



Artist—"Craig Carlisle"

By Sarah D. Goldstein

Noted artist, Craig Carlisle is currently holding a solo exhibit in Los Angeles. Carlisle has exhibited his work in New York, San Francisco, and throughout the Midwest. Now his recent work can be seen at the George Billis Gallery, located at 2716 S. La Cienega Boulevard in Culver City from February 15 through March 26, 2005, telephone number is (310) 838-3685 and website is www.georgebillis.com. The Gallery is open Tuesday-Saturday between 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Although Carlisle's work has been part of several L.A. art exhibits with other emerging major names in the art world, this new show focuses entirely on his recent mesmerizing acrylic work, which has a complexity and charm both optimistic and healing.

His paintings evoke emotions reminiscent of childhood innocence and are infused with serene happiness, joy and yet have a hint of melancholy. Carlisle has created a new type of soulful folk art which speaks directly and strongly to the viewer. He creates a "still moment" in his narrative art by juxtaposing recognizable elements while at the same time using minimal, sometimes flat color, for the background. A complexity is built around the emotional and psychological context of the work. The figures he paints are inanimate, sometimes single heads or double heads sprouting from the same set of shoulders. Carlisle explains, "My work is about communicating something optimistic, almost healing." His figures are anonymous, and at times nude, genderless, almost childlike. The artist relies on the traditions of folk art, Surrealism and naïveté of his "soulful" innocent figures in this series. These mysterious individuals live in their own worlds with their own thoughts, they convey to us only what we, as viewers, want them to convey—a sometimes sad interpretation of our society. Yet Carlisle is optimistic, "I paint to see people's reactions, each work has a different relationship with the viewer."

This is Carlisle's fourth solo exhibition with the George Billis Gallery. Three other shows were done in New York at the Billis Gallery located in Manhattan's Chelsea Art District.

Whether one chooses to sell his or her artwork or to give it away is of no consequence. Creating is a journey. When I paint, I feel a sense of completion. The process of painting helps me discover myself, and I am continually searching for new direction. I find in the depths of my soul an outlet for expression."

"I'm into interpretation," he said. "I may feel something and paint something, that's my interpretation. But then I want you to interpret what I've done, maybe even discuss it. Two birds, for example, one holding a branch, the other holding a sword. What does that mean? It's up to you; it's up to me."

"Teddy Bird in the Big City"



(8 "x 8 "acrylic on panel)

Craig Carlisle was born in Oklahoma; he received his BFA from Columbus College of Art and Design in 1988. While attending CCAD, Carlisle spent summers as an intern at the Nimbus Gallery in Dallas where he was influenced by the large-scale oils of the Native American artist Fritz Scholder. "I liked the drama, the mystery, the passion in the brush strokes, the isolation of objects, and the size of his paintings."

Carlisle lived in New York for a year-and-a-half, selling his work as an independent. "I worked countless hours struggling to make my own way, constantly feeling the pressure of survival," he said. "Painting is a commitment to self-integrity. I do it alone and I do it for myself. I believe that channeling my spiritual self onto a canvas creates an image of truth and that there is a great responsibility to being an artist. Artists are brought forth into this world in order to express themselves creatively and to teach.

The message one communicates may have a significant impact on the viewer, as is evident from the effect of movies and music. Yet, there is even more of an impact from the fine arts.

A painting one creates has the potential to pass from one generation to another and makes a statement not only about the artist but about the caretakers of the art. One may simply toss out an old CD or a video, but one rarely does that to a one-of-a-kind painting. There is a unique voice in the dried paint on a canvas. The marks represent hours of love, labor, and soul-searching.

Carlisle left New York City with gratitude and experience. He set-off to embark upon another chapter in his life in San Francisco. "It wasn't easy to walk away from the heartbeat of the material world. I look back knowing my guardian angels were accompanying me," he said. He looked forward to what the Bay area would offer him. He explains, "I lived in a city with a reputation for change and diversity, something that exemplifies my very being. I always knew that the landscape of Northern California resembled the contours in my paintings and each day I gathered new references for my work. San Francisco had always been a destination that I knew I would achieve. When I would look into the eyes of the Big Head paintings, I knew they were telling me to take this leap of faith. Putting my soul onto a canvas allowed me to see the truth in my life."

Today, Carlisle resides in Los Angeles, but he never forgets his roots in Columbus, Ohio, NYC, San Francisco and the people who have assisted him along the way. He continues to visit and hold exhibits in these cities.

Carlisle is very much involved in charity and foundation donations and auctions. He has been an integral part in Art For Life/Art Auction which supports the Columbus, Ohio Task Force. The auction is held in Columbus, Ohio at the Columbus Museum of Art. Carlisle donated a large painting and was featured artist at this event which is held every two years. About 230 artists, both local and from across the nation, have donated pieces. "As an artist, I have a personal interest (in the fund-raiser) because there are friends, artists I've lost because of AIDS. It's a personal honor to be in the show," Carlisle said.

After the terrible events of September 11, Carlisle checked in with close friends in New York City who he had remained in contact with since his days as a resident. Together they decided to assist the New York Firefighters 9-11 Disaster Relief Fund by donating some of their work to a silent auction. The auction was a rousing success. All proceeds went directly to the fund. With the help of Sharon Weiss, owner of Antiques and Art on Popular in Columbus, Ohio a wonderful event was created in less than 24 hours.

Carlisle will open a new exhibit on April 1 in Columbus, Ohio and will continue through April 30, 2005. The exhibit will be held at the Sharon Weiss Gallery, located at 20 East Lincoln Street, in Columbus, telephone number is (614) 291-5683 and website is www.michaelhoza.com/sharonweiss. The Gallery is open Thursday-Friday Noon to 4:00 p.m., Saturday Noon to 5:00 p.m., and Sunday 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.