

ERIN CURRIER – A GENTLE CRUSADER

By C. Whitney Ward from the blog "Chasing Santa Fe"

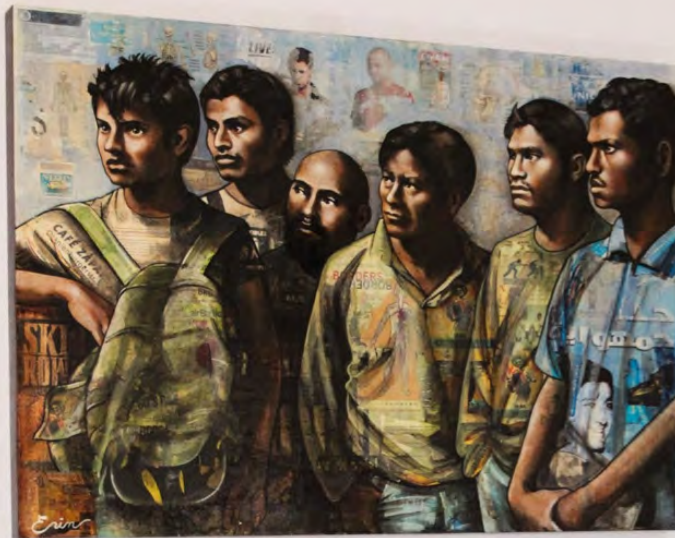
Photography by C. Whitney-Ward



I first met contemporary artist ERIN CURRIER a year ago at her BLUE RAIN GALLERY opening. What struck me immediately was the dichotomy between her powerful and exuberant collage portraits and the ethereal demeanor of this beautiful, smart, soft-spoken woman.

Like an actor stepping onto a stage and assuming a character, Erin's passionate inner voice unfurls onto her canvases, a vibrant chronicler of the human struggle – both tangible and philosophical.

"I am a humanist artist for whom art and the social world are inseparable."





Her subjects – street workers, prostitutes, patriots, unsung heroes, activists, all struggling to maintain their pride and individual voices – take center stage on her canvasses along with recycled trash that speaks volumes to what society discards and de-values.





Erin invited me to visit her home and studio and graciously answered a few questions that I posed. Her words create a verbal portrait of this amazing young woman who has been described as a “force for spiritual, social and political change.”



Q. What 'triggered' the Saint series – BEATIFIED FROM BELOW – and what do you like best about this body of work?

To recognize and honor through painted collage portraits individuals who embody timeless spiritual qualities, is the raison d'être of my art. By using "post-consumer waste" gathered from the world's streets, I transform profane materials into sacred art. My quest to highlight the extraordinary within the ordinary individual life, has led me to portray Bodhisattvas, civil rights workers, and, ultimately, (mostly female) Catholic saints.



In the same way that I attempt to transform humble materials into aesthetic works; these women often led humble and quietly compassionate lives that were, nonetheless, admirable enough for their peers to pressure the church on behalf of their transformation into sainthood. In this sense, the saints I have portrayed were “beatified from below.”

Q. Who was Santo Toribo Romo and why did you choose him for this portrait. Can you explain the recycled inclusions, why were they chosen and how do they add dimension to the work?

I was working on a series focused on immigration, and came across Santo Toribio Romo: the Patron Saint of Immigrants. He was a priest in Mexico in the early 1900's. He was said to have been extraordinarily faithful, fearless, austere, and compassionate to the point of depriving himself of basic necessities in order to alleviate the sufferings of others. In 1927, religious persecutions began with the onset of the Cristero War; Romo was killed at dawn on February 25, 1928 by government troops.

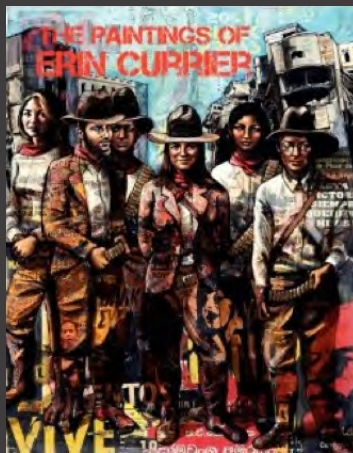
Many undocumented Mexican immigrants crossing the perilous border into the US, have since claimed to have been visited, assisted, and guided by Santo Toribio Romo. He often appears driving a blue pickup truck. In light of recent draconian laws in Arizona and elsewhere that criminalize immigrants, Romo's compassion is more welcome than ever.

Much of the materials in the piece reference Romo's life: there are pieces of old maps from the Mexico/US border; club cards from Berlin on which is written Soul Explosion; the gasoline can has multiple significances: it references the gas cans used by immigrants crossing the Sonora Desert border to carry water; it is a reference to the gasoline can as an insurrectionary weapon against an oppressive state; it also references fuel/ the spirit needed to alight a thousand votive candles, or to ignite a revolution...



Q. Books are everywhere in your home and in your Saint Series. Tell me the importance of books in your life?

First and foremost: I love to read! Stylistically, I have intentionally placed an emphasis on books in recent series of works. The books that appear in my portraits are an extension of the subjects' individual biographies, and an homage to literature itself. I also see my use of books as an act of resistance against the demise of the written word in our digital age.



For me, this has been an exciting couple of years in that I was fortunate enough to have my own work published in book form: in “The Paintings of Erin Currier” (a monograph of 150 or so of my collage paintings), and “Carnet d’Asie” (one of my travel journals – this one from journeys through Asia in 2005), both published by CSF Publishing; thus the value of books is especially important to me. A book is a mosaic of intellectual power as well as spiritual labor – it is a vital expression of the human imagination.



Q. You travel six months out of the year and are leaving soon on a 3 month journey to Southeast Asia. Will this trigger another series? Do you sketch each day and do these trips effect you or your work?

Yes and yes! The more I travel the world, the more people I meet from places so distinct from my own world, the more my interactions with people reveal a depth of human nature that I find profound – profound in the fact of our similarities.

I try, in my work, to transcend as much as I can such things as borders, religions, ideologies, and show what I have found again and again to be true: that most of us have, beneath our conditioning, substantial links; our shared curiosity, our tendencies toward inquiry, our spirit of struggle, our ties as brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, daughters and sons.

The dark side of humanity is very real to me, but I've met many warm, intelligent people in my travels. This warmth is where I feel the strongest affinity as an artist to Latin American muralists like Rivera, and those who continue to work in this lineage.

SKETCH BOOKS FROM ERIN'S TRAVELS – EACH A GEM



Final Question

Q. If you choreographed your collage/paintings to music... what would we hear?

Bob Dylan! In his songs and in my paintings, you hear the ballad of the subject – not the singer and the painter. I like to think that you would hear music “from below,” ie, the music of immigrants, exiles, workers: border corridos, Columbian cumbia, Argentine tango, gospel from the Deep South, old Appalachian folk songs, gypsy ballads, hip-hop, soul – music that is often born of poverty but is rich in heart and spirit.

Just one more painting...

Erin – center holding her parents as babies. Love it!

