

KARSTEN CREIGHTNEY

Paper Visions



516 ARTS

February 4 – April 1, 2017
Albuquerque, New Mexico



Outskirts, 2016, collage, watercolor, acrylic, oil & wax on canvas, 66 x 78 inches

516 ARTS is an independent, nonprofit contemporary arts organization, operating a museum-style gallery in the center of Downtown Albuquerque. 516 ARTS offers programs that inspire curiosity, dialogue, risk-taking and creative experimentation, showcasing a mix of established, emerging, local, national and international artists from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Programs include exhibitions, collaborations with museums and organizations around the region and beyond, public art projects, talks, workshops, youth programs, performances and more. 516 ARTS is made possible in part by major support from McCune Charitable Foundation, The City of Albuquerque, The FUNd at Albuquerque Community Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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Open Tue – Sat, 12-5pm

KARSTEN CREIGHTNEY

Born 1976, Lives in Albuquerque, NM

EDUCATION

- 2011 MFA, The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM
- 2001 Tamarind Institute of Lithography, Professional Printer Training Program, Albuquerque, NM
- 2000 BA, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, OH

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Paper Visions*, 516 ARTS, Albuquerque, NM
- 2016 *Off the Record*, Inpost Artspace, Albuquerque, NM
- 2015 *Common Ground*, Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, MI, Muskegon Museum of Art, Muskegon, MI
Visualizing Albuquerque, Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, NM
- 2014 *The Bold and the Beautiful: African American Masterworks from the Collection*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne, IN
Black and White, Inpost Artspace, Albuquerque, NM
History and Hope: Celebrating the Civil Rights Movement, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO
- 2013 *Indelible Images: The Politics of the Social in Contemporary Art*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne, IN
- 2012 *Karsten Creightney: Works on Paper*, Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, MI
Once Upon a Time: Prints and Drawings That Tell Stories, Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI
Local Exposure, Selby Fleetwood Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
New Voices, New Visions, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne, IN
- 2011 *Celebrating Diversity in Art*, Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, MO
Wishful Thinking: New Paintings and Prints by Karsten Creightney, SCA Contemporary Art, Albuquerque, NM
New View: 17th Annual Juried Graduate Exhibition, Tamarind Institute, Albuquerque, NM
- 2010 *Zanatta Editions*, Sherry Leedy Gallery, Kansas City, MO
Emergent Visions: Young Antiochians Make Art, Herndon Gallery, Yellow Springs, OH
Inprint II, SCA Contemporary Art, Albuquerque, NM
- 2008 *Crossing*, Harwood Art Center, Albuquerque, NM
Splash: 14th Annual Juried Graduate Exhibition, UNM Art Museum, Albuquerque, NM
- 2007 *At First Sight*, Jonson Gallery, Albuquerque, NM

COLLECTIONS

Antioch College, Yellow Springs, OH
Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AR
Beach Museum of Art, Manhattan, KN
Belger Arts Center, Kansas City, MO
Bernalillo County Public Art Collection, Albuquerque, NM
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH
Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI
Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, MI
Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne, IN
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, MI
Muskegon Museum of Art, Muskegon, MI
Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO
Springfield Museum of Art, Springfield, MO
Tama University Art Museum, Kyoto, Japan
Tweed Museum University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN
Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery, Nashville, TN
Wichita Falls Art Museum at Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, TX

COVER: *4th of July Picnic*, 2016, collage, silkscreen, watercolor, acrylic, oil & wax on canvas, 56 x 44 inches

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His voracious curiosity about art's role in history means we cannot avoid what Karsten Creightney has contributed to this moment in our voracious living history. Partly that's because the scale of his offerings are dimensional not only in size, subject matter, materials. In his words, the heart of things is "worn on [his] sleeve."

That advertisement for me advocates unabashedness combined with humility. Creightney refers to himself as a "very slow learner," someone who in younger days felt worlds away from technical prowess of European Renaissance and Dutch masters, leagues apart from El Greco and Velasquez. Their times and subject matters appeared too far afield, a full understanding of what they portrayed or portended elusive. But it wasn't much time before repeated open-minded returns urged by the safety of his family, his schools, their books, and those doors began to gradually swing open.

He discloses how aspects of his training, their emphasis on old ways of hierarchical mastery, are what turned him away from those previous eras of artistic practice. He strives instead to maintain a constant sense of autodidacticism. "I never want to stop apprenticing." Thus his tendency propels a commitment to liberal arts without fear of veering into unexpected or uncharted territories.

Retreats into the natural world also provide ongoing tutelage. Those and adventures in foraging, pulling materials from thrift stores and discarded books, layering them with matter and inquiry without caution about how they might transport him and his viewers into unexpected places. He says such improvisational impulses are in response, in part, to contemporary academic and art market fixations with conceptual art. The trick, according to Creightney, is not to fear ubiquity, not to fear subject matter if it veers hazardously close to derivative or what he refers to cheerfully as overplayed. (In fact, labels of all sorts be damned for their impositions and superficiality.)



"If I want to paint flowers," he laughs, "then gawd-dammit, I'm going to paint flowers."

Lightheartedness is part of how he renders what others might press into hackneyed imagery. How he's capable of playing with and in contrast to a subject of conventional beauty the recurring flower figure in ways not prescribed by traditional precedents.

There were moments he wondered whether it was viable to fixate on a subject we find ourselves yawning at, glazed over at in a hospital waiting area or a sterile hotel room. It's viable. With head-on pursuit of multiple mediums, offset and highlighted with multiple fields of information. With rabbit-skin glue to preserve the integrity of what

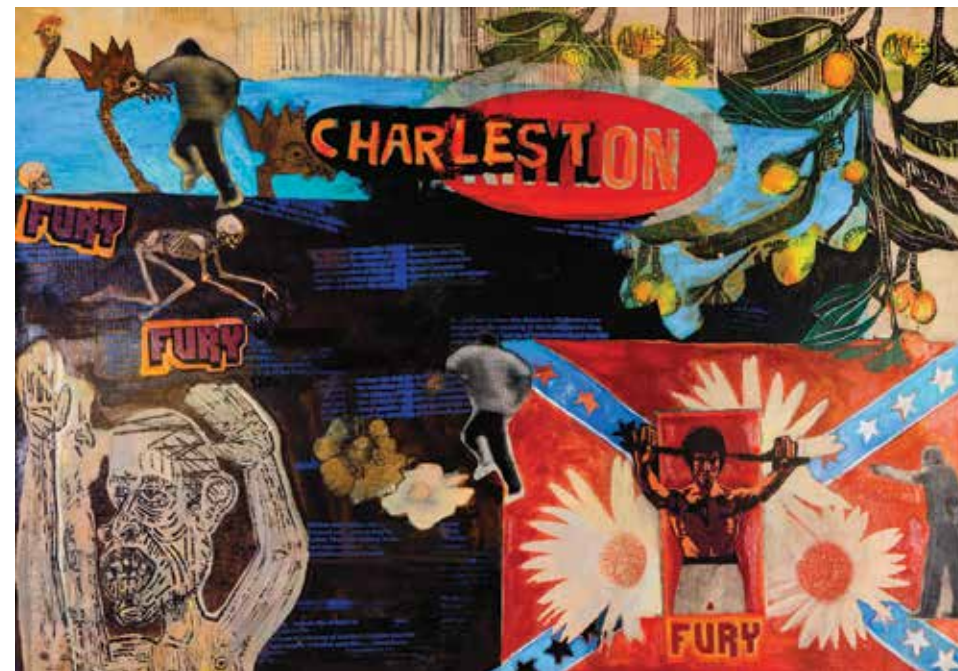
Arab Spring II, 2013, lithography, silkscreen, ink & colored pencil on paper, 30 x 22 inches

others refer to as a canvas. With layers of pasted paper, thin mixtures of wax, varnish, linseed oil. With printmaking pressure that sinks one thin piece of Japanese parchment into a thicker base. It means great lengths to smooth it into a complete carrying vessel. And for work so antithetical to superficial, the surface is one of the essentials.

Speaking of precedents: What I read as (cheeky?) references to early Andy Warhol's floral work, Creightney says are grateful and unabashed acts of homage. He loves, after all, that Warhol implanted a conversation with the culture of mass production still buzzing, loves learning through imitation by adopting some of the same processes that Warhol did in his frenzied pursuit of imitation. The Warhol way of making work implanted a kind of new dialect into the world of art, a license to give its practitioners, Creightney among them, an abiding lack of inhibition.

"It's in his spirit that I'm stealing and borrowing." (Again, laughing.) Such full transparency in methodology means weight and depth of his pieces manage to simultaneously wholly complement and counteract other forms of sincerest flattery or thievery. His *Lagoon* woman was "straight-up lifted" from Gauguin's *Woman By the Sea*. (It had to be done. "She's a gesture of pure beauty.") There are also nods to David Hockney's deconstructed Western landscapes photographs, though Creightney's are an invocation of serenity, an idyll imagined rather than imprinted or constructed.

He's considered making work more polished, more precisely packaged. Stints in academia instilled how to distill polished descriptives, but those exercises also taught him that those are "against my nature." Rather he tries to exert a "push and pull between deliberate intention" and what materializes, morphed by reactions to the materials he collects and manipulates. Not immune to the manic barrage of political discourse that only seems to have picked up steam and vitriol and volume, "but it's also so exhausting and infuriating, that I have to escape into my own worlds--peaceful worlds that only exist in the imagination."



Self Portrait as Walter Scott, 2016, collage, silkscreen, watercolor, acrylic, oil & wax on canvas 28 x 40 inches



Lagoon, 2016, collage, silkscreen, watercolor, acrylic, oil & wax on canvas, 66 x 78 inches

And "I don't want to shout," he says, nor does he confront with aggression. Rather he extends an invitation, provides the space and time he's been allowed in his own life for asking disconcerting questions, for expelling anger and frustration in compelling forms rather than reacting. He's seen people turn away hardened, lacking transformation, when they're "immediately hammered with the point."

His wariness of the potential of art to comment on civil society with exploitative methods is palpable. "I'm not living in the ghetto. Cops aren't harassing me on a daily basis. Talk to me on the phone, and you'd probably not have any idea I'm black." The question, then: Is the maker's right to explore such subjects, to take any ownership, to benefit from an awful extreme?

A film that struck him, *13th*, omitted Walter Scott's killing by a Charleston police officer per wishes of Scott's family. And yet a still frame trimmed out of the worldwide sharing of his visible death notice meant Creightney felt not only "fury" and horror, but that "as an artist it's also my place to acknowledge countless things," no matter how they incite feelings that simply cannot be contained. His *Arab Spring II* piece, for one: Creightney describes its background as a field of noise. But that field feeds crops, bloom bursting through what others see a desert. Not unlike the places he calls home, places that can peel eyes open with drought or depletion, beauty brimming from a wilderness unaccustomed outsiders might overlook as too harsh, too brown, too barren. Too fertile to crave shelter.

— Margaret Wright

Freelance journalist from New Mexico, residing in Washington, D.C.