

Buy art that speaks to you



Tracy Nesdoly
Object Of Desire

I bought my first piece of art more than a decade ago. It transformed my life.

The painting is part of a series by the artist David C. Rutherford, a strange and beautiful picture of hip bones lined up in a row, looking as though they are both on guard and laughing, painted in oil and tar. It is eerie and strange but very elegant.

The entire series was like that: close-ups of parts of the human body we rarely see, examinations of the carapace we carry with us, distilled from the essence. I thought the entire exhibition was powerful. It melded exactly with my own fascination with the difference between body and spirit, the moment when the body ceases to be a body and the person ceases to be human, transformed by death into being merely an object.

Why was I fascinated by this? Who knows – the mystery of

From grim memories comes a joyful piece of art for me and the painter

transmogrification as per Catholic mass, the battles I've had with living within my own body (too fat, too thick, too dumb-girl, too likely to cause unwanted attention from boys I was ill-equipped to deal with). Why was Rutherford fascinated? He had lost a brother to cancer, witnessed first-hand the slow but not slow enough inexorable onslaught of terminal cancer. He watched his brother morph from being his brother to being a body on a bed.

This sounds grim but the painting isn't. It spoke to me, simple as that; it is beautiful, and it gives me pleasure even now

every time I look at it.

Since that first picture, I have collected a few more paintings, always from the same perspective. Each one resonates with me, looks like something I barely remember, elicits in me a feeling of something – I don't know – bigger than ordinary life.

My good friend Brenda has grown up with art and that would be art with a capital "A;" she travels to see exhibitions of artists she admires and has a serene and airy home filled with carefully selected pieces that are no doubt Important, or will be. I am not like that; I buy art from the heart out, as she does, but without the intellectual rigour. It's the same with clothes, really – I will always opt for the fur trim when prudence would suggest I'd be better served by something plainer. I just cannot forsake my heart's desire for what my head thinks might be practical.

However, of all the things I have ever purchased, the things that give me the greatest enduring joy are the paintings, drawings and photographs I have collected over the years, usually from otherwise starving artists, often from small galleries with discerning and kind curators who can explain to me the nuances of what I see and help me fall deeper in love.

As Tom Wolfe describes in *The Painted Word*, sometimes the story is the thing. He was suggesting this is part of the sham of modern art; I think it is part of learning to appreciate something more deeply than intuition and instinct would allow. I don't know about you but, dorky as it may seem, I've never gone wrong by renting the audio-tour in a gallery. There is more to a lot of things, art included, than meets the eye.

I've been thinking more about art recently, since my beloved friends Julie Jenkinson and her partner Michael Baumgart took their courage in their hands and mounted a show of their work last month at Xspace, a gallery in Kensington Market, under the name The Bureau of Productive Arts.

They are graphic artists by day and though their work is very different, both are true artists in the rest of their lives. Julie's work comprises drawings in charcoal and crayon, all of it animals that exist in imagination. They look oddly familiar, the animals of childhood, dreams, maybe nightmares, and their quirky charm belies an undercurrent of something else. What that something is is what keeps you standing in front of one of her pictures, mesmerized, trying to define not so much what you are seeing, but what you are feeling.

I have one of Julie's creatures on my wall, *The Surveyor of Hostility*, a wolf who watches over me — I live in a hostile world; it's good to know there's something keeping an eye out. My favourite piece in the show was a creature I will call *Yellow Monster*, which has the teeth-baring grin of a child's drawing but is infused with an adult's sense that, as scary as monsters may have seemed in childhood, they ain't nothing like those you'll face in the big bad world and you've got to just brace yourself and be brave. Or at least that's what it looks like to me.

Michael's work is different. He is a collector, picking up the bits and pieces of things we throw away, forcing us to look at these things differently. His part of the exhibition comprised double exposures that turned otherwise banal poses into something richer; he collects found photographs, the many cast-off pictures taken for every one that makes it into a frame.

One discarded photo proof had 'no good' written across its back

He showed the backs of old photographs, the flowery and wonderful signatures of the photographer, identifying the studio. My favourite was one that had "no good" written across it, apparently one of the proofs that wouldn't be chosen.

It takes courage to put your soul in a frame and hang it on the wall, to withstand the off-hand remarks of strangers who don't get it, to bravely soldier on with people laughing with drinks in their hands and their

Galleries to check out

> Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art

Projects for great emerging artists and those who dabble on the edge. Mulherin can be counted on for the provocative and quirky as well as reliably good work. Two locations, 1080 and 1086 Queen St. W.

> **Stephen Bulger Gallery**, 1026 Queen St. W. for photography. Plus, Stephen is passionate and kind; you'll learn a lot from him.

> **The Angell Gallery**, 890 Queen St. W., for provocative, sometimes alarming but always interesting work.

> **Any gallery** on Queen West, Yorkville, the Distillery District, Morrow Ave.

> **Any gallery** where you see something that catches your attention.

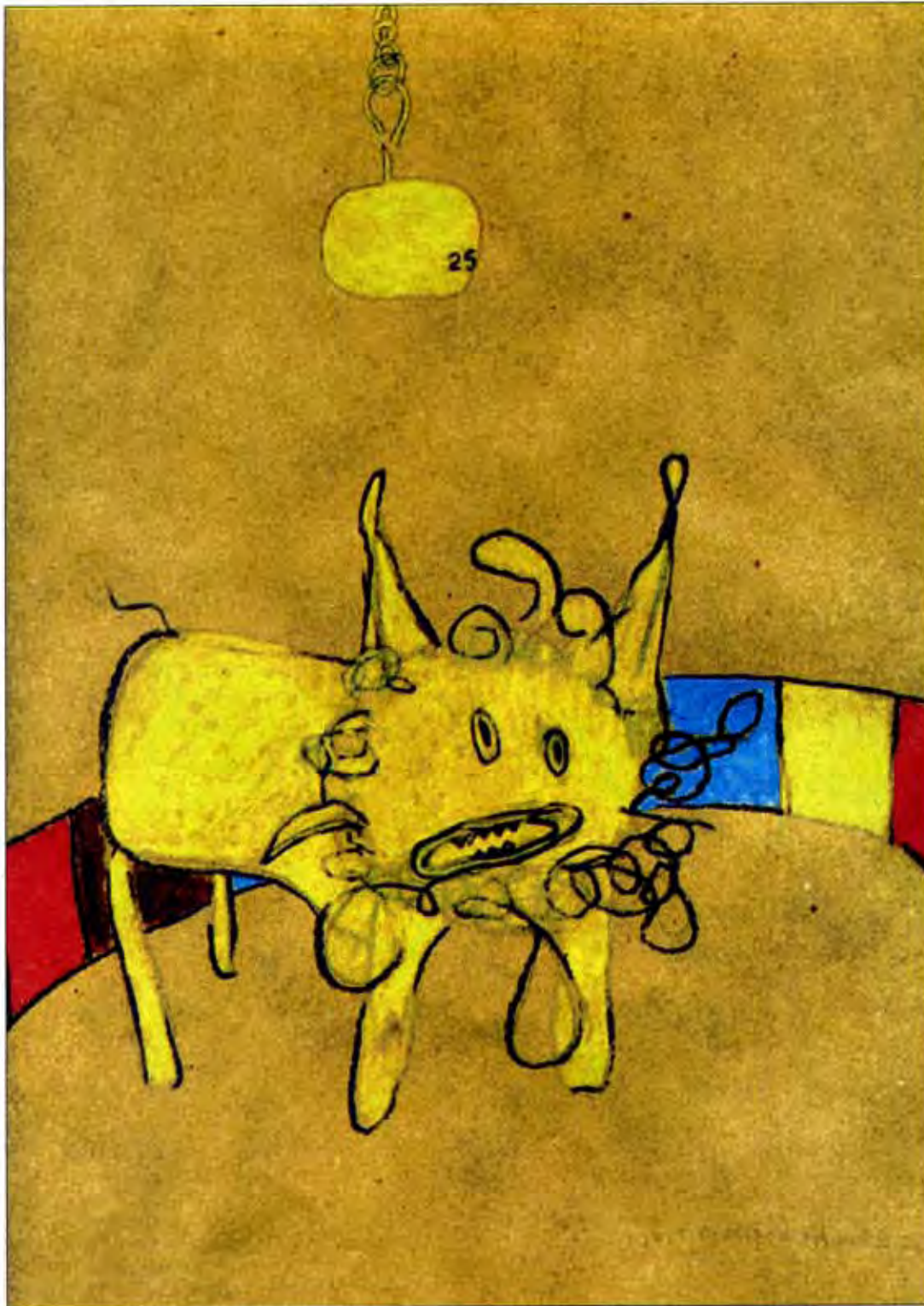
TRACY NESDOLY

backs to your work rather than showing the rapture you deserve.

It takes courage to buy art, too. It is one of the last man-made objects we are able to own. It is provocative, it is alive, it offers a centre to a home. It is the soul of a place. The art I have collected gives me a sense of peace and possibility; something in each of the pictures I own reminds me that the creative impulse is what gives my life meaning. Others may say children are the reason and purpose for life, but what is a baby, really, but the ultimate creation and collaboration by man and woman?

I believe every home requires a piece of art. Its pursuit needn't be expensive. Though art serves no purpose other than pleasure, it is something to take seriously because it will transform where you live, and will tell a tale on you. Whatever you choose must speak to you; it must, as I say, resonate with you. It is a union between you, the viewer, and the artist, it is a connection between your two souls and sensibilities. It is visceral human communication.

My view is no one should ever



Tracy Nesdoly has dubbed a piece by Julie Jenkinson *Yellow Monster*. To Nesdoly, it says, "As scary as monsters may have seemed in childhood, they ain't nothing like those you'll face in the big bad world."

buy art for its up-tick as an investment; it must always be bought by heart; it need please no one but you. If it so happens that your painting turns out to be Matisse, well, good for you.

What your picture will do is create an energy in your home. It will describe something deep within you, something beyond your choices in wall colour and sofa. Brenda, for example, innately knows how to behave appropriately in any circumstance. She is feminine; her perennial jewellery is a delicate bow necklace. Yet the picture above her bed is edgy and slick and raw in a sophisticated, demimonde way. It connotes all the things within her that she has yet to reveal, and may never reveal to any but the most intimate of friends or lovers.

Our homes are our sanctuary, especially in the frightening age we live in now. Decorate yours with the illustrations of the soul.

If you'd like to see examples what the Bureau of Productive Arts has to offer, please visit www.baumgartjenkinson.com and click on Bopa.

Tracy Nesdoly's column appears every two weeks. Write to her at tn@tracynesdoly.com