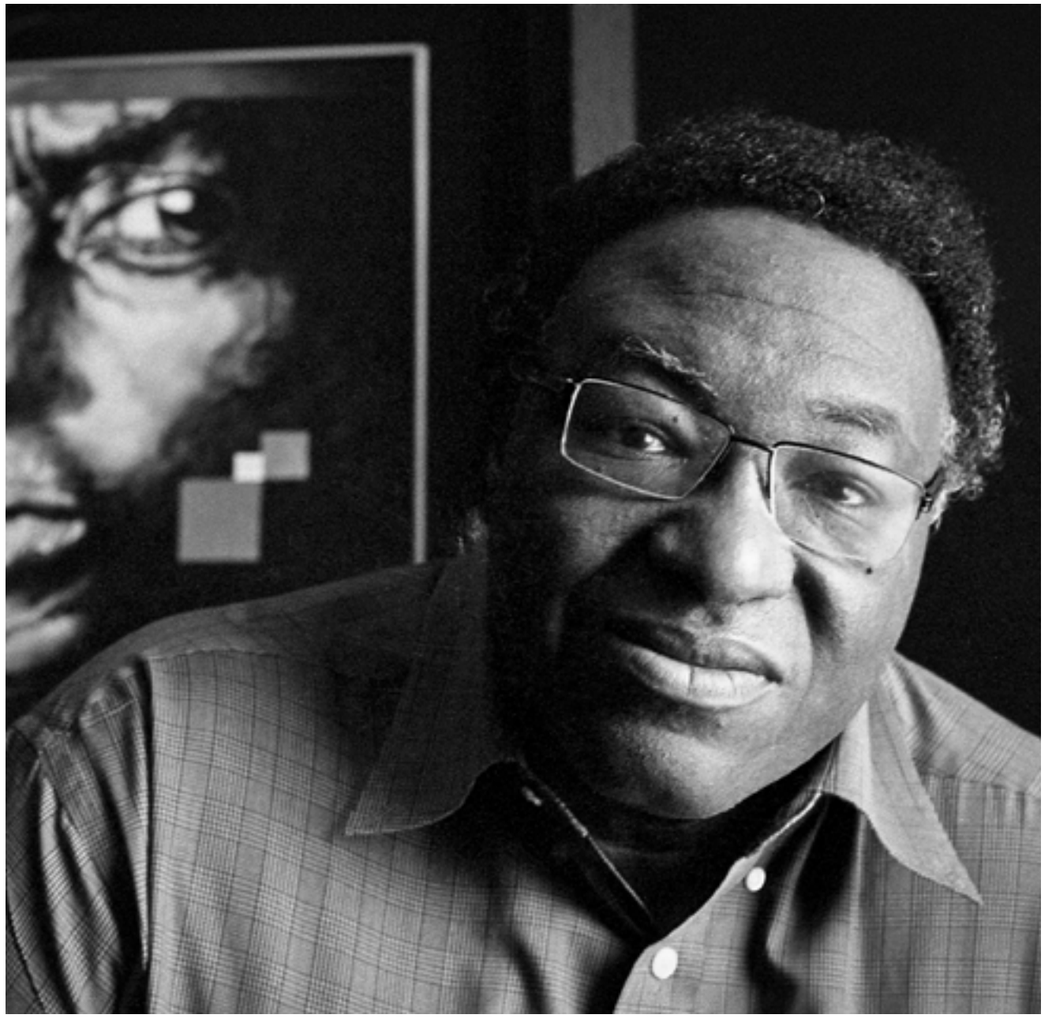
bottom
Popculture - The Bomb
color photography

above
Windows of Ma Dham
color photography

on their looks. As a middle age woman, I recognize myself the feeling; when I leave my hair grey, I become almost invisible…"

Houghton also brings her concern to liberate and empower women to her classroom. She strongly associates with her young girl students who frequently are lost trying to figure out who they are. They remind her of herself, of how she metamorphosed from a weak woman to a more assertive one; and she does all she can to help them, guide them, teach them how to be strong.

"All trajectories of my works are connected," says Houghton. "They all fall in the broader context of the human; from the questioning about myself, a woman, an artist, what I wear, where and how I fit in the world, my journey; to the free-thinking and rebellious Galileo, the image of a man I fell in love with; to the oppressed and exploited women of India; to women in general… When I make art it empowers me, helps me find my way; it has changed my life. I want to share it with others hoping it might achieve the same."



JIMI JONES

Riotous Art Beats Violent Protests

Jimi Jones paints to challenge injustice

Jimi Jones was 10 years old when he first experienced the power of art. He grew up in Boll Weevil Hill in the mountains of Western North Carolina and moved North with his parents when he was 10. There, due to his background and his particular use of the English language, the school he attended thought that he lacked intelligence and assigned him to the lowest group of his section. Silent, attentive and perceptive, young Jimi started drawing. He used the strength of his artistic language and its symbols to communicate and overcome his barriers. He quickly asserted himself, excelled and moved to the top group of his class.

Jones is a Cincinnati artist of Cherokee and African-American descent. He initially trained and worked in engineering at General Electric. He then attended the University of Cincinnati College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning and worked as a graphic designer, art director and display manager of international shows for Procter and Gamble. That job gave him the opportunity to travel the world and experience major galleries and museums, getting exposed to their high quality art.

Jones draws and paints; he is also a printmaker. His art usually expresses personal, philosophical, social and political concerns.

“In the beginning I was more interested in the crafts and skills of art,” he says. “Growing up in poor Appalachia, I very early on experienced poverty

and what it meant on a daily basis; also discrimination, not only based on race, but also on the part of the country you're from, on your accent and your use of the language.My social awakening, however, did not enter my art until I experienced first hand riots in Cincinnati and saw how badly the police was treating people. I felt the urge to do something, to join the rally, to put an end to discrimination… My older age prevented me from keeping up with the young rioters. Instead, I stayed up the entire night and did thirty one statement drawings, then a big painting, *The Riots: A Tale of Two Mothers*, out of them. That's how it started… I needed a way to vent my frustration without bringing harm to myself and my family in a moment of rage."

Since then, Jones has been using his drawings and paintings to communicate his ideas and feelings, his beliefs, to get his outrage out and to organize it in a way to move others. He fights his battles through his art.

"If you want to do something violent, it is very quick and over," he says. "The result may last longer but not your participation in it. On the contrary, if you're thoughtful, constructive and creative in your approach, you can have long-lasting historic impact on other people. A story well told will still be used by generations to come and they will learn from it; the same for a powerful painting or sculpture. That's to me the strength and the art of art."

Many of Jones' paintings deal with injustice, be it civil war, slavery, discrimination, oppression. Many comment on religion and injustice and on how often they go hand in hand, not the spiritual religion that its founders wanted but the material-based religion that is exploited to the benefit of the few. *In the Name of*, a large horizontal painting, showcases injustice from different standpoints: a

above
Night Watch
oil on canvas

bottom left
Blowing Smoke
oil on canvas

person being lynched while people watch and are being entertained, and Hitler being glorified for efficiently killing other human beings.

A recurrent theme in Jones' paintings is the proliferation of wars and their destructive power. He uses every chance he gets to uncover the veil of secrecy about war, the military-industrial complex and its hidden profit motives.

Night Watch, is based on a Rembrandt painting of the same name in which soldiers, dressed up in their best uniform, only act the staging of a war. Jones instead depicted US soldiers taking on a much more violent and risky role in a conflict they did not plan for. The painting at the same time addresses the Palestine/Israel conflict, showing a 12-year-old Arab girl holding flowers, and a 12-year-old Jewish boy, standing side by side and looking straight ahead. It is Jones' message for the youth of these countries to become the engine of peace and stop the violence. Jones says he hesitated to represent the two kids looking at each other and communicating because he knows, by the time they become adults, they will have lost their fresh and unadulterated outlook. "Due to its religious and tribal roots, the Palestine/Israel conflict represents a significant global danger that, if not resolved, could spread," he says.

In addition to serving as a vehicle for his ideas and beliefs, art connects Jones to his past, to history, to people and to life in general.

"Art to me is more than just painting images," he says. "It is a way of life, a way to understand the world that one may not have control over. It helps me create my own world. I live through my paint-

top left
The Death of Innocents - Innocence
oil on canvas

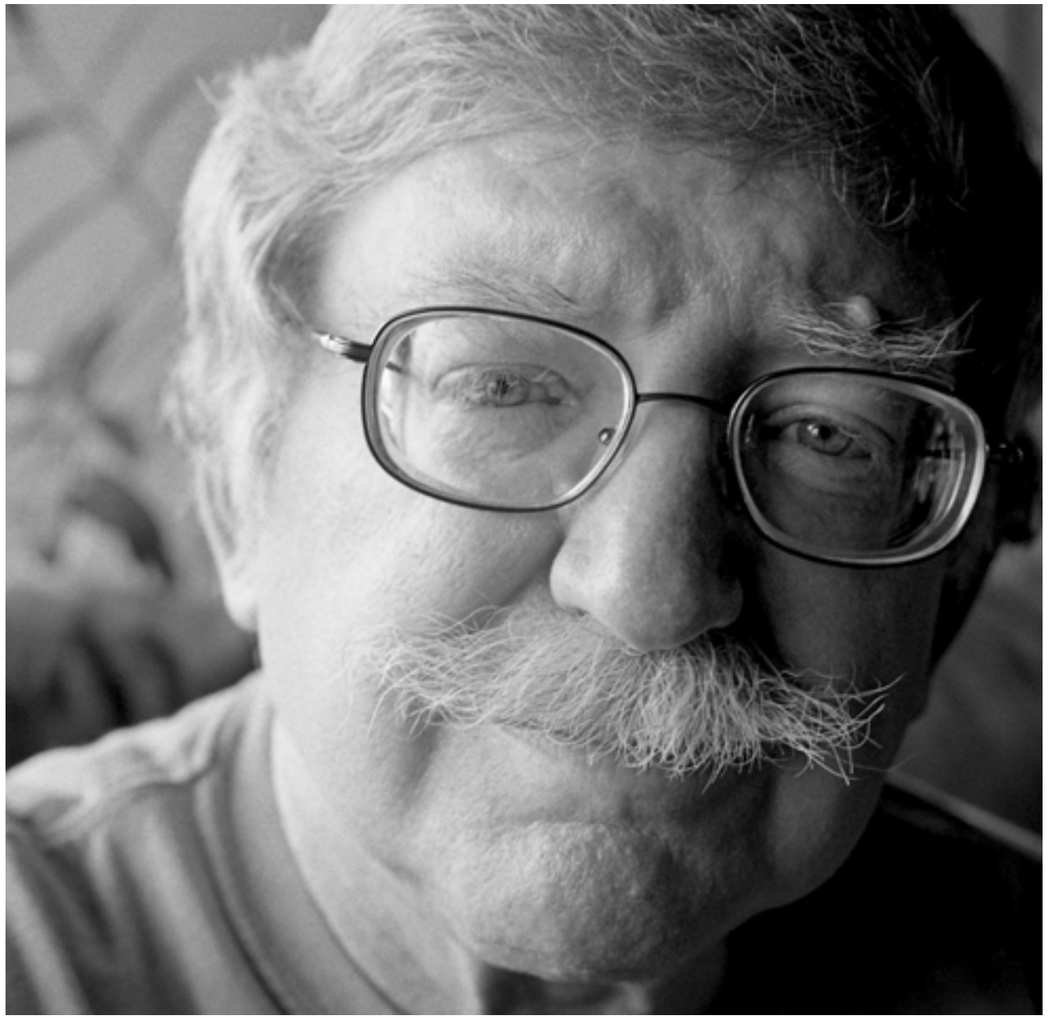
top right
In the Name of
oil on canvas

bottom left
Crossing the Delaware
oil on canvas

bottom right
The Riots - A Tale of Two Mothers
oil on canvas

ings; they help me organize my random thoughts and share them and myself with others. Art then takes a bigger role than just catharsis or cleansing; it becomes historic."

Jones draws and paints from his heart, exposing himself and what he stands for to the viewers with whom he wants to connect. It is his way to include others in his life, to move them, to rally them for a better world.



JERRY JUDGE

Poetry that Keeps the Door Open

Jerry Judge's unexpected outcome

"Poetry found me and gave me a different voice," says Jerry Judge, a Cincinnati poet who started seriously writing only in his mid-forties. "I was having strong feelings about many issues and not a good way to express them adequately. Poetry worked for me; it gave me a powerful tool to get them out."

While growing up, Judge loved to read; he wrote a few short stories for his own pleasure, also on high school and college assignments; he even published a couple in his twenties. He also occasionally wrote poems in an attempt to impress girls.

His academic career, however, took him into business administration and then social work, a field he has worked in ever since. Initially and for a long time he held a demanding and stressful job in public child welfare; it consumed most of his time. For the past 9 years he has been a caseworker for *Big Brothers Big Sisters*, a mentoring program that pairs kids with adults who serve as their role models.

In 1990, deciding to slow down professionally, Judge took a writing workshop. This is when he discovered his strong affinity for poetry; he has been writing it since, publishing his poems in various magazines, in seven chapbooks to date, participating regularly in writing groups and in public readings.

"With poetry everything came out - my thoughts, feelings, fantasies, joys, worries, questions," he says. "Each poem would take me on a different discovery path, put me in touch with unexpressed or unexplored parts of myself and the outcome often unexpected."

As a result Judge wrote about fatherhood, family life, relationships, death, social issues, politics.

His poems on justice, peace and wars, also abounded even though hard to come because of all the feelings and pain involved and all it took to dig them out. Judge did not shy away from them, however; he wrote many over the years, pertaining to the violence of wars, the futility of innocent deaths, the inflicted ravages of youthful demise, the hypocrisy of warmongers. He recently put them all in a chapbook he titled, *Night Talk in the Barracks*.

"It was important to let them all out together in a book," he says. "They were clearly stating my anti war perspective, and I was loudly saying: This is me."

Cleansing for Americans, one of the poems of the book, addresses satirically the attraction Americans have for violence and their self-destructive use of might and weapons when facing the problems of the world. Through his words, Judge progressively overlapped bombs, with flags, with church, and transformed an apparent ode to violence into a sarcastic American prayer: "We will wave our flags and bomb. We will attend church and bomb./Bombs will cleanse./Hallelujah!/ Forgive us our sins./Hallelujah!/Bombs. Bombs. Bombs."

In *Deep in the Heart*, he treats of money, greed and wealth, of their self gratifying role in triggering and shaping wars: "How right to have a President/dedicated to the super rich./At strategic points across America,/certain men will pause and contemplate/their wealth. The gleam from their smiles/will light the skies of Afghanistan and Iraq."

His poem, *No Forwarding Address*, goes back to the Gulf war. Its title evokes death, loss of contact, abandonment, reflective of Judge's feelings at the time, sorrow mixed with anger and a sense of isolation. Images of violence coincide with the insensitivity to violence when it affects others and the callous detachment from reality when TV announcers play only the out-of-touch advertisers. It also reminds of Cincinnati City Council's proposal to outlaw begging by the homeless in order not to inconvenience downtown merchants. Judge closes on all these feelings with the image of empty eyes, a metaphor for the lost soul of society, a statement he felt applicable to our country.

Judge reads his poems in public whenever he can, sharing his feelings and powerful images with varied audiences.

"I feel the need to share my poetry, to have someone else hear it or read it," he says. "I want it to make an impact. When I feel strongly about something, I have to voice it, and my poetry comes to my rescue. It becomes my conversation, my communication. I use it to trigger awareness, thinking, to plant a seed."

Judge has also been an activist for peace beyond his poetry. When in his early twenties he enlisted to avoid being drafted to Vietnam, he soon became a conscientious objector, ready for imprisonment if not discharged. Awaiting court decision, he actively participated in antiwar activities, rallying with similar minded objectors in Austin, Texas, writing regularly for the *Fatigue Press*, an alternative press for military men. Whenever he feels a peace and justice issue needs to be heard, he is always prompt at writing letters to

Friendly

My Uncle Paul was friendly. He flopped
to the floor and played with my kids and helped me
assemble those daunting Christmas toys.

Betty, waitress at the Corner Café, is friendly.
She asks how I'm doing and cares about
what I respond. Sometimes she doesn't charge for pie.

Bill, a retired co-worker, was friendly.
Always a big grin and laugh, we kidded about how
he would make a great Walmart Greeter.

However, friendly fire is confusing. It blew off
the skull and more of my neighbor's son.
Military personnel who delivered the news were friendly.

Deep in the Heart

How right to have a President
dedicated to the super rich.
Their happiness is important, too.

When I was young, my favorite
comic book character was Uncle Scrooge.
True, he never shared with Donald and

Huey, Dewey and Louie, but his joy
was so pure when he lounged around
in his vault of money and jewels.

At strategic points across America,
certain men will pause and contemplate
their wealth. The gleam from their smiles

will light the skies of Afghanistan and Iraq.
Uncle Scrooge will paddle through green
quacking, "The stars at night are big and bright…"

Cleansing for Americans

We will march and bomb.
We will bomb and bomb.
We will bury our dead and bomb.
We will bury their dead with our bombs.
We will wave our flags and bomb.
We will attend church and bomb.
We will watch on TV the bombs bombing.
We will watch on instant replay the bombs bombing.
We will watch on slow-mo the bombs bombing.
These are holy bombs.
We will bomb bomb bomb.
Bombs will cleanse.
Hallelujah!
Bombs. Bombs. Bombs.
These are holy bombs.
Hallelujah!
Take us back home. The bombs.
Show us the way. The bombs.
These are holy bombs.
Hallelujah!
Forgive us our sins. The bombs.
Forgive us our trespasses. The bombs.
Hallelujah!
Bombs. Bombs. Bombs.

Photographs

I hate the bright sun.
I hate the light deepening the sadness.

I hate the grief I can't heal
spreading through the families.

I hate seeing the soldiers coming home
in boxes that now can be photographed.

No Forwarding Address

I should have known at the stadium.
Quarterback's neck snapped.
Fifty thousand frenzied fans cheering
tackler dancing flamenco over still body.

I should have known from television.
Clean-cut announcers foaming at mouth.
American flags undulating as
Iraq's people are blown into scraps.

I should have known from City Hall.
To protect downtown merchants
an ordinance was passed
forbidding begging.

I finally knew when I opened the curtains
on the other side of his eyes.
Void. Empty.
No forwarding address.

Cincinnati
The Riots, 2001

Perhaps foul chemicals falling
from the urban sky took their toll
upon your people in the valley.

Who knew such hatred lurked
beneath the surfaces of ads for Reds'
games and visiting your Zoo babies?

Decades it took for violence to gush
forth from your denial's volcano.
A generation it'll take for acceptance

to pry open nailed-down windows.
Your city fathers and consultants
must first probe and cleanse them-
selves.

the editor or to congress, participating in marches and demonstrations.

In Cincinnati, Judge has also been instrumental at strengthening the voice of other poets, encouraging them in their writing and publishing. He is an active participant in the *Cincinnati Writers Project* and the *Greater Cincinnati Writers League*, groups that meet regularly to read, review and critique poetry, develop writing skills, foster learning, at the same time mentoring emerging poets and forging relationships.

Judge will continue writing poetry, as it is his voice.

"I would like to write more about homelessness, about progressive issues I have deep feelings for, the environment, childhood, warfare, climate warming," he says. "Also about poverty, domestic violence, child abuse; dissident poetry that involves me from within, that is universal. I learn a lot when I write. Poetry keeps the door open and let me wander, like an explorer, inside my own territory."

Judge also wants his poetry to trigger action in himself and in others. He wants it to clearly and loudly state his beliefs, to reflect who he is. He always carries in his wallet *As a Man*, a poem by David Ignatow, which last lines say: "I am haunted by the poem/yet to be written/that I may live as a poem/when I die as a man." This would also be his wish.

The Homeless Man at the Library Computer
For Mark P.

connects to his wiring
pulse of machine
fingers explore
probe the keyboard

enters the internet
a birthing
his old life
starts deletion

sends a prayer request
to a web ring
feels a warmth
rippling under his skin

develops own page
aloneness fades
views a future
with him in it

KEVIN T. KELLY

Dark Humor and Harmony

Kevin T. Kelly's spiritual trek

"Art is the tangible manifestation of an eternal spirit that flows through all things," says Kevin T. Kelly. "When I get immersed in creating art, I lose track of time and space; I am only in the "now" moment, communing with the sacred and spiritual, with a universal energy, a force bigger than me that manifests itself through me. I feel deeply satisfied and connected, as if touched by the hand of God."

Kelly is an artist and educator who grew up in Ludlow, Kentucky. After high school he attended the Art Academy of Cincinnati and earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in sculpture. He moved to New York City for six years, working as a studio assistant to Pop artist Tom Wesselmann, then resettled in Cincinnati.

As a child, Kelly drew non stop, inspired and coached by his father, who nurtured his talent, teaching him perspective, creating images for him to copy. Although his degree is in sculpture, Kelly shifted entirely to painting after college.

"My sculptures were more akin to assemblages, comparable to drawings in 3D," he says. "I always liked the Pop genre and decided to explore it in painting to reflect my perceptions on personal experiences, the human condition, as well as on society in general."

From the beginning, Kelly felt that art needed content and that it needed to convey a message. He is not an abstractionist, but rather a figurative painter whose work tells a story, is socially- aware, and taps into the emotions of the time. As an undergraduate he created works on apartheid and Nazism, in particular the 'Monster of Vienna,' a Nazi with no remorse for his atrocities–topics prominent in the news. While working at Wesselmann's studio Kelly continued his own art. He created a series of black cut-out still life that did not satisfy him; they prompted him, however, to move in a different direction–Pop art.

"Pop art allowed me, through visual metaphors, to establish allegories and narratives which looked at personal dilemmas and perceptions, and apply them to a general societal context," he says. "It let me open a visual dialogue with the viewer while trying to get to universal truth."

With humor, Kelly's work examined various facets of the human drama. Family issues, relationships, communication and misperceptions all found their way into his paintings, often with a dose of cynicism and sarcasm. They served as his commentaries on life and society.

Paradigm Lost is based on a car advertisement from the 1950's. A man is driving; his wife is blindfolded. The message of the ad is that the car runs so smoothly the wife is not even aware of the ride. Kelly re-contextualized the image to reflect upon the issue of the ever-changing roles of gender and identity in society.

In *Club Lust*, an apparently wealthy married couple is shown in the intimacy of their bedroom. While the wife is waiting, sitting on the bed, her husband is instead admiring and enamored with a golf driver. The bedroom window opens on a golf course and an image of the same hangs on the wall. Kelly used the painting

top left
Club Lust
acrylic on canvas

top right
Lama Sabachtani
mixed media

bottom left
Export
mixed media

as a metaphor for the hidden aspects of relationships, for what is expected, what actually happens or does not happen; he depicted in it the openly unspoken truth, reality versus perception, the dissonance of the moment encountered in personal exchanges. The painting also alluded to the role sports play in people's lives, particularly at retirement–a curse and a blessing at the same time.

Many of Kelly's topics come from his personal experiences and reflections. The more he delves into them, the more he connects with himself, his emotions, his beliefs and values. It is for him an uncovering process, like peeling off the skins of an onion, exposing layer after layer. Often and sometimes after the fact, he says, he realizes that his paintings subconsciously relate to his own history–his divorce, for instance–yet have a universality due to their basic human subject.

In his concerns for personal, social and political issues, Kelly always tries to convey his thoughts and messages with subtlety and humor. He does not want his paintings to impose only his views; he strives to understand and represent the other side, engaging viewers in the debate, expanding their awareness, indirectly leading them to the spirituality of life.

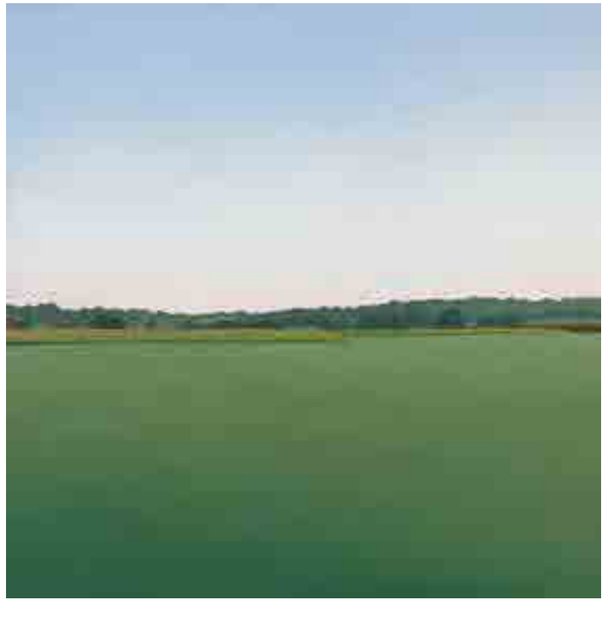
All along Kelly has been interested in his own spiritual quest. Recently, he became dissatisfied and wanted to part with the cynical dark humor of his work, striving instead for more beauty, joy, serenity. He began introspectively reevaluating his belief system, meditating daily, embracing Taoist philosophy, and learning the disciplines of Qi Quong and Tai Chi. This led his work into a new direction. He is now focusing on painting calm and harmonious landscapes, conveying the awe and grandeur of nature, its perpetual change,

top left
Sentinels
acrylic and gouache on paper

top right
The Bottoms I
acrylic on paper

bottom left
Paradigm Lost
acrylic on canvas

bottom right
Sunset on the Bottoms
acrylic on paper



its peace and spirituality. They are small, intimate, meditative paintings.

"I began looking at places I've passed hundreds of times, really noticing their beauty and abundance for the first time," Kelly says. "Nature is in a continual state of becoming, and I equate it metaphorically in these new landscape paintings to one's journey from ego to spirit." He adds, "It's my attempt at conveying to the viewer a transpersonal experience which transcends the mundane veneer of just focusing on personal and societal ills. I want to offer in these works the gift of serenity, a haven of solace and tranquility for anyone willing to take the time to look."

Kelly's art always comes from his heart. Whether through Pop art or new landscape paintings, it affirms who he is, conveys his beliefs and worldly views, shares his spiritual journey. Using symbols and metaphors, it aims at a higher level of understanding and consciousness, at the fullness of life, at the universality of truth.

AARON KENT

Flags and Penises

Aaron Kent's art delves into politics, religion and sexuality

"I do not see myself as special or different from anyone else," says Aaaron Kent. "I am just an artist who enjoys what he does. My art makes me happy; it is my being."

Kent's art is also his voice as he uses it, instead of words, to express and affirm who he is, convey his views, question and confront political and social issues and challenge the viewer to think critically about our government and the values of our society.

A versatile artist born in Springfield, Ohio, Kent now lives in Cincinnati. He has been drawing or involved in art classes since early childhood. In High school he studied commercial art, later switching to fine arts. He graduated from the Art Academy of Cincinnati with a bachelor of fine arts degree in sculpture and worked at *Casting Arts and Technology* for fifteen years, practicing mold making, bronze casting and metal fabrication. After Casting Arts, he opened *DIY (Do It Yourself) Printing*, a small hand-pulled silk screen studio for artists. In addition to screen printing, Kent also uses other media including printmaking, painting and performance art.

From the beginning his work has been unconventional, questioning the status quo, triggering thinking about controversial issues such as religion, sexuality, money, freedom of speech and some aspects of punk culture. It has also been provocative both in its imagery and the often taboo subjects it addresses.

top left
New American Anthem
mixed media

top right
Hey Buddy, Can You Spare a Dime
mixed media

bottom left
In God We Trust
silkscreen print

bottom right
God Told Me It Was Ok
mixed media

His graphic series, *America the Beautiful*, recreated the American flag in various ways, associating it with money, religion and war, thus using it to address different issues that pertain to America, its politics and its culture. It served to artistically reaffirm the freedom of speech that Kent believed the US Constitution provided, at the same time raising awareness and dialogue with the viewer. *Hey Buddy Can You Spare a Dime*, a piece from the series, consisted of an American flag made out of $1 bills. By incorporating money into the flag, Kent alluded to the important role money plays in US politics, American-wealth in the face of its coexisting poverty and the increasingly changing economic horizons locally and worldwide.

In *New American Anthem*, he used music bars as lines for a flag that he shot several times with a gun; he then had music written based on the shots-caused pattern. He thus associated firearms violence to the American flag, creating a new anthem with a new message, making an implicit statement about the direction of our country.

Another series, *In God We Trust*, challenges the thinking on who and what God is, religion, right vs. wrong and how people use God for money and make money their God. Raised Catholic, Kent disassociated himself early on from religion as it did not answer his questions and was often, in his eyes, misused to perpetuate control, repression and self-interests.

"I do not need God to have a good heart," he states. "Without religion one can still be a good person."

Although agnostic, Kent remains spiritual, connecting to people and helping others whenever he can–the poor, homeless, abandoned and less fortunate. This is his religion, being honest, kind and supportive–not the materialistic, empire-building values promoted by institutions, which detract from the essential.

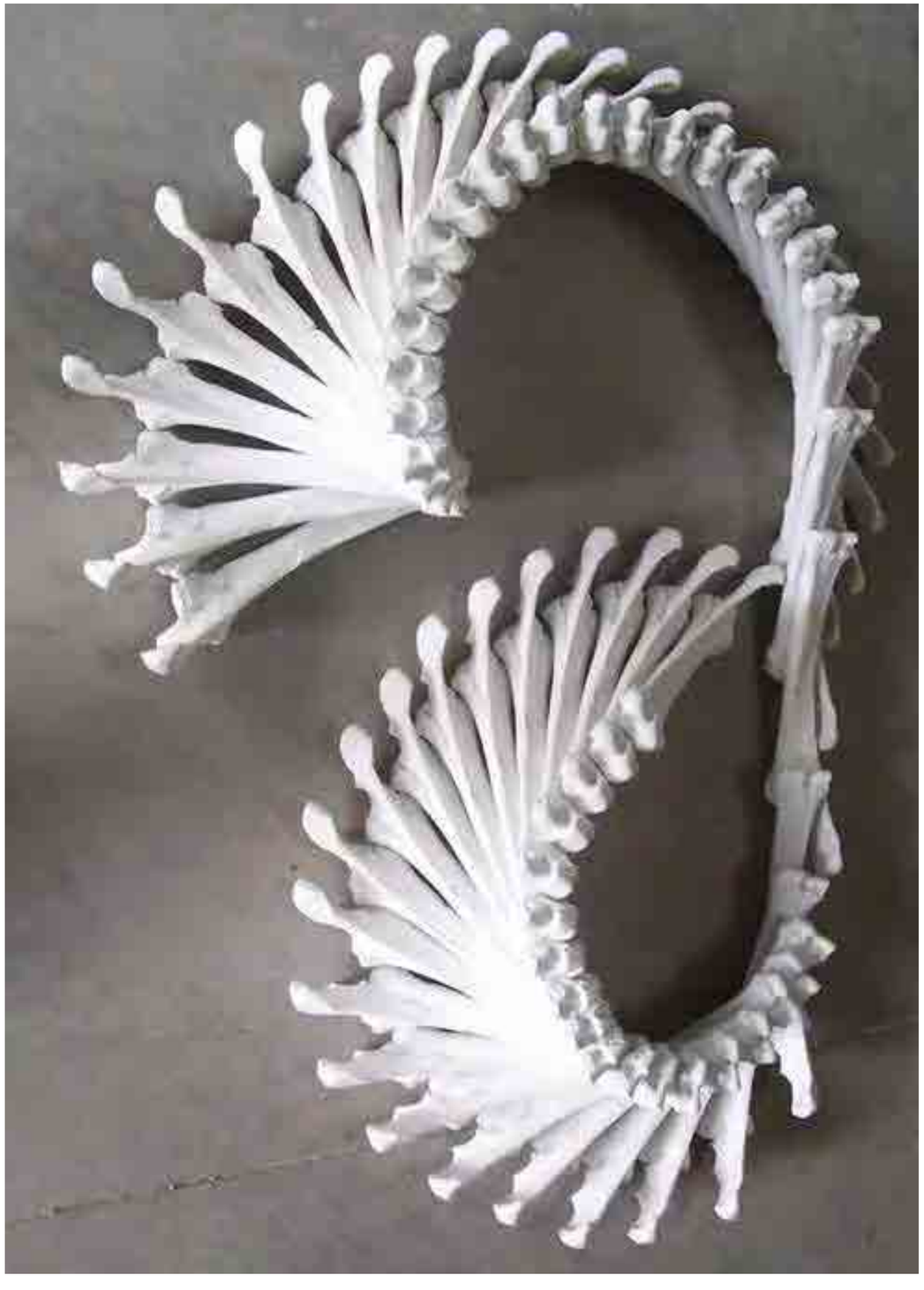
His print, *In God We Trust*, consists of $1 bills forming a cross. It shows the front of the bills with "The United States of America" prominently printed on them and the image of George Washington in their center. It directly links money to politics to religion, an omnipresent, omnipotent, overlapping trinity in our society.

Kent's sculpture, *God Told Me It Was OK*, represents a cross covered with Bible pages on which he silk-screened images pertaining to sexuality. His intention was to throw religion and the underworld of sex together, questioning what is right and who judges wrong and points to the fact that religion looks down on lifestyles not of its likeness instead of accepting people for whom they are, appreciating their goodness.

Other artworks address the hypocrisy of religious institutions, for instance their tacit approval of wars and violence contradictory to their peace teaching, just because they benefit from them materially and monetarily.

Kent's latest series, *Bones*, consists of sculptures reflecting on death and its spiritual connection to the circle of life. Based on bones repeatedly casted in bronze and arranged into unique, somewhat abstract sculptural patterns, the pieces represent a shift from death to the beauty and power of the continuous creative process. They connect individuals in a serene and harmonious way to their questioning of life and death, their own death, their survival through giving back. His sculptures illustrate at the same time the fragility yet the strength of all living beings, neutralizing indirectly the fears imposed by religions.

Kent also makes a point of putting his art outside galleries, in public spaces, in order



left
Bones
plaster

above
In God We Trust, New Currency
silkscreen print

to impact directly passer-bys and make his art and message part of their daily life. For instance, he pastes his enlarged prints on blank, abandoned walls, installs his sculptures anonymously in the streets, sets spontaneous performance installations.

"I am an activist," he says. "My art says something that I want to communicate. It reflects who I am, what I believe in. I want it to raise questions and trigger thinking, irrespective of the immediate reaction."

To point to sexuality and its important role in life and fight its unhealthy obliteration by society, Kent displayed in many public places large plaster-casted penises, connecting them to each other as if leading the way. To call attention to the terror of wars we inflict on other people, he performed unannounced, dressed up in a hazmat suit, public acts in restaurants and coffee shops, leaving behind him, unattended, small black boxes and briefcases. Perceived as a threat, he would be asked to leave, but after having generated in those present the same uneasiness and fear others live on a daily basis because of the wars we have created for them.

"If I do not do art, I do not feel complete," says Kent. "Art is my voice and my communication. It is also my share for a better world."

MARY ANN LEDERER

Compassion Is a Natural Resource

Mary Ann Lederer promotes peace

Mary Ann Lederer's first use of art for political purposes was at age 20, during the civil rights movement, designing posters and picket signs. Influenced by the Rev. Maurice McCrackin, whom she had met when volunteering at a neighborhood house day camp, she actively participated in the desegregation campaign of the early 60's. With others in the city who were trained in Gandhi's methods of non-violence–negotiations, picketing, occasionally sit-ins–she helped integrate Cincinnati's restaurants, stores and theatres.

Lederer grew up in North Avondale in a Jewish home surrounded by art and music. Her father was a Republican, her mother a Democrat; though fond of both, she sided politically with her liberal more compassionate mother. She did not study art per se. In college she took only one drawing course, and majored in sociology. She worked for several years as a social worker, then returned to the University of Cincinnati (UC) to pursue a master's degree in community planning.

Not long after Lederer graduated she was shot in the back by an intruder in her home. As a result she became a paraplegic.

"When I woke up I realized I could not move my legs any more," she said. "It felt like half my body was filled with cement; yet somehow I knew I wanted to paint."

top left
Holding Hands for Peace
acrylic on canvas

top right
Transforming America - A Vegetable Garden in Every Yard
acrylic on canvas

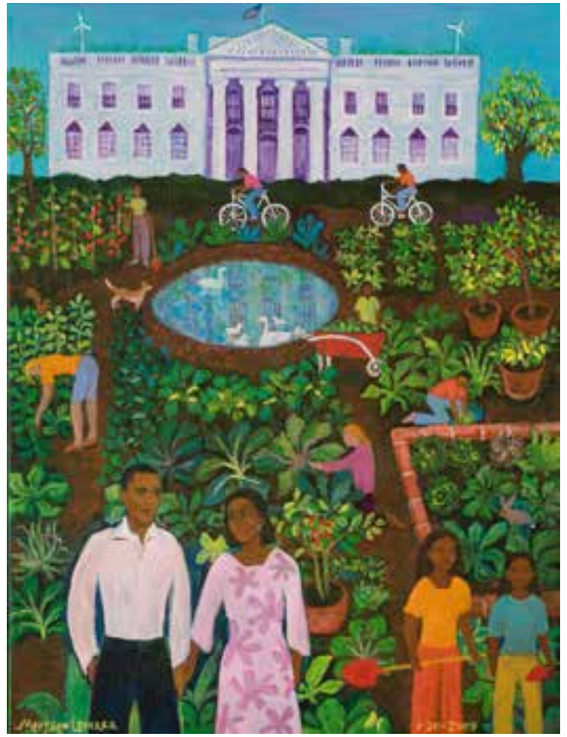
bottom right
Imagine a Peaceful Place
acrylic on canvas

Lederer underwent rehabilitation, then became active in the disability movement. She set up a handicap program at UC and started a wheelchair basketball team. The team became the subject of several of her early paintings. Other paintings addressed various disability issues. One, for instance, showed two world class wheelchaired athletes wheeling across America to raise money for wheelchair sports. Others depicted a wheelchaired Santa Claus, a wheelchaired Cupid for Valentine's Day. Many represented disabled individuals in varied living activities. It was her way of raising awareness about their condition and identity.

As the years passed Lederer developed health problems and was unable to continue arduous physical activity. An alternative vegetarian doctor, however, helped her heal by teaching her how to use food to turn her health around. As her health revived, she became active in EarthSave Cincinnati (now renamed VeganEarth), an organization which promotes a plant-based diet for the health of individuals, a clean environment for the health of the earth, and the compassionate treatment of animals. She has been active in the local chapter of EarthSave/VeganEarth for many years, and its values have influenced her painting.

"I consider myself a philosopher-painter," Lederer says. "I paint the world I'd love to live in, a multi-ethnic world of freedom, equality and healthfulness, where the air is clean, water pure, plants wild or organically grown, animals free–a sustainable natural world."

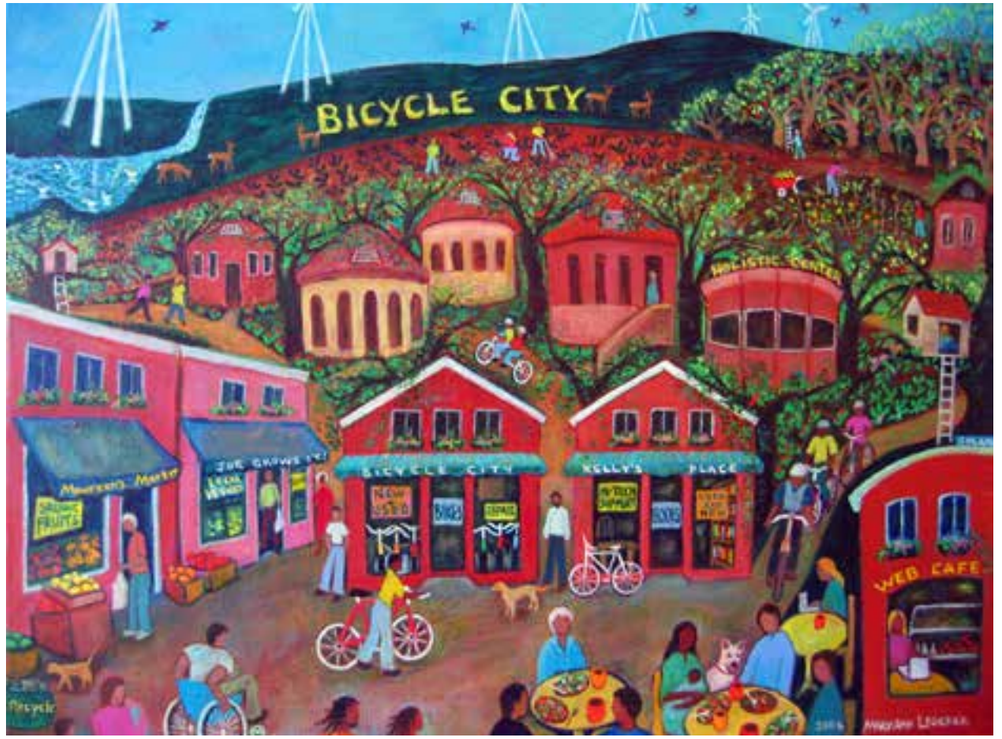
Her painting *An Intentional Community* represents people in a vividly-colored world of rivers, trees and animals; some people are gardening, some are coming together at a vegetable market. A *Peace Village* depicts ethnically diverse individuals living together in harmony with animals and the earth. *Bicycle City* shows a community with no cars–only bicycles, windmills, solar panels, a clean environment where people are able to communicate more closely with one another. It reflected her hopes for many such future communities.



Lederer started the painting *Transforming America–A Vegetable Garden in Every Yard* the day after the last presidential election and completed it on Inauguration day. It shows the First Family on the White House lawn, which has been transformed into an idyllic community vegetable garden. It was her vision for a healthier, "back-to-the-earth" America. Posters of the painting are now available. She hopes they will encourage more people to grow their own food.

Lederer was pleased to learn that Michelle Obama has indeed recently started such a garden. She is convinced that what people eat affects not only their health but also their minds, their hearts and their behaviors, that a plant-based diet is preferable to one based on cruelty to animals, and that gardening and organic farming promote communication, community building and a healthy and peaceful society. Lederer also uses her art to express her political views. Though aware of the violence in the world, she says, "We have an untapped natural resource in compassion. We need to nurture it. Our educational system unfortunately is more head than heart, and prepares individuals to be competitive sometimes at the expense of a better world for everyone."

A recent painting about the Iraq War shows individuals of different ethnicities wearing different costumes, forming a



top left
The Wall
acrylic on canvas

top right
Bicycle City
acrylic on canvas

bottom left
Bridge to Peace
acrylic on canvas

circle, holding hands. *The Wall* shows Jews and Arabs working together for peace while writing in their own languages on the wall intended to divide them.

"My painting is a plea to the peoples of the world to appreciate each other's cultures and differences, to come together and communicate. 'Compassionate communication,' for example, a system designed by Marshall Rosenberg, teaches people how to listen to each other and feel each other's feelings. It works. We can get along with each other."

Lederer's dream is now to help start organic gardens all over the city, ensure compassionate treatment of animals, promote a vegan diet, and pay respect to mother earth. Her art will continue to reflect her vision of a vibrant, natural, diverse and peaceful world.

CAROLYN MAZLOOMI

Quilts as the Fabric of Life

Carolyn Mazloomi uses her art and Quilters' organization to keep quilting potent and alive

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Quilts and quilting changed Carolyn Mazloomi's life. A Ph.D. in aerospace engineering, Mazloomi, taken and mesmerized by a quilt exhibit she visited in Dallas, Texas, promised herself to learn the art. Her decision stayed with her and led her a long way, completely removed from her initial profession. Mazloomi became instead a highly skilled and talented professional quilter and an ardent life-long advocate for African-American women quilt-makers.

Born and raised in New Orleans in a segregated Southern society, the double burden of being black and a woman accompanied her all along. She experienced directly and early on the subjugation of women and their second class role in a male dominated society, also the prevailing racial discrimination of the early 60's. Growing up she would always ask questions, challenging the status quo and the injustices she was seeing; she also constantly felt the need to express her concerns and communicate her thoughts and ideas. Thanks to their potential narrative pictorial quality, quilts appealed strongly to her. They seemed to be a natural and fitting vehicle for her social commentaries and messages; she, as well, liked the touch and feel of fabric.

"We humans have a love affair and a privileged visceral relationship, from birth to death, with the cloth," she says. "Quilts serve as a tactile link to visual sensual memory, also as metaphors for covering, protecting, warmth and security."

top left
Forever Faithful
fabric quilt

top right
Peacekeeper's Gift
fabric quilt

bottom right
The Offering
fabric quilt

Convinced that women had one of the most, if not the most, important job on earth, being mothers and first teachers at the same time, she felt the need to empower them and call attention to their status and rights. As a result, most of her quilts, from the start, dealt with some aspect of their condition.

"I am a woman; I am a mother; I am a concerned citizen of the world," she says. "My quilts depict my concerns about the world I live in and how we treat each other. And women, who represent 50% of humankind, are often mistreated."

In *Forever Faithful*, she tackles the issue of female circumcision still practiced in many parts of the world. Her quilt shows the silhouette of a naked woman laying down in the center of what represents a sharp blade. At the bottom is written "A lifetime of pain" alluding to the painful and violent procedure forced on a woman's body, detrimental to both her health and well-being.

The Peace Keepers' Gift is about the fate of West African women who have been raped by UN soldiers. It portrays an African girl holding a mixed race baby with sandy hair and, under her, white UN peace keepers. It points to the vulnerability of the woman and the uncertain destiny of the child.

Seeking Comfort, Finding Pain refers to the Korean "comfort" women who, during WW2, were forced into prostitution and used as sex slaves by the Japanese military, abused, abandoned and ignored.

Bride Burning in India, prompted by a young Indian girl brought to Cincinnati for burn treatment, stresses the ongoing problem of Indian widows forcefull placed on the pyre of their dead husband and burnt to death.

A series of black and white quilts pertaining to grandmothers and great grand mothers who, nowadays, have often the added responsibility to take care of their grandchildren, reflects on the increasingly dysfunctional family structure in our society.

In addition to women issues, race also found its way into Mazloomi's quilts. *Strange Fruit*, inspired by the song of the same name about lynching, depicts images of hangings and burnings, of pointed hoods symbols of the Ku Klux Klan, of a screaming woman. Mazloomi meant it as a sacred offering to those African Americans who have been lynched and an homage to the many who, from slavery to present days, have heroically fought for racial justice. One of her quilts comments on the racially- biased immigration policy of our country; it represents Haitians standing next to the Statue of Liberty holding in her hand a stop sign, and at her feet, a quotation saying 'Certain people do not need apply.'

In 1985 Mazloomi founded the *Women of Color Quilters Network*, an organization that supports and empowers women quilters, maintains quilts' artistic and cultural tradition, keeps alive their heritage, and helps the economic development of the artists through selling their work and protecting its monetary value. The organization, in addition, plays an important educational role, informing about quilts, promoting their cultural and historical value, offering technical workshops, recruiting newcomer youth to the craft.

"Quilts are very important historical documents," says Mazloomi. "They provide glimpses into people's lives and serve as cultural windows. They reflect the fabric of life, and inform about material, dyes,

ways of expressions, customs and events of a given period."

The organization, now international, counts close to 2000 members, primarily, but not exclusively, African American women. It has been honored by the International Labor Department, also by the United Nations, in recognition of its programs to help advance women. It owed Mazloomi, in 2003, the first Ohio Heritage Fellowship Award.

Through her role as a founder and president of the organization, Mazloomi was led to curate exhibits to showcase the works of the members, also to write books relating to the art form. Six of her books have already been published dealing variably with Contemporary African American quilts, quilts inspired by Religion and Faith, quilts related to Jazz, reflecting on African American Women's history, celebrating Obama's election to the presidency… Touring exhibits traveled throughout the USA, and as far as Central America, Africa, Japan, museums hosting many of them, also acquiring some of the work for their own collections.

"Quilts need to be included in permanent museum collections," says Mazloomi. "Our children and grand children should be able to see how we, African American women, contributed to culture in America."

Mazloomi wants her art and quilts to educate, inform, make people reflect and think. She intends them as transmitters of her cultural, political, social, spiritual values and beliefs. Through her organization, she also aims at keeping the quilting tradition vibrant and alive as an artistic, cultural and historical tool; and at giving recognition and power to the many African American women who, for centuries, have used it in the shadow of their lives.

top left
Loving Arms
fabric quilt

top right
Strange Fruit
mixed media quilt

bottom left
Bride Burning in India
fabric quilt

bottom right
Seeking Comfort, Finding Pain
fabric quilt

GLORIA McCONNAGHY

Ascending to the Pure Realms

Gloria McConnaghy's creations celebrate spirituality

"Why don't you draw pictures about something from your heart, something you dream of, good things you remember," that was the advice a junior high school art teacher gave Gloria McConnaghy when she was a preadolescent girl. It was an advice she would never forget and that shaped from then on all her artistic expression.

Gloria, born in California, grew up in British Columbia and later located in Cincinnati. As a young child, she liked drawing, enrolled in scholastic art programs and won several awards. When ready to choose a career, a well-meaning adviser dissuaded her from going to art school and directed her instead towards nursing. She attended a small Jewish nursing school in San Francisco and mingled with students from all ethnic backgrounds, African American, Jewish, Japanese, Chinese, Haitian.

"This was the best thing that ever happened to me," she says. "It woke me up to social reality and forged my tolerance by experience."

Gloria loved nursing and taking care of patients who opened her eyes to the world and its diversity. While working as a nurse, she took art classes at night, mostly drawing and painting. The paintings she did then were popular and sold well; she felt, however, they had nothing to do with her.

top left
The Dalai Lama Dreaming of a Peaceful World
mixed media

top right
Man of Peace
mixed media

bottom right
Mistaken Identity in Wellington
mixed media

Frustrated, she decided to stop painting until she had something to say. Interested in public health, she joined the Cincinnati Health Department, then the *'Peace Corps'* and *'Save the Children*,' which took her for many years to Colombia, South America; Fiji and Tuvalu in the Pacific; Bhutan in the Himalayas. Not mastering the languages of these countries, she resorted to her drawing skills to generate public-health teaching documents based on images she would create. Their topics varied from prevention of malaria, maternal and child health care, family planning, clean water and sanitation, to a complete primary health care manual for Bhutan. The documents served as visual aids well suited to citizens of these countries who could not read well. They tied her art interest to her public-health concerns.

When, after many years of overseas commitment, she decided to settle back home, Gloria was well in her fifties, out of synch with the nursing field and not easily marketable. To earn a living, she started an ethnic jewelry and folk-art shop in downtown Cincinnati and got back, seriously this time, into her own creative art. Inspired by her experiences abroad and the spirituality of the places she had lived in or visited, she started doing small construction pieces, shrines or altar-like, some with strong religious connotations, each with a personal story. They connected her to her dreams, to the mystical images she had in her mind, to her beliefs, to the people she had met, and to the important individuals who had influenced her views of the world. Gandhi, the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa, for instance, often appeared in her works, reflecting on the values of peace, non-violence, love and compassion, they promoted and imparted onto her.

Corona Awaiting Her Ascent into Heaven is a small construction piece she did in honor of a small and frail black lady she encountered one day on her way to work. The lady was quite ill but scared to go to the hospital because she had no money. Gloria arranged for an ambulance to take care of her; she died, however, shortly after. That same night she appeared in Gloria's dream as a beautiful angel ascending into the skies.

Ascending from Evil into the Pure Realms is about the Holocaust. Although not Jewish, Gloria grew up all her life haunted by the Holocaust and the innocent people who were murdered. She wondered what happened to their souls and wanted to commemorate them, floating in the universe, connecting with the world. She glued together 2 old wooden boxes and used an old broken doll, missing a hand and a foot, as a symbol of the victims. She dressed the doll with a striped outfit similar to the one the prisoners had to wear and planted in its open, cracked head, flowers representing hope and life. She also incorporated into the piece old ashes, burnt objects and bones and added pictures of her relatives, underlining her own connection to the oppressed world.

Another piece, *Mother Teresa*, is treated like an old Russian icon, holding in her hands a jewel, her offerings to humanity; and under her, two small statues of the Virgin Mary, a reference to her sainthood. Until two years ago Gloria had been very prolific in her art and participated in many exhibits all over town. Magical images from her experiences kept emerging in her memories, leading her to create a visual world of beauty, poetry, spirituality and positive feelings.

"I have strong political views," she says. "But what comes out in my work is the sweetness, the magic, the beautiful and not the ugliness. I am more interested in peace than just the absence of war.

top left
Ascending from Evil into the Pure Realms
mixed media

top right
Corona Awaiting Her Ascent into Heaven
mixed media

bottom left
Mother Teresa
mixed media

bottom right
Japanese Disaster Survivors
mixed media

We need to get along and address fairly everyone's concerns. That is my definition of peace; that is also what I want my work to achieve."

Her social concerns also got her involved in many community projects, for instance, painting murals for the soup kitchen in Cincinnati and offering her services to the Red Cross.

Until the end of 2012 Gloria owned a folk art and jewelry shop, the Little Mahatma, in Over The Rhine, Cincinnati; it occupied all of her time and energy. Now that the shop is sold, she looks forward to devoting more time to her creative art. She feels she still has a lot to say and offer; she is in particular eager to create works to sensitize people to the problem of hunger in the world, also to participate in public art projects.

"Art is very important to me," she says. "It gives me happiness, and when I do it, I am in heaven. It helps me connect with my self and my experiences, also convey, in a poetic translation, the values I live and believe in."

PAULETTE MEIER

LessonSongs for Peacemaking and Understanding

Paulette Meier sings for social justice and a better world

"For me, art is the expression of an underlying truth, of that which is usually hidden or not noticed much," says Paulette Meier. "It can make us aware of the inner conditions of others' lives, and can open our hearts to strangers, as well as to our own deeper selves."

And the truth that Meier alludes to, and which she strives to attain in her life, is the one uncovered by compassion, love, understanding and the power of the "Spirit."

A Quaker singer/songwriter, peace educator and spiritual social activist, Meier has devoted much of her life to singing and working for peace, equality, the rights of the oppressed, the protection of the vulnerable and invisible in our society, particularly children.

She grew up in Northern Kentucky in a large Catholic family, attended private Catholic schools, and developed, as a result, a strong spiritual inclination and sense of morality. A semester in Germany, in college, in 1971, shook her rather parochial worldview, and she returned home with new awareness of injustice, both in the Church and in her country.

Church choir and family reunions introduced her early on to singing, but it was moving to Washington, DC, in 1980 and living in a communal house-

hold of women musicians that opened her eyes to a vision of herself as a political folk singer.

"The women sang with a group called *'Heresy'*," she says. "They were progressive, engaged in women issues, social justice and spirituality. They affirmed my voice and strongly encouraged me to sing."

Meier had been involved in activist work already in the 70's. While working on her master's degree in German and Education at the University of Cincinnati (UC), she helped organize a union for teaching assistants, and later, as a teacher in Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS), was very involved with the teachers' union. In the late 70's, she became very active in opposing the construction of the Zimmer Nuclear Plant on the Ohio River, which prompted her move to Washington, DC, to work on national nuclear energy issues. Back to Cincinnati in 1984, Meier befriended many of the activists she had met earlier at UC or through the local community. They included Buddy Gray and Bonnie Neumeier of the *Over The Rhine People's Movement*, and Reverend Maurice McCrackin, a civil rights activist and pastor of Community Church in the West End. Diana Porter, a friend and fellow teacher union activist, had co-founded a new women's choir, *MUSE*, which Paulette joined. With her new passion for political folk songs, she and some friends started a Cincinnati chapter of the *People's Music Network*, sponsoring monthly song gatherings in different homes to share and teach songs with social justice themes.

With Ginny Frazier, a fellow *MUSE* member whom she had met earlier campaigning against nuclear power, she started performing in coffee houses, at rallies for the homeless and refugees, at peace demonstrations, labor, environment, and women's events. In 1991 they produced a recording, *Ginny and Paulette: Harmony for Social Justice*, which included many of their songs among which "*The Power Shuffle*," a parody of "*The Hokey Pokey*," they had written to protest the first Gulf War. It was sung with gusto at many local demonstrations:

"We put the teachers in, we take the missiles out… we march and sing and shout. We do the power shuffle, we turn this world around and that's what it's all about!"

One of Paulette's first own songs from 1989, "*Green Bins*," was actually used by *"Keep Cincinnati Beautiful"* to promote the city's new recycling program. She also wrote songs in opposition to the death penalty, and sang them at many protests and vigils. "*No Killing in My Name*" is a call to stop state sponsored murders, and "*Born to Love*," a plea in compassion with families of murdered victims. In 2004, she wrote "*It's the Race to the Bottom*," a song about privatizing government jobs; she recently added to it a verse about teachers, in opposition to SB 5. Its chorus sings: "It's the race to the bottom. (3x) Where they're cuttin' public service so their private profits rise."

An area of concern for Paulette has been the emotional health of children, that she sees directly related to peace in the world. In 1989 she began working in the field of social-emotional learning and focused on it for over 20 years, including many years as a trainer in peace education. She started writing songs to augment her lessons, and in 2002, released a CD, *Come Join the Circle: LessonSongs for Peacemaking*. It has received national acclaim and several awards and is now used in classrooms all around the country. Paulette would like to do another CD for children, to include

Rediscovery

1. Rushing stream, you are still here.
How many years have you been gushing by?
Cascading over these ancient stones,
Whispering tales in mystical tones?
I'm glad I found you.
2. Old beech grove, you are still here.
Dappling the light from the warm noon day sun.
I've missed the sweet scent of your life giving leaves.
Forgotten the grandeur of high canopies.
I'm glad I found you.

Chorus:
Nature is crying, it's dying I know.
Heads in the sand can't make it not so.
But while we do all that we can for our earth,
We need this communion
To treasure its worth.

3. Meadow bright, you are still here.
Teeming with life on this fine autumn day.
Butterflies flitting from aster to gold.
Song of the bob white brings memories of old.
I'm glad I found you.
4. Quiet pond, You are still here.
Restful oasis for geese on their flight.
Now I remember your minnows and frogs,
And blue dragonflies and turtles on logs.
I'm glad I found you.

Chorus
Bridge:
Why did I let so much time go by?
Caught in the grip of technology's lie?
When I was young we would roam fields of green.
Pick pails of blackberries and wade in the stream.
But our house was part of new suburban sprawl.
And my love of nature came linked with its fall.

5. Stars at night, You are still here.
Shining so clear in celestial skies.
I feared your numbers had dwindled to few.
But lights of the city just dim them from view.
I'm so glad I found you.

No Killing in My Name

(Lyrics in v. 1 & 3 inspired by Rev. Maurice McCrackin)

Chorus:
Execution by the state is murder;
No killing in my name!
Execution by the state is murder;
No killing in my name!
No killing in my name!

1. An eye for an eye, A tooth for a tooth
Leaves everyone toothless and blind
An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth;
Thought we'd left that foolish notion behind!

Chorus

2. Teaching not to kill by killing
Is a lesson never learned.
Teaching not to kill by killing
Makes more killers in return.

Chorus

3. Capital punishment is for the poor;
If you've got money you can buy your life.
Capital punishment is for the poor;
Those with capital just do some time!

Chorus

4. Look at the people on death row;
There's a lot more black than white.
Look at the people on death row;
A racist system says who lives and who dies!

Chorus

5. Let's look to South Africa, that had a new way,
Healing victim and oppressor alike.
Let's look to South Africa, and start a new way,
Truth and reconciliation abide!

Chorus

songs she's written about media violence *("Cool to be Cruel?")*, compassion and understanding *("Don't Judge Them")*, and healing past hurts *("Triggered")*.

A more recent musical endeavor for Paulette relates to her spiritual path. About ten years ago, she began attending Quaker meetings and learning about the *Religious Society of Friends.*

"The Quaker faith emphasizes spiritual experience instead of dogma," she says. "Still solidly rooted in the wisdom of Jesus, it integrates an inward seeking spiritual practice with an outward movement towards peace and compassion in the world. I also appreciate the equal role women had in spiritual leadership since its beginnings in the 1600's."

In 2004, Paulette was awarded an Artist in Residence scholarship for a year at Pendle Hill in Philadelphia, where she studied Quaker theology. She recently released, with Quaker Press, *Timeless Quaker Wisdom in Plainsong*, a CD of twenty one quotations from 17th century Quaker leaders, she set to music and sings a cappella. One of the quotes by John Woolman, an early 18th century abolitionist, captures well the Society's philosophy:

"May we look upon our treasure, our furniture and our garments, and try to discover whether the seeds of war are nourished by these our possessions."

"I would like my art to raise awareness of the inherent goodness that every child is born with and what we do that helps that goodness shine or get shadowed over," says Meier; "also to open hearts and build empathy for those who are oppressed. I want my songs to inspire listeners to see things more clearly, and to take action, no matter how small, to support this planet in all its beauty."
Throughout her life, Meier has worked toward all these goals and her voice has always been as lucid and strong as her beautiful "lessonSongs for peacemaking and understanding."

The Power Shuffle

(By Ginny Frazier, Paulette Meier, & Steve Schumacher)

1. We put the peacemakers in,
we take the warmongers out,
We put the peacemakers in,
and we march and sing and shout.
We do the power shuffle,
and we turn this world around.
And that's what it's all about!
2. childcare in, warfare out
3. housing in, missiles out
4. teachers in, bombers out
5. healthcare in, profits out
6. unions in, injustice out
7. earthcare in, destruction out

It's the Race to the Bottom

Chorus:
It's the race to the bottom. (x3)
Where labor costs are lowest, and their profits rise sky high.
(on last verse: Where they're cuttin' public service so their private profits rise.)

1. I had a job working nine to five,
The pay was ok, I didn't struggle to survive,
Ten more years of filing records all day,
With a good pension plan, I could make it all the way,
Then the county decided to privatize;
Contracted out my job right before my eyes.
Well now I'm doin' the same ol' job, but with much lower pay, and my pension got robbed.
And now there's no union to stand up for me;
It's much harder now to build solidarity.
'Cause….
Chorus

2. I've worked ten years as a prison guard.
Though it's not much fun, it didn't use to be hard.
As a government worker, our training was good,
Went home knowing I'd done the best that I could.
Then a corporate owner took over the place,
Said they could run it cheaper, there was too much waste.
In less than a month, over half of us were gone,
The few they hired on, got no training at all.
Now there's lower wages and much higher risk.
Don't know how long I can take all this
When….
Chorus

3. I've been a teacher most of my life.
I love those children; wanna do them right.
But they're 35 kids, with all different needs,
Meetings galore and parents to please.
And there's constant pressure to teach to the test;
It's all I can do to manage the stress.
I work twelve hours most every day,
While they're passing legislation to cut our pay.
We know they just want to union bust,
'cause it's equity down and never up
When….
Chorus

Born to Love

Chorus:
We were born to love, and love is what we're here for.
We were born to love, and love is what we're here for.
No baby is born to the earth, expecting to be hurt at the hand of another human being.
No child comes into the world, expecting to find hate among fellow human beings.

1. Generations oppressed,
Passing on the distress.
A mother lashes out in anger;
A father beats his son in rage,
And the heart of a child
is slowly broken.

Chorus (first two lines)
2. An estranged one stalks the night,
Filled with ancient cruelty.
He kills your loved one cold;
The bullet rips your heart in two,
And you wonder what it means
To go on living.

Chorus (first two lines)
3. Your trust in life betrayed,
You think his death will help heal you.
But it doesn't stop the pain,
And it doesn't mend your soul.
And it doesn't help us all
Be more fully human.

Chorus (first two lines)
4. We will hold you close;
You are safe to feel your rage.
Through the storms of grief and anger,
And the depths of sorrow in the night.
The tears break through like rain,
heal your pain.

Heal your pain.
Tears break through like rain,
Healing your pain.
We will hold you close.
Again and again.
All the time it takes
to heal your pain.
Healing your pain.

Chorus (all lines)

ROD NORTHCUTT

Challenging Problematic Systems to Improve Relationships

Rod Northcutt uses animals and nature to reference social concerns

"Once your eyes are open and awakened to social reality, you cannot escape it anymore," says Rod Northcutt. "It stays with you and your innocence is gone."

Northcutt became acutely aware of social issues when he moved to Chicago for graduate school. He was confronted for the first time with poverty, homelessness, crowded housing, environmental decay, the many human and physical problems of a large city. They remained with him ever since and found their way into his art. A visual artist, he teaches sculpture at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. He has a bachelor of fine arts degree in drawing and painting from the University of North Texas and a master of fine arts degree in sculpture from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Northcutt grew up in rural Texas, intimately connected to the land and to animals he raised and tended to. It triggered in him a lifelong interest in biological and social systems that he explored, compared, and illustrated in his work using analogs between humans and the natural world.

"My sculptures, drawings, paintings, all speak of human relationships," he says. "I use animals as surrogates to construct allegorical tales referencing social history, philosophy, labor movements, manufacturing, revolution…"

He also resorts to nature-related metaphors to raise awareness of the various societal ills.

Initially destined to become a medical illustrator, Northcutt soon realized he was in reality a maker and that he liked to craft and create things; also that he enjoyed setting his art in nature, interacting with its environment, doing sculptural installations. His work, as a result, grew along these lines.

In his interior gallery work, he functions like a fiction story teller, combining animals with study of the sciences or humanities. This allows him to empower the animals, understand them, especially understand human resemblance to them and what humans owe them; also to apply his meticulous craftsmanship skills to his projects. Northcutt would design an imaginary tale, halfway between truth and lies, connecting animals to human history and to real events. He would then craft related physical objects, "relics" that look real and legitimate to give support and validity to his story. He would display all in a natural history museum-like setting, thus playing with the line between fact and fiction.

"I consider myself a 'writer' of historical fiction," Northcutt says. "The events I cite are grounded in history yet diverge humorously from known archives by combining with current social concerns, such as outsourcing of labor... My work is carefully hand-crafted and often suggests a 'backwater' answer to difficult social questions."

He used, for instance, native woodworkers and builders such as beavers, woodpeckers, and termites, to devise an alternate history of building and manufacturing in the United States, pointing to their inherent problems. His displays have variably included relics and tools from beaver lodge architecture in the 1950's, dioramas illustrating a 19th century American Luddite movement among beavers, Dutch-style shoes supposedly carved by woodpeckers and beavers… At times, he

top left
Arborvention
installation

top right
Live Drawing Community Project
projected drawings viewed as they are created

bottom left
Fox River Installation, Green Bay, Wisconsin (detail)
sealed cypress wood

placed orthopedic braces around damaged dying trees. He was calling attention to the scarred trees and their condition, but also indirectly to the care needed for vulnerable, diseased, possibly disabled and neglected individuals in society.

In *Near-shore Fish and Flotsam of New York City*, an installation he did on the shore of East River in Brooklyn, he made, out of floating garbage collected from the site (Styrofoam, wood, plastic…), model sculptures of the various fish that live in the river. He accompanied his sculptural installation with a didactic display that included, in addition to pictures of the indigenous fish, pictures of the discarded elements and information about their constituent chemicals. The toxic chemicals we throw away became like the new fish of the battered environment.

To raise awareness about consumption and recycling, and working collaboratively with *Material Exchange*, a green/sustainable collective, he built with materials recovered from various Chicago dumpsters, a temporary miniature golf course on which passer-bys played for 2 weeks. In one of his pieces, he used bird watching as a metaphor for racial prejudice in selection and categorization, birds sought after being usually the only bright colored ones; and in another one, bird migratory pathways to reflect on Mexican migrants, natural migration patterns, in his mind, all similar and legitimate.

"In my art I try to facilitate conversations that challenge habitual, often destructive, ways of thinking and living," he says. "I want my art to make an enabling and ennobling change in both the artist and the viewer."

Recently, his work, still site-specific, became more performative, creating a more direct connection between the art and the audience, facilitating environments where conversations on critical issues would also featured natural ceramic workers such as potter wasps and barn swallows.

Northcutt quickly realized, however, that his conceptual gallery work did not reach common individuals who, confronted with real daily problems, could not afford the luxury of frequenting galleries. He felt the need for a different venue to touch them and resorted to outdoor installations, easily seen and experienced, and good vehicles for his social concerns. He would research a site specific area for his work, become familiar with its environmental problems (for instance diseases affecting its trees, gypsy moths, predator insects…), and propose a piece that speaks to its ecological or social issues. Nature and its elements would thus become proxy for humans and their life.

In his installation *Arborvention* (a composite of arbor and intervention), he

take place. One of his projects involved building a mobile kitchen and dining area equipped to cook pancakes for the local public. The pancakes were free as long as the diners would be willing to stay and talk about the social issues of the site. Their dialogs were then recorded, and later used in an art installation that served as a sculptural interpretation of the site's social issues, from the perspective of its local people.

In addition to his art, Northcutt uses his teaching to convey his concerns. In the classroom he discusses social and environmental questions, how to research them and express them. He involved his students in developing a material resource data base to understand materials being discarded into the land, differentiating, according to the environmental theory 'cradle by cradle', the naturally degraded biological from the technological needing recycling. For the past 3 years, he has also taught traditional, non-electric, wood-

top left
Miniature Gold Course
mixed media installation, recycled trash

top right
Near - Shore Fish and Flotsam of New York City
mixed media installation, recycled trash

bottom left
Indigenous Genius, The Luddite's Luddite
mixed media, plaque and installation

working skills through a making-based traveling course, *Unplugged*. He would like to offer the course, free of charge, to kids in various parts of the country, giving them access, opportunity, and ability to become creators, the creative act, according to him, "allowing unfolding and reaching the spiritual."

"With my work, lectures, and teaching, I always challenge problematic systems," Northcutt says. "I would like my work to improve relationships between people, animals and the earth. I want to get into people's heads; I try to do it through humor, beautiful craft, the involvement in an active experience."

KELLY & KYLE PHELPS

Advocating for the "Invisible" Worker

Kelly and Kyle Phelps combine their potent voices to address class issues

Kelly and Kyle Phelps, identical twin brothers and well known local sculptor artists work all the time in tandem, like right and left hand. In undergraduate and graduate schools, they applied to the same university for the same degree, did all assignments collaboratively, sat in unison for the same art critiques. Kelly even accompanied Kyle for his job interview at University of Dayton, answered all questions asked, and as a result both were hired to teach together the same class.

"We've had a shared story and experience for ever," they say. "Our relation is everywhere in our life; we studied, did chores at home, worked… always together. We support each other, contaminate each other's ideas and work; it ceases to be a one person's authorship."

The Phelps grew up in New Castle, Indiana, a working middle class small factory town, with bi-racial parents. Their father and sister were factory workers their entire professional life, as were the majority of the residents of the town. They, too, after college, worked for a while as gear cutters at Borg Warner Gear in Muncie, Indiana, and had the opportunity to actually "walk in the shoes" of a factory worker.

The Phelps turned their life experiences into an ongoing advocacy for the blue collar worker, the factory laborer, the common individual made invisible in our society. They identified with them as they were their parents, their

top left
Us and Them
mixed media

top middle
Miss America
mixed media

top right
News of the Layoff (detail)
mixed media

neighbors, and to a certain extent themselves. They used their strong two-voiced art to call attention to their plight and condition.

"Our works are about regular, every day individuals, not celebrities," they say. "Our people are those who work in plants, disenfranchised, generally ignored."

The Phelps received their bachelor of fine arts degree from Ball State University and their master of fine arts degree in Ceramics and Sculpture from University of Kentucky/Lexington. They are currently Associate Professors of fine arts, Kelly at Xavier University/Cincinnati, Kyle at University of Dayton.

In undergraduate school, their work was mostly based on art principles, design, material manipulation. They did also, to paraphrase them, the "angry black man" work, addressing race and slavery, topics until then not part of their daily concern.

"Growing up in a predominantly white small town, where everyone worked in the factory focusing on making a living, we knew nothing about slavery or racial tension," they say. "College introduced us to them and we felt like addressing them in our work. We quickly, however, realized that our real issues stood elsewhere."

In graduate school the Phelps found their inner voice. Their work changed and became about "angry people" in general, race taking a larger transcendental dimension, associated with the every day working class.

They started addressing the world of factories, their poor, dangerous and stressful work conditions, the hidden sweat behind every part produced, the threat of globalization and technology for workers' livelihood, the devastating effect of closing factories for families who relied on them from father to son, the feeling of fear, abandonment and sudden joblessness of the many… and at the same time the destruction, erasing and disappearance of buildings, infrastructure and culture, until then the blood of many towns, on which America was built.

Predominantly 3 dimensional, mostly wall hanging relief sculptures, their work include not only their own imagery, figures and handcrafted ceramic forms, but also objects retrieved directly from factory sites: scorched and corrugated sheet metal, wooden pallets, tools, etc.

"These added 'truthful' archival materials provide witnessing and authenticity of time, place and history to our pieces and to the issues they address," they say.

Us and Them, a wall sculpture part of Michael Moore's art collection, contrasts conditions of factory workers to those of upper class administrators. Using for background a piece of roofing material recovered from an old Buick plant, it depicts on its left, in clay, a group of workers dressed in greasy dirty clothes, separated, on its right, from a group of individuals in suits and ties, holding briefcases, cigars, coffee cups... It underlines divisiveness in factories, administrators removed from the daily reality of workers, from the issues they face, disconnected, as if in a different world.

In *News of the Layoff*, the Phelps address the distressed reaction of workers to closing of factories, result of NAFTA and globalization politics. The sculpture shows two distraught workers worrying about their future; they are surrounded by remnant tools, clothes, corrugated material, items collected from abandoned factories.

top left
Off the Cross (detail)
mixed media

top right
Dennis Osborne
mixed media

Off the Cross, meant literally as a 'working class crucifixion,' is about workers who believed in the factory as their religion, devoted all their life to it, yet found themselves victimized, abandoned by it.

The Worker's Altar, a wall sculpture influenced by religious triptychs, is composed of 3 vertical compartments, the right and left representing Adam and Eve as struggling workers, the center, two hands holding a gear, and underneath, various tools. The hands, casted from a real worker's hands, allude to those of God trying to protect the factory and its workers.

The Phelps' works later addressed single female workers becoming bread winners of their families. *Miss America*, about women in the workplace, easily applies to their sister who worked for many years in the heat treat dangerous area of the factory. Lately, they started addressing workers in general, every day laborers, irrespective of their job.

"We went to a hotel for a conference and found most workers to be immigrants, Latinos, with same plight as factory workers..." they say. "They work in luxurious places, yet live crammed many in a single room."

Their *Migrant Worker*, juxtaposes a Latina to a box of tomato cans; it points to the fact that tomatoes did not pop into the can by themselves but by individuals, often women, who worked hard, were generally poorly treated, kept invisible.

Their works also deal with war and its effect on simple citizens, the military, in their mind, having become the new working class factory, where poor, Latinos and Blacks enlist just to make a living. Their

piece *Dennis Osborne*, an Ohio soldier crying at the death of his unit members, is in thinking of their own students.

"We consider ourselves activists," the Phelps say. "As educators we teach, inform, shape minds. Our visual art seeks to create truth; we want it to achieve awareness, appreciation, respect …. We want people to know the everyday struggles of common men and women. We feel obliged to share what we know."

above
The Migrant Worker
mixed media

below
The Worker's Altar
mixed media

THOMAS PHELPS

Found Objects and a Found Voice

Thomas Phelps speaks through his art

"I am a tinkerer," Thomas Phelps says. "All my life I have collected stuff– found and discarded objects I have used to make things out of my imagination. I give them a new life and a voice. They end up speaking for me."

Phelps, a mixed media/installation artist, was born in 1939 in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he currently resides. He is of African American origin, the son of parents who relocated from the South. Until the age of 21 he grew up in the West End neighborhood of Cincinnati, in the Lincoln Courts housing project for low income families.

In elementary school he was introduced to art, and his creative ability was recognized and encouraged by his art teachers all along. He won several art contests, including a citywide contest in 9th grade, sponsored by Shillito's; it earned him a one- year scholarship to attend the Art Academy of Cincinnati.

Phelps' social awareness was practically lacking while growing up. The housing project where he lived and spent most of his time was his world; it kept him isolated and protected, disconnected from the rest of society. There and at school he mostly encountered fellow African Americans like him, with no direct reasons for racial questioning or confrontation. His parents, who had experienced the oppressive South, did not want him to deal with such issues.

"My social awakening to racial and ethnic discrimination came only at the age of 17," says Phelps. "It was, however, in relation to the Native Americans' plight. I read by chance an article describing the slaughter by thousands of buffalos to starve the Indians who relied on their meat; also how at one point the Indians were given blankets infested with small pox in order to decimate them. I was appalled and revolted, and these injustices stayed with me."

Phelps' artwork, until then with no specific statement, started addressing the American Indian situation. *Mr and Ms Red* is a painting that depicts an isolated and powerless Native American couple, separated from their community. *They Slaughtered Me to Kill Us*, a mixed-media piece superimposed the image of an American Indian and that of a buffalo, a reflection on the history of the US government as it pertains to Native Americans.

Who Are the Founding Fathers?, a mixed-media hanging quilt incorporating found objects, shows a picture of four American Indian men positioned in front of the four US presidents on Mount Rushmore. In the center of the piece is a T-shirt depicting American Indians on horseback and in war apparel; it says, "Fighting terrorism since 1492," ironically questioning who are the terrorists when it comes to Native American history.

In the 1960's, thanks to the Civil Rights movement, Phelps became more aware of the black issue. His black identity, its culture and its ancestral roots became very important to him. Through the Cincinnati Art museum and traveling traders, he discovered African art and artifacts; he was taken by the fetishes, their imagery, their meaning. He also came across yard art brought from the South that connected him to the spirit of African Ancestors.

left
It Remains, It Retains, It still Pains
mixed media installation

top left
Bill Of Rights - Afro -American Fetish (detail)
mixed media installation

top right
They Slaughtered Me to Kill Us
mixed media

"Society was trying to de-Africanize and demonize us," he says. "They associated our culture with voodoos, devils, sorcery. For me, these artifacts spoke loud through their rawness and sense of mystery; they grew on me, impacted me strongly even when not fully understanding them."

Phelps' work shifted then to mixed media installations influenced by the African art he was experiencing; they became his identity statement, a cultural connection to his background and origin.

"I did not use my art to make statements about the Civil Rights movement going on at the time," he says. "I used it instead to assert who I was, to connect to the history of Blacks in this country and elsewhere. Once I found the link to my roots, I kept speaking to it, and nobody could take it away from me."

In the 1980's, with Jimi Jones and Ken Leslie, two African-American artists from Cincinnati who felt like him, Phelps co-founded the Neo Ancestral artists collective movement. Their goal was to make artistic visual statements related to African-American identity, legacy, community and culture.

On his own or part of the group, Phelps continued creating his statement mixed-media installations. He would exhibit them in public or private venues, outdoors or indoors, such as at Thirld World Gallery, which featured African-American art, and at the Arts Consortium, the Contemporary Arts Center, the Weston Art Gallery and the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Imprisonment, created for the Weston show, consisted of fences, posts, bars, a hanging body, a target image and weap

top left
Weapon of War Fetish (detail)
mixed media
installation

top middle
Who Are the Founding Fathers
mixed media
installation

top right
Mr and Ms Red
oil on canvas

bottom right
Watermelon Mama and the Melon Chilluns Fetish (front and back)
mixed media
installation

ons. It alluded to institutional prisons, but also to the isolated and confined condition of many minorities, the vulnerability and violent victimization of the poor and weak in our society.

Watermelon Mama and the Melon Chilluns Fetish, recently exhibited at the Cincinnati Art Museum, was part of a series of installations Phelps created based on postcards that debased and degraded the black race, associating it with watermelons, cotton and animals. It shows on one side a black baby in a cradle with a watermelon and a cross, the baby in his innocence and nakedness reminiscent of Jesus Christ, also a victim to this world; and the cross symbolizing the hypocrisy of hateful acts in the name of Christianity. The other side displays an African lady, two babies, watermelons, cotton and crosses.

"I meant my piece in defense of all human beings, plants, animals, objects and subjects of unjust, vulgarized characterization, by civilized, God-avowed human beings in the USA," he says.

Phelps also used his art to make statements about wars, their casualties and the military-industrial complex. His installation, *Weapon of War Fetish* created for an SOS Art show, reflects on how military efforts support and produce aggressive weapons, propaganda and monetary gain.

"I will always be a pacific activist," says Phelps. "My art advocates my ideas, my beliefs, my history. It is my outlet and my voice. It empowers me and possibly others who want to hear; I do not use it, however, to convince or impose my views."

ELLEN PRICE

Exploring Her ‘Two-ness’

Ellen Price finds unity in art

As the light-skinned child of a bi-racial marriage–mother white and father African-American–the subject of race always proved both non-existent and ever present in Ellen Price’s life. Growing up in the early 1960’s, the first question she remembers being asked in kindergarten by other African-American children was whether she was black or white.

“I do not know,” was her answer, later supplemented, after having queried her mother, by “I am colored, but fair… and nice.”

Price, a local artist and professor of art at Miami University, Oxford, grew up in Saint Albans, a residential neighborhood of Queens, New York, mostly inhabited by well-off middle-class African-American families. Raised by progressive, politically left-leaning and non-churchgoer parents, she was from an early age sheltered from the habitual societal interactions and class integration. Her home was her sanctuary, and she had a happy childhood, spending time drawing and playing with her sister, often visiting New York City, its parks and its wonderful museums with her mother, a former art teacher.

When graduating a semester early from high school, she joined open life classes at the Art Students League in New York City, where she was really taken by drawing–the challenge, concentration, professionalism and sense of achievement it imparted. She decided then to become an artist and a few

top left
Symbols of Faith
etching

top right
Recent Transplant
drypoint,
ink transfer,
collagraph

years later obtained a bachelor's degree in arts from Brooklyn College, then a master of fine arts degree in printmaking at Indiana University, Bloomington.

All along, questions of race, ethnicity and identity were embedded in her mind. In her teens, obsessed with fitting in, she smoked mentholated Newport cigarettes to emulate other African-American girls of her school and befriended those who had an afro hairdo. She also unconsciously adopted a more southern accent. In college, finding herself in a mostly white world, she was quite sensitive to racist remarks she would occasionally hear, attributing them to ignorance and fear. These questions, however, did not clearly permeate her art until many years later.

In college, Price's paintings and prints were mostly based on the figure and sketches of people in the subway, reflection of urban life. In graduate school, many of her etchings were of cows, a possible link to their maternal character. Her subsequent artwork dealt with lawn ornaments, landscapes and trees–ornaments and trees often depicted lonely and isolated, as if stating their uniqueness, their somewhat disconnected identity.

In 1993, more than a decade after the death of both her parents, Price lost her paternal uncle, the last link to her father's family. She inherited from his estate a collection of photographs of relatives, many of whom she had never met before; all represented, however, her connection to the black side of her family. Reflecting on these images, on what they meant to her and to her history, she decided to use them in her art and make a statement.

Instead of working with the full image and the entire portrait, Price decided to

above
Royale
monotype

below
By Halves
photograph, print

crop the face and feature only parts of it in her prints, thus alluding to both the incompleteness of information, and the often hidden and unknown side of reality.

She did a series of these prints titled, *So Many Why's*. Representing only fragments of the faces of her relatives, such as isolated lips, eyes, hair, semi profiles, they indirectly and subtly raised many questions she had been having throughout her life about herself, her origin and her family.

"Issues of identity and fragmentation have followed me everywhere," she says. "As an individual whose African-American descent is not obvious, the space between what is revealed and what is hidden had become a familiar psychic territory. I made this indistinct zone inhabit my prints, and by using cropped elements of speech and hearing implied my incomplete knowledge of the subjects bearing my surname–as if at once I desired to know, connect and understand and at the same time acknowledged what I could never know."

Her print, *By Halves*, from the same series, represents the half face of one of her relatives. Smiling, it elegantly challenges the viewer to discover its other side, weighing at one edge of the image as if pulling the past to unveil itself into the present, the unknown to merge into the known. It was also Price's dealing with the dual aspect of her own personality.

"In his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Dubois writes about the double consciousness, the 'two-ness' of African-Americans," Price says. "My portrait series is my search to resolve my own 'two-ness,' to locate my identity in history."

Price keeps coming back to her portrait series, adding new prints as if in a permanent dialogue with her questioning of race and identity, with preconceptions of family

and history. Her prints serve as a confrontation of prejudices regarding who is black. She would like people to connect to them and think about the issues they raise. She recognizes, however, that they are only the expression of her own experience that she wants to share–not impose.

More recently, Price created prints based on war imagery. Inspired by objects she saw at the Metropolitan museum of art and resonating with the seemingly endless American war in Iraq and Afghanistan, they consisted of helmets, armors, military hardware… Her monotypes, *Two of Each* and *Royale*, juxtapose images of a crown with artifacts of European military history, thus highlighting the relationship between political power and war. Her etchings, *Armor Study* and *Bassinet*, examine humankind's long history of organized warfare. Her latest monotypes depict explosions based on the recent Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

When not doing her own art, Price teaches printmaking. In her teaching she always tries to shake students out of their complacency–provoke thinking and discussions about issues, encourage empathy, looking at the world differently.

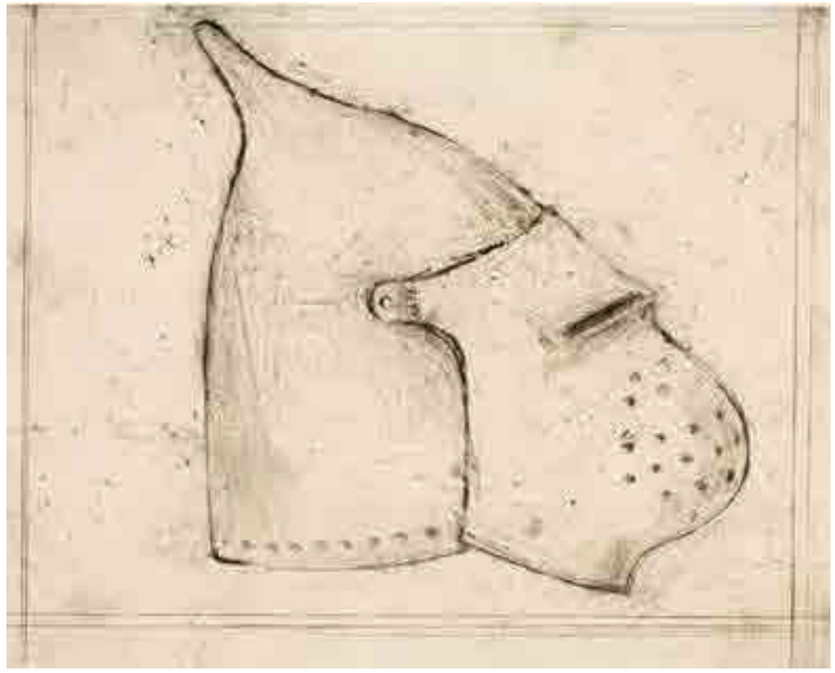
Price likes to quote Arthur Miller, who said: "That which is not made into art is lost." Making art, showing it, communicating through it, is very important to her.

"Art is what makes us human beings," she says. "It brings the sublime, the spiritual; it transcends mortality. Art has been central to my life; it helped me claim my history and assert my identity. It keeps my questioning alive, and hopefully it triggers the same in the viewer."

top left
Charlie's Cows
etching

top right
Plume
monotype

bottom
Bassinett Helmet
etching



MICHELLE RED ELK

Creating Art to Beautify the World

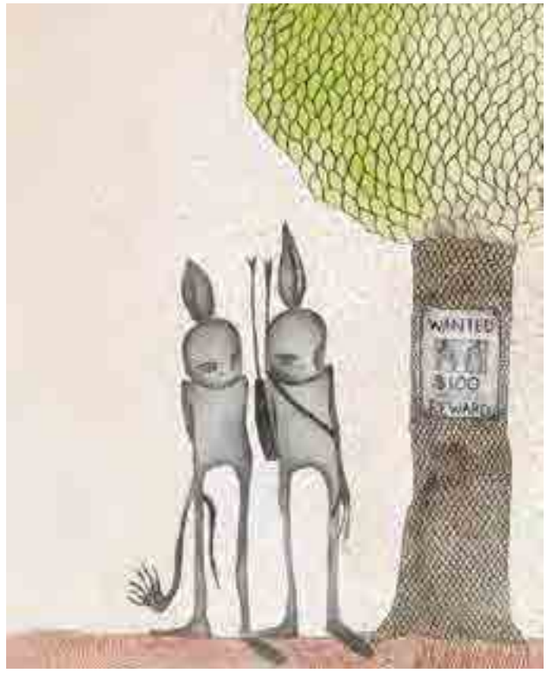
Michelle Red Elk's work speaks of her Native culture and her love for animals

"Artists have the power to illuminate their beliefs through their work; they have a remarkable platform for resonating emotionally with people," says Michelle Red Elk. "I hope my art is able to seep and embed itself into the hearts of others. Sometimes one image can change a person; it can spread peace, love and understanding."

Two subjects have always permeated Red Elk's artwork, her Native American heritage and her love for animals. She is a well established visual artist, born in Lawton, Oklahoma, to a Comanche/Kiowa Indian father and a French Canadian mother. She lived most of her life in Ohio where part of her father's family resettled in the 50's, result of the Indian Relocation Act. She attended The Art Academy of Cincinnati and earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in printmaking and drawing.

Growing up, Red Elk was very early on exposed to art, surrounded by drawings of her father, an artist in his own right, and visiting regularly the local museums. She started drawing at age 5 and never stopped since.

As a child, she discovered the American Indian culture and its history through her father and through regular trips she took to Oklahoma to visit her grandmother, her uncles and their family. She learned in particular the history of her family, the history of the area where her father grew up and



part of his family still lived, the fate and traditions of the Comanche and Kiowa tribes to which she belongs.

"The Indian culture was always an integral part of my life," she says. "It played an important role in the way I think and see things. Stories my father and grandmother told me accompanied me all along. Visually, the land and the people stayed with me; they remain vivid in my mind."

Red Elk's father would reminisce on the past of the Indian tribes, explaining what happened to them and to their land. He would describe the way things were traditionally before the settlers came; the old style of living; the predominant types of housing, cooking, clothing; the religious beliefs and habits. These stories would generate many images that found their way, intentionally or subconsciously, into her drawings. They became her glimpses

top left
Sumusu
(One Time)
graphite,
watercolor

top right
Sihka Tabeeni
(This Day)
graphite,
watercolor

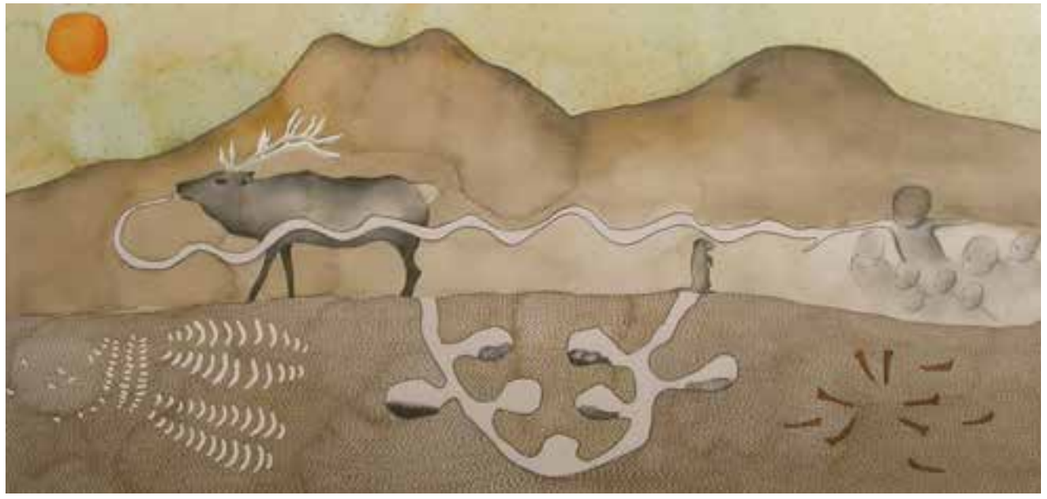
bottom left
Cover Your
Tracks,
The Four
Directions
graphite,
watercolor

to the Indian culture, its ways of life, its landscapes, its companion animals; also her means to sensitize the viewers to it.

"I like to remind those who see my work of the Native people who lived on this land long ago and who still exist," she says, "to weave pieces of their customs, beliefs and lives into my drawings; to show that their culture remains strong, beautiful, living, enduring..."

The Wood Cutter is a drawing she did about Wovoka and his vision. A prophet of peace, Wovoka believed that Native people could peacefully end white American expansionism by performing ritual circle "ghost" dances; that they could bring back the past by living the culture and tradition, relinquishing all that Europeans had brought, guns, alcohol, etc. Red Elk incorporated his beliefs into her image.

Standing Watch, another drawing, refers to the prairie dog, an animal part of the Indians' environment, surveying his burrow, controlling his area. Red Elk meant it as a reminder of all creatures we overlook and the importance of their own worlds. Included in her drawing, buried underground, are also elements of the past: railroad spikes alluding to the expansion of railroads through Indian territories, altering the geography and favoring hunting of the buffalo on which the Natives relied for their survival; bones, symbols of the Native people killed. An elk, animal attentive to his environment, (also in this case an intended link to her last name), connects to the souls of the Indians gone, sensing their spirits and messages, perpetuating the cycle of their life. In the background, tall and steady are the Wichita mountains of Oklahoma, witnesses to the history of a people and its land.



top left
Sanapia, Medicine Man, The Four Directions
graphite, watercolor

top right
Food Chain
(with Rob Jefferson)
graphite, watercolor

bottom left
Standing Watch
mixed media

below
The Wood Cutter
graphite, watercolor

"By standing watch we can open our hearts to the people and animals in our lives, become nourished by all that surrounds us," says Red Elk. "My drawing asserts that despite the fact that the land was taken and altered, the people and the spirits keep watch."

Her paired drawings *Sumusu (One Time)* and *Sihka Tabeeni (This Day)* speak of the before and after, of the change that occurs in a landscape when one culture disregards the vitality of another. It is again her statement that even if physically driven away, the spirits of the people remain planted. Red Elk also included in her 60 drawings series, *The Four Directions*, many Native scenes. Medicine man, hunter, cook, fish and fishing, buffalo… All traditional elements of the Indian culture unite her imagery.

Animals have also always occupied a privileged place in Red Elk's drawings. She depicts them in their beauty, innocence and wisdom, and makes a strong case for their rights to exist without human interference, rights she wants to protect and advocate. Few years ago after a friend told her how one cow, shot in the head to be slaughtered, ran away bleeding, braving her jailors, toward her freedom, she decided to become vegetarian, then vegan, and a proponent of animal rights. She educated herself about the violence and cruelty directed against animals, watched documentaries portraying their mistreatment, and strengthened her resolve to fight for their cause.

Her drawing *Food Chain*, done in collaboration with her husband Rob Jefferson, considers the oppression of man and beast alike, linking injustice toward animals to injustice toward humans, generalizing the fact that in our world, convenience and want often come at someone else's expense.Following her grandmother's steps, Red Elk also does functional and artistic beadworks, often related to animals, represented either in stories or as amulets.

"Art is an important and essential part of my daily life," says Red Elk. "I use it to convey my messages and beliefs, to trigger thinking. I hope my work can contribute to the beauty of the world; that it can speak to the value and rights of animals, and portray glimpses of my Native culture."

MATT REED

Reason Awakens from Deep Sleep

Matt Reed uses art to teach ethics

As a child, Matt Reed was very much into comic books. His parents would buy them for him before he could even read. He would draw from them again and again. They were his first introduction to art, also his first love in art.

Born in Toledo, Ohio, Matt Reed, a visual artist, moved to Cincinnati in his senior year of high school. He attended Columbus College of Art and Design and majored in illustration. He soon realized, however, that his real love was teaching; he enrolled at the University of Cincinnati, obtained a teaching certificate, and since then has taught art to high school and middle school students.

Reed has also been doing his own art all along, mostly detailed drawings influenced by his illustration training. His art usually expresses his interests and concerns, his political views and his obsessions, all mixed and mashed together.

“It is a blend,” he says, “one that comes from within and finds its way out. Art is also my escape from reality into a newly imagined world. It helps me communicate and make a statement.”

Reed has been political all his life, growing up in a family where both parents were politically-minded and where politics was regularly discussed. Different from his father, who is conservative right wing, Reed is progressive

and leftist, influenced early on in his views by the political messages of punk rock bands. Social and political issues concern him and transpire into his art. His satirical drawing *You Will Be Recycled*, for instance, is about environment and people who refuse to recycle. Reed ironically points out that the Earth will recycle them whether they like it or not.

There Is No Peace in Retreat is based on a direct quotation of then president George W. Bush regarding the Iraq war. Reed found the statement arrogant; it reflected in his mind how the Administration was conducting its foreign policy relying mainly on might and war, rarely conducive to peace.

"As a strategy, retreat does not necessarily equal defeat or cowardice," Reed says. "Sometimes withdrawal is simply the best option."

At the bottom of his drawing, several silhouettes mimic an evolution scene and progress from a caveman into increasingly refined gunmen. The message is that we're evolving into more sophisticated and more efficient killers. In the middle, a mound of skulls is surrounded by comic book-inspired panels depicting explosions; and at the top, a soldier standing on a tank is approached by a suicide bomber who blows up everything. The drawing links increase in violence to current politics, to death, and questions the wisdom and rationale of waging unending wars in the pursuit of peace.

His pen and ink drawing, *Reason Is still Sleeping*, is a take on *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, in which Goya reacts to the violent events of the late 18th Century - wars, the Spanish Inquisition, etc. The drawing represents, in the midst of explosions and destruction, a woman smiling happily, embracing in her arms a large bomb, her young child standing by her. It was Reed's assertion that mankind's reason is lacking, also his expression of outrage at the Iraq war, a war in his mind based on greed and lies.

In addition to his personal art, Reed also uses his teaching to convey his values and beliefs and to trigger thinking in the fresh and avid minds of his young students; he does this, however, always cautious not to impose his own views. Teaching is for him a type of activism where one shows students how to interact with others, treat others with respect and tolerance, react appropriately to a difficult situation, develop social skills, appreciate the diversity of things.

Reed thus does not only teach the techniques and skills of art but also works on building the character of his students, opening their minds and their hearts to various important issues. He uses, for instance, recycling paper in the classroom as a model and a trigger for environmental concerns. Discussing and deciding with his students what is acceptable and what is not when it comes to conduct, he helps them set ethical norms for their own behavior. Exploring social or political content of artists' work, he leads students into reflecting about the issues addressed, at the same time challenging them and empowering them to use their creativity and art to express their own concerns and beliefs.

He recently used Keith Haring's works as a trigger for a class show, Haring's art being simple, straightforward and still full of messages. Not infrequently, in addition to visual art, Reed resorts to poems, texts, stories and events to interpellate his students and open their eyes.

With the changes brought by the new administration, Reed's outlook on the world is more hopeful. He is still concerned, however, by the persistent and powerful control big businesses exert over

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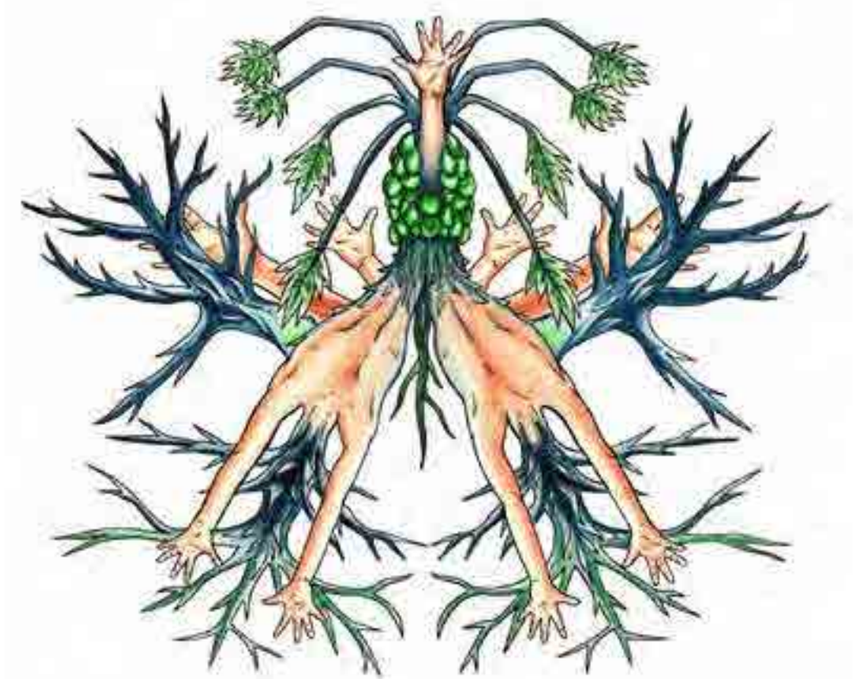
top left
Reason Is still Sleeping
pen and ink

bottom left
Election Day
pen and ink

right
You Will Be Recycled
pen and ink



politics, often at the expense of the people. He will continue to use his own art and his teaching to address big issues such as war, environment, equality, freedom, choices in life, etc. but he would like to do it now in a more positive way, to be able to offer viable alternatives instead of simply being critical.

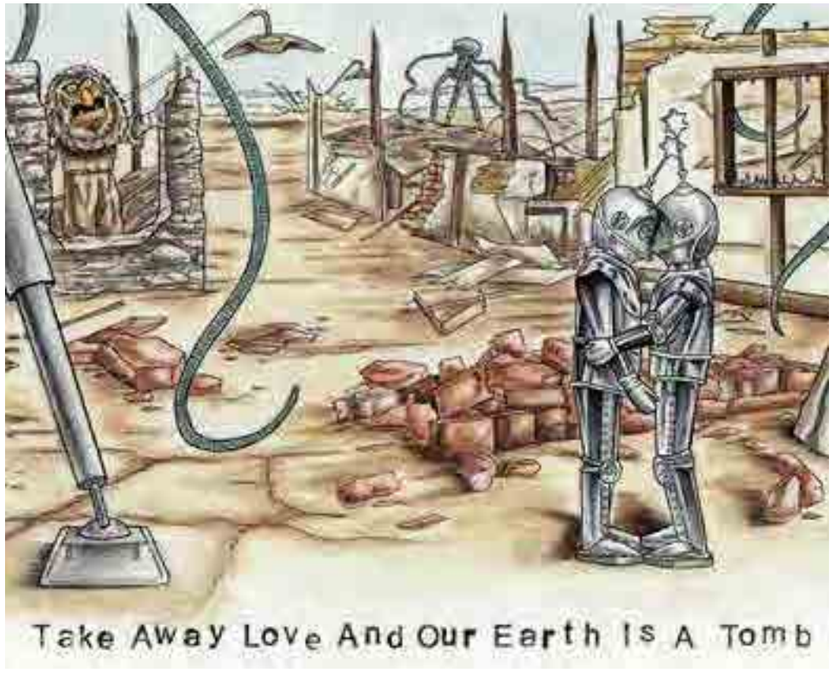
"Art is a very important tool for change," Reed says. "It uses and triggers imagination, which is unfortunately undervalued in our society. Imagination, however, is badly needed to recreate the world. The world does not have to be the way it is. We have to imagine something better; focus on something new for the good of everyone and the survival of our planet."

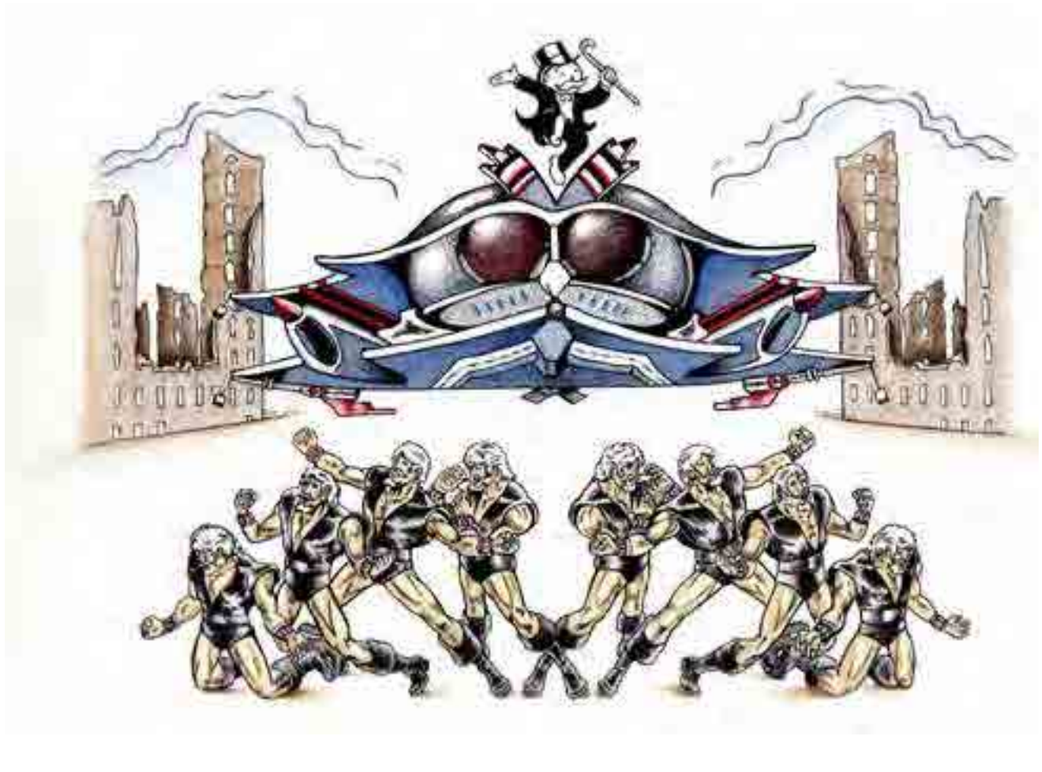
top left
There Is No Peace in Retreat
pen and ink

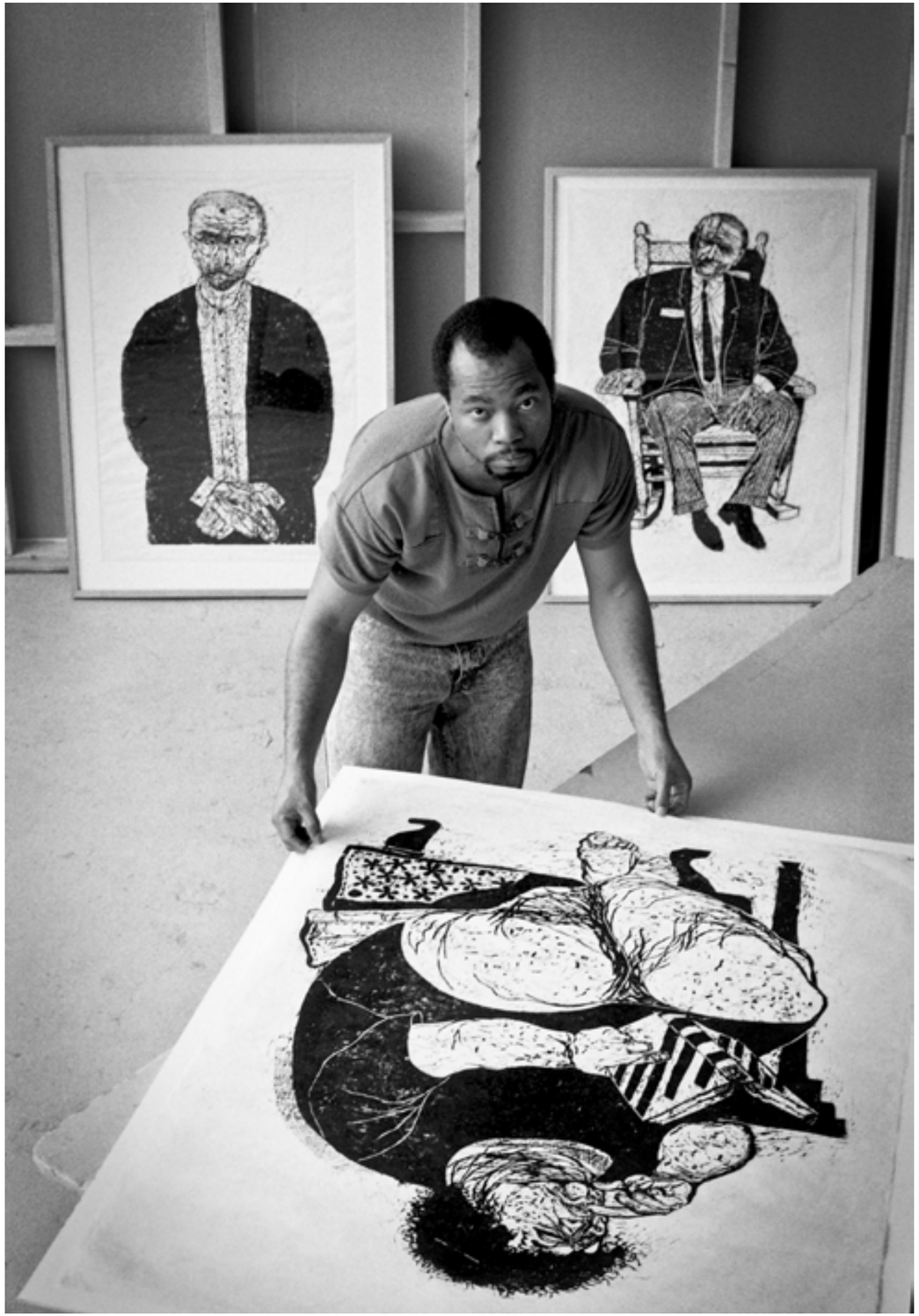
top right
Tea Party 3000
pen and ink

bottom left
Take Away Love and Our Earth Is a Tomb
pen and ink

bottom right
Love Yourself
(by Allison Randall, student)
white pencil on black paper







THOM SHAW

From Malcolm X to Mountain Dew

Thom Shaw's woodcuts depict urban life's hopes and hazards

Thom Shaw took interest at making art in 2nd grade when he was six years old. He overheard conversations among his teachers about two of his classmates gifted at drawing and who were given tuition for art school. He wanted to emulate them and started drawing.

He soon proved very good at it and was sent as well to art school - initially the art museum, then Walnut Hills high school summer program. In college, he attended the Art Academy of Cincinnati (AAC) and graduated, majoring in printmaking. The immediacy of woodcuts, close in many ways to drawing, and the boldness of black and white prints interested him from the start; this medium later became his artistic signature.

As a child, Shaw's drawings were innocent, based mainly on what he would watch on TV, heroes like batman and superman. At AAC he learned to draw from what he saw; his drawings were academic, often based on the human body. Social commentaries first appeared in his works during his senior year in college, triggered then by the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. After graduating from AAC, Shaw worked for a while as a graphic designer for Cincinnati Bell. His work during that period was non-representational, corporate-like, abstract large scale collage assemblages and color paintings. Even though it sold well, it was not filling the void in his soul and did not feel honest.

bottom left
Jamal's Nightmare
woodcut print

bottom right
The Malcolm X Paradox, New American Anthem
woodcut print

top left
Stress Test
woodcut print

top right
The Sentinel
woodcut print

In 1986 he became acquainted with German Expressionism and the works of Kathe Kollwitz, Leonard Baskin and George Grosz. Influenced by their imagery and its content, he started making large woodcuts with social themes that incorporated the ills of his community. At the same time he happened to witness a gang fight, the members of which were wearing T-shirts depicting the late Malcolm X. He found the association intriguing, Malcolm X in his mind being a promoter of unity and good relationship, and not of destructive fighting. Shaw decided to learn more about gang life, its roots and how it reflected the problems of society. He embarked on interviewing gang members, inquiring about their life and thinking, collecting at the same time a visual repertory of their stories for his own work.

The prints he made then led to a series he titled the "*Malcolm X Paradox*." They were exhibited in 1991 downtown Cincinnati. To his surprise, they were very well received, finding an immediate echo in Over-The-Rhine residents who strongly identified with them. Shaw had carved a gang icon which, irrespective of ethnicity or color, represented the many ills of society, the broken down family, the loneliness of youth, the addiction to drugs as an escape, the resort to violence to prove oneself.

His images were quite graphic, showing killings, prostitution and drug dependence. In one, a pregnant woman with a baby stroller is on her knees performing fellatio on a wealthy man in order to get money and buy drugs. Many dealt with drive-by shootings, often resulting in accidental injuries such as children being killed, in the name of business as usual. One depicted a man at a bus stop shot just for his gym shoes to be used as a trophy and proof of gang loyalty.

The Sentinel, a woodcut from the series, portrays a 15-year-old boy serving as a watchdog, looking out to make sure no intruder was approaching the gang's headquarters hideout. The boy, however, is entirely oblivious of the danger awaiting him, depicted in the print by a pistol behind him, and that could terminate his life. His pride at being assigned the responsibility overshadowed his concern for death; he would do anything for his new gang family, one that makes him feel valuable and trusted.

Shaw's work at the time was often criticized as being derogatory to the black man, confirming the media notion that he was a menace to society. Shaw disagrees.

"If at any time my images had negroid features, it was specifically to depict the negative effects society imparted on African American males with whom I identify," he says. "I wanted to show the black man as a victim, a target of the many social ills; I wanted to raise awareness about his condition."

In 1994 Shaw was asked to show his enlarging *Malcolm X Paradox* series at the studio museum of Harlem in New York City and a year later at the Cincinnati Art Museum. In 1995 he also had a show at the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati, titled, "*Hegemony: the Hidden Fury.*" It consisted of woodcuts, murals and videos, all dealing with domestic violence.

Social commentaries kept abounding in his works. His series "*Zombies*," for instance, dealt with the lack of education and the illiteracy of youth. It pointed to family challenges, to kids not being fed properly before going to school, to kids lacking parental guidance and supervision; it was meant as a call to action for a serious and threatening problem facing society.

top
Zombies 2
woodcut print

bottom
Who Am I
woodcut print

right
The Malcolm X Paradox, Shootout at Race St Aparments
ink drawing

In the past few years Shaw's works focused more on himself and his health problems. He had suffered for many years from diabetes that affected severely his heart and kidneys, resulting in various surgeries and hospitalizations. He incorporated his health issues with his other concerns, wanting to share them visually with those who might be experiencing the same.

His woodcut *Stress Test* represents Shaw with testing wires connected to his skin and heart, also with a mountain dew can, a forbidden drink in view of his condition. It alludes metaphorically to the bad choices he had made and to their serious health ramifications.

Art is life for Shaw. It keeps him young and challenges him; it allows him also to challenge and sometime confront the viewer.

"Artwork can be controversial," he says, "but we artists are ambassadors of truth, ambassadors of the human experience. We try to make sense of a world gone astray, and thus have an impact on people whether we intend it or not."

(Note: Thom Shaw passed away on July 6, 2010, at the age of 63, following a lengthy illness. His critical mind and acute social commentaries are being missed.)

KIM SHIFFLETT

Who Decides What Is Good or Equal

In her art, Kim Shifflett questions arbitrary boundaries

A recurrent theme in Kim Shifflett's artwork is that of boundaries. They range from boundaries imposed by societal rules and expectations, delineating roles and behaviors in such matters as gender, relationships, families, deciding good from bad, to actual physical borders that separate and isolate people, leading to poverty, violence and conflict.

Born in Champaign, Illinois, Shifflett grew up in Las Cruces, New Mexico, near Ciudad Juarez, on the other side of the Mexican divide. It was at a time when flow between the 2 countries was welcome and safe, and when crossing the border was a daily enjoyable adventure; she often accompanied her friends and mother to party or shop on Mexican soil. Shifflett was also interested in art very early on, drawing constantly, her talents encouraged by teachers and family.

At the age of 18 she left New Mexico, settled for few years in Tucson, Arizona, moved to Lexington, Kentucky, and then finally to Cincinnati, Ohio. Along the way she married twice, bore children, learned to weave and knit, started a needlework design business, pursued her art education. She earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and a master of fine arts degree in painting from the University of Cincinnati.

In undergraduate school, older that most of her classmates, Shifflett felt less free, having to juggle her role as wife and mother with her study demands

above
Trapped
oil on canvas

and aspirations for a professional career.

"At home I was always expected to do the 'women chores,' cooking, cleaning, taking care of the kids, tending to everyone else's needs," she says. "I always came last. People would even make me feel selfish for wanting to be in school."

In a traditional society built mostly around men's convenience, she found herself fighting for her interests, having constantly to redefine and assert who she was. The theme of feminism then permeated her work. She did a series of semi-abstract paintings on relationships, women in the family, all the push-and-pull they daily experience. The images were based on round balls, one of them representing her; they would also be accompanied by statements to clarify her message. In *Tomato Soup Family*, for instance, she is a big red ball at the bottom, pushed away by 2 other balls on the top, one being her husband, the other her daughter.

She later expanded her series to address more specifically her relationship with her teenage daughter. They were both struggling for independence, yet her daughter demanding, needy and rebellious at the same time. The abstract paintings in the series were done using Elmer's glue and graphite, Elmer's glue in her mind associated with the school classroom, thus connected to her daughter. In *I Hate You Mom but Can You Please Take Me and My Friends to the Mall*, she reflects on the expectations and tasks she's supposed to meet just for being a mother; and in *Stony Silence because I Said No*, related to not letting her 14 year old daughter go to a slumber party at a 16 year old boy's house, on how these expectations were only used when they suited her child.

Between undergraduate and graduate school, Shifflett worked on another series related to flowers usually considered weeds. Travelling down the interstate to get to her studio, she would often admire along the way large patches of beautiful and colorful flowers, just to find them the following day mowed away.

"I felt every time violated," she says, "like if someone was deliberately destroying my favorite garden. Why would a flower in a certain setting has value and beauty and in others not. Who decides what is good or equal? Unfortunately by drawing arbitrary lines, our society often contributes to abusive control and prejudice."

She did colorful paintings of black-eyed Susan, corn flowers, other 'weed' flowers she had encountered, one painting for each month from spring to early winter. She used on purpose very large canvasses to draw in the viewer and give added importance to their subject.

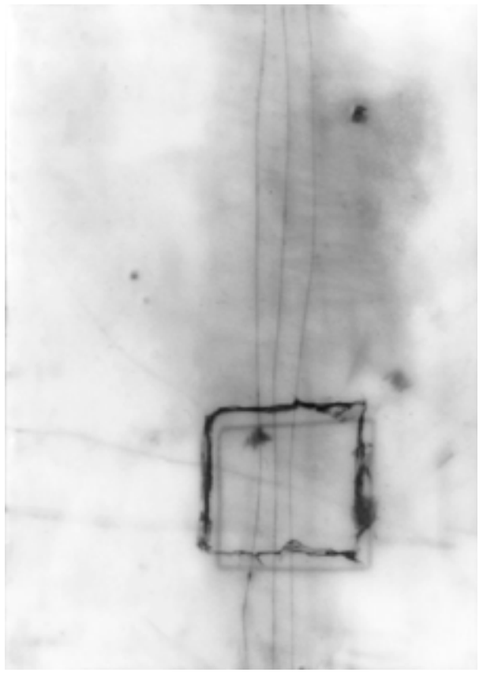
bottom left
Tomato Soup Family
oil on canvas

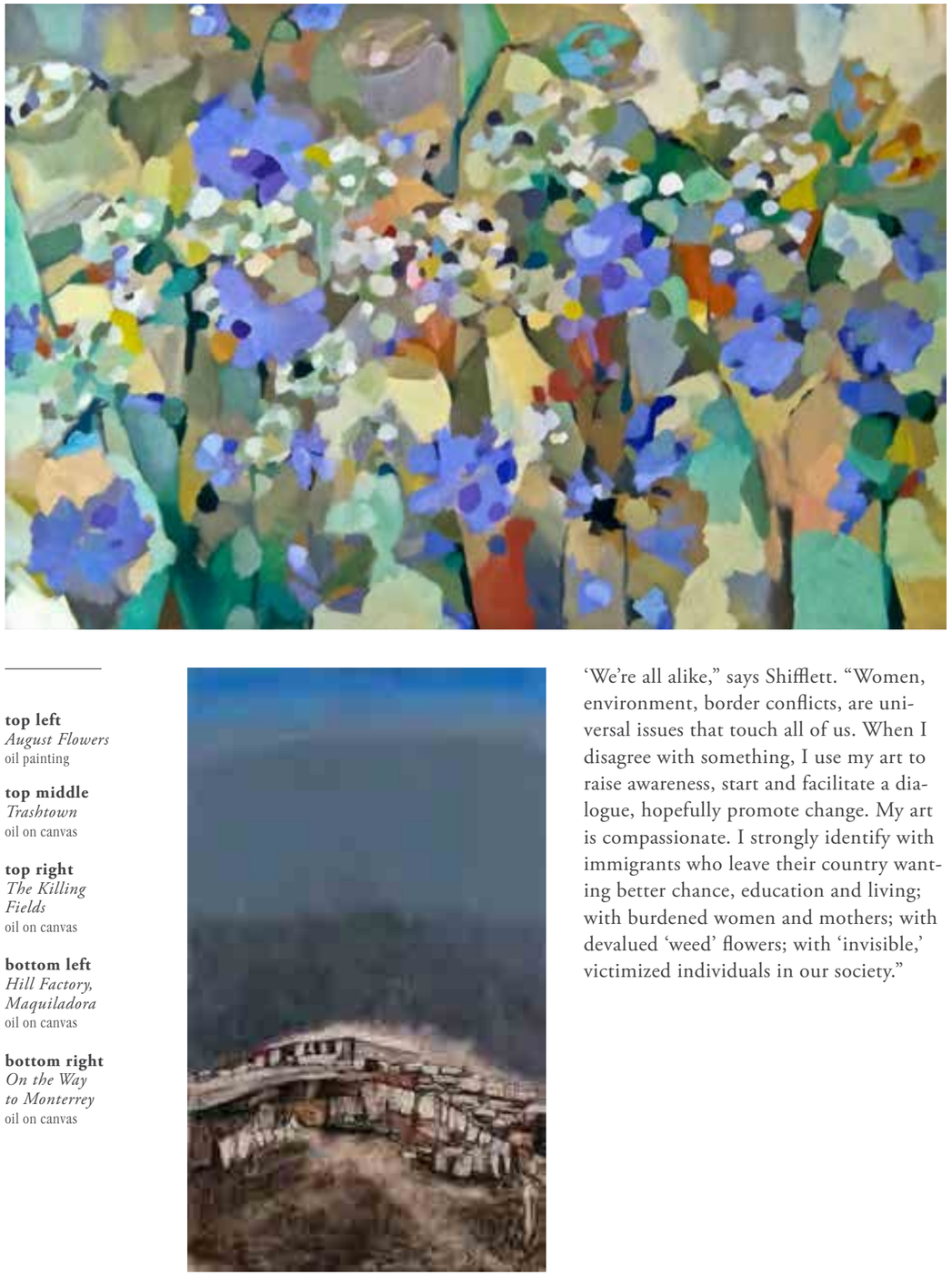
bottom right
I Hate You Mom but Can You Take Me and my Friends to the Mall
oil on canvas

Halfway through graduate school, Shifflett went back to visit her parents in Las Cruces. Wanting to return, like in the old good times, to Ciudad Juarez, she was strongly discouraged by her sister who shared with her the ongoing violence in the border town, the hundreds of working women found dead for no reason, the daily killings due to the drug wars, the desperate prevailing poverty. She was appalled not to have heard about it on the news. Doing her research she discovered the truth of the new reality and embarked on a new series of paintings, *Borderlands*.

Her large and somber painting *Trash Town* is a commentary on the effect of NAFTA on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans who, in order to find better paying jobs, relocated to the border cities where new factories had opened. Unfortunately they were met with inexistent infrastructure, no electricity, water or sewage, and ended up living among trash in shanty towns, the for-profit companies not concerned with their well-being.

The Killing Fields was based on the massacre of 73 to-be illegal immigrants who, before reaching the USA, were kidnapped by drug cartels, held for ransom and killed, their families not able to pay. *Trapped* is in response to the escalating violence in bordering towns, people becoming prisoners in their own homes, trapped and squeezed between an obstructive border fence, terrorizing drug lords, daily danger, poverty. It was also related to similar imagery and background she had experienced on a recent trip to the West Bank, Palestinians impeded in their daily living by a big dividing wall, numerous checkpoints, long lines and queues, omnipresent occupation. Shifflett had travelled to the Middle East to help Bedouin women improve their weaving technique and find opportunities to better market their product.





top left
August Flowers
oil painting

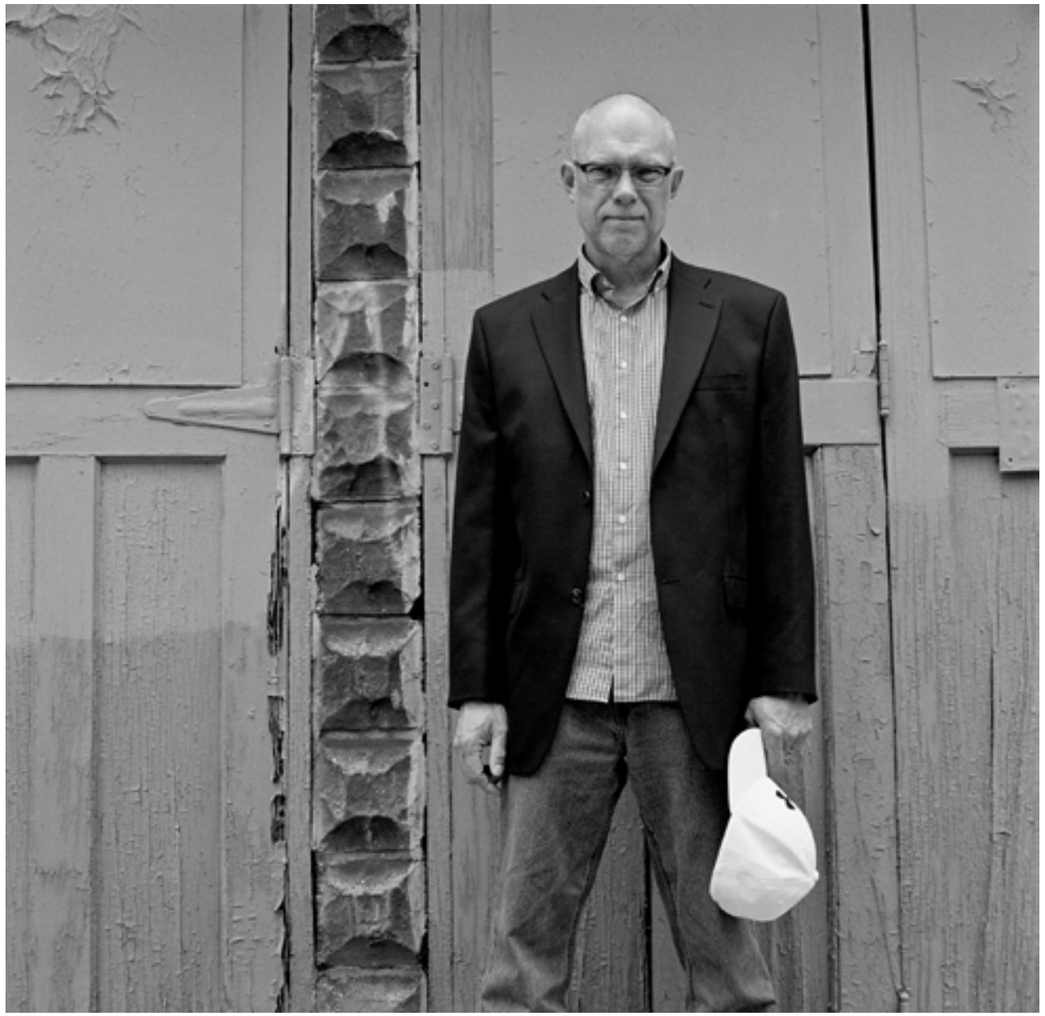
top middle
Trashtown
oil on canvas

top right
The Killing Fields
oil on canvas

bottom left
Hill Factory, Maquiladora
oil on canvas

bottom right
On the Way to Monterrey
oil on canvas

'We're all alike," says Shifflett. "Women, environment, border conflicts, are universal issues that touch all of us. When I disagree with something, I use my art to raise awareness, start and facilitate a dialogue, hopefully promote change. My art is compassionate. I strongly identify with immigrants who leave their country wanting better chance, education and living; with burdened women and mothers; with devalued 'weed' flowers; with 'invisible,' victimized individuals in our society."



KURT STORCH

Power of Uncomfortable Art

Kurt Storch's painting advocates mental health

"I am a regular guy, husband, and father," says Kurt Storch. "I am OK with being me, but it has not always been that way. Fear and self-loathing marked much of my early life."

Storch, a visual artist, has suffered from clinical depression since his early childhood. When he was 2 years old, he discovered crayons, coloring books, and Play-Doh and used them as an immediate means to express himself and find respite from the torments of his condition. He did not, however, become serious about art until in his mid-30's when, going through a serious depressive episode and heavily self-medicated, he tried to take his own life. Luckily he did not proceed all the way, sought medical help, and actively started confronting his situation. One of the decisions he made then was to pursue an art career.

Storch attended the Academy of Communicative Arts in Cincinnati, graduated with a degree in design and illustration and worked for several years as a commercial artist. This, however, did not satisfy him. Doing work for others was taking him away from his own needs and connecting him more with his underlying anger. He found himself slipping more into depression and decided to quit.

Storch did not do art for several years afterwards. He later got progressively back into it, focusing more on himself, discovering a new spiritual dimen-

above
House of AK
mixed media

sion to his creativity. His works during that period consisted of a series of assemblaged boxes, subconsciously executed; they talked to him after the fact and opened a road to his psyche, connecting him to his ego. They also addressed several social and political issues that preoccupied him: gun violence, the role AK 47 plays in modern society, the indiscriminate targeting of black males by the police, the distorted vision of God and Judeo-Christian symbols by Western civilization.

His art had become mostly process-oriented, away form the commodifiable, sellable product. It was helping him sort out his issues, unravel and express the alienation he was going through, assert himself and find his voice. Unfortunately, Storch quickly discovered that society did not easily accept mental illness, that it was frightened by it and rarely knew how to deal with it. His condition kept him isolated, losing friends and job opportunities; it also prevented him from sharing his works with others.

Few years ago, Storch met Barbara Gamboa, a local visual artist who was using her art to combat her own post traumatic stress disorder. Gamboa got him to show his work and encouraged him to fight through his art the stigma of mental disease. She involved him in *Hope and Strength Through Art*, an exhibit she was curating at the time, sponsored by The Mental Health Arts Collaborative. The exhibit connected him to many other professional and non professional artists who, like him, were suffering from mental illness. Through artists' talks, they all shared their personal trials and tribulations with the disease, telling their own story. For Storch it was an empowering experience, one that opened new horizons and determined him to become an activist for the cause of mental wellness.

"I started using my art as a metaphor for spiritual awareness to help myself and others who suffer and are stigmatized by mental illness," he says. "I wanted my work to make a comment about my own condition as well as that of others. The creative process can also help anyone realize what is going on inside and find a therapeutic outlet."

Storch is now very active in raising awareness about mental illness and the stigma it places on the individual, self inflicted or imposed by society. He shows his related work whenever the opportunity presents and gives talks on the subject, sharing his own experience. He was recently invited to display his works at a seminar featuring a psychiatrist who had written a book on the topic.

above
Red Shift #3 (detail)
mixed media

Manic Depression, one of the paintings Storch exhibited, pertained to the brain diseased mind and its implications to the individual. It shows two frightened and distraught faces of a woman with the words "manic depression" written on them; also a brain depicted upside down, an airplane falling, metaphor for despair, and an anatomical picture of a man cut in half, allegory to the way mentally ill individuals often view themselves. Storch also added the image of Groucho Marx because Marx had said, "I would not want to be a member of any club that would have me as a member," a statement many mentally ill people would also make. To personalize the piece, Storch incorporated in it the brushes he used to paint it, thus reflecting on his own creative process and on the process of the disease itself; he also signed it "CC," for Cody Cavanaugh, the alias name of a "female consciousness" that allows him to expand his dimension and speak not only from the standpoint of a man but of that of a universal being espousing the entire humanity.

In *Oh Happy Girl*, another painting he displayed, Storch put a face on the anger many mentally afflicted individuals experience, anger that often leads to uncontrollable violence. He represented the face of a furious woman wearing a voodoo hat, next to an image of many hearts alluding to the various conflicting emotions she may have, depending on the day.

For Storch art now has an explainable purpose. It helps him reach self realization, and allows him to loudly convey his messages and raise awareness about mental illness. He also uses it to bring mentally afflicted individuals in contact with their own healing creativity.

top left
45's, Greetings from the USA
mixed media

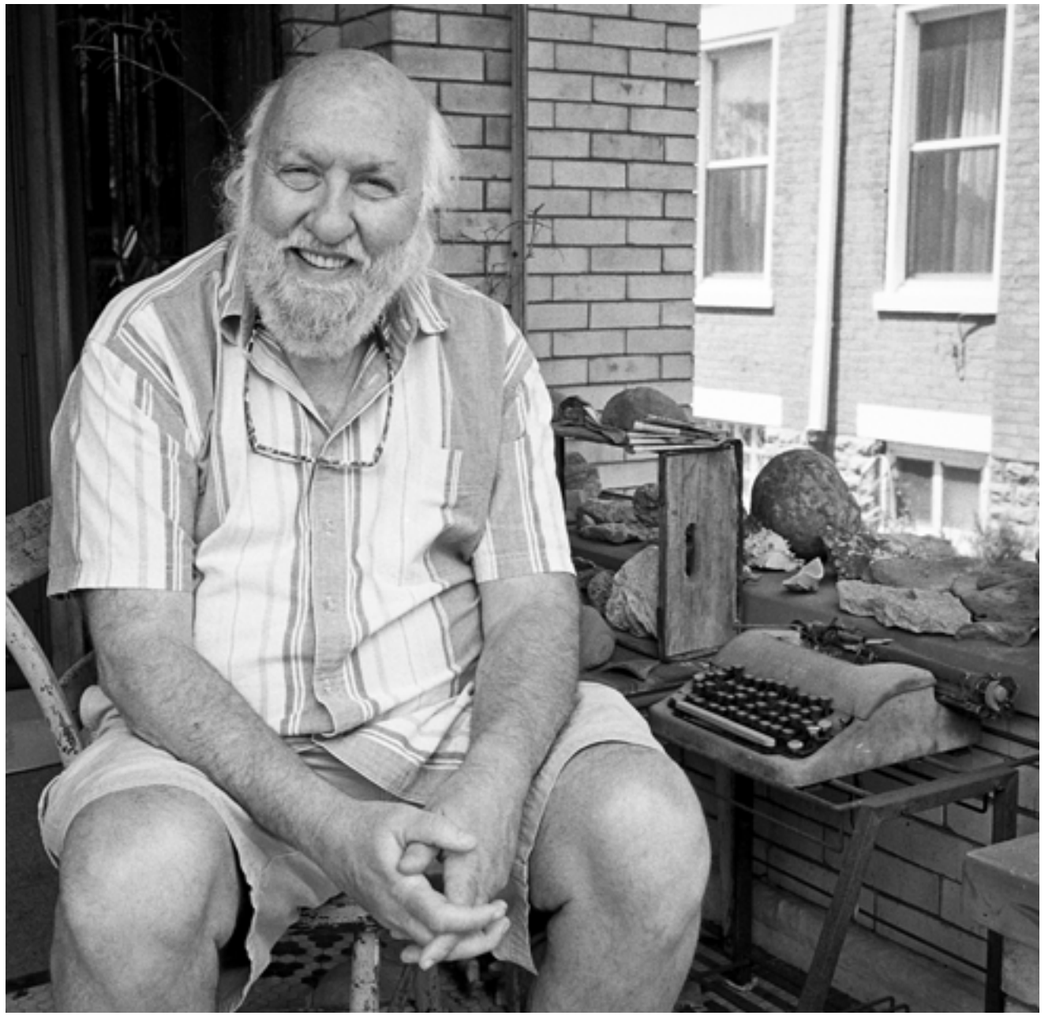
top middle
Oh Happy Girl
oil on canvas

top right
Manic Depression
oil on canvas

bottom left
Ecce Homo (Behold the Man)
airbrush and oil pastel on paper

bottom right
Whatever #14
mixed media

"I consider my art successful if it makes a statement rather than simply being a vehicle for something only pretty," he says. "It's not commodifiable anymore. I want it to trigger a dialogue with the viewer where the stigma of mental illness becomes evident and uncomfortable."



STEVE SUNDERLAND

Drawing for Peace

Steve Sunderland's artistic vocabulary

"A question always haunts me: What am I doing for peace?" says Steve Sunderland, an artist, writer and professor of peace and educational studies in the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services at the University of Cincinnati (UC) and a former professor of social work, also at UC. Sunderland is also the director of "Peace Village," a healing educational organization he founded after the 2001 Cincinnati riots and the 9/11 Trade Center attack; it uses art, music, conferences and various creative means to heal from violence and promote inner and social peace.

Sunderland actually has done and daily does a lot for peace.

Growing up in New York City in the 1950's and 60's, early on he developed good organizing skills that found him an important player in many social justice and liberation movements. As a college student he was actively involved in the hunger program for Mississippi, the Civil Rights movement in Washington, DC, desegregation and setting of a union for graduate students at Indiana University/Bloomington, promotion of student academic freedom of speech under the American Students Organization and development of compassionate and inclusive means to fight anti-Semitism as part of the National Training Laboratories.

After graduating from Case Western Reserve University with a PhD in organizational behavior and administration, his energy focused on desegre-

gating higher education. He functioned as vice president of the Master Plan at City University in New York City, helping integrate25,000 African-American and Hispanic students based on open-admission policy. Then, until the 1977 recession, he was head of a small college for African-American and underprivileged individuals in New York, pulling them out of welfare and enrolling them into a master's degree program that combined study and work.

This is when he moved to Cincinnati to join UC, initially as dean of the College of Community Services, then as a professor at the School of Social Work and lately at the School of Education. At UC he continued his activist work toward the integration of higher education.

As an organizer, Sunderland followed in the steps of his father, a British immigrant, labor organizer and communist leader in New York City in the late 1930's.

below
Why Aren't moreVets Helped
markers

As an artist, Sunderland took his inspiration from his maternal aunt, a mentally handicapped artist whose beautiful paintings adorned the walls of his family house. For two years he also attended the first public High School of Music and Art in the country, in the center of Harlem. Students of all ethnic backgrounds populated it, his first experience with real diversity.

Sunderland, however, did not do art until he was in his sixties. Art came back into his life with the 2001 Cincinnati riots and 9/11 attacks of the same year. Inspired by Jacob Lawrence's documentation of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass' life stories on particleboards, he decided to use cardboards to document and reflect the events going on at the time. Armed with cardboards, markers and crayons, he mingled with the Cincinnati rioting crowds, watched, listened and drew mostly the faces and emotions of those present. He also involved his UC students, enrolled then in a class on conflict resolution, to do the same. Witnessing the events through the faces and feelings of participants rendered on cardboard grew in scope and intensity, and "*Posters4Peace*" was born.

Sunderland has since been using the technique non-stop. He drew people's reactions to the 9/11 attacks. For the past nine years he has been drawing the feelings of participants in a yearly Vietnam peace conference led by Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn; the conference includes Vietnam War vets for peace, anti Vietnam War protestors and Vietnamese people, all gathered for healing and reconciliation. With students, he has drawn images about hunger; with children, about events that have affected them. His drawings have also related to inclusion in the classroom, to natural disasters such as tsunami in Indonesia and earthquake in Haiti, wars and the misery of death.

above
I have Signed a Peace Treaty Inside
crayons

"I always draw about the pain I encounter or experience, pain of those who want social justice, fairness, pain caused by poverty, loss of hope, no jobs, racism," he says. "I draw mostly faces of people I meet. I draw them myself; also invite them, if willing, to partake in the activity. Afterwards we all share the images, discuss feelings and messages."

After the 2001 Cincinnati riots, when the city hired a consultant to mediate between police and the community, Sunderland was invited to join in to elicit police officer's and citizens' feelings about the violence. Using his technique of drawing on cardboard, he prompted participants with 2 questions: "How do you feel about the riots? And, what would your drawing of a healthy city be?" He obtained hundreds of response drawings that served as conversation starters to address the issues; they eventually contributed to a peace treaty with the police.

After the 9/11attacks, drawings were reactions to the events, to the sense of impotence generated and to how to respond to the tragedy. With the Vietnam vets, they were about feelings of hurt, regret, anger.

In all instances, Sunderland uses the drawings as vehicles for an immediate reflection on the problem addressed, an expression of his own reaction and feelings and of those of others involved, everyone empowered and engaged in a dialogue for a peaceful resolution.

"Art provides a vocabulary; it is a liberating activity," he says. "It is also a communication tool that allows exchange of ideas, feelings. Art can plant a seed of compassion and function as an instrument for peace. Drawing images and feelings, sharing and discussing them, break down artificial boundaries between individuals, lead them to a deeper appreciation of their humaneness."

Through Peace Village and with his students at UC, Sunderland has recently focused on Inclusion, Hunger and Islam. His drawing *What Is Inclusion*, created in response to a conference of disabled individuals, ponders whether there is room in our hearts for mixing people despite their disability–or only room for segregation. *Dreaming of College* is about the disabled student wanting to be in college but not in an isolated corner.

Sunderland is also a writer who authors a regular column on peace in the monthly online Metro newspaper.

"I want both my art and writing to be at the human level," he says. "My work illuminates peace in some fashion, catching a look on the face of a person, a word

or expression that throws light on justice. My drawings are sketches of hope and compassion in a world that struggles to keep peace alive; I want them to heighten reflection and action for and with others. Through art and conversation, I aim to rebuild the world of people caught in tsunamis of violence and despair, to signal the powerful inner spirit of love."

top left
I Am Sorry but We Have to Kill You
crayons

top right
What Is Inclusion
crayons

bottom left
Hunger or Peace
markers

bottom right
"New" Him - Her
crayons

KEN SWINSON

Art Grows Communities

Ken Swinson uses art for his own sake and the sake of others

Working at the Beehive Tavern, in Augusta, Kentucky, Ken Swinson befriended the owner, Luciano Moral, a native of Cuba, who had emigrated as a child to the United States.

“Luciano was very generous, always helping people in the community,” says Swinson. “He gave much more than he took. He influenced me a lot and I wanted to follow his steps.”

Since then, Swinson has been very active in every community where he lived, using art to bring people together, empower them, help improve their communal life. A self-taught visual artist he grew up in a military family and never lived in one place for long.... until 12 years ago when he fell in love with rural Northern Kentucky. He has been living there since, initially in Augusta and more recently in Old Washington, part of Maysville.

Raised in a Mormon family, he was taught early on to care and have compassion for others. In college, he took pre-med classes, seeking a profession to help people; he learned quickly, however, that medicine did not suit him. He quit, did not pursue his undergraduate education, and resorted instead to making art.

“Art was one thing I always loved to do,” he says. “It helped me in difficult times; I discovered it was a powerful tool I could also use with others.”

above
Up Hill
silkscreen
print

Swinson learned on his own the techniques of printmaking and pottery. At the time, his printed images were mostly portraits and landscapes; his pots, functional, decorated with painted scenes.

In 2003, when the Iraq war started, he got distressed, firmly believing the war unjustified. He also resented the direction the country was taking and the imposed climate of fear and control. He sold his belongings and wandered for six months in his van throughout Florida and California, camping, living mostly in national parks. He drew and painted many nature-related scenes, peaceful subjects that took him away from politics, helped him meditate. Back to Northern Kentucky he continued his own art but also became more involved in community activities.

Swinson's art stems from his contact with and appreciation of nature, also from issues related to where he lives. Many of his prints, for instance, pertain to biking and its beneficial effects, healthy exercise, direct connection with the surroundings. An avid biker himself, he rode all the way to Washington, DC, and documented visually his trip. *Up Hill*, a serigraph, shows him biking up hill, welcome by cows and birds; a *Pig on a Bike* ironically alludes to his conviction that everyone can use the transportation mean to an advantage.

"Poor health due to sedentary living, and scarce and polluting fuel, are two important problems our country faces," he says. "Bicycling is a natural remedy for both. Through my cycling artwork, I try to inspire people to want a bike, raising at the same time awareness about health and the environment."

Also a video-maker, Swinson recorded in motion many of his nature experiences, trying to impart a sense of awe onto the viewer witnessing nature's beauty, at the same time stressing the importance of a healthy natural living. His video *Kentucky Canoe Trip* incorporates his painted images with nature scenes, communicating a feeling of peace and harmony; *Birdwatching*, the pleasure of biking and discovering the world of animals.

Living not far from Ripley, Ohio, a key town in the Underground Railroad, Swinson learned more about slavery. He started a series of paintings and prints illustrating heroes of that period, "brave people who stood up for the right thing at a time when it was the wrong thing to do," he says.

His painting *John Parker* illustrates the story of Parker, a former slave who bought his freedom, settled in Ripley and became active in the Underground Railroad, helping runaway slaves escape to freedom. He is shown barefoot assisting a couple and their baby he had just rescued, to escape.

above
John Parker
oil on canvas

Eliza Harris, a linocut print, is a portrait of the famed woman holding her child. Desperate for freedom, Harris crossed the partly frozen Ohio River jumping from ice flow to ice flow, braving death. Swinson incorporated the image of a white hand, that of Chance Shaw of the Ohio Patrol who rescued her and stated: "Any woman who crossed that river carrying her baby has won her freedom."

A Better Life, a screenprint, is in honor of all the nameless fieldworker slaves who dared to dream of a better life; it includes a dove, symbol of hope, and a river and the North Star, for freedom. Swinson later animated the print showing the dove flying.

"In the last 4 years I have been able to live completely from my artwork," says Swinson. "I have been very grateful and felt the responsibility to give even more to the community."

As a result Swinson became involved in many community-oriented projects. In Maysville, with artist friend Barb Clark he started few years ago *Art Walk*, now a yearly community event where artists connect with various businesses, exhibiting their work inside their spaces. The event brings visitors downtown to view the artwork and discover, at the same time, what the town has to offer. Also in Maysville, he has been teaching a monthly free art class to both adults and children. He recently arranged a screen-printing activity for residents to screen-print a design on their old cloth, thus introducing them to printmaking and to recycling.

Volunteering for a neighborhood children Christmas party in the Pendleton area of Cincinnati where his studio is, he

top left
Community Garden - Grow Peas, Grow Peace
encaustic

top middle
Eliza Harris
linocut print

top right
A Better Life
silkscreen print

bottom left
Pig on a Bike
silkscreen print

brought in his portable press and taught the kids how to print their own holiday cards. At the Pendleton Art Center he also participates actively in *Arts In Action*, an educational initiative for art education in downtown Cincinnati.

Living in a house with a large back-yard Swinson opened it as a community garden, making it a rallying place for the neighborhood to gather, plant and connect. He also started *Grass Root Arts* an independent social project to encourage community participation, reciprocity and generosity through the arts. It proposes communal art-related activities to help promote social causes.

"I have always been passionate about causes that improve community and society," says Swinson. "I want to use art to help advance them. I also hope to inspire people to make their own art and contribute to a better world."

This is why in 2012, Swinson created a mural for the Bracken County Public Library, a memorial for Makensie Hay-Youngman, a friend of his who had suffered from depression and committed suicide. In its creation he insisted at involving Makensie's family and close friends.

"This project became a great opportunity to use art to help people suffering from a tragic loss," he says. "It also opened my eyes to the large number of individuals who are affected by depression and mental illness in our society. Unfortunately, while mental illness seems widespread, its treatment is often difficult to obtain, and people are reluctant to talk about it."

Swinson is now working on a 5 year project to take artists on the road to communities that do not have significant exposure to the arts; he hopes this will inspire the artists and also share their talents.

Swinson is an activist through his artwork, his actions, his lifestyle. Very active in his community, he strives to make a positive difference… He uses his art to express himself, communicate, give and bring others together.

LEIGH WALTZ

When the Greed for Oil Ignores Peak Oil

Leigh Waltz's recent art is public "emergency" art

"We cannot decide on our destination, we can only try to decide on our journey," says Leigh Waltz. And Waltz's journey took him into many directions and to many parts of the world. From a happy and art-filled childhood in Dayton, Ohio, he went as a high school exchange student to Malaysia, lived in Europe studying languages and linguistics, enrolled in the Navy and served during Desert Storm, the Bosnian Theatre and Operation Iraqi Freedom, studied movie and fine arts, taught photography, drawing and sculpture.

As a result Waltz travelled to 34 countries and developed a universal sensibility and culture. He speaks 5 languages, holds a bachelor of arts degree in cinema studies from Columbia College, Hollywood, California, a master of fine arts degree in printmaking from the University of Cincinnati, and is Adjunct Professor of art at Sinclair Community College, in Dayton, Ohio. He is a prolific artist who works across photography, video, printmaking, sculpture, performance and installation.

Waltz's awareness of violence, prejudice and intolerance came first at age 11 when he saw a 200-year-old copy of Dr. Southwell's *New Book of Martyrs*; it contained engravings depicting public executions and various acts of torture. When he asked his father why people were killing other people, he was told because they had different religions. This was complemented later by his awakening to the "haves and have-nots" in America and other coun-

above
Truth Is Beauty
stamped text on
recycled aluminum

bottom right
Take Exception - We Believe Everything
mixed media print

tries he visited; and most recently, after his deployment in the Iraq war, by discovering its real oil-based motives.

"Talking to army personnel in Northern Iraq, I found out that their main responsibility on arrival was to secure the oil fields," he says. "My unit in Qayyarah was also helping build the largest fuel depot in the country. I learned quickly that our so-called liberation war was in fact all about oil, money and control."

Cerebral and detached until then, Waltz's art became more personal and engaged, reflecting his experiences, what he had witnessed. After returning from Iraq, he had a solo show, *Taking Exception*, at the Dayton Convention Center. It exposed raw his feelings, the brutal reality he had lived, his critical thoughts as a result. Included were large-scale white and black mixed media prints with images of a cruise missile next to altered texts from the New Testament referring to war profiteers; pictures of Arab women with rocket propelled grenade launchers and dead civilians alluding to the destruction of life in a country; images of the attacked twin towers smoking with writing above them saying: "We Believe Everything," thus reflecting on the 9/11 attacks as pretext for a greedy non justifiable war; translated quotes from the Hadith pointing to the highly moral and charitable teachings of Islam, in contrast to the prevailing preconceptions of a violent and intolerant religion; images of sheep and knives –metaphors for the misinformed, naïve believers, blind followers and media-victims most Americans had become.

"I was still coming back from Iraq," Waltz says, "still living daily and at home my traumatized memories. I wanted my show to provide first-hand witnessed information, to compel viewers, make them think beyond the routine brainwashing. I hoped it would also serve as a step across cultural barriers, beyond prejudice and preconceived ideas."

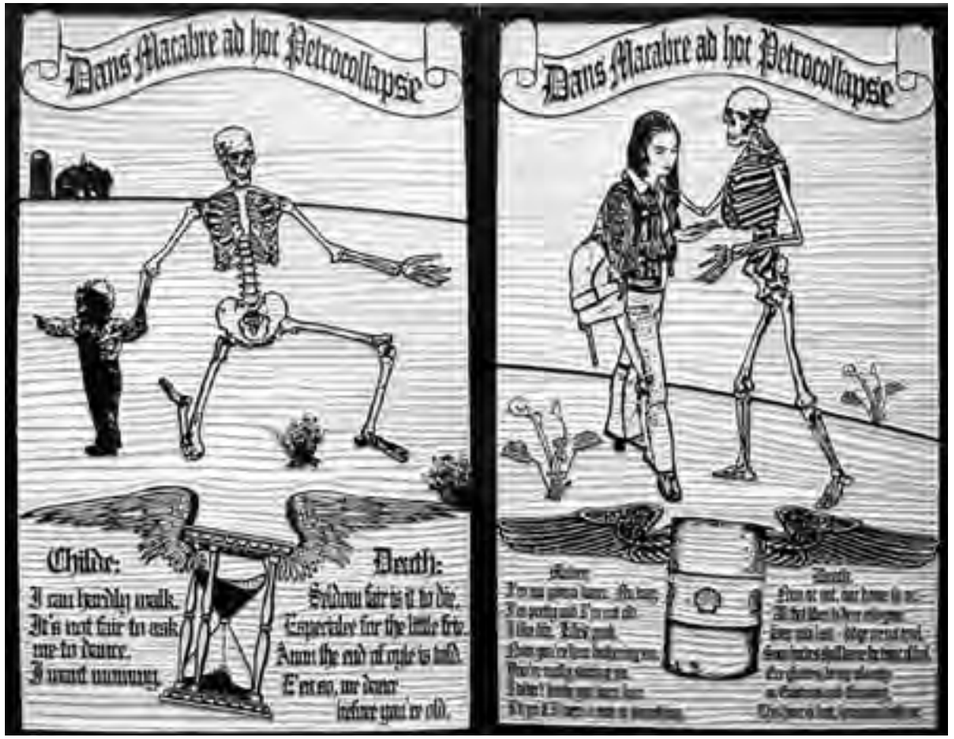
At the same time Waltz discovered the power of live performance art, when the artist could say, in front of an audience, things not said otherwise in newspapers, on radio or TV. He organized yearly in Dayton such festivals, open to artists from all over the world, and used the venue to continue expressing his own concerns. This allowed him to also apply for grants, get funded, and video-document the events.

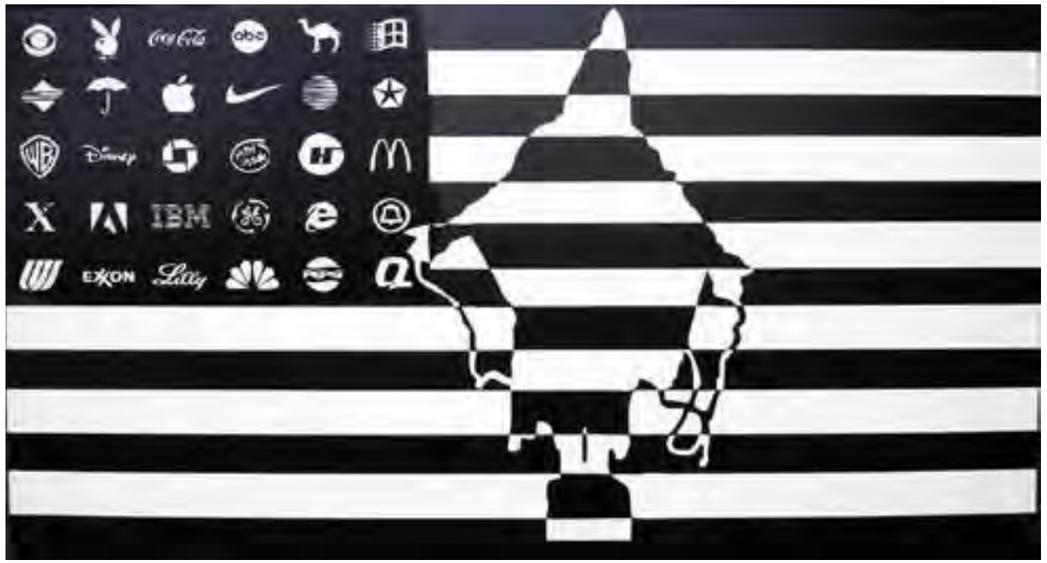
"I was lucky to meet Mark Siemer who worked on our video," says Waltz. "Mark was working at the same time on another documentary, *The Power of Community - How Cuba Survived Peak Oil*. I had never heard of peak oil before and thus became educated on the topic. I quickly realized it was essential for our survival."

In fact, scientists had observed for a while, that close to 50% of the planetary oil resources had already been used and that, due to the diminishing reserve, world demands in oil would not be met after 2015. They had predicted, as a result, catastrophic implications, unless the world transitioned from a highly industrial society to a sustainable one, from a society relying heavily on a fossil-fuel-based economy to one more organically and more community-driven. Rob Hopkins had even started a Transition movement to get from a high to low energy consumption culture, favoring local organic gardening and community connectedness, thus adapting and surviving in the absence of oil.

Convinced by the theory, Waltz started using his art to tackle the issue and educate others about peak oil. He received an individual artist grant to create an informational booklet of wood engravings, poetry and writings, he titled *Dans Macabre*, implying that by doing nothing we're dancing with death. He disseminated the book widely and posted it on the Internet, thus raising awareness about its content. He accompanied it by 2 large carvings, *Death and the Maiden* and *Death and the Child*, depicting Death as a skeleton, taking by the arm a young girl using her cell phone, and inviting a child to dance, each stating that, unless prepared, once fuel scarcity strikes, death will also come.

To expand his target audience, Waltz created *Let's Talk about Peak Oil*, a project combining visual art displays, street art and performances. He designed a die with the image of a skeleton pumping oil at a gas station; he used it to stamp aluminum sheets recovered from discarded cans. Next to the stamped image of the skeleton he typed aphorisms and quotes related to peak oil, collected from *www.theoilage.com*. One, for instance, mentioned the 2nd law of thermodynamics which states that energy dissipates unless constantly replenished; another listed states and cities with peak oil legislation. Waltz nailed these aluminum art pieces on telephone poles, street display boards, and accompanied them with street performances.



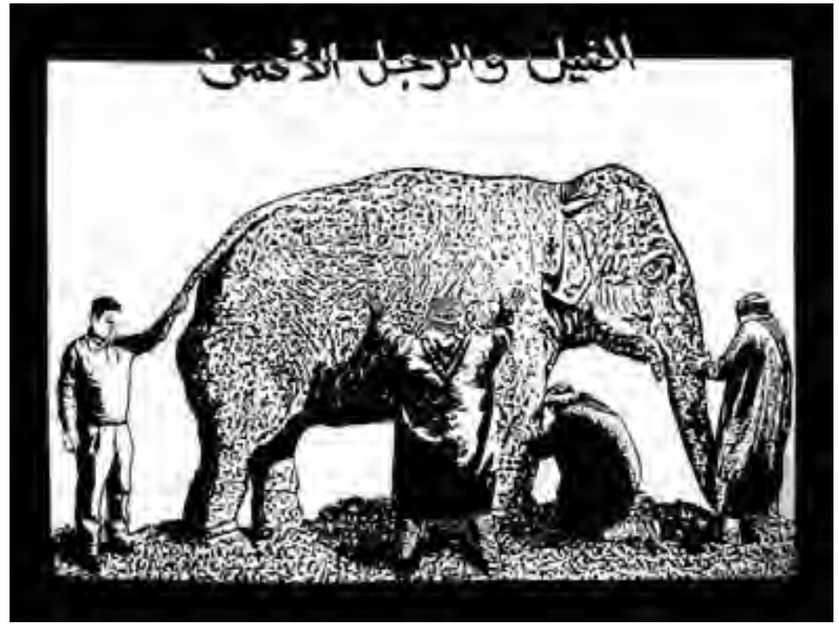


top left
Dans Macabre Ad Hoc Petrocollapse - Death and the Child and Death and the Maiden
diptych carving

top right
The Elephant and the Blind Man - Global War on Terrorism
mixed media print

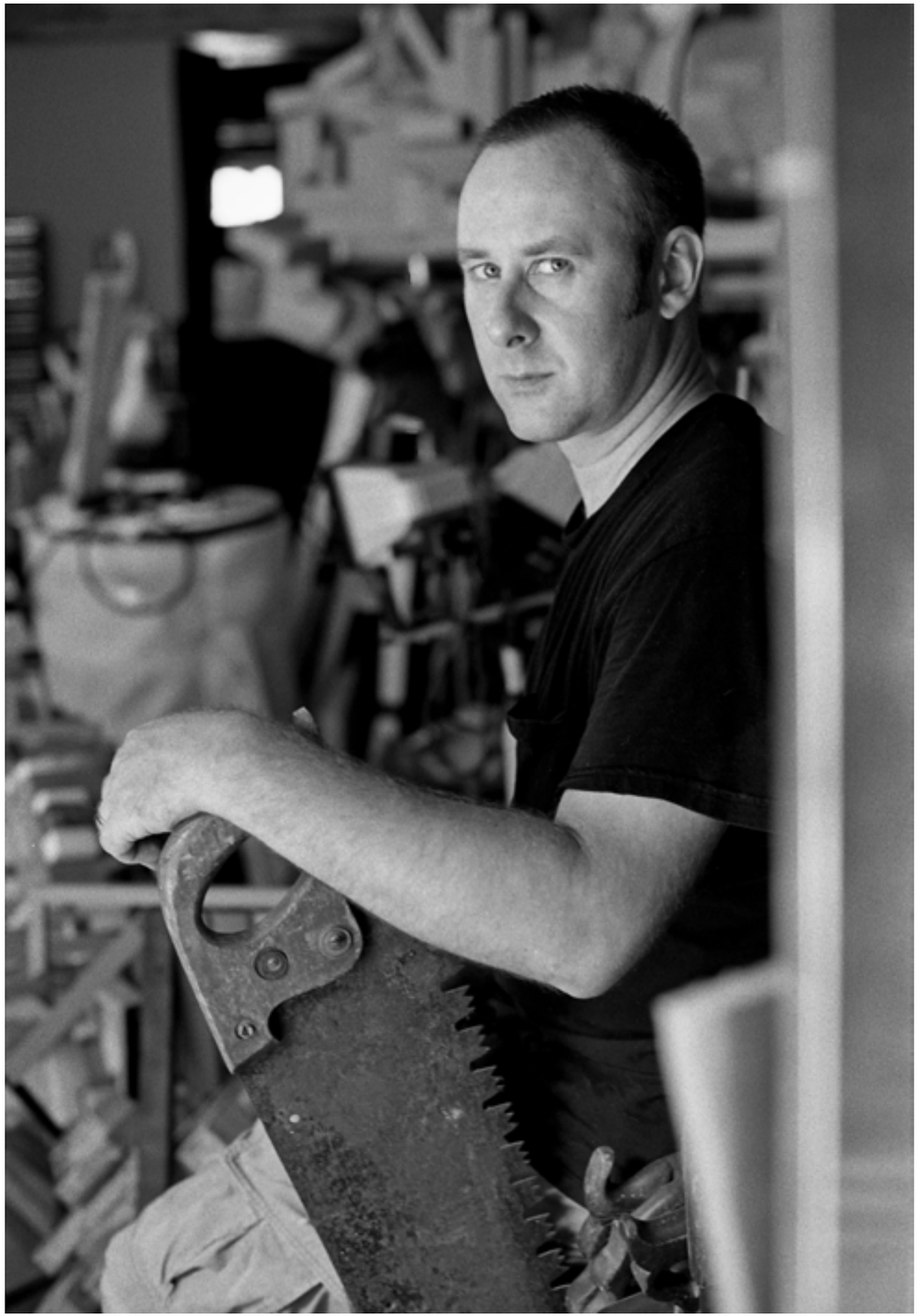
bottom left
Take Exception - Stain II
mixed media print

bottom right
Peak Oil
stamped image on recycled aluminum



"I wanted to get the word out about peak oil," he says. "I wanted people to become aware of the reality, confront it and take action. I view it as necessary 'emergency art', trying to avert catastrophe."

Waltz's interest in peak oil is directly connected to his other concerns, in particular the "greed, lies, injustice, poverty, pollution…" he sees everywhere. His deployment in Iraq woke him up to the important role oil plays in our world; also to how truths are often silenced in our dominant media-controlled culture. His art has since become his voice and presence in a society where public discourse and public forums are increasingly unavailable.



ROSCOE WILSON

Instead of Pollution, Recycled Art

Roscoe Wilson creates from what exists

"For me, to be an artist is to be an activist," says Roscoe Wilson. "They are not separate. For the past fifteen years I have made work that consistently raises concerns about over-consumption, waste, destruction of our environment, big coal and big oil. My work investigates broader issues to draw people in to take a closer look."

Wilson, a local artist and associate professor of art at Miami University-Hamilton, grew up in rural northern Indiana and southern Michigan. He lived most of his life in close contact with nature, surrounded by water, trees, woods and animals. This shaped his environmental values as he learned to love the earth, its beauty and poetry, the materials composing it, its inhabitants.

"Growing up in nature enabled me to develop an awareness only a forest, lake, field, can offer," he says.

In college, even though destined to art, he spent significant time studying biology, discovering the secrets behind the function of the natural world.

Wilson started drawing at a very young age. Very early on and influenced by his grandfather, he also made and built things out of wood and recycled material. These experiences served as his initial engagement into the arts.

He later attended Wabash College, Indiana, earning a bachelor's degree in art and biology, then Purdue University, earning a master of arts degree in painting/printmaking, and the University of Wisconsin (UW), earning a master of fine arts degree focusing on printmaking, sculptural installation and painting. While at UW, he studied the history of environmentalism and drew inspiration for his artwork from former Wisconsin residents and environmental pioneers John Muir and Aldo Leopold.

From the start Wilson's work addressed nature, how it is being affected and destroyed by our consumer-oriented, industrialized society, but also how it can be protected and enriched, contributing to a better life.

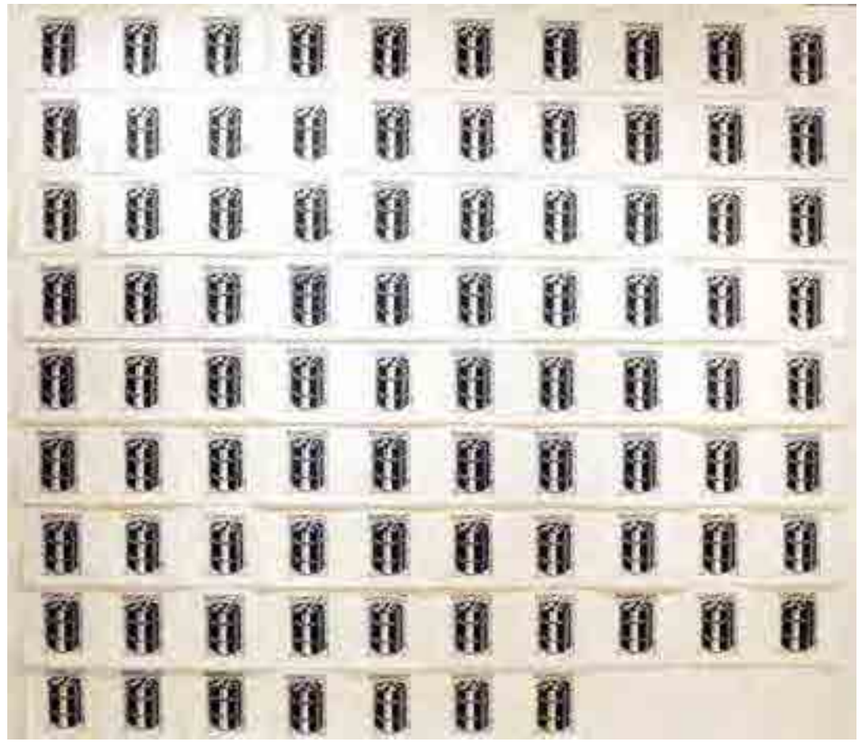
"If we treat our world well, the world will treat us well and we'll end up treating each other better," he states.

From first year of college and throughout graduate school Wilson was encouraged, in addition to design, to think of content. He probed inside himself, connecting to his childhood and past experiences, and researched his themes and grabbed at historical references. His art came from a personal place, but at the same time took a universal dimension, adding to his own symbols imagery and concepts borrowed form books and nature. He repeatedly referred, for instance, to the mayfly, an insect that emerges every six years from a larval form under water to live for only 24 hours, thus alluding to the hidden world behind what one sees every day.

Concerned by the big waste characteristic of our consuming culture, and having developed a great appreciation for natural materials, his art was often based on found objects, rusty nails, prints printed on discarded boxes, paintings on recovered wooden lathes. His sculptures and large installations would also often use collected bottle caps and cardboard boxes, arranged and organized to initially draw the viewer by their vibrant colors, large scale and esoteric appeal, then to trigger deeper questioning and understanding. Wilson usually derives his post-consumer materials from his own personal use, but also from family, friends, students and colleagues who, in the doing, end up developing a renewed relationship with the discarded materials, viewing them in a different and more constructive and aesthetic light.

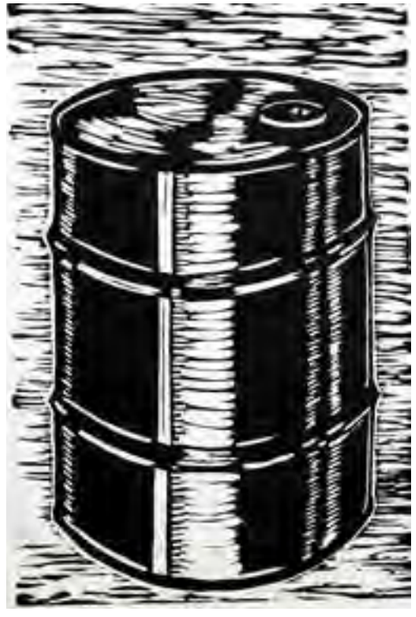
Instead of making new things, Wilson gives new life to things that had already existed, thus not adding pollution to the world and reaffirming his message of "reduce, reuse, minimally consume."

below
196 Oil Drums
installation



top left
87 Days
print installation

bottom right
87 Days
linocut print



In addition to his "art recycling" and distressed by the large amount of "trash" thrown away at parties he attended, Wilson started a widespread recycling program at his college, involving other students, friends and later family.

Waste and recycling aside, Wilson became progressively interested in broader themes, those of the environment, polluting energies, climate changes. The deleterious effect on the planet of burning coal, oil and natural gas; the devastating result of oil spills on the ecosystem; and the green potential of alternative sources of energy –solar, wind and geothermal–preoccupied him and found their way into his art.

His *Tree* series consists of paintings that address the beauty and majesty of trees, magnificent expression of nature on earth, but also vulnerable to human destruction

top left
Last Stand
oil on canvas

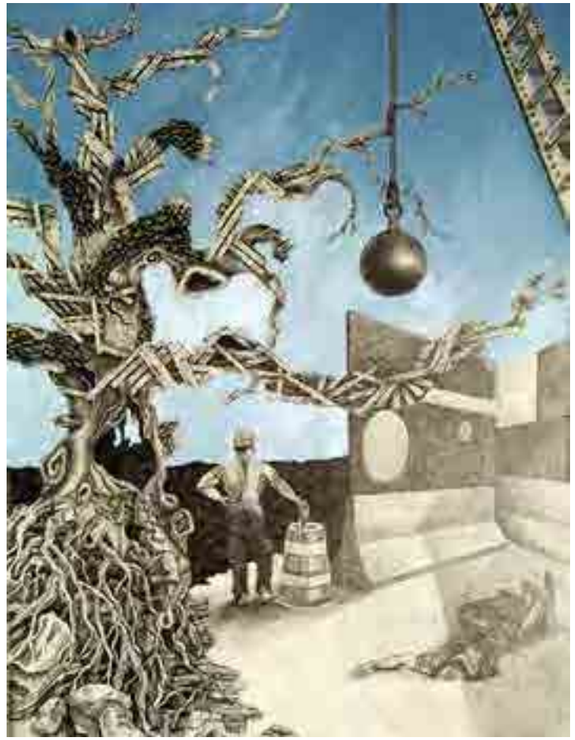
top middle
Wasteland
linocut print

top right
Having a Ball
oil on canvas

bottom right
Oil Field
graphite and oil
on canvas

and victim of polluting waste. *Having a Ball* represents a dead tree, result of urban construction/destruction. *Last Stand* speaks to industrial insult, nature bulldozed away, replaced by degraded earth. *Oil Field*, another painting from the same series, shows a destitute landscape of black oil drums, suffocating a decaying, barren, leafless tree. On the trunk of the tree are remnants of a child's tree-house, alluding to the innocence of childhood disappearing, pushed away from its natural source and habitat. The dead branches of the tree are shown taking over the entire sky and horizon, replacing life with death, obstructing the future. Wilson meant his image as an apocalyptic landscape of the never-ending wasteful consumption. Started before the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, it proved prophetic in its realism and message.

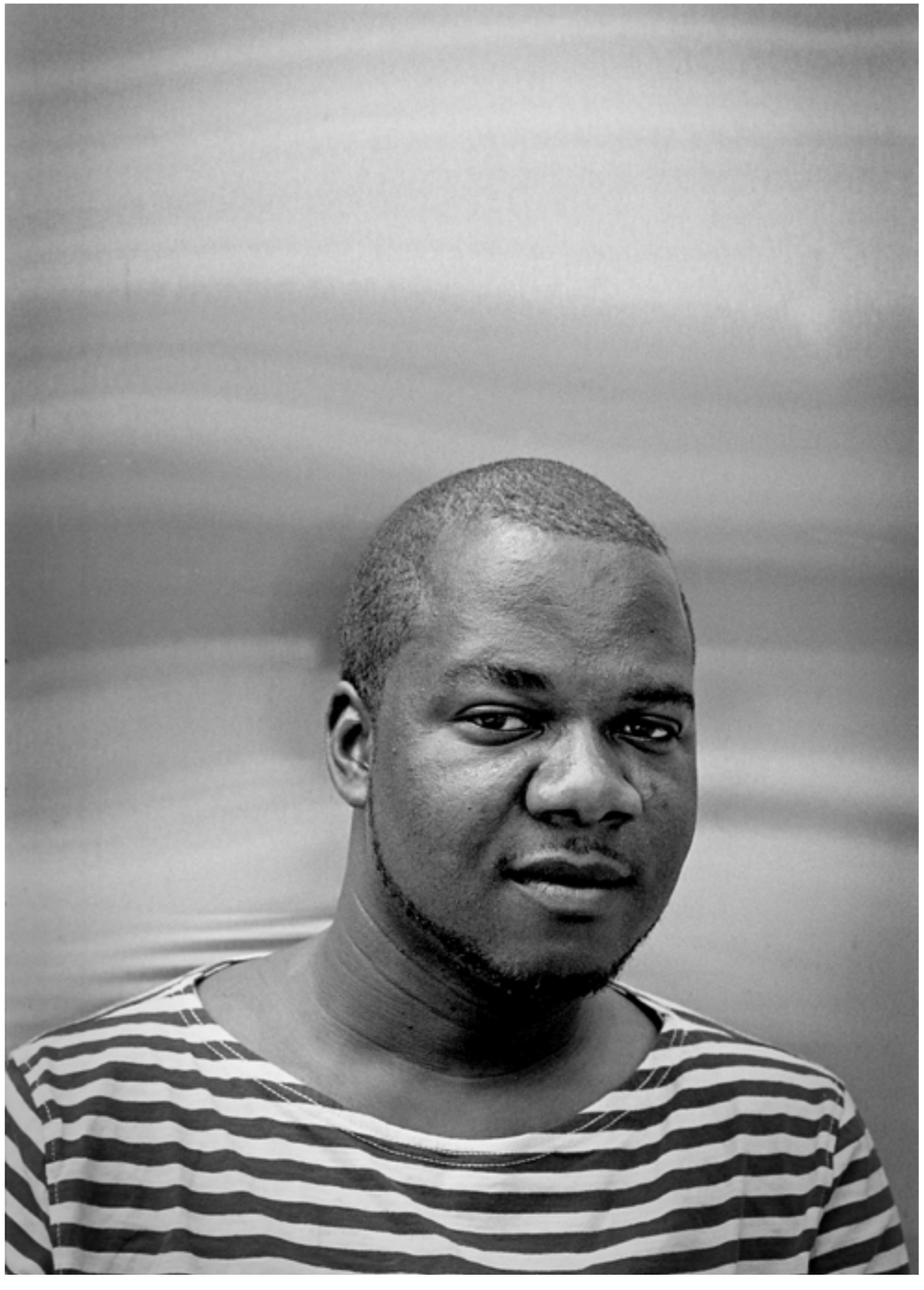
In response to the spill, Wilson also created an overlapping installation of 87 prints of oil drums, one print for each day the BP spill lasted–he pinned them up together in a large ominous piece that he exhibited in Oregon. In the same exhibition was a large wall installation of 196 miniature plaster cast oil drums each representing 100,000 actual oil barrels for the total equivalent of 19.6 million oil barrels consumed each day in the United States. To counteract the amount of energy (carbon footprint) he caused while planning and installing his exhibition far away in Oregon, Wilson planted 20 trees of various types in his residential town of Hamilton, Ohio. Over the next 10 years, he expects these trees to take-up enough carbon to compensate for the pollution he has created.



While teaching, Wilson also engages his students to think about the various issues that concern him and the world. He does it either by discussing works of established artists who have raised consciousness through their art or by giving students assignments based on specific topics. As a mentor to the students' ecology club and in charge of their art club, he uses both venues to integrate art with environmental awareness.

Wilson will continue to use his art as his voice for the protection of the environment. He wants to read more, learn more, connect with similarly concerned individuals, add to the debate and make a change. Coal, mountain-top removal in strip mining and, the origin and culture of food are topics he would like to explore more and address in his artworks. He feels that most social and political issues relate to the environment, are interconnected and stem from the same roots. Even though he realizes that we all need to consume to live, he strongly believes that we do not need to live to just consume.

"Art is an important expression of who I am," he says. "It is a continued synthesis of my experiences and beliefs, and as such carries and communicates my messages. I love the earth and want to preserve it; I want my art to shake our apathy for the degrading environment. Our backyards, deserts, oceans, have become receptacles for waste to dump, spill, and leak into our lives. It has to stop."



MARTIN ZEINWAY

Forging the Universal Human

Martin Zeinway rebels against war and divisive identities

"My artwork is a commentary on my war-torn origins and on the search for my identity," says Martin Zeinway. "As a child I had to leave Liberia, my country of origin, devastated by an ongoing civil war, and resettle as a refugee in the United States of America. Before moving here I never considered myself to be 'Black.' I was Liberian, then African. To Americans, however, I am first Black, then African, then Liberian; and to Black Americans, an African, who is Black, from Liberia. Who am I in reality?"

Zeinway, an Ohio-based visual artist, arrived to the United States, with his uncle's family, at age 14. He lived originally in Cleveland, Ohio, received a bachelor's degree in Studio Art from Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio, a master's degree in Art Education form Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, and a master in fine arts degree from the University of Cincinnati (UC). He taught art at Central State University and at Alliance Academy, a Cincinnati charter school. He currently resides in Cleveland, Ohio.

In undergraduate school, Zeinway mostly developed technique, acquired skills and learned the academic side of art. Preparing for his master's degree in Art Education, he started questioning himself, remembering his past experiences, allowing them to emerge. Painful memories, silenced until then, resurfaced. The war he lived as a child and the damages it caused and that he experienced when visiting back his country, had never left him. Images of

violence, desolation, destruction, human loss and suffering, dormant for many years, started reappearing in his drawings.

"I found myself sketching bodies without limbs, exploded bleeding heads, crying individuals, displaced families…" he says. "I knew where they were coming from."

Encouraged by his professors to explore his feelings and concerns, he decided to create works about himself and his past and inform the viewer. War, violence and their negative effects, the destruction of his country and of its culture, the loss of life, the disintegration of communities, became all part of his painted works. They spoke of the ugliness of armed conflicts and of the need to abolish them.

A Mother's Cry, represents an African woman crying, her sons gone, recruited to be soldiers, her daughter forced to become a sex slave. Nothing is left to her, not even food depicted as fruit in the painting, alluding to both starvation and loss of her children, essential ingredients of her life. Zeinway was also indirectly referring to his own mother, sad, separated form her son she sent away not to be killed.

In *Decisions*, a young pregnant lady stands next to writing that says: "All I wanted is some food, and now I carry the baby of the rebels," illustrating the unjust and inhuman pressures war places on individuals, especially women, for survival.

The Peace Keeper points to the irony of war; it shows a soccer ball next to 2 groups of fighters laying down their arms. During the war, fighters would often reunite and stop fighting just the time of a football game, the ball, thus, an elusive symbol of peace.

The Role Reversal addresses the changes arm power inflicts on the traditional functioning of a community. It shows elders and elderly, in time of peace wise decision-makers of the tribe, silenced and replaced by powerful young gun–carrying fighters.

In *The Future Is Dead*, an image of a man holding a gun and shooting overlaps silhouettes of kids. It refers to all the kids who lost their future becoming children fighters or who were, as well as their culture, killed due to war.

Zeinway did many more paintings in his series, all focused on war, its detrimental effects on his country and life in general. In addition to his visual art, he also started writing down the outline of his life and experiences from the moment he was born. This led him to introspective analysis, to questioning about his identity, his

top left
Decisions (detail)
oil on canvas

top middle
The Effect of War on Children
oil on canvas

top right
Self Portrait II
watercolor

role in a country different from his birth one, his future. It also coincided with the beginning of his graduate school at UC.

"Being at UC was challenging and frustrating at the same time," he says. "I wanted to do something different but did not know what. I felt unable to define myself, asking constantly: Who am I? Am I an artist, an educator, a student, a Liberian, a Black, an African, an American…? I felt lost with so many layers of identity."

This is when Zeinway resorted again to his artwork for help, visualizing his dilemmas and, in the process, working toward their resolution. To emphasize his African identity he included in his new drawings and paintings Adinkra symbols from West Africa, representing popular proverbs and maxims. He also delved into the world of fashion, applying African fabrics and designs to western cloth and garments he would wear, thus pointing to the intricate stitched-up duality of his being.

Who Am I?, a lithographic print with watercolor, displays the ongoing conflict between the 2 sides of his personality, the African Liberian and the American. It consists of 2 of his portraits shown back to back, one dressed in a western suit, the other in a suit layered with African fabric. In the background is the image of a child holding an AK47 gun, sitting in a classroom. Red, white and blue refer to the American flag and in the center is the Adinkra symbol of knowledge. Zeinway thus incorporated references to his African origin, his past as a child in a warring country, his experience in the West, his educated status wearing a suit, his search for knowledge… all sharing the surface of

top left
The Big Question
watercolor

top middle
Who Am I?
lithographic print with watercolor

top right
Self Portrait I
watercolor

bottom right
The Peace Keeper
oil on canvas

the same page, overlapping, yet coexisting in harmony.

"Liberia created me and showed me how to love and care for humanity; America taught me how to live and work," he says. "I am a man of the world, rich of many experiences; I do not want to choose. The more categories we draw, the more divisiveness we generate."

Zeinway will continue to use his art to oppose war and fight racial and social classifications. He wants his work to educate on the issues of identity, race, discrimination, and motivate for equality, peace and justice. He hopes one day to build an art school in his native Liberia to give children the opportunity to develop their creative talents at the service of a better world.