

Passion, Pathos and the Human Potential



COURTESY ERIN CURRIER

A favorite of the artist from her new series at Blue Rain

Erin Currier talks Taos in Santa Fe

BY LYNNE ROBINSON

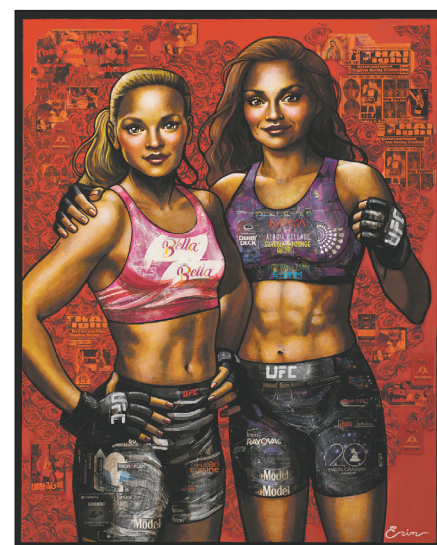
DON'T RECALL how or where I first met Erin Currier, but I've been looking at her work since her first show in Taos at the old South Side Bean – her little painted box shrines piqued my

curiosity. At the time too, Currier was painting her buddhas and bodhisattvas on the walls of the El Monte Sagrado after Tom Worrell acquired the property to build his resort

Her gallerist back then, the late Steve Parks, was an old friend of mine, and

someone who truly knew about art, so when he began representing Currier, it was clear she wasn't going to be hidden in Taos much longer.

Soon she and her longtime partner, poet, philosopher and writer Tony Hasset, moved on to Santa Fe and a new gallery. Perhaps it was closer to an airport, perhaps there were other reasons besides, but I missed seeing the two of



Currier depicts the strength of women in her iconic portraits

them around town, in-between their travels to remote and forgotten places.

Erin never really disappeared from Taos, she visits her many friends here frequently, and more often since Hasset's tragically early passing. Her upcoming show at Blue Rain in Santa Fe is her first since the pandemic took hold and seemed like the right time to check in with the artist and activist.

You have an upcoming show in Santa Fe at the Blue Rain Gallery which has a Taos connection, as do you – please tell us a little about the new work you are showing?

Yes: Leroy Garcia, owner of Blue Rain Gallery, was born and raised in Taos, he first opened the gallery off Taos Plaza; director Peter Stoessel lives in Taos; and I lived in Taos for over a decade, had my very first solo show in Taos at a coffee shop in 1998, and my very first traveling solo museum exhibition at the Harwood Museum in 2018. Some of my best friends and family live in Taos; I continue to visit regularly.

New Mexico in general has long inspired me perhaps more than any other place in the world. As an arts community, I think that New Mexico reveals its heart through its actions. Living in New Mexico has been advantageous to my creative process – for the

spirit of camaraderie in the art community here.

My new series honors human excellence in its myriad forms – be it embodied in the bright spirit of female mariachi musicians, in the powerful words of young poet Amanda Gorman, or New Mexico’s chef Fernández Ruíz – a teenage gunrunning gangster who uplifted himself and those around him through his passion for cooking and feeding the hungry.

My new works are meant to transcend our many and growing divisions imposed by power, to instead recognize that all humans suffer, and to celebrate the passions that unite us, and allow us to potentially overcome.

You were up here recently to sit on a panel at the Bob Richardson opening at the Bareiss Gallery. How did you come to participate in that event?

I was honored and delighted that artist Bob Richardson and art critic/author/curator Ann Landi invited me to participate in the panel discussion on figurative drawing at Bareiss Gallery. Bob became a friend of mine through the Tuesday Night Drawing Group – New Mexico’s longest continuously running, live, nude figure drawing group – which Dixon artist Eli Levin founded over half a century ago! Our group is unique: its members range in age from 18-88, with all levels of skill. People contribute snacks or wine, we play music, have lively and engaging discussions, banter and share laughs around renderers’ inside jokes. We also have supported one another’s solo shows and events over the years.

Your late partner Tony Hassett and yourself traveled extensively during your many years together, and you both kept journals from those journeys, documenting a pre-www - connected world. Can you talk about the journals and their new trajectory?

Not a day passes that I am not grateful for every day of the 21 years I spent with Anthony – the funniest, most hilarious, most compassionate, imaginative, sensitive, strong, talented, fearless man I’ve ever encountered. We travelled the world together on a shoestring, experiencing firsthand daily life by living to the best of our abilities how people lived. We’d travel by foot, train and bus, buy food in local markets to cook, study languages, and make friends – all the while drawing, writing, sketching ideas in our travel journals and gathering ephemera for my work.

Since he’s been gone, I’ve continued to live fully and brightly the life we built



A portrait of poet Amanda Gorman

together. I’ve returned to the places we loved, and I’ve continued to publish, exhibit and put forth both our work.

Anthony’s art – some 50 pen and glaze on moleskin Japanese albums and around 50 of my travel journals and sketchbooks, along with some of my large scale works, are now in the Tia Collection, one of the best modernist collections in the world. I am working closely with the collection, and am honored and excited to share that an international traveling exhibition is in the works – I will keep you posted!

You’ve earned a reputation as a feminist artist advocating for women of all cultures, and all walks of life, most especially those on the front lines of resistance to oppression. Can you tell us a little about your own journey to self-awareness as a woman and

artist, and how it informs your work?

What compels my artistic practice is the desire to convey that which I have found to be true in all of the countries I have traveled to – that our commonalities as human beings far outweigh our differences. The bond between brothers, the love between mother and child, the kinship shared through creative endeavors; these run like threads in the great fabric of generations.

As a practitioner of Buddhism, I believe its primary precept: that all humans suffer; that the human realm is one of suffering. Yet it is also through suffering that the opportunity of a greater understanding, transformation

Erin Currier

COURTESY PHOTO

and liberation can occur. Many of my favorite portrait subjects over the years have spoken of parlaying tremendous personal suffering into their respective passions.

Today, the pathos of individuals, and the communities they represent is hotly debated, ranked and contested – in Congress, in courts, on the streets, and on social media, as more and more people begin to recognize that institutionalized suffering – rooted in racist, sexist, colonialist, discriminatory laws and practices – must somehow be transformed, and that reparations be made, and justice realized.

Many of my subjects are engaged in this struggle. There is a very human pathos that no amount of privilege, wealth or prestige can shield one from, and that no reforms nor revolutions shall ever change. Impermanence – the truth of our own mortality and that everything and everyone we’ve ever loved will someday perish. Herein lies what unites us in our humanity; and this is what makes every moment of our lives ever more poignant and significant.

What are your plans once the show is over? Any new horizons in sight?

In addition to a number of commissions, the traveling museum exhibition mentioned above, and more publications of Anthony’s work and my own put forth by CSF Publishing. I am profoundly honored to be collaborating with Oaxacan singer-songwriter Lila Downs on her trilingual Mesoamerican Cuentos!

FYI

Passion, Pathos, and the Human Potential opens at Blue Rain Gallery in Santa Fe, Friday (Sept. 10) 5-7 p.m.; blueraingallery.com

