

Barron Storey and the Anatomy of a Commission

By Jeff Singh

Barron Storey is.

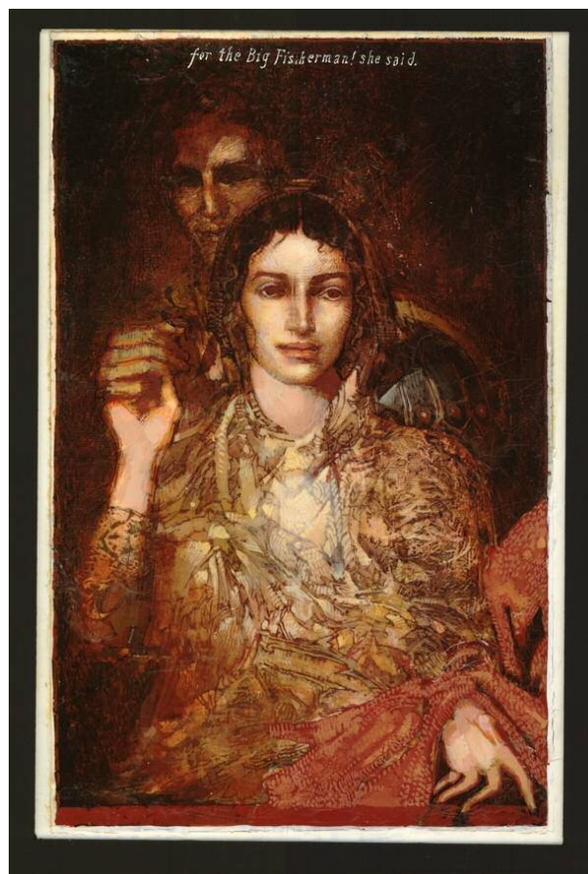
An illustrator, an innovator, a mentor, a teacher, an icon yet first and foremost an artist. He is someone who struggles with each piece he creates. Some come easy and some come with sweat and tears and anguish, or so it seems to me. His works evolve in journals as he develops ideas and refines, reworks and brews his ideas. The journal pages are his thoughts, worksheets and solutions distilled into a tangible form. These journals are legendary and they have been exhibited at the Society of Illustrators in New York City. There are a few great YouTube videos of these that are worth watching (search: Barron Storey journal exhibition). This is why I consider him an artist in the true sense of the word. He has talent and passion but from looking at his journals and his process, art is not something he just learned to do or maybe even wanted to do but something he had to do. The creativity that pours out onto the journal pages in words and pictures has given me more insight into the artist than any biography or catalog of his work. But... since I am writing a bit about Barron you are stuck with a bit of a Biography and a few highlights in his career before I get into the main focus of my piece. I will introduce you to Barron's work in the same way I came to know him, through the pieces in my collection and a few that are not.

A little bit about the man that would influence comics and illustration in countless ways. Born in Dallas, TX in 1940, he trained at the Art Center in Los Angeles and at the School of Visual Arts in Los Angeles. He began his professional career in the early 1960's and continues to produce work of importance. His career as a teacher began in the 1970's and has included teaching at San Jose State University, Pratt University and the California College of the Arts. He has given seminars at Pixar Studios. Many prominent comic artists were taught by Barron including Kent Williams, Scott McCloud and Peter Kuper. The profound influence his work had on many other artists including Dave McKean, Bill Sienkiewicz and David Mack is probably Barron's biggest contribution to comic art. His actual work in comics is limited but includes stories for Heavy Metal Magazine,

Tales From the Edge published by Vanguard and several pin-up pieces in various comics. Comics were never his career path but rather a medium he experimented in.

I must admit, a decade ago I didn't know Barron Storey but I unknowingly knew his work and was a fan of many who took inspiration from him. It was a real epiphany being introduced to his work and then having the pieces of a puzzle slowly fit together.

My first introduction to Barron's work was in person while visiting a friend's loft in Brooklyn while in NYC for a comic convention. The pieces I saw continue to resonate with me but one in particular has never left my mind. It was entitled *The Lady*. When I first saw it, I thought it was an old master's painting until I got close enough to see it well. I was mesmerized by this piece and still am today. You will see the influence of this piece reflected in some of the choices I made in finding Barron's art for my collection. The piece still remains with my friend.

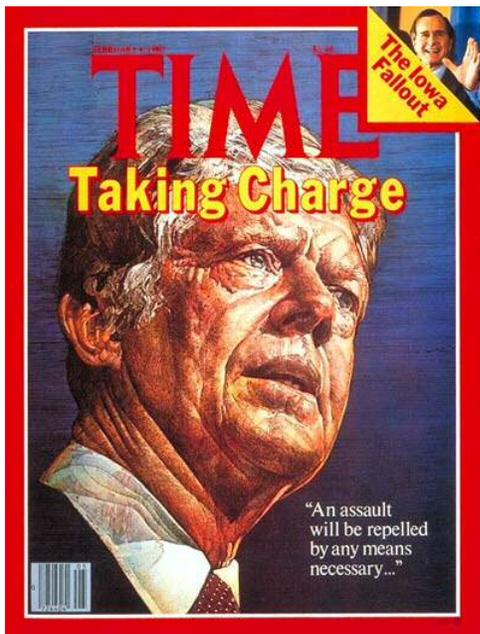


The Lady by Barron Storey (1993)

I continued to find and discover more of Barron's work and was amazed to find that I had seen his work decades before without ever realizing it. He created large, fold out rainforest illustrations in National Geographic Magazine I had seen when I was probably 8 or 9 years old. The deeper and harder I looked for art by Barron Storey, the more places I found it. I realized I had seen his art many times but was too young to attach a name to the style or to make the connection between pieces. Barron has pieces of art in the Smithsonian Portrait gallery and has done many covers for Time Magazine among numerous other published pieces. There have been several gallery shows featuring Barron's work through out the world. He has received numerous awards and distinctions for his work.



National Geographic Magazine Rainforest Illustration by Barron Storey Copyright National Geographic Society



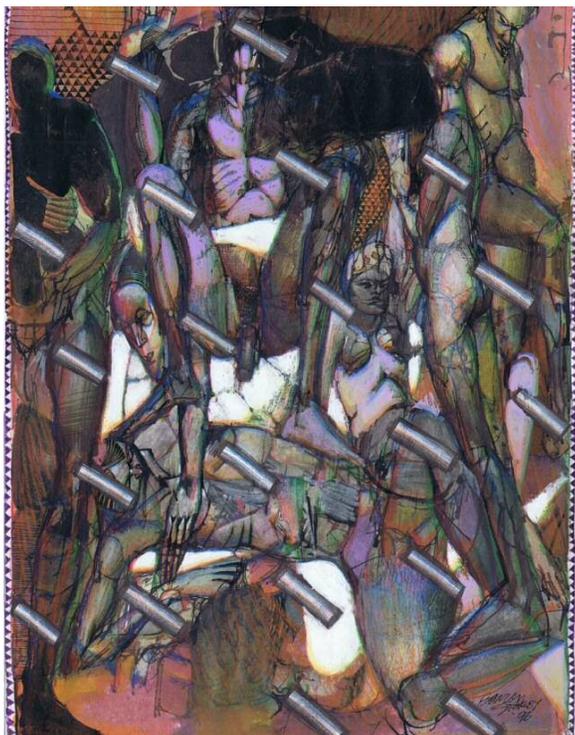
Time Magazine Cover by Barron Storey (1980) Copyright Time Magazine



Real Snake – Blade Runner by Barron Storey (circa 1988)

My first piece by Barron came to me from the same friend who introduced me to his work. He had a large collection of pieces by Barron and was willing to part with a few. **Real Snakes** was perfect for me as Blade Runner is still a favorite movie. At the time I got the piece, I had only seen a small scan and not made the Blade Runner connection until I had it in hand. It is an oil painting on a thicker wooden board with collage elements. You will notice the triangle motif in this piece. You have seen them before in the works of Bill Sienkiewicz, Dave McKean and David Mack among others. They are very much like a signature for Barron and all the other times you have seen them by others are a tip of a hat to Barron and his work. Barron discussed a bit of the African influences that led to this motif later in a correspondence. The **Real Snake** piece is from the later 80's or early 90's. There are multiple figurative elements in here and as you get a sense of how Barron works you can imagine these coming out of his journals. There is text along the bottom of this piece and text which the image is too small for you to see but reads **"If I had a real snake" She said "Do you think I'd be in a place like this?"**. This is a quote from Blade Runner by Zhora. Quotes and thoughts are common elements in Barron's journals and often later make it into the final images.

My next piece by Barron was a larger piece done on paper. It also came from my friend who got all of his art directly from Barron. This piece is a bit more characteristic of the finished work Barron does. It is largely images that have been transferred to the paper and then reworked with added mixed media including ink, paints and in this case pencil shading around the bullets.

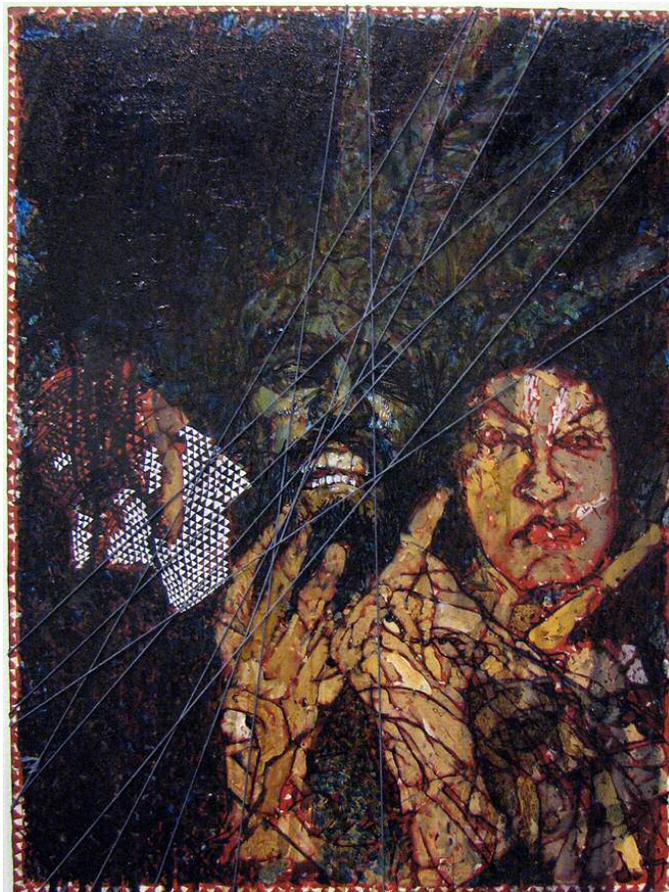


Figures and Missiles by Barron Storey (1996)

In retrospect I should have been aware of Barron's working style and how a piece like this is just as valid as a final piece as would a finished painting. It was with this piece I started asking more questions about exactly how the image was created before collecting more of his work. I will discuss my initial thoughts and conclusions about the media a bit later in the article but suffice it to say my initial reactions were more a reflection of my inability to categorize and understand the process and the art that is Barron Storey.

It would be a few years before the next pieces came into my collection. Barron had a number of shows through Anno Domini Gallery (www.galleryAD.com) in San Jose. I had found them through searching for works by Barron. I have since formed an ongoing relationship with the gallery and a substantial amount of the other art on my walls has come from them as I appreciate the aesthetics and choices they make in the artists they present. The next piece I acquired from Barron was from a much darker themed show in 2008. The show was entitled Victims. From this exhibit I bought a larger piece with some mixed media elements. It is still among my most powerful and favorite pieces of art. The main image of **Canvas 64** is composed of two portraits and what I believe is a cowering figure. The art here is mostly paints over the transferred elements.

What makes this piece particularly interesting are the strings that have been attached to the canvas and cross the canvas and hang loosely off the bottom of the art. They add an element to this piece that can't be achieved in a traditional manner. These break the image out of being a two dimensional work into something more real and tangible. From the strings comes a movement and sense of bondage which is in keeping with the themes of this exhibit. There is darkness, anguish and ugliness in this piece. I have this one on my wall and it has this presence that demands attention and reflection. The signature triangles are again used to frame this piece. The Victims show is truly a great representation of Barron's recent works and I'd suggest visiting the GalleryAD site and checking out the art under past exhibits in 2008.



Canvas 64 by Barron Storey (2008)

The next show Anno Domini did with Barron in 2009 was focused on Bob Dylan. I ended up with a smaller canvas from that show. This was a less heavy and dark show but certainly not any less thoughtful or challenging. When Barron puts on a show, there are quite a large number of pieces done with each exploring different

facets of the theme. I feel a lot of the artist's personality comes through in the themes from the wide scope of art produced. **Younger Then, Older Now** is a bit of a lighter piece yet still an interesting reflection on youth, time and age. Where did the years go? Can experience and wisdom replace the hunger and inspiration of youth? This piece is largely a transferred image that has been reworked. The underlying image is of a youthful and perhaps naive Bob Dylan with a super-imposed drawing of an older character over it. The second graffiti-like image I assume was meant to be an older Bob Dylan but to me it looks more like a self-portrait of the artist. It was this reflection on youth and age that drew me to this piece.

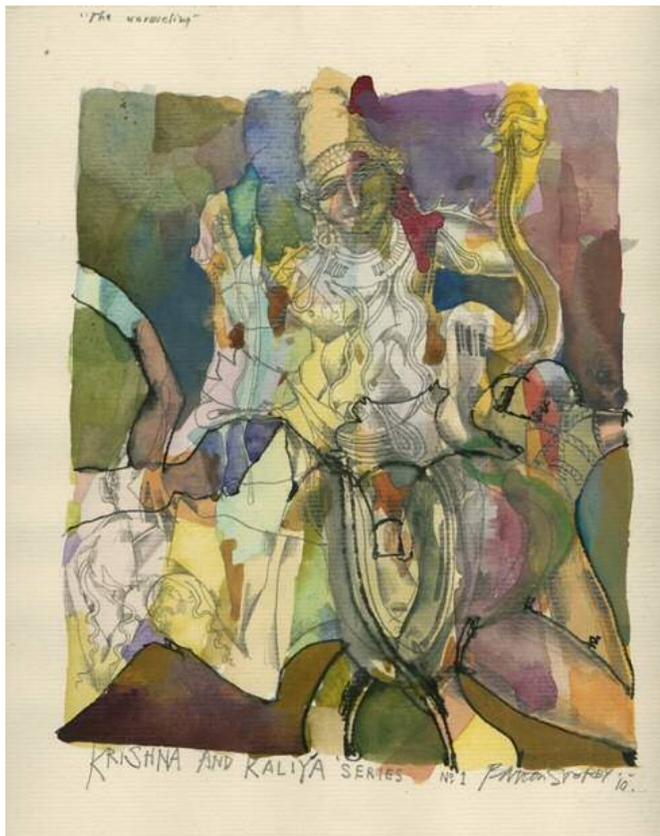


Younger Then Older Now by Barron Storey (2009)

The last Storey pieces I got from Anno Domini were a series of 3 pieces from a Krishna and Kaliya series. Coming from a non-religious East Indian background I really connected with the pieces. I remember some of the mythology from stories told at bedtime by my father. In his later years my father became much more religious and studied Hindu mythology. He has since passed away and I draw immediate connections

between these deities and memories of him. Of the three, I gave two away to my sisters as Christmas presents and kept the third. The two water colored pieces are the ones with my sisters now. On these there are transferred elements that have been reworked and painted. The muted and warm color choices that were made really add to the pieces and to my own personal sentimental connection. I ended up keeping the pencil only piece as I have wanted one of these ever since seeing originals in other collector's collections. These pencil pieces by Barron are really quite impressive in person and of the ones I have seen start without any transferred images. I don't know if the ideas for these come from pre-conceived imagery and ideas in the journals or are fresh on paper as they are created. Although I don't own any inked pieces, the ones I have seen are just as intricate and interesting. Much of the limited work Barron did in comics was in this format with inks.





pairs with the idea of taking a single image and approaching it differently. The inspiration for the images was taken from various journal pages throughout Barron's career. The show was entitled **Factum 1 Factum 2**. Bert goes on to explain the concept of this series as follows.

Storey is referencing a project by Robert Rauschenberg in which he created 2 versions of the same artwork. For Storey, this was a watershed moment in his understanding of the nature of art and perception. Storey takes source images from his own journals, duplicates them and creates non-identical painted copies, displayed side by side as diptychs, these works reference digital technology and the nature of reproduction yet rely entirely on the artist's hand.

The "Factum 1" image of each pair below is a digital print, in some cases enhanced with additional artwork, and the "Factum 2" is a totally new, original work based on the same imagery. They are sold together as a pair (diptych).



Krishna and Kaliya 1, 2 and 9 by Barron Storey (2011)

In 2013, the Bert Green Gallery in Chicago had a Barron Storey exhibit in which Barron did a number of pieces in

I really liked a number of pieces in this exhibition. Having started to understand Barron's work and process more, these pieces were very interesting from both a process and final image perspective. I picked two works which were composed of two final pieces each. The first, **Go Your Own Way Factum 1**, harks back to my first encounter with Barron's work in person and **The Lady** painting. Both pieces are on canvas board. The first canvas is a reworked image with some paint and is composed of several interesting graphic elements. There are two framed pictures in the background which look like more traditional portraits. They are of Lotte Lenya and another actress. The plant imagery ties the two pieces together with the patterning on the main female character's dress and with the almost foliage like appearance of the second canvas.

The second canvas is all paint on raw canvas board. The central image and the two portraits are present here but in a much looser presentation and with a change in orientation of the canvas. There is text behind the main character that reads. Lyrics from **Go Your Way My Love** by Bert Jansch 1967.



Go Your Own Way Factum 1 and Factum 2 by Barron Storey (2013)

*DRAWING WATER
FROM THE WELL
SPILLING OVER ON THE GRASS
WALKING HOMEWARM
MY HEART IS FILLED
WITH PAIN
WOE IS ME
AS I WANDER THROUGH
THE TREES
PICKING UP WINDY LEAVES
THINKING YOU MAY BE SLEEPING NOW
I WANT TO DIE
AS I SIT MENDING YOUR CLOTHES
THAT YOU WILL NEVER WEAR
LOOKING DAILY
I DO PREPARE
BUT WOE IS ME
IF THERE WAS SOME FAR LAND
AND HAVE YOU GONE TO THIS LAND
DO YOU LIE BROKEN AND DYING
I WANT TO DIE
GO YOUR WAY MY LOVE*



What Despair Does Factum 1 and Factum 2 by Barron Storey (2013)

The next diptych is composed of two stretched canvas pieces entitled **What Despair Does Factum 1** and **Factum 2**. The first is a transferred image with a lot of reworking. You cannot see this in the image but there are dozens of smaller figures in the hair of the main subject. These figures are in various positions and many look to be in anguish. The central image is a portrait with many graphic elements classic of Barron's work including the triangle motif. The second piece is on paper that was applied to a stretched canvas. There is a similar central portrait and then a lot of line work in the area of where the figures are in the first piece. I don't recognize figures in this piece. There is a tracing of a life sized hand over the main portrait. There is a caption that reads **LIFE IS SAD LIFE IS A BUST ALL YOU CAN DO IS : DO WHAT YOU MUST.**

For me and my understanding of Barron and his work, this was a pivotal show. I came to understand his process through further reflection on these pieces. I can see the struggle. I can see the pain. I can see the beauty and the anguish in every piece. I can also understand how an original image can create many different paths to a final piece.

While exploring the work at the gallery, I struck up a conversation with Bert about Barron and his art. He passed on some of the questions to Barron about the

pieces. In particular, I asked about the reference images that were the source of these 2 pieces and I asked about the triangle motif often used. Here is the response that I got from Barron via Bert.

The "Go Your Way" pair first: The "Factum 1" piece is a mash up of three images created in the past, one of which was in a journal, number 55, "Pangs and Chaste Treasures". Another piece in the show, "Abandon", contained an actual page from that book, but the image in "Go Your Way" is a modified print. The background is a print that combines two other elements from works done years ago. A comic strip called "Life Is A Force, Death Is A Wish", created for "World War 3" magazine and reprinted in "Watch" magazine in the late 80's with two little heads from a painting from my "Weill / Lenya" project done in the 70's. The "Factum 2" piece is, of course, a drawing of the other. While working on it, my wife happened to raise the volume on her computer as a plaintive Bert Jansch song played with the chorus of "Go your way". I'm a huge fan of Jansch. The song moved me and seemed so in sync with the meanings of the pieces that I wrote the words onto the unfinished drawing, catching bits of it each time I asked Petra to replay it. My personal seeking for a lasting relationship, also a

theme in the pair called "Lady Look", stretched over many years, produced a huge amount of artwork and finally found fulfillment with my dear Petra, who is kindly tolerant of images created in my lovelorn years. And, by the way, I knew Lotte Lenya, and loved my brief times with her. My only Gold Medal from the Society of Illustrators in N.Y. was for a portrait of her, which shows up in "Lady Look".

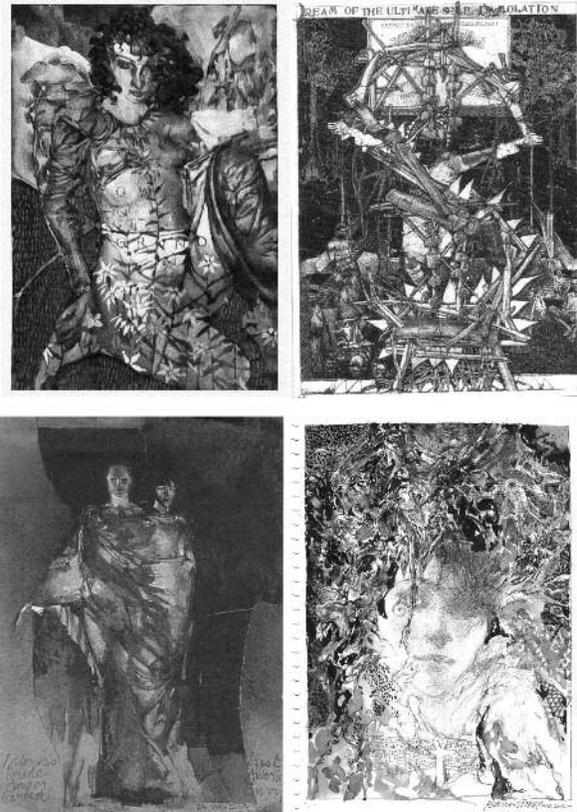
The other pair derived from my involvement with a graphic novel character created by Neil Gaiman, "Despair". Not really a comics artist, I was flattered by the request for a portrait of Gaiman's creation and studied up on his Sandman Comics "Endless" characters. Despair is an empath--unable to feel strongly until another person displays emotion. I identified with her, being one who lived in the shadow of another extremely emotional person, my mother. In fact my identification was so intense that I wrote on many of my drawings for comics fans, "I am Despair". Because of my connection, the tragic suffering my mother felt for the sorrows of all mankind turned my version of the character into something other than Gaiman's original. The "Factum 1" of that pair is derived from one of the drawings done at comics conventions although it has been very extensively reworked. The redrawn one contains a bit of text from a Bob Dylan song, a favorite quote source for me, this phrase followed by the recurring line, "I do it for you, honeybaby, can't you tell?"

My career long preoccupation with arrays of triangles, derived from a life changing trip to Africa where my mother's passion made more sense than ever is also a tip-off. Yes, I, a self confessed empath, learned to feel what my mother felt. In the artistic guise of "Despair", I do a lot of things for her, hence the title "What Despair Does".

Speaking of Dylan, his lines, "lonesome hearted lover with too personal a tale" have always seemed to apply to the work I've done and I can only hope that these details do not fall into that category to an objectionable extent. At the risk of disappointing your interest in the pieces produced for the "Factum 1 / Factum 2" show, I'm sending a jpeg of the original

pieces that became the elements in the "Factums". I am criticized for my recycling my old works and as I get older, some of my earlier things intimidate my present abilities...

One more chorus, Bob..."You do what you must do and you do it well. I do it for you, honeybaby, can't you tell?"

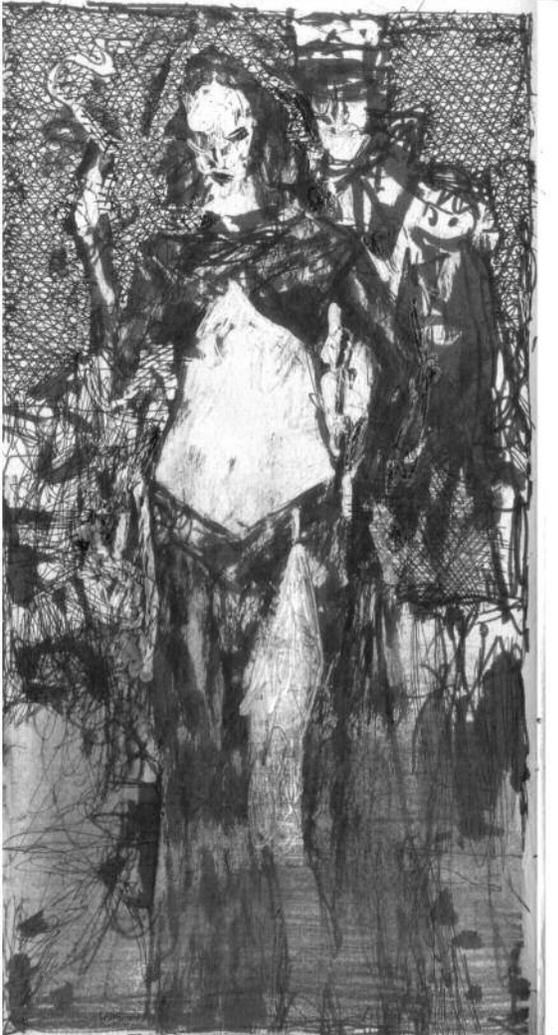


Journal Reference for Factum Art by Barron Storey (2012)

The depth of this response and the insight it added to Barron's work and his personality really struck a chord with me. He always seemed so proliferative but having seen his journals I knew he struggled and worked out ideas in there first and then committed the solutions he found to a final image. Getting to see the journal pages that ultimately became the Factum pieces was fascinating. Since I had such a great response, I decided to ask the impossible. I asked if Barron would consider doing a comic related commission with the characters of the Dragonlady by Milton Caniff and Corto Maltese by Hugo Pratt, my two favorite comic personas. I heard back from Bert that Barron knew both characters and had a deep respect for both creators and was willing to give it a try but had doubts he could do them justice.

After a bit more back and forth, Bert put Barron and I in direct contact and this was the birth of the commission.

I heard from Barron a few times through Bert as the idea was being fleshed out and details organized. The first images from Barron's journals are below as he started to work through this. There are a number of images from his journals shown below.



Straight portraiture won't do, we got to think about this.

Early Journal Work Up for Dragonlady and Corto Maltese Commission by Barron Storey (2013)

When we talked a bit more about the pieces and I mentioned some of the secondary characters in both Caniff and Pratt's work I got the following response. This is also when Bert let go of the project and let Barron and I communicate directly.



What Cha' Reading, Kid? Comics by Barron Storey (2013)

Direct communication--a good idea. I charged into this assignment full of enthusiasm and appreciation for your interest. I'm afraid I didn't quite know what I was doing! I have admired Milton Caniff since I was a boy and

Hugo Pratt since I became aware of European comics--an admiration based on these artists' sure draftsmanship and picture making. I had a general sense of the world traveling adventurer genre of tales but, I came to realize that I hadn't actually read Terry or Canyon or Corto with much attentiveness to the story lines or even the characters...something that became evident when you mentioned the secondary characters in your last email.

Time to do some serious research. I checked out a terrific book on Caniff and ordered one of Pratt tales from Amazon to get a better grasp (MUCH better! I didn't know that Terry started out as a kid and mistakenly thought the Dragon Lady was a villainous siren!) I'm devouring the enlightenment I'm gaining and incidentally, finding a great deal of identification with Caniff. Noel Sickles was the first person who looked at my portfolio when I arrived in New York in 1960--didn't even know of his collaboration with the artist I had enjoyed in the Sunday newspaper comics since I was about 6 or 7 years old. Also a parallel, I've been working on a WWII story about American pilots abroad for quite a while now...and it has a kid as the

center of the story... and as I learned about Caniff's history, the parallels multiplied. (Drew all the characters from historic novels while he was in high school? Me, too...)

I haven't got my hands on the "African Stories" Pratt book I've ordered yet but I expect it will click with my own African "adventures" to a degree. So I'm getting closer to feeling connected. My time is dominated right now with my daily teaching

schedule, so this restart is going rather slowly. I don't expect to have a complete drawing done until the end of July. Gotta' go to ComicCon as well in that period, but you can be sure I'll be talking to people who can enrich my awareness of these artists even more.

So that's where I'm at with the project. Not the first time I've gone off "half-cocked" on a project, but I caught my error and I'm on it.



Terry/Chenault
 CAPTO: LIFE FORCE
 IN THE 3RD WORLD.
 HOW YOU GONNA
 KEEP 'EM DOWN ON
 THE (FUNNLES) AFTER
 THEY'VE SEEN LIFE,
 DEATH - AND THE
 DRAGON LADY?"

Bert,
 I'm working on
 the CANIFF, PRATT
 subjects. I have
 to get into it. Can't
 just respond to
 the pop icons of
 CORRO and the
 DRAGON LADY. There's
 2 story in the ex-
 perience that motivated
 these artists. I'm be-
 ginning to get to it
 through my processes.
 So - yes. I'm on it, but
 I can't be sure at this
 point if the results
 I'll achieve will go to
 the collector's interest.
 I'm doing my best...
 Barron.



Join the Army and See the World (And How It Works) by Barron Storey (2013)

As we progressed Barron kept in contact. He has a number of other obligations and continued to keep the project simmering while teaching and working on other

projects. Here is a short email where you get the sense of the struggles he has with the piece.

Trying to get straight on your commission. Kind of tricky being paid in advance, though I appreciate it very much. Why tricky? Well, I never quite know what I'm going to come up with and, you know, I am trained to fulfill my client's expectations...In this case, it seemed clear that a nice, high rez painting of the "first flash" image sketch was the ticket. Except...well, except I wasn't motivated to do that. But I know and am also trained to know that I can always "find a way" that's good for me and my client as

well. Working in my journal at the random moments between school and ComicCon, I gradually made my way through my hesitations by facing them directly. Problems: "Comic characters", especially those done superbly by other artists...not my thing. I was so pleased by your interest in my Bert Green work that I eagerly signed on to do your commission without realizing I'd be confronting that issue. But, as I said, I can always find a way...



Corto Maltese and the Dragonlady Mock Comic Strip from the Journals of Barron Storey by Barron Storey (2013)

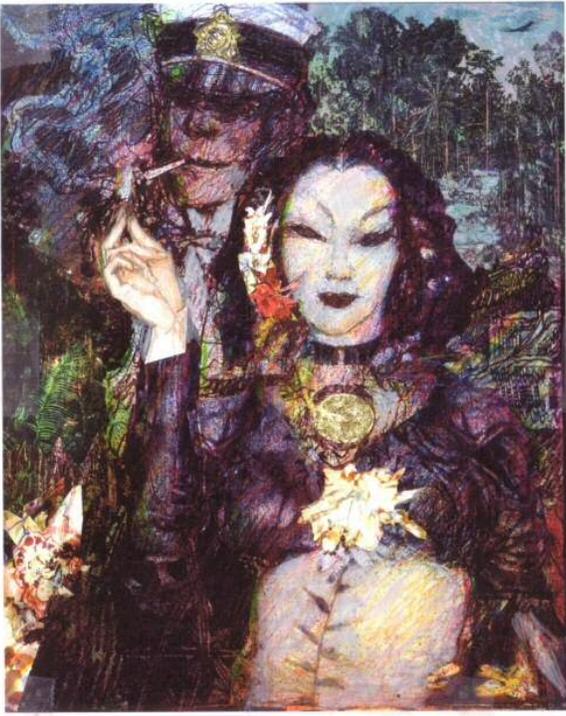
So. Where am I in this? I'm on my way to a solution and expect to have something to show by this Friday. Thank you for your patience, Jeff. Meanwhile, I thought it might be amusing to show the work-up stuff I've been doing. I made a little story out of it and I'm sending a scan...

The next email has the foundation of what the final piece will look like.

And this was followed up with the following email.

Thanks for your understanding. Good to be reminded of the illustration (from "The Robe") that caught your eye in the first place. Yeah, I work through my "dragons" on every piece, but I am definitely "on it". Friday may be too soon, but a solution is on it's way...

Took your note about the old piece. What do you think about this design? I did a quick mashup from old bits and workups to give the sketch pencil some tonal range...The costume suggests a shouldered halter with a gold neck piece with a dragon medallion. Shapes in the hair? An accident of the mashup process, but maybe some kind of exotic flower dangling from the hair? Not Caniff's wardrobe for DL but I'm liking it at the moment...I see the thing as a bit of a statement about male / female interactions and Caniff's influence on Pratt.



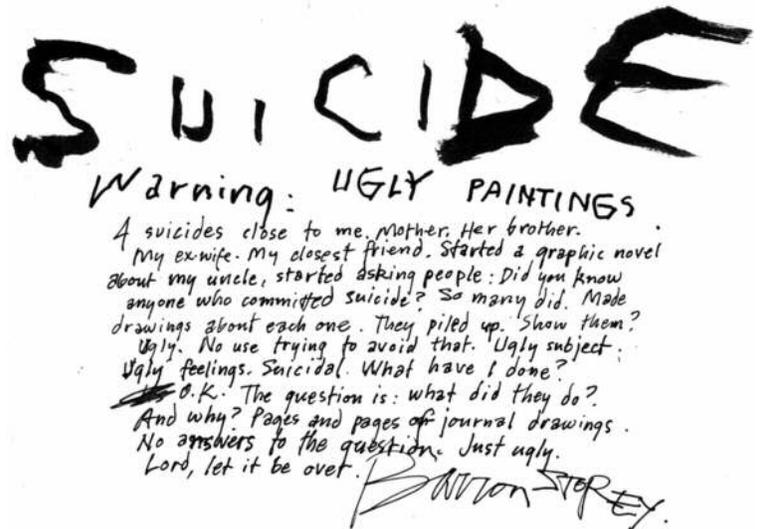
Dragonlady/Corto Maltese Composition by Barron Storey (2013)

In his next email, Barron talks about time out to produce the art for another show.

Here is the present state of the piece. I haven't worked on it in a long while--had to create a huge amount of work for my Suicide show at the Anno Domini Gallery in San Jose and the subject depressed the hell out of me. After that emotional ordeal, the Dragon Lady and Corto look very peaceful indeed and I'm anxious to get back to them. However, another demand is on me that requires my staying in a dark place a bit longer: the Sandman show at the Cartoon Art Museum needs my efforts on the character, Despair. As much as I long for some light in the things I must do, schedules have me in their grip and I must stay in the depressing world of dark contemplations for another week or so. I assure you that D.L. and Corto will be completed and I will give the work my best. I should have let you know what was going on and I apologise emphatically. I lost all control on Suicide--nearly drove me to...well, yes, I am sorry for the delay and hope you can accept my promise that your assignment is in the works and will be finished ASAP.

The Barron Storey Suicide show was very dark and the Gallery described it as follows.

Barron Storey, returns to Anno Domini for his fifth solo exhibition with the gallery. Having lost several people close to him to suicide: mother, her brother, ex-wife, and close friend, Storey began asking others: "Did you know anyone who committed suicide?" So many did. Storey made drawings of each one in his journals...pages and pages of them. The resulting art works on canvas are poignant, beautifully expressed moments of deep despair and the struggle to understand "why?".



Shortly after the show opened, the art arrived as promised. It was a large package as the art is quite large. On the front is the final artwork and on the back is a collage of pieces from Barron's journal where he solved his dilemmas with the art. There was a bonus surprise included in the package. On the following page is the final image which is 18 by 24 inches.



The Dragon Lady and Corto Maltese (aka 'The Robe')

For Jeff -

BARRON STOREY '13

Dragonlady and Corto Maltese Commission by Barron Storey (2013)

The main composition is a wonderful tribute to both Caniff and Pratt. The personalities of both iconic characters come through with an understanding that can only be from someone who knows them. Both

Corto and the Dragonlady are almost always visualized with a cigarette. Using this to tie the two characters together was brilliant. With the Dragonlady lighting the cigarette, there comes an interesting question into who

is in control in this dynamic. It may seem that Corto has tamed her but in fact she has him manipulated into thinking this and is the one controlling things. I suspect Corto is also too smart for this and understands what is going on but is going along with it.

As Barron mentioned, it also is a bit of a tribute to how Pratt would have learned from and been influenced by

Caniff in his career. The dragon is present on the necklace as is the flower that Barron originally spoke of. There is what appears to be an African figure or a skull under the Dragonlady's bent elbow. The dress has a foliage like pattern which reminds me of the dress in both the Factum piece I own and the original *The Lady* piece that started this all for me. A bookend of sorts to my Barron Storey collection and journey.



2. Every picture tells a story, dont it? This patchwork quilt tells quite a bit about my process. Im also attuned to the story-or stories suggested by the chemistry of sequential suggestion. The suggested narrative goes something like this:

- 1) D.L. and CORTO come into my life.
- 2) Check out CORTO - trying to identify.
- 3) Try 3rd world connections. Nope...
- 4) Look at more comics
- 5) Off to comic con with characters in my head
- 6) CORTO read turns me away, so...
- 7-12) Back to D.L. In 12, she calls CORTO on imperialist duplicity.
- 13) Some old dragons...
- 14) Yeah... Chinese ones Japanese ones...
- 15) War... on Asia... on comics...
- 16) D.L. wants me back on the trail...
- 18-24) "Gonna use me..." Flirting and insightful challenges
- 25) D.L. pissed off as f...
- 26) ...go to abstraction by way of Jackson...
- 27) ...decides to get overt with challenges
- 28) ...plays coy...
- 29) ...pnts down CORTO: "CORTO sexist pig... You not like him..."
- 30) D.L., getting no response from me, goes into "The Dance of the Dragons"...

Just one of many possible suggested narratives... but EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY AND PICTURES IN SERIES TELL STORIES, EMPHATICALLY

Work Up Images - Back of Commission - Barron Storey 2013

The large collage on the back of the art was a surprise and a wonderful reference to the process that led to the creation of the final image. I have the final piece framed

and hanging now so the back can't be seen but I have made a print of it and pasted it to the back of the framed art.

Things just kept getting better. To my delight, there was a 2 page spread that Barron removed from his journal and included. This for me was a true treasure. This little strip was my favorite image from all of Barron's correspondences. The text along the borders was new to

me and gave me further appreciation of Barron's struggle with the themes. Ultimately, the journal pages made connections for me that would not have otherwise been made.

59. Yeah - another worm in the can.

60. So... DO IT.

...like you better in the halter with shoulders.

61. PUMP TIME...

AS ROB LIKE

62. So... DO IT.

Journal Pages for Corto Maltese by Barron Storey (2013)

The final piece is on paper and is partially a digital transfer and a lot of it is reworked. When I had first been discussing this with Bert and Barron, I thought I had made the request that it was to be mostly original art and that was my only misgivings about that. I mentioned that in my email back to Petra; Barron's partner responded to me more about Barron's process and said he would get back to me.

so glad you got it

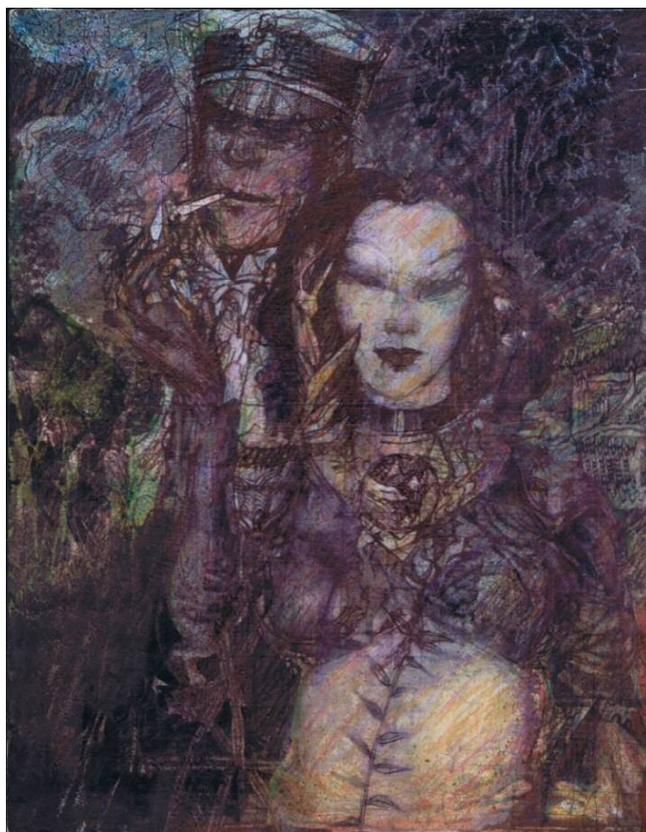
About the technique. I dont know exactly how to describe how Barron works, but he has always done a layering style as you see from what you already have. He would not consider this a "reworked"print but a full original. It evolves over many layers,many different stages as it were. I think perhaps it is the word paint that is the problem. (personally I think if he had done a "painting"it would have been faster and without the detail perhaps this subject needed) The word print is a tricky trigger for Barron,because when it is used against how Barron works it seems to be used to devalue what he does.

It took me a day or two to start to appreciate what had happened and for me to come to some terms with my definition of art. Barron had done exactly what he promised and then exceeded any expectations I could ever have had. The piece is exactly what it should have been and any disappointment I had was entirely of my own inadequacies and being unprepared to define art. The process of the commission was brilliant, insightful and more than I had hoped for as was the final piece. Not only a beautiful image it challenged me on so many levels and made me re-evaluate how I thought about art and ultimately caused me to evolve the way I think and define art.

I awaited Barron's response but rather than email me, he sent me another incarnation of the piece, a piece on board that is a similar image but painted/reworked differently. A lot of the reworking in this one is done with pen and there is a new dragon image beside the Dragonlady's arm.

This was totally unexpected and not required. I had prepared a long apology and explanation for Barron in response to his next email but this came instead. I have since apologized and hopefully explained the source of my ignorant misgivings on first blush. I was afraid I had severed the short relationship I had with one of my

artistic heroes. We have continued to talk since and the images and content of emails are used with Barron's permission.



The Dragonlady and Corto Maltese Reworked by Barron Storey (2014)

Barron Storey's process of creating art is very fascinating. Although I present it in what I hope is a clear fashion, it is something I learned through years of studying and observing his work and even then it wasn't entirely understood until just recently. His work in the journals leads to his finished pieces. For a particular theme, there may be dozens of journal pages with reference images, ideas and thoughts. As the idea evolves, the images to be used are selected. Journal images are then taken and reproduced on media and often combined with other elements and images. This is then worked and reworked with more traditional media including pen, graphite, ink, paint, pastels, markers, and white out in layers until the final image is complete. Sometimes sculptural elements are added like strings or collage elements. In his recent Suicide show, Barron also painted additional images on the backs of many of his canvases.

I asked Barron a bit about his journals, his influences and his process and how it evolved.

During his early years he worked for an advertising company in New York City and would spend his long lunch breaks at the Museum of Modern Art which was just down the street. It was an important time in the evolution of modern art and Barron found many artists he took influence from including Jasper Johns, Willem deKooning, Jim Dine, Larry Rivers, Louise Nevelson, Arshile Gorky, Picasso and most prominently, Robert Rauschenberg. Barron tells me, *"I was trying to do illustrations that used the visual vocabulary I saw around me. I loved the way Rauschenberg used appropriated silk screens, JFK or a Nasa space flight, for example, along with radical "abstract expressionist", free, daring brushstrokes. It was his work that inspired me to include elements in my work that seemed to be created separately from the overall painting. I was at that time a student of Robert Weaver and saw his work doing the same thing. So, Rauschenberg used "copies" of a sort and Weaver pasted on collage elements even as Picasso and Braque had done with French newspapers and de Kooning had done with a pasted on (Marilyn Monroe?) mouth on "Woman 1"... Joseph Cornell with his "boxes", Dada, the idea was all around me."*



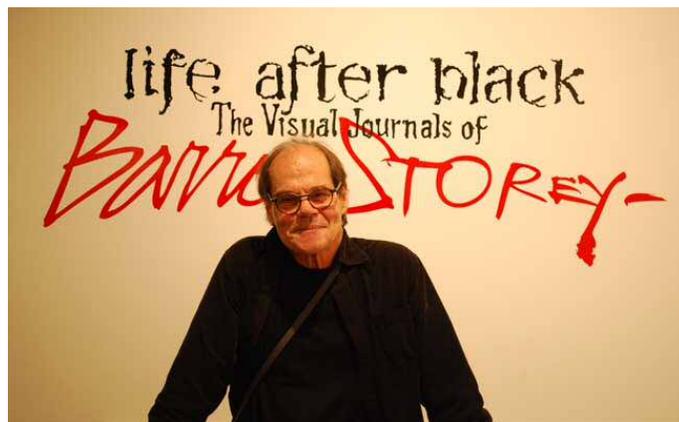
Retroactive I by Robert Rauschenberg (1963)

Barron Storey and the Anatomy of a Commission

The journals were not something he has always worked with. They started while in Los Angeles with taking little drawings he had done and pasting them into a sketchbook. He liked the way this worked out and from there the journals started, each with a number. Barron tells me *"Upon returning to New York, I reconnected with my teacher who asked me to help him make photo copies of his awesome journals--a treasured memory. We went to a copy place and I ran page after page of his brilliant journal images through the copy machines of the day. That did it for me. I soon had my own copier and began to experiment with copies in my work, both personal and commercial. I had studied etching, had my own press and saw the copies as what I believed they were: prints. Using them in my art was natural and in line with what I had seen in the art I admired. My first computer seemed like an extension of this. Copies, but not just for printing alone--I could alter them."*

My discovery of the works of Barron Storey, growing my collection and then making connections to artists I admired and pieces that I had grown up with as a child were all part of an important journey for me. This voyage led to an insightful experience in working with Barron and getting a truer understanding into his work and process. In the end I ended up with more than just a piece of art but a whole new way to look at art. I have hinted at my conclusions on art throughout the article but decided to keep it as a separate discourse.

If you have made it this far in my article, I hope it was a journey you too found interesting.



On Art

What is art? When I was a child I knew what art was, I just didn't have the vocabulary to define it. As I grew into an adult I'd say the definition is unchanged but complicated by a lifetime of learning. I now have the vocabulary but the clarity of the definition has now become much more elusive.

As children, art is a way to express ourselves. That is it. We finger paint and smear and build without being self-conscious. We create and don't care about what it is we are creating or what others think. As we grow we start to look for approval from others and this is where we start to lose sight of what art is. We get compared to others through some value systems and as we grow we are told what art is and what artists are. They are the people who paint and sculpt the things we see in museums. Almost overnight our art goes from being about self-expression to being grossly inadequate. I can certainly see why many shy away from it is a career. It takes real determination, drive, a thick skin and talent to get past all the people telling you can't do this and that you are no good. Not the least among them being one's self.

Going forward with the definition of art we understand as being the works we see in museums and on walls, it was hard to classify other art forms. At least it was for me. We hear that music, theatre, literature, poetry and dance are art and we get that because we are told that but how does that fit into our definition of art when we intuitively attach the definition to a physical object? The art in museums for the most part are one of kind pieces and we associate that rarity with artwork too. How does photography fit into this and what is the original piece of artwork? I love photography but it took me decades to get to the point where I can grasp how a photograph could take its place proudly in a museum next to a painting.

I have come to some conclusions about what art is. I have always told my kids that art is something that makes you think and feel. I still believe in that but I also feel art is many things to many people. It is about the expression of the creator, it is about the experience of the patron, it is about the questions and challenges it proposed and it is about its impact on future works. Not all these elements need to be there. In this broader definition I can see artistry in things like a beautiful

math theorem solved with finesse or in the way a computer program is coded. Art is all around us and not everyone sees the art in everything. That is OK.

Does art need to be man-made? I have not answered that question as of yet as there is so much beauty and awe in the world around us but is that art? Is Mother Nature the greatest artist of all time? I am not sure but I think I can include or exclude this without muddying the waters too much.

The reason I am bringing up all of this is digital artwork and the commission experience I shared with you above. This is one that was hard for me to wrap my head around. Is digital art art? Of course it is. There is no denying the beautiful image but what is the actual art.

I had come to a conclusion that the physical artwork has to be separated from the experience the patron has. I was recently speaking with a friend on this subject and he used the word artefact to describe the physical piece of artwork. I think that it is a near perfect word for my resolutions on this topic. It reflects both the physical nature of the artwork and that it is a record of art but not the art itself.



La Trahison des Images by Rene Magritte (1928)

Going back to our programming as kids and artwork being defined as the things we find in museums. There is a physical nature implied in the definition of artwork, the artefact if you will. Separating art from artwork or artefact is required to appreciate dance and music as you have to experience the art as a patron unless you are the dancer. At the end there is nothing tangible to take away, only the experience and the questions it may have asked and the inspiration it may have given. Coming back again to visual arts, this is why

photography was hard for me initially include as art since I had not separated the idea of art from artefact yet. A photograph may be one of a kind, part of a series, seen in a magazine or only a digital image. The image is the art and that is what you experience. All the rest are artefacts. Just like a print of a painting, a photograph of the painting and the original canvas painted on... all are artefacts. Does a piece like the Mona Lisa cease to be art if the canvas is destroyed? Of course not, it is just the physical artefact that no longer exists but the image lives on as does its influence.

We assign value to the experience of art like paying admission to dance, theatre or museums. We assign value to artefacts like paintings, sculptures and photographs but these are separate from the art which we cannot truly own except in a personal way through experience. Within our hobby of collecting and enjoying comic art, we are indeed only collecting the artefact... the paper that was drawn and inked on by the artists. I think we might be a little more accepting of this artefact concept as we understand that what we collect is only the by-product of creating a final image to be printed.

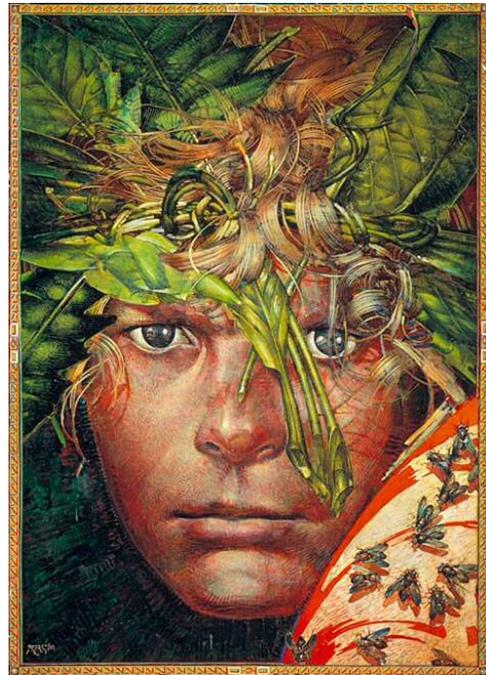
This all comes into play as I try to understand the works of Barron Storey. Initially seeing a piece that was drawn elsewhere and digitally or mechanically altered and then reproduced made me question what the artwork was. Certainly there is art in the image but what about the physical artwork. Was the goal to produce the image and the artwork a by-product or was the physical artwork the goal. Or... was it both where the image and the artwork come together in a final piece. Or... does it matter and do I need to stop trying to define and understand everything and should I just let it be what it is. I think separating artefact from art helped me come to an understanding. Any initial misgivings I had with this piece quickly evaporated as I came to understand that it was my inadequacies as a patron to appreciate what was art rather than any failure of the art or the artist. They both did exactly what they were supposed to. It was me that needed to change how I viewed and valued things and in this sense the art really did challenge me and made me question art in general. I needed to find a conclusion or resolution and it forced me to make a paradigm shift in how I understand artwork.

I now have a framework on which to hang my thoughts about the art I see and experience as well as artefacts I

own. I have redefined what it is I actually collect and redefined my understanding and definition of art in general. Although I have been struggling with this for years, it all came together for me through my commission experience with Barron Storey. How is that for a piece of art and a commission experience? It made me ask questions that changed the way I thought in a profound way.

My final definition of art is quite simple again.

Art is.



Lord of the Flies Cover by Barron Storey (1980) Copyright Pedigree Publishing



Victims Exhibit Sculptures by Barron Storey (2008) Gallery AD

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