



Beyond Reality: The Many Worlds of James H. Vredevoogd



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Beyond Reality: The Many Worlds of James H. Vredevoogd
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April 11-June 7, 2015.

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On the cover:
Watching the Invasion, 2005
Acrylic on Canvas
46"x56"
Courtesy of the artist

Mother Earth/Father Sky, 2013
Acrylic on Canvas
24"x48"
Courtesy of the artist

The Many Worlds of James H. Vredevoogd

April 11-June 7, 2015

College of Central Florida
APPLETON
MUSEUM *of* Art

Director's Message

Cindi Morrison
Director

The Appleton Museum of Art is pleased to organize and present *Beyond Reality: The Many Worlds of James H. Vredevoogd*. Since his retirement from teaching at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, James has done more than just play golf, he has amassed a large body of work spanning the past 25 years.

During a studio visit he explained some of the influences and meanings behind the imagery he uses; it ranges from playing golf to the writings of Carl Jung to one of his son's childhood toys, to name a few.

Luckily for us he and his wife Jeanette, also an artist, found their new home in central Florida, far removed from the harsh winters in northwestern Pennsylvania, and through this retrospective exhibition is sharing his world with us.

Paint on, Jim!



Gaia, 2011
Acrylic on Canvas
37"x26"
Courtesy of the artist



The Room Piece, 1970
Performance, Edinboro
University of Pennsylvania
Courtesy of the artist

Curator's Message

Ruth Grim
Curator of Exhibitions

Narrative art, whether used to capture religious, historical, personal or public stories, was a dominant art form for centuries around the globe, particularly in the Western world. The advent of Modernism, many would say, shifted the focus from the tradition of storytelling to a preference for capturing individual moments. The 20th century saw more dramatic changes as art seemed to move further and further away from narrative.

James H. Vredevoogd is an American artist whose career reflects much of the sea-change that occurred in Western art over the past century. He began as a painter but soon took a job teaching art at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and joined the wild ride that must have been the early years of “Performance Art” in this country and abroad. Performance Art was a radically new art form in which paint, canvas, paper, clay or any of the other traditional fine art materials were abandoned in favor of highly conceptual staged actions or performances. By the 1960s and 1970s, early 20th century Abstraction, and later Abstract Expressionism, had opened the door to all avenues of new expression in the visual arts. Jackson Pollock, with his groundbreaking drip or “action painting,” is closely related to the development of Performance Art as, for the first time, the act of creation itself became the subject.

Mid-century film and photographs of Pollock wildly flinging paint from his brush as he danced over the tops of his canvasses are legendary. Representation, narrative and form seemed to fall away in this dynamic new type of painting. It was not such a big leap then for artists to abandon paint and canvas altogether in lieu of pure action and performance.

As a witness to the heyday of this new type of art, Jim Vredevoogd taught decades of Edinboro art students to open their minds to the power of the artistic concept. He taught “Time/Space Workshops” and gave assignments based on activities such as eating pie and cake in unison for an audience, spilling tin cans from a box and making group-constructed sculptures afterwards, and spilling water on a slight decline and tracing the line it made, just to name a few. His classes exposed hundreds of young minds to cutting-edge art theory and the radical experiment of Performance Art.

Then after 30 years, Jim retired and it was time to lower the curtain, at least for the moment. He returned to painting in the late 80s and produced an impressive body of work in the ensuing decades. But, a funny thing happened on the way to the painting studio – Performance Art followed him! He assembled a motley cast of characters – man with a bowler hat, ravens, bald baby dolls and Mexican puppet figures – who came together on a regular basis to perform in his colorful, dreamlike compositions telling tales of ancient mythology, human psychology and everything in between.

With nods to the great 20th century Surrealists Dali, Magritte and de Chirico, Jim Vredevoogd has brought his own artistic journey, theories on life and history, and love of prescient, teachable moments to his canvasses. In doing so, he shows us the many worlds and planes his mind travels and we think you will enjoy the journey.

After all, everyone loves a good story.

Artist Statement

James H. Vredevoogd



The Prevalence of Science, 1978
Acrylic on Canvas
55"x43"
Courtesy of the artist

My work has had one common theme since I returned to painting in the 80s from nearly 10 years of practicing and teaching performance art. That theme is the recognition of what R. Buckminster Fuller called “event aggregates” as our only perceivable reality. Modern physics has shown us that there is not a single solid object in the universe - the entire cosmos is in transition. One could say the word cosmos itself is a verb rather than a noun. The poet Eli Seigel described his poetic perception as “Things having to do with each other.” James Joyce in “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,” draw on Aristotle’s “Poetics” and Thomas Aquinas “Art is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an aesthetic end.” My role then is to make aesthetic unity out of the chaos of the visible world, which includes what science has been able to present to us, from the Hubble telescope images to the electron microscope to the “cabbages and kings” of everyday reality. Science has expanded our knowledge immensely in what we are able to perceive, both the “sens-ible” and the “intelligible” aspects of it. So, as an artist, I am free to draw from, that is “dispose” (arrange) the past with the present, the sacred with the profane, the unseen with the seeable, the conscious with the unconscious, symbolism with metaphor and to celebrate my being alive in such a marvelous time and place. My early instructors showed me the intricacies of the forces inside a rectangle and the interaction of color, which I extrapolated out of two and three dimensions to the fourth dimension of time/space. That knowledge now comes back with me to the illusionary world of the canvas. My paintings then are not an “imitation” of reality, they are an intimation of reality. They are clues to a priori mystery.

An Interview with the Artist

Ruth Grim: In the vein of “starting at the beginning,” tell me a little about your very early years and when you might have known you were going to be an artist.

James H. Vredevoogd: In the first elementary school I attended in Flint, Michigan, hung a landscape painting that I saw every day as we first graders marched down the hall to the bathrooms. It was a scene of a creek running beneath a high stone bridge with woods along the banks and you could see up to the sky through the trees here and there. I'll never forget how awed I was at someone being able to do that with paint. As I grew older, I started to look in art supply stores with my mother on shopping trips and convinced her to buy me some watercolors and artist paper pads. I also began to pour over the “How to Draw and Paint” books. I am sure that landscape painting was the initial impetus for wanting to learn how to make pictures. It never left me.

RG: In your teaching years at the Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, you seemed to be particularly drawn to Performance Art. Why?

JV: I had never heard the term “Performance Art.” I had heard of Alan Kaprow’s “Happenings” but dismissed them as participatory events and arty novelties. I got into the art of the fourth dimension by teaching two-dimensional design and non-objective painting. I reasoned at that time that the

rectangular space of the canvas was too restricting (see the Picasso photo in *Zut Alors, Le Rectangle* in the exhibition) and moved off the canvas into the room, then into a sequence of structured events based on the underlying generalized principles of visual art. I called them “Performance Art” for lack of a better descriptive term. I may have been one of the first to use that term. After a few years of working with my students, we founded the Edinboro Performance Ensemble and did pieces at art festivals in Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio, New Jersey, Rhode Island and New York.



Zut Alors, Le Rectangle!, 1969
Acrylic on Canvas
28"x32"
Courtesy of the artist

RG: You were teaching Performance Art in its early years – how exciting/difficult/interesting was that?

JV: After asking my students to make art works that moved off the canvas into the room, I decided that what we were doing no longer fit the course description. I then developed a course called “Time/Space Workshop” that was open to anyone, not just art majors at senior level. It began with two-dimensional concepts and moved from there to the walls, rooms and larger contexts such as gymnasiums and spaces between buildings, stairwells, etc. It was exciting to see how quickly the students grasped the principles and ran (literally) with them. One negative aspect was that students outside of the class didn’t grasp the art. For example, once a mouse got into the candy machine on the second floor of the art building and left the tray half filled with chewed paper off of the candy wrappers. One student walked up, looked at it, put in his money and received one third of a candy bar for his trouble. He was heard to grumble, “I thought it was that damned Time/Space class again!”

We did have a couple of run-ins with the police, but in one piece, the town constable was actually in the performance.

RG: Some of your earlier paintings seem to be more about showing parallel planes or universes and less about representational metaphor and/or telling a story with human (or otherwise) figures. Can you remember when you made the shift to representational paintings that have a specific moral or story to tell and what caused that shift?

JV: Simply, the American invasion of Vietnam and Iraq and their

aftermath put me into a situation similar to the French 19th century painters such as Gericault and Goya. I had to express my opposition to the madness of war but do it in my own idiom. In short, I used the imagery of war to make a visual statement.

RG: I see the influence of Performance Art in your paintings in that many of them seem to have some kind of performance going on even if the figures may not know they are in the midst of one. Did you notice that happening in the course of your renewed interest in painting?

JV: Yes, and it was a deliberate choice. I had learned so much about art from my own study, as well as the contributions of my best students, that I wanted my paintings to bring that enigmatic quality of action back to the static world of painting by implication of activity beyond the frame of the canvas. I want people to be drawn into the painting, to pique their intellectual curiosity.

RG: You have mentioned that great writers and theorists such as Carl Jung, James Joyce and Joseph Campbell have influenced you significantly. Can you describe some instances of how their influences are most apparent in your paintings?

JV: Poets and painters always have much in common in that they work with images; but psychologists, biologists, anthropologists, mythologists and physicists look deeper than the common person to what underlies our lives. The paintings in the exhibition that have equations, images from cyclotrons, the Hubble space telescope, mythic figures, religious symbols, etc.

are drawn not from writings about art, but from writers in the forefront of human research outside of art. Whatever presents a view that resonates with my own perceptions becomes the “stuff” out of which I construct paintings. Representation or depiction is therefore necessary for the viewer to enter into the painting. Abstraction can’t do that; it can only make allusions, similes and metaphors.

RG: References to Native American and other religions are also prominent in your work – can you explain some of the related symbolism?

JV: Native American world views contrast greatly with arrogant and avaricious European invaders who murdered, poisoned, stole land and penned them up in “reservations.” Private property itself is a notion ridiculous to people who see the Earth as their provider and sacred mother. The “sacred ground” golf course elements in my paintings are an attempt to throw light on that contrast in values.

RG: Regarding other influences and symbols that often show up in your work – the dolls, game of golf, crows, bluebirds and man wearing a bowler hat – can you give the viewer a clue as to how one should “read” these symbols?

JV: In some paintings the “actors” are stand-ins for people, just as “Punch and Judy” or the “Muppets” are. Birds, for me, are an image of the spirit. Crows are a feathered intelligent society that

flies without machines. They are a potent Native American symbol of human qualities, failings and power as in the Crow Nation of the plains. Magritte’s black hat is a nod to the painter himself, whose work is an early influence along with other surrealists Salvador Dali, Buñuel, M.C. Escher and others.

RG: As a non-artist, I’ll ask a question many of us outsiders often wonder – what makes you pick up the brush and paint? In particular, does it happen spontaneously or come from dreams? Does the idea of the painting develop over time, or all of the above?

JV: All of the above. Most of my work grows out of internalizing my reading in the sciences, literature, Buddhism, poetry, perennial philosophy and comparative religion.

RG: When they move from northern regions, artists often comment on the different quality of the natural light in Florida. Did you notice this when you moved here? Did it affect your palette or the depiction of natural light in your paintings?

JV: I can’t say that Florida had any direct effect on my work, except in the painting *3, 30, 60, transformation*, which is based on a Kwakiutl wooden mask that opens up to reveal two more levels inside. The first is of an eagle, a clan figure. The second level is a personal fetish, in this case a bear. The third is the actual face of the individual (also a mask concealing the person within, the everyday mask we present to the world). In my painting it represents the three stages of man; myself at

3, 30 and 60, the year I retired from teaching and moved to Florida. Thus, the Florida landscape surrounding the three-headed figure is drawn from my own photographs of an island near Cedar Key.

RG: Finally, what do you have in store for the future? Are there any ideas, themes, events, etc. that occupy your thoughts and might inspire you to render them on canvas?

JV: To answer this question, I have to broaden the response to include what draws me to paint at all. It was John Cage, the composer, artist and writer who said, “Art changes because science changes.” In my artist statement, I make reference to both the philosopher Ken Wilber and the great James Joyce to put my work in context to the viewer. Ken Wilber’s essay “In the Eye of the Artist: Art and the Perennial Philosophy,” he talks about the artist having and using three different eyes. These are “the eye of flesh, the eye of mind and the eye of contemplation.” The first eye perceives the world of the sensible, or the world perceived through the senses - the physical world. This is the representational tradition of depicting physical things like people, places and things. The second eye is the eye of mind and what mind makes of the world - namely, the symbolic, conceptual and linguistic perceptions. This is usually found in physics, mathematics and ideas of reality unseen by the eye of flesh. Examples might include Pythagorus, Euclid, Einstein, Hawking, and James Joyce’s “Finnegan’s Wake” and the stories of Carlos Casteneda, as well as the music of Bach. The third is the eye of contemplation, which discloses the spiritual, transcendental and transpersonal world; the world of dreams, visions, spirituality and consciousness or, as Alan Watts wrote in

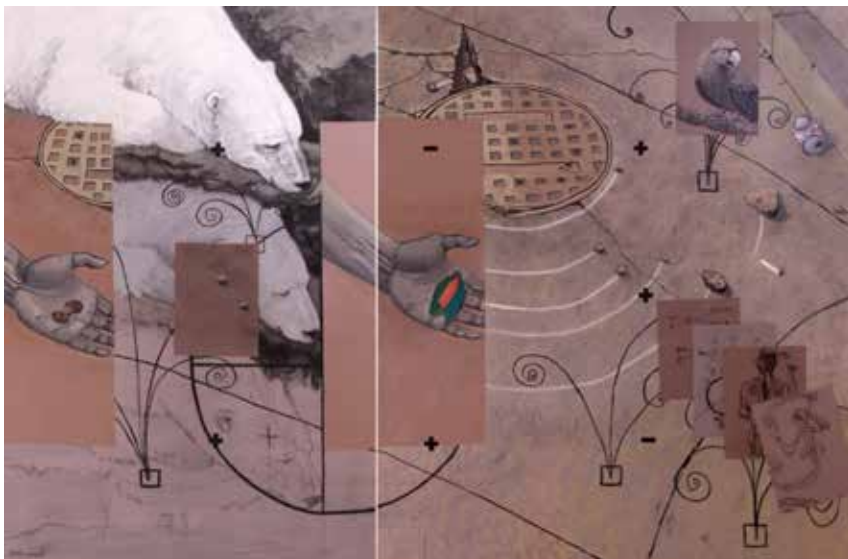
“Beyond Theology,” as “Man as the behavior of a unified field.” Examples may be found in artists like Dali, Magritte, Pat Steir, James Rosenquist, Zen poems of Busen and Basho, Taoist writings of Lao Tzu and in Hindu texts and scriptures. All three of these “eyes” at once inspire and underpin the paintings in this exhibition and will, I am sure, keep me happily going forward into the future.



Astronaut, 1982
Acrylic on Canvas
50"x60"
Courtesy of the artist

opposite:
Play Room, 1998
Acrylic on Canvas
66"x39"
Courtesy of the artist





Going, Going, Gone, 1980
Acrylic on Canvas
93"x60"
Courtesy of the artist



Enantiodromia, 1980
Acrylic on Canvas
71"x51"
Courtesy of the artist

Opposite:
On Feynman's Porch, c. 1980
Acrylic on Canvas
36"x48"
Courtesy of the artist

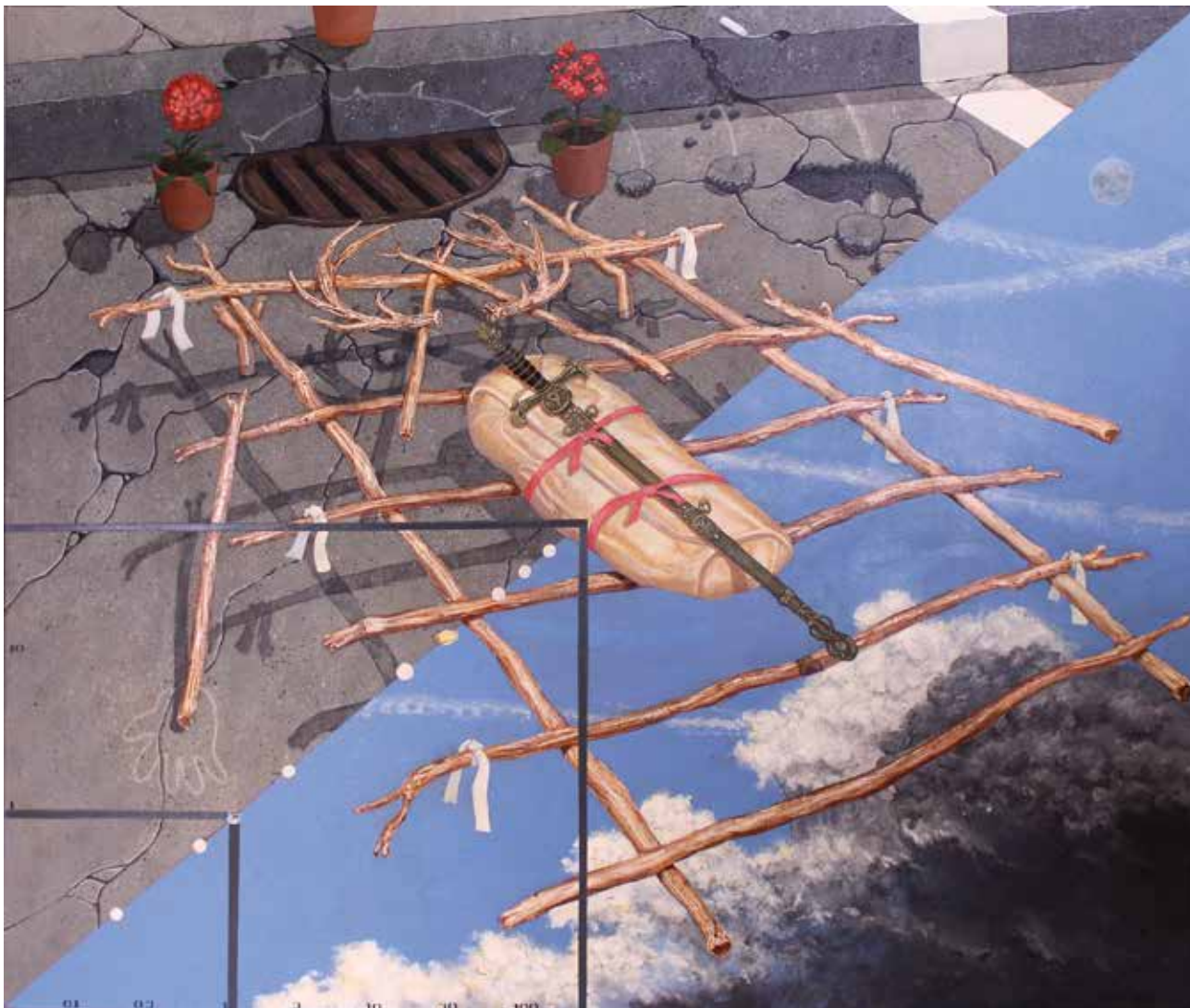




Bode's Law: The Prevalence of Scientific Knowledge, 1986
Acrylic on Canvas
60"x42"
Courtesy of the artist



Patterns of Organic Energy, 1982
Acrylic on Canvas
60"x120"
Courtesy of the artist



Hero's Journey, 1995
Acrylic on Canvas
65"x76"
Courtesy of the artist

opposite:
Accused, 1997
Acrylic on Canvas
62"x42"
Courtesy of the artist





Waiting for Orpheus, 1997
Acrylic on Canvas
49"x54"
Courtesy of the artist



A Sacrifice was Needed, 2007
Acrylic on Canvas
61"x51"
Courtesy of the artist



Stiff Breeze from the West: Axis Mundi, 2001
Acrylic on Canvas
61"x41"
Courtesy of the artist





Performance #6, 2001
Acrylic on Canvas
40"x50"
Courtesy of the artist

Opposite:
Three Dances (African, Ghost, Spanish), 2010
Acrylic on Canvas
120"x63"
Courtesy of the artist



Observed by Crows, 2009
Acrylic on Canvas
52"x42"
Courtesy of the artist



"The Barque", 2011
Acrylic on Canvas
63"x51"
Courtesy of the artist



Twelve #One, 2008
Acrylic on Canvas
36"x42"
Collection of Mr. Tom Lane





Island of Duality, 2013
Acrylic on Canvas
24"x48"
Courtesy of the artist

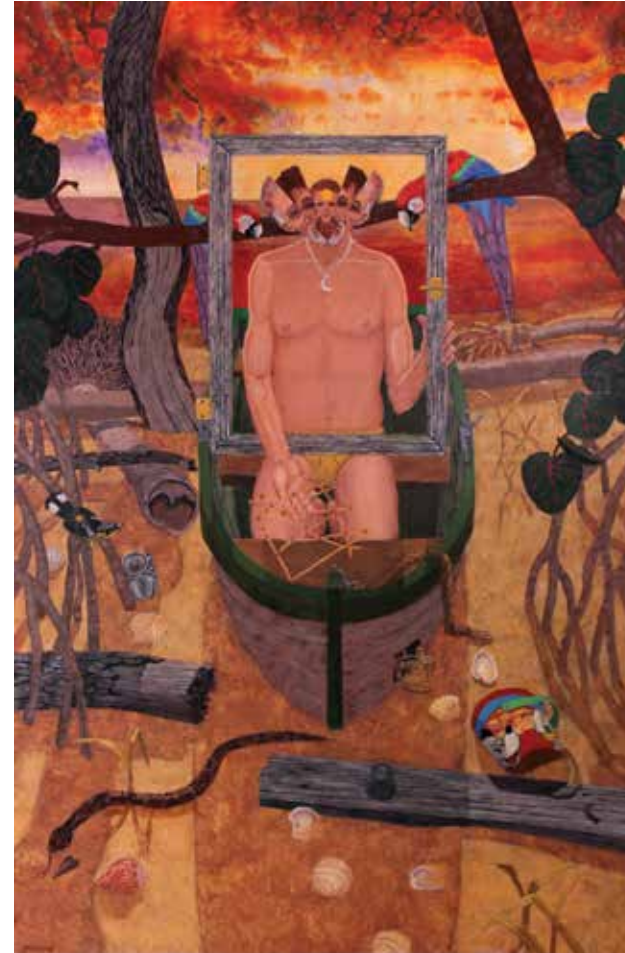


Conscious/Unconscious, 2014
Acrylic on Canvas
24"x48"
Courtesy of the artist

Opposite:
Landscape with Figures, 2011
Acrylic on Canvas
60"x40"
Courtesy of the artist



Double Cross, 2010
Acrylic on Canvas
48"x72"
Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Roy Reynolds



3,30,60 Transformation, 2009
Acrylic on Canvas
71"x51"
Courtesy of the artist

*The Man in Black Turns:
For Robert Bly, 2009
Acrylic on Canvas
50"x60"
Courtesy of the artist*





Return of the Goddess, 2010
Acrylic on Canvas
50"x74"
Courtesy of the artist



Portrait: Brazil, 2009
Acrylic on Canvas
48"x55"
Courtesy of the artist

Exhibition Checklist

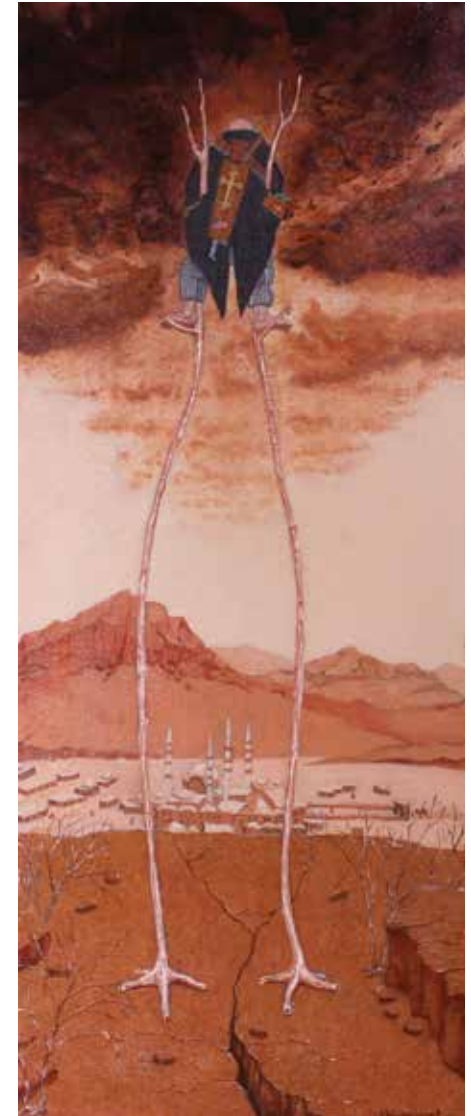
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Acrylic on Canvas
43"x54"
Courtesy of the artist |

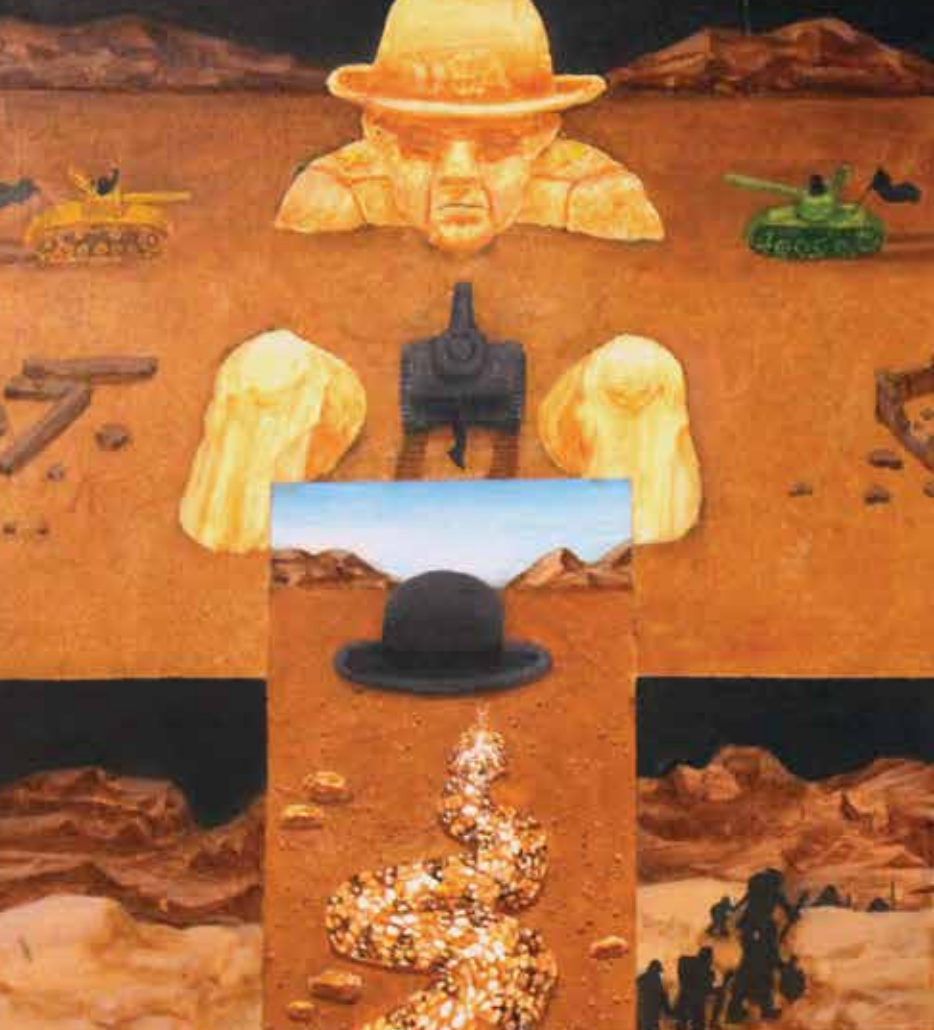


19. *Twelve #One*, 2008
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Collection of Mr. Tom Lane
20. *The Man in Black Turns: For Robert Bly*, 2009
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31. *Island of Duality*, 2013
Acrylic on Canvas
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32. *Van Gogh Abandons the Field*, 2013
Acrylic on Canvas
63"x45"
Courtesy of the artist
33. *Two Arrows*, 2014
Acrylic on Canvas
43"x54"
Courtesy of the artist
34. *Conscious/Unconscious*, 2014
Acrylic on Canvas
24"x48"
Courtesy of the artist
35. *Mission Impossible*, 2009
Acrylic on Canvas
50"x60"
Courtesy of the artist

Horseman, 2007
Acrylic on Canvas
24"x48"
Courtesy of the artist





Mission Impossible, 2009
Acrylic on Canvas
50"x60"
Courtesy of the artist



On back cover:
Van Gogh Abandons the Field, 2013
Acrylic on Canvas
63"x45"
Courtesy of the artist



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