



WATCH 16 VIDEOS IN
THIS ISSUE SEE PAGE 37

AMERICAN
art
COLLECTOR



*Also Showcasing
Glass, Ceramics & Wood*



CARL DOBSKY & CUONG NGUYEN

Making connections

For the better part of the past year, Carl Dobsky focused his energies on a large-scale work titled *Ship of Fools*. The piece, at 72 by 108 inches, was something Dobsky had wanted to paint for some time. “It’s been a very rewarding and insightful experience,” says Dobsky. “I think I am more pleased with the results of this work than I have been with anything else I’ve produced to date.”

As Dobsky explains, the theme for *Ship of Fools* has been around for hundreds of years, coming into its own in the 15th and 16th centuries with works by artists such as Hieronymus Bosch. “It usually depicts a boat without a pilot filled with deranged passengers or people who are kind of oblivious to the situation. In some cases it has been used as social commentary. I wanted to take these elements, but give the theme a personal interpretation,” Dobsky says. “For starters, I didn’t want to make it into a social

commentary where the viewer or I was somehow looking at it from a privileged point of view where we can pass judgment on the people in the boat. In fact, I wanted the viewer to sympathize with their plight. So instead of making each person an archetype of a particular social class, I tried to keep them all on the same level, or rather, belonging to no social class in particular.”

The dilemma in *Ship of Fools* is played out where the voyagers are caught between “an ideal vision and a practical situation.” The practical situation is the boat about to wash up into rocks if the passengers don’t take control, while the ideal vision is shown through the symbol of the butterfly—its delicate and fragile beauty. Dobsky also notes references to Chuang Tzu’s dream and connotations of daydreaming from the expression “chasing butterflies.”

“Between these two, the butterflies and the rocks, these people are



all stuck on a boat, and their fates are tied together whether they realize it or not,” Dobsky says. “But instead of passing judgment on these fellows, I wanted to focus on a range of reactions people would have when caught between these two poles.”

Portrait artist Cuong Nguyen explores a different narrative in his art—creating an emotional connection. “What’s important to me is to create an emotional painting. I’m

1
Cuong Nguyen, *Morning Moon*,
pastel, 14½" diameter

2
Carl Dobsky, *Ship of Fools*,
oil on canvas, 72 x 108"



not trying to get the likeness of the model, but their emotion is much more important," says Nguyen. "Thinking of humans, we don't really act as who we are in public, but there are quiet moments in life and I want to show that to the viewer. That is my goal. It is very important to transform the emotion in the painting to the viewer."

Nguyen, who works in both pastels and oils, has studio sessions with models, often taking photographs. "Usually I have the

plans for a painting first," he says. "For me, I'm always thinking of ideas. I find a model who may have the structure and face I've imagined, so I hire them and they sit for me and I work with them."

One of Nguyen's latest works is *Morning Moon*. "The painting shows the start of a new day, the start of a new time," Nguyen describes. "...the moon represents that yesterday is still here, and the start of a new day is to come—it's a hope for a better day."

Another work, *The Artist's Model*, came about when Nguyen's model and friend was on a break. "I loved the scene and asked him to pose for me like he was listening to music," he says. "I don't know what kind of music he was listening to, but it was a personal moment for him. I am, as the viewer is, looking at him as a moment in time."

These and other new works by Dobsky and Nguyen are on show at San Francisco's John Pence Gallery through May 2. ●