

ERIN CURRIER'S ART disassembles elements of geography, spirituality, economics, and politics to reconstitute them as wonderful splices of the human condition. Part travel journals, part aspirational abstractions, her collage paintings and drawings invite the viewer to examine notions of privilege, strife, and agency as lived by individuals and communities around the world.

"Art can lower people's defenses so they connect on the familiar level first," says Currier. "With a lot of my pieces, viewers will say, 'She reminds me of my niece,' or, 'She reminds me of my neighbor.' There's this kinship and familiarity. Then it's only in the next moment that they realize she's from a different race or a different religion or a different country, and that's my hope, that the viewer is first drawn in by the familiarity."

Currier's artistic insights developed at an early age. Even before she could speak, her mother would place crayons in her young daughter's hand, encouraging her to draw. In high school, Currier used her artistic talents to connect with peers and teachers. "I was always the go-to artist in high school," recalls Currier. "I drew a life-sized Einstein for physics class, and illustrated all the crime types for law class, and I always had a lot of friends because I would do fliers for people's bands and events. But then I kind of rebelled against all that."

Turning down scholarships for art schools, Currier instead pursued a BFA in theater technical design at the College of Santa Fe. While working her way through college as a barista, she began incorporating refuse into her art, which would become a signature trait of her work. After her first successful art series, in which she created Buddhist deities out of trash collected from the coffee shop where she worked, she used the earnings from the art sales to take a nine-month trip around the world.

The journey helped shape many of her beliefs and her artistic identity. "I learned to travel with purpose," Currier says. "The quest for understanding and awareness is always being played out in a global arena. Some people say my work has become more and more sociopolitical over time, but really, for me, the spiritual and the political are always the same."

In her latest series, Currier continues to incorporate "disinherited 'waste'" as she reimagines classic works of art. These derivative creations bridge physical and immaterial separations between old and new and merge the exotic with the mundane. "By subverting, contemporizing and re-creating a masterpiece, you're also keeping it alive," says Currier. "Artists who made those masterpieces also borrowed from those who came before them. In Japanese it's called *honkadori*, which means 'picking up the melody.' I'm trying to pick up the melody, too, and honor these masterpieces by making them my own."

When not traveling, Currier says she is proud to call New Mexico home "because of artists who follow in their traditions but also subvert them to make sociopolitical, spiritual and contemporary statements. I've never seen anything like it anywhere else in the world." —Efrain Villa

# Erin Currier