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artist scene

Adding Myth and Magic to Art

By Wendy Edwards

"People always ask you where your influences come from and where your first exposure to art comes into play," says Russ Warren, a Charlottesville-based artist who has painted magic realism for more than half his life. Warren's first impressions arrived at a very young age when what was only meant to keep a wall from looking bare became a springboard for his curiosity.



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Goodnight Little Cerberus, 1987

"I was really little. Every morning when I'd wake up, it was the first thing I saw," says Warren, who was fascinated by a Pablo Picasso print his mother had placed in his bedroom. "I was very curious what [Picasso] was trying to do in that painting. What made it really special? What was he doing?"

Out of his many questions came a desire to know how the painting world works, and like a child might pull apart a favorite toy to understand its mechanics, Warren studied art. "I was a sponge. I wanted to know about technique, medium, scale, illusion, space, color. I wanted to learn about everything. I would look at all kinds of artists often, and as much as I could."

On a trip to New York at the age of 14, he saw the actual painting in the Museum of Modern art "and I was like that's my painting! That's my painting!"

In further study, [the cubist movement] "just blew my mind, it was the kind of art that I longed to see. I was so happy to see someone else working the same

little attack method, work that could be as energized," from artists who, like Warren, experiment with shape and color and, like Picasso, test the boundaries of perception.

"I still play around with magic and myth," says 53-year-old Warren, who has since taught for 30 years in the Fine Arts department at Davidson College. His work is at home in the contemporary Les Yeux du Monde Gallery in Charlottesville. "I use a lot of symbolism and a lot of really bright, harsh colors."

While he remains inspired by the cubist movement, Warren's more recent paintings are inspired by stories of author and anthropologist Carlos Costaneda. "[The paintings] are really not stories that are pure narrative. You can look at one of the paintings and figure out what the myth is, but you have to look at it for a while. Even though the paintings are real tight and together, they're pretty complicated."

Warren's previous work has been shown in The Whitney Biennial (1981) and La Biennale di Venezia (Venice Biennale, 1984) both of which he honored; however,

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