

From to TAOS LAOS

NEW MIXED-MEDIA PAINTINGS BY ERIN CURRIER WILL BE ON DISPLAY AT BLUE RAIN GALLERY THIS SEPTEMBER. BY JOHN O'HERN

Leaning against the wall in Erin Currier's Santa Fe studio is a panel bearing the lines of the Sacred Geometry that underlies all representations of the Buddha as well as all creation. On an easel is her painting *Wu Ma (Dark Horse) as the Buddha* that is based on those principles and proportions. On their travels in Asia, she and her partner, Tony Hassett, came upon the subject sitting beneath a tree surrounded by his paintings. A former gang member, he is portrayed as the Buddha (who obtained enlightenment sitting beneath a Bodhi tree). His figure is composed of bits of trash that relate to his story.



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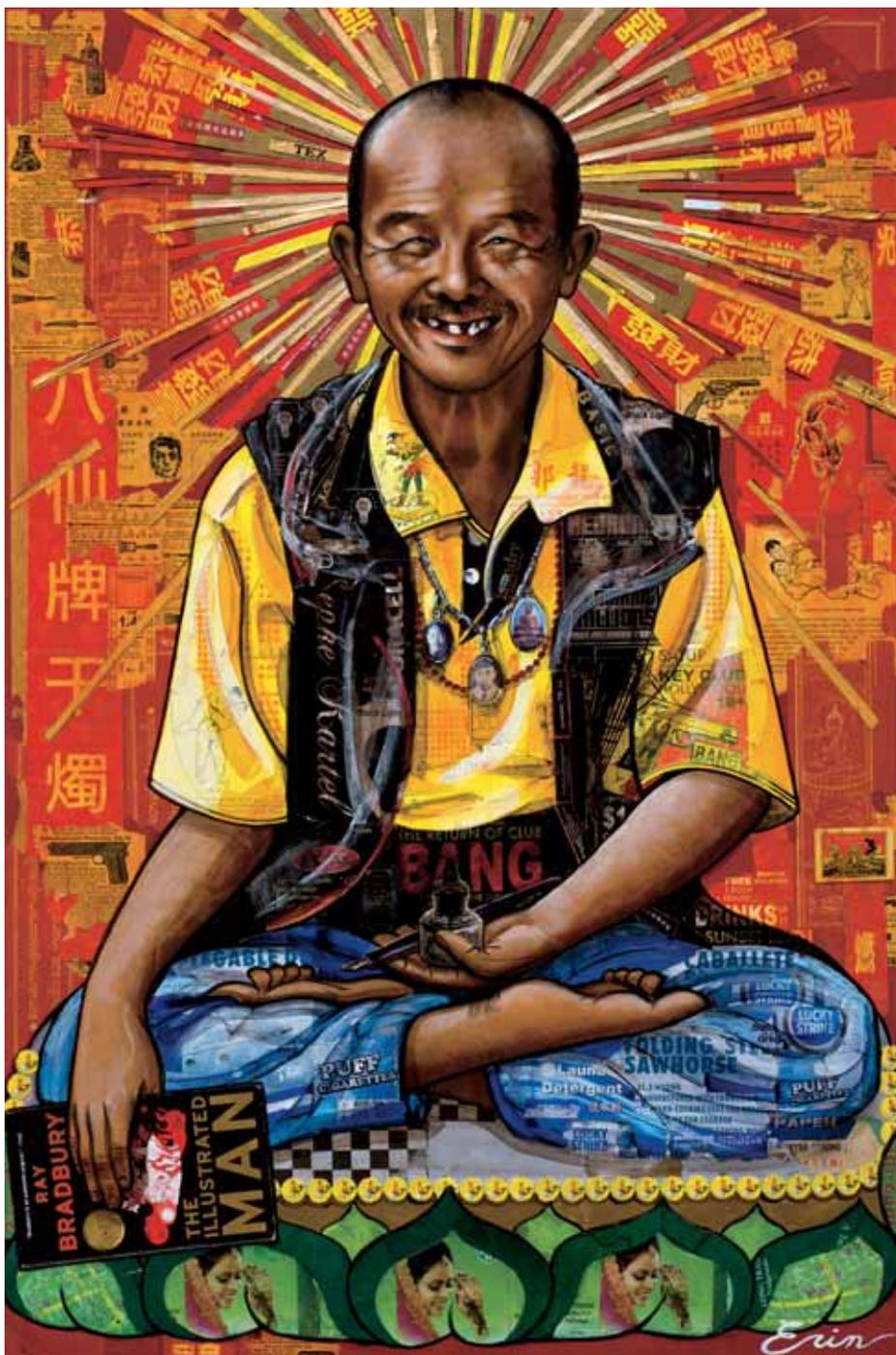
Neatly stored away in plastic bags sorted by color and continent are trash and garbage Currier has brought back from around the world to incorporate into her work. Her travel journals are full of her impressions recorded on site as well as sketches of the people she meets and the settings they live in. Currier finds the universal in the mundane and the divine in the worldly.

The study of people, their essence, and their relationship to their environment is called *ontography*. "My art-making concerns and process are three fold," she explains. "First, as a traveling ontographer documenting through drawing the

1
Angela Davis as the Green Tara, acrylic and mixed media on panel, 48 x 48". Private collection.

2
Art tools in Erin Currier's studio. Photo by D'Nelle Garcia Photography.

3
Wu Ma (Dark Horse) as the Buddha, acrylic and mixed-media collage on panel, 36 x 24"





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4 Erin Currier in her studio. Photo by D’Nelle Garcia Photography.

5 *Tuk Tuk Gaucho*, acrylic and mixed media on panel, 72 x 60"

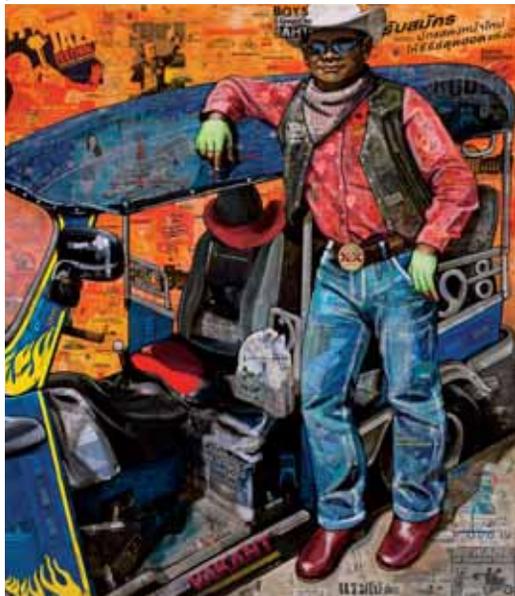
6 *Guadalupe*, acrylic and mixed-media collage on panel, 36 x 24"

environments that I encounter abroad; secondly, I collect discarded ephemera from the streets of the world; finally, I incorporate the above findings into portraits that celebrate figures who resist or defy authority, as well as people who exist outside of their societies’ conventions.

“The discarded waste is re-transfigured into, hopefully, something of beauty; in the same way that discarded human beings, who are the subject of many of my portraits are, themselves, re-contextualized through the privileged position of portraiture, historically relegated to oil barons and kings,” she continues. “My use of trash is thus a poetic incantation—a call for a counter power rooted in the imagination.”

Her travels have taught her “that our commonalities as human beings far outweigh our differences. Divisions are often either superficial or artificially created based on racial, economic and

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national ideologies. Where we are similar is of a more profound philosophical, metaphysical caliber: the bond between brothers, the love between mother and child; these run like threads in the great fabric of generations.”

Both Taos and Laos “share a culinary desire for hot chili; an affinity for Western films, cowboys and, surprisingly, low-rider culture, as well as tricked-out cars and beauty queens,” she explains. “On a deeper level, both regions share similar encroaching ecological and economic impacts, yet manage to sustain powerful indigenous communities with strong cultural traditions. Buddhist temples, alleyway shrines and household altars in Southeast Asia are as prevalent as adobe chapels, roadside descansos, and household nichos inhabited by santos are in New Mexico. In both locales, the personal relationship between individuals and the divine feminine—embodied in the form of Kwan Yin in the former and Our Lady of Guadalupe in the latter—run as deep

as the Mekong River and the Rio Grande, respectively.”

Currier explores New Mexico traditions in her diptych *Fiesta Queens VI*, celebrating the fiesta queens and low-riders. She brings in images of Southeast Asian beauties in a banner along the top. “I admire their upholding tradition in the face of urbanization,” she says. “The local traditions center more around the values of family life—a different value system from the Miss America Pageant.”

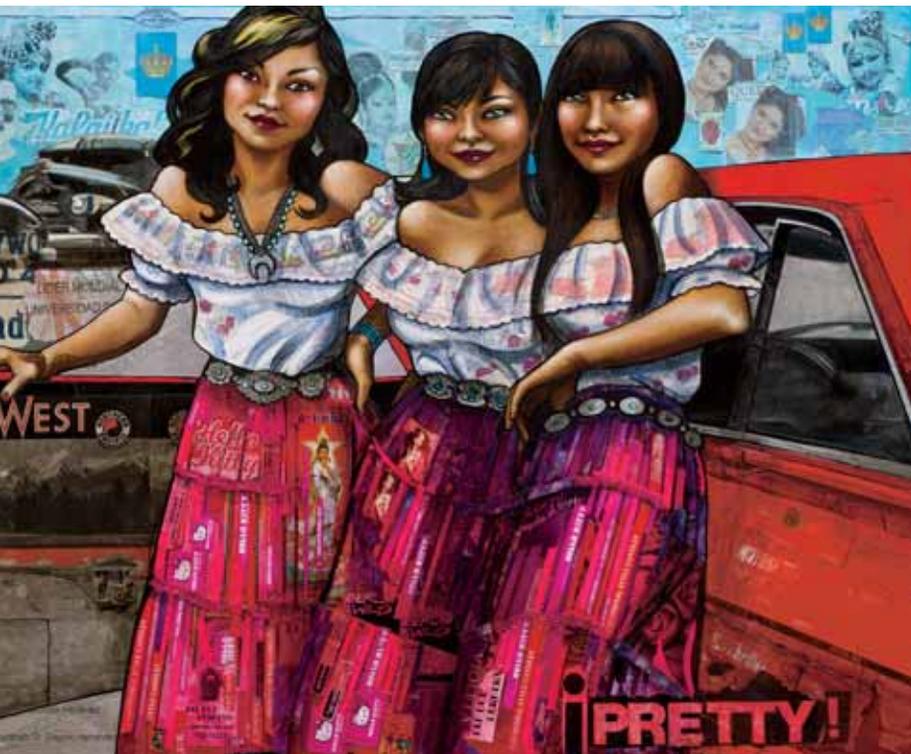
The fiesta queens’ skirts are made up of trash relating to Hello Kitty, a Japanese advertising icon. Hello Kitty has been drawn without a mouth because she “speaks from the heart. She’s [the company’s] ambassador to the world and isn’t bound to any particular language.” The young women wear Navajo concho belts, representing a more proximate cultural crossover.

When Currier was looking for a way to express the principles of Buddhism in contemporary America she discovered

the civil rights movement to be the ideal subject matter.

One of the manifestations of the Buddha is Tara, the goddess of universal compassion. When represented as a Green Tara she represents action as well. Currier chose to depict *Angela Davis as Green Tara* in an earlier work in her *Liberation Series*. Davis, an activist and scholar, wears handcuffs in recognition of her once having been on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted Fugitive List. The handcuffs are only attached to her wrist, recognizing that she was captured, tried and found not guilty.

The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared miraculously on the cloak of a Mexican peasant in the 16th century. She is a potent symbol in Mexico and throughout the Southwest. Currier depicts *Guadalupe* as an Asian woman holding a water container on her head. There are references to her celestial role in the words “Royal” and “Por Amor” along the edge of her sari. The red container has a



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Fiesta Queens VI (diptych),
 acrylic and mixed media
 on panel, 36 x 98"

Studio photo below
 by D'Nelle Garcia
 Photography.

second meaning, however. It can also be a gas can providing fuel not only for internal combustion engines, but for revolutions. "It can carry the material to make a fire or the material to put it out," she says.

Her figures are philosophers, activists, workers, women—all "struggling for human dignity...I believe people are good," she says. "We're conditioned to be afraid of one another by false divisions that are imposed from the top."

Currier studied costume design and worked on theater set design at the College of Santa Fe. After college she worked in a coffee shop in Taos and was shocked at the amount of material that was thrown away, at how "aesthetically pleasing it was, and the art and design that went into making it." She began gathering the material and created a series of Buddhas in 1998, which she showed at the coffee shop. The proceeds from her art sales funded a journey to South Asia as well as to Italy and Spain. Art sales continue to fund periodic trips to discover and to "experience compassion, wisdom and goodness in the contemporary world."

The universality of her themes attracts a broad spectrum of collectors from Hugo Chávez, the former president of Venezuela, to Coretta Scott King; from Bernardo Bertolucci to Mel Gibson; and from Whoopi Goldberg to Carlos Santana.

Her latest work will be in the exhibition *From Taos to Laos* at Blue Rain Gallery in Santa Fe, September 12 to 27. ●



ERIN CURRIER: FROM TAOS TO LAOS

When: September 12-27, 2014

Where: Blue Rain Gallery, 130 Lincoln Avenue, Suite C, Santa Fe, NM 87501

Information: (505) 954-9902, www.blueraingallery.com