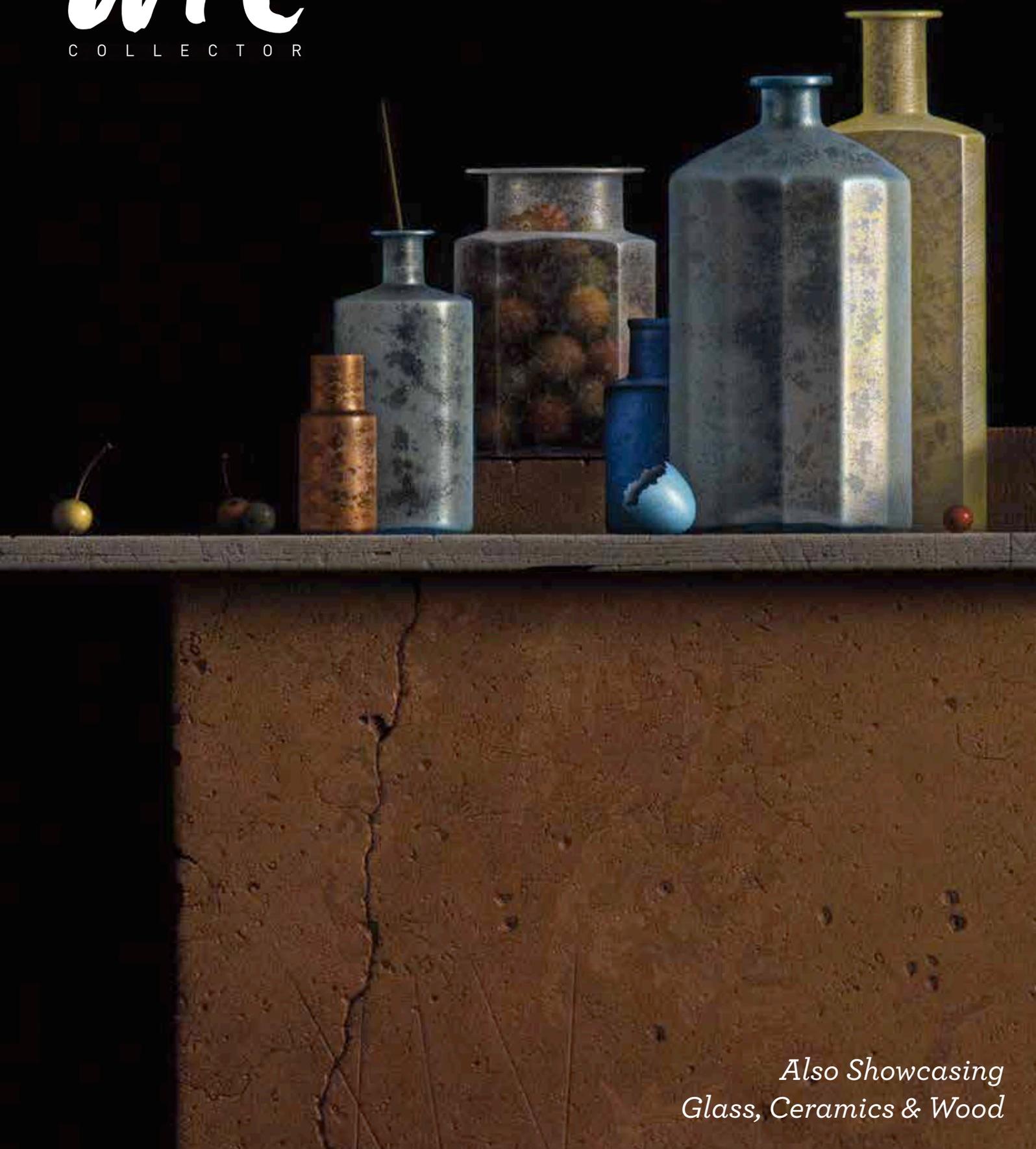




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ROBERT TOWNSEND

Dreamland

In Robert Townsend's paintings, vibrant colors and retro designs from the '40s to '60s dominate his works, evoking warm feelings of nostalgia. The world he creates in his watercolor and oil paintings is his "dreamland," which is also the title of his upcoming exhibition of about 10 works at Altamira Fine Art in Scottsdale, Arizona. The settings are propelled by idealism, as they depict a time when war had ended, and their inhabitants entered the space age.

Taking road trips with his family from his home state of California and hearing stories of his dad's childhood are two of Townsend's biggest inspirations in his work. The self-taught artist gathers vintage mementos from friends, collects classic slides, and shoots photographs of landmarks to create compositions to



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populate his pop realism art.

When he presents figures in his works, such as in oil *Just Kay and Patty!*, he aims for scenes that feature interesting images that tell a story, and he names the characters after people in his real life. In this work, Patty is named in honor of a woman in her 80s whom he often sees while at his bowling league, a charming gal with fabulous vintage clothes and costume jewelry.

Often, Townsend's landscape work is inspired by real locations, such as the Mexican-American restaurant from Holbrook, Arizona, depicted in watercolor *Joe and Aggie's Café*. Townsend says he searches for unique historic sites in whatever city he visits and sometimes takes road trips specifically for scouting new locales. He says the places he paints serve as a pictorial diary for him.

"It's the small stories that are much more

interesting to me than whatever is going on with the big building in Dubai," says Townsend, who has called artist complex Los Angeles Brewery home for the past six years. "I went to New York earlier in the year, and instead of seeing every landmark, I Googled the 'oldest candy store in New York.' It made the Statue of Liberty seem like nothing. It's the off the grid thing that tells a little story: 'This is where the locals go, and no one else knows about it.' Those



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are the fun little stories of real people and real lives.”

Townsend calls the use of bright colors and imagery in his works a “catharsis,” one that also allows his works to lift the spirits of those who view them.

“I’m trying to give people a little bit of a spark and a smile,” Townsend, who cites Wayne Thiebaud and Robert Bechtle as influences, says. “It’s been a more serious endeavor the last couple years, the idea of optimism, especially in a world where it’s not easy to come by. There aren’t a lot of answers to the difficult things in life.”

He’s achieving that aim with collectors Matthew and Amy Semansky, who own two of Townsend’s works: a swirling image of candies jumbled in a glass jar, and a series of cupcakes.

“The candy jar picture has held a prominent spot in our home right over our kitchen table, where we eat our family dinners every night,” says Matthew. “Every single time I look at it, I get some spark of joy. I continue to enjoy these pieces daily and hope to own more of his work. We find his painting to be a great blend of amazing technical execution and a touchstone for happiness in our daily lives.”

Just because his objects and scenes emanate a sense of fun, Altamira Fine Art Scottsdale director Audrey

Parish says the works are also impressive for their detail-oriented skill.

“Robert’s exceptional technical ability is complemented by a painterly approach to color and design, with occasional whimsical elements adding a playfulness to his skillfully crafted watercolors and oils,” says Parish. “His pop photorealist style and vibrant colors are perfectly matched with eye-catching subject matter, including retro candy bars, cakes and pies, and a larger-than-life wall clock.”

Townsend says his version of “dreamland” is not about escapism and pretending everything is OK. It’s about dealing with harsh experiences while embracing what it felt like to be a child.

“There are the realities of bills and sick children and car accidents and failed relationships, but we can still live in this dreamland of embracing whatever is out there that is quirky and interesting and sticks around,” Townsend says. “It’s about waking up in the morning to think, ‘What’s wacky, what’s crazy, what’s interesting?’, and then searching those things out. Don’t pretend the bad stuff doesn’t exist, but don’t give up that around the corner is something magical.” ●

1
Robert Townsend photographed in his studio by Steve Lucero.

2
Joe and Aggie’s Café, watercolor, 35 x 45”

3
Just Kay and Patty!, oil, 64 x 95”

4
Wall Clock, oil, 54 x 60”



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