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Written by Jessica Meng on Tuesday, 05 May 2009 20:29



Second Chances

Artist Winston Torr narrowly escaped death and found his life's passion.

Canadian born artist Winston Torr was raised in Los Angeles, and is now spending his time conquering the Berlin art scene. Of Chinese and Mongolian descent, hints of his heritage can be seen in his artwork. He speaks four languages: English, Mandarin Chinese, German, and Spanish and obtained his Bachelors Degree in Fine Arts and a minor in Graphic Design from California Polytechnic State University, Pomona. Winston worked a routine 9-5 job until a near death experience altered the course of his life towards his passion for art.

What do you want people to know about you and your art?

Creating my art is not only about expressing how I feel about the world but also how I feel in the world, in my environment, in my time. That's why I use newspapers to draw on. This body of work deals with the human figure and puts it in relationship with the daily news of a globalized world. I use newspapers of various languages that

reference my cultural and racial background as well as places that I live in and travel to.

By literally making the drawings part of the newspaper page, the three-dimensional charcoal drawing create a dialogue with the mostly two-dimensional space of news items. This dialogue makes my personal—and at times intimate—experience of drawing the models part of the news—my news. Furthermore, the date on every newspaper page places my creative interaction with the depicted person in time—and into my personal "history". The technical rawness I like to keep in these pieces are a direct translation of my psychological experience in a day-in, day-out society.

What inspires you?

People who live life and have goals.

Does your cultural background influence you?

To a certain extent, yes. I'm Chinese-American and when I was around 5 or 6, my mother would teach me how to paint on a porcelain vase she would create from her pottery class. She would make an extra vase just for me to practice on. I mention this is because she would paint flowers, birds, and Chinese characters on the porcelain vase.

I always loved watching her do so. The Chinese characters definitely made a lasting impression on me. The black and white characters translate somewhat to the black and white figures that influence what I draw today.

What artists influence you?

I have always been fascinated with sketches of Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci. These sketches strike me as an undisguised 'skeleton' of the finished works. I find the unfinished rawness of them very appealing and honest.

Which of your own pieces is your personal favorite?

Answering this question is like asking a parent which child is their favorite. I favor all of my pieces because each piece deals with a live figure model. The connection that the model and I establish to produce that one art piece is valuable in retrospect.

What is your favorite medium to work in?

Charcoal on paper, but now I am also getting into Acrylic and Oil Paints and I have started doing murals.

Do you think you see the world differently from people who aren't artists?

I guess artists do see the world differently. Yet, I believe every person is an individual with their own unique set of experiences anyway. See, for example, one night in 2003 I was hit in the street by a hit-and-run driver who still remains unfound. I nearly died and spent 5 weeks in the hospital recovering with a severe broken leg, massive tissue, skin and nerve damage, and a tube in my leg attached to a device that plugged into the wall. I nearly lost my left leg and my life. It took more than six months to learn to walk again. Needless to say, this deeply personal and painful experience was a life changer. That following year, I decided to do what I always wanted to do, so I quit my office job and moved to Berlin to be an artist.

What advice would you give aspiring artists?

Keep on drawing, challenge your goals and focus on good things in life.

What is the craziest thing that's happened to you in the art world?

This year would be the craziest actually! Working together with business partner Michael Urbschat and a furniture company named Bauhaus Zitat in Germany, I will be having my own limited edition household collection, which includes items such as lamp shades, tiles, light switchplates, coffee tables, vases, and espresso cups. If this goes well, it would be a continuous thing in the future I will also be working with the architecture company Konturbau to paint commissioned murals for every model home or building they build. I am also planning to publish a book of an exciting body of work in which I spent one whole year doing. It's a year's worth of self-portraits, one done on each day of the year. Basically, the tables are turned in this self-portrait art book project as I challenge myself with life study portraits as my own model.

All this is pretty crazy to me as I've never been so busy in my art career. Things are really starting to Rock 'n' Roll!

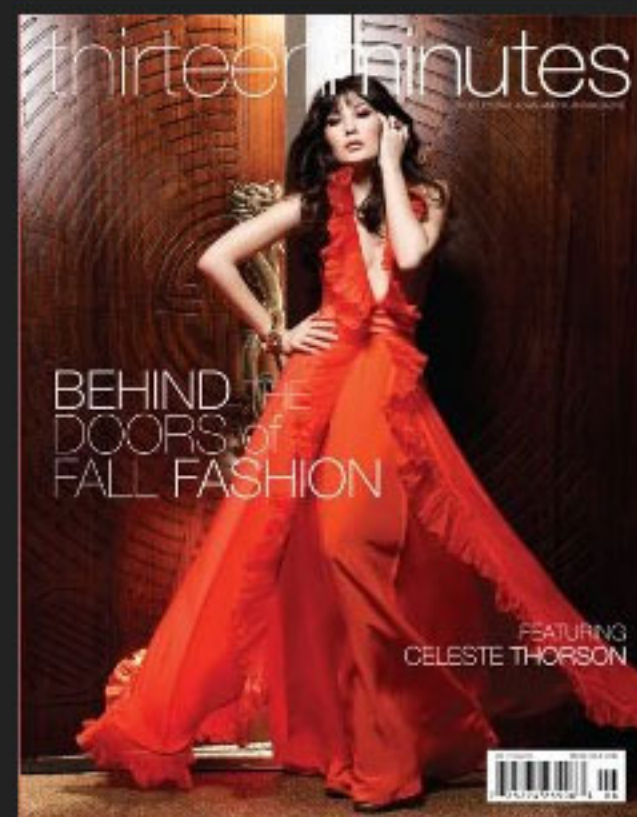
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