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More Than Just Pen and Paper

Contributed by Shannon Collins

Young American artists deal with political subject matter in surprisingly subtle and abstract ways. Such is the case in the small gouache-on-paper narratives of Christopher Davison, 28, a Philadelphia artist who has made a name for himself with his brightly colored, emotionally tense paintings and drawings.

Looking at the complexity and sheer talent of Davison's figurative ink and gouache drawings, it's impossible not to be impressed. His work depicts nightmarish prophecies while containing stylistic references to what he describes as being, "the ills of America." Davison achieves a high level of emotional tension in his oft-ominous work, juxtaposing brightly colored scenes with dark, violent subject matter that speaks of government corruption, moral decay, and over consumption. His work feels lyrical and spontaneous, but manages to stay very accessible - something about the simplicity of a mere pen, the schoolboy fantasy doodles, the "Where's Waldo?" level of his detail. "I've always drawn since childhood, but it was at college in Florida that I realized it was time to get serious. I saw Picasso's "Vollard Suite" at the Cornell Museum and felt so stirred that I changed my major to drawing the following day at the university," said Davison.

End of Summer, a recent series, conjures a surreal world that has a sinister undercurrent and is densely populated with Davison's signature ambiguous, beast-like characters. In this series, figures are seen reclining in backdrops that have undeniable Boschian visions of the future. The characters and scenes in Davison's paintings are endowed with everyday attributes, as well as historically and culturally-loaded signs such as masks. Floating in the midst of crisp, white paper, Davison's scenes resemble children's illustrations that hark back to "Where the Wild Things Are." In exploring these ideas, Davison has developed his own personal symbolism, and his Goyaesque fantasies unfold with a recklessness that is intricate, but uncomplicatedly enjoyable.

"I try to get as focused as possible and approach each drawing with a high degree of intensity and spontaneity. Nothing is planned beforehand. I don't know what the drawing will be until it is finished - it could take ten minutes to finish or I could end up working on it for a month. The most important part of the process is to attempt to remove myself from the process," Davison said.

When he's not in his studio at the Crane Arts building, Davison works as a freelance designer and is currently teaching a pre-college drawing II class at The University of the Arts.

"Whereas most jobs require that you put your life as an artist on hold while you're on the clock, teaching allows you the wonderful opportunity to continue the dialogue in a public setting," said Davison. "It's great to work with a student over the course of a semester and see them develop and grow as an artist and as a person. It's very rewarding on multiple levels. I also like the structure that a job gives to my schedule. There is something about having a little less time that allows me to focus a bit more when I'm in the studio."

Davison has also exhibited in Rome, where he lived and worked in 2005. His work has been on display at Jenny Jaskey Gallery in Philadelphia, Fette's Gallery in Los Angeles and Pierogi Gallery in Brooklyn, NY. Davison's most recent set of drawings can be purchased in Café Royal's Issue Two at www.caferoyal.org. For more information on Christopher Davison, visit www.christopherdavison.com.

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