

EXAMINING THE MYTH WITHIN

LOMBARDI'S GODS AND MONSTERS

There are gods and monsters in each of us. One person's hero is another person's villain; as Joseph Campbell famously wrote, "You could be a local god, but for the people whom that local god conquered, you could be the enemy." In the exhibition statement for "Saints, Sinners and the Collective Unconscious," artist D. Dominick Lombardi wrote that his work is his "personal freedom."

Our collective history and, therefore, unconscious, is haunted by savors and destroyers, imaginative human-made entities derived from external emotions and conditions. Our conscious struggle to break free from a mutual and vague imprisonment defines the human animal. It is our cultural intellectual and artists who assist us in processing the truth.

Lombardi has been creating art since the 1970s. With a background in woodworking, he combines craft tradition with modern expressions. Along with being a visual artist, he is also a curator and writer who has organized numerous exhibitions and published many catalogs. In all his work, he continues to explore and expand upon his

personal mission to identify and reveal "the source, signs, and suppositions of human behavior."

Formally, his work offers an excellent cross-section of modern manners blended with the foundations of European traditions. Dada and Surrealism are the

"outsider" aesthetic that is appealing and approachable. The images are a strange synthesis of history, as if an innocent person attempting to understand human life pulls together artifacts and assembles them, idiosyncratically creating an off-beat personal mythos.



obvious elements, along with contemporary illustration and drawings, and the influence of Christian religious narrative storytelling. The mixed-media images are amalgamations of cartoonish, pop culture forms and vintage material as well as classic figurative, landscape, portrait and genre-painting.

Lombardi fuses humor and sadness to expose our gloriously tragic comic condition. The style is a "junkyard/salvaged" or

tion that blend the paranoid with the guileless. Think Dali meets R. Crumb."

Lombardi's subject matter is enjoyable to decipher because many of the motifs are contemporary. "Saints, Sinners and the Collective Unconscious" arrives with a serious message but the images themselves come off as playful and provocative. "Saint Joseph of Cupertino" (2016), presented on a vintage 1960s game board, depicts Joseph in his sim-

UNIVERSITY SPOTLIGHT

D. DOMINICK LOMBARDI: SAINTS, SINNERS AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

**HAMPDEN GALLERY
UNIVERSITY OF
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AMHERST
131 SOUTHWEST
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AMHERST,
MASSACHUSETTS
SEPTEMBER 10
THROUGH 29**

LEFT: Sinners #11
(*Lester Lanin Goes to College*), 2016, acrylic medium, acrylic paint, album cover, artist's frame, salvaged wood, nails, screws, plaster, joint compound, latex primer, latex paint, 15" x 15".

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Sinners #4 (*David Bowie-Heroes*), 2016, acrylic medium, acrylic paint, album cover, artist's frame, salvaged wood, nails, screws, plaster, joint compound, latex primer, latex paint, 15" x 15".

ple, brown wool monk's robe and sandals while wearing a space helmet and being launched into cosmic space, we assume in search of blessed heaven.

"Sinners #7 (Richard Pryor-No.1)," 2016, is a reworked portrait of Richard Pryor on the vintage record "Richard Pryor: That Nigger's Crazy, No. 1, Uncensored." In "Sinners #11 (Lester Lanin Goes to College)," 2016, a vintage album cover of Lester Lanin and His Orchestra is re-imagined with a doodle drawing of a young man without pants, exposing his tighty-whities, evoking a secret eroticism and underlining the illusion of the wholesomeness and purity of 1950s and '60s America. Lombardi has unmasked the reality of "good boys and girls."

Lombardi's conceptual theme, however, is more confounding and evocative because it derives from a study of the teachings of mythologist Joseph Campbell and psychiatrist Carl Jung, who tried, with different methodologies, to give form to the perplexing attributes of the human animal. For both Campbell and Jung, storytelling is vital. Campbell looked at universal stories, while Jung examined a person's private history. Lombardi does both in his work. When the two intersect, the result is a confused soup of belief and attitudes powerful enough to give birth to both saints and sinners simultaneously. He wrote, "The paths we take, the lives we lead and the decisions we make are born of many foundations both learned and innate."

WE CAN BE HEROES

Returning to Campbell's quote about local gods, he is elucidating the importance of personal perception in forming a judgement. This, of course, naturally leads us to the question of how hero/god identity is formed. Musician David Bowie, for example, the subject of "Sinners #4 (David Bowie-Heroes)," 2016, is loved by many as a hero who gave voice to "strange kids," yet it is also understood that much of his private and public behavior is considered sinful when examined from the morals of religious conservatism. In this

way, David Bowie is both god and monster. Lombardi depicted him with a pink mask and observed, "We see tenets and intricacies of morality presented through familial teaching, the hard and fast laws of the land the traditions of our various religions, yet in the end, we must decide for ourselves what is right and wrong for us."

The fluctuating duality between good and evil, a topic that needs to be continually reexamined, is especially relevant today. Campbell studied and identified the stages of personalized elevation, or hero-rising, in his monumental "Hero's Journey" by focusing on the collective monomyth and aspects of the unconscious, without passing judgement or clarifying right or wrong in the process. There's a famous quote attributed to Ernest Hemingway, who lived the life of both god and monster/saint and sinner, that I like, offering another interpretation and perspective: "As you get older it is harder to have heroes, but it is sort of necessary." The stories of how ordinary people become saints show us that they went through a conversion after suffering some kind of trauma or great struggle.

Hemingway – who after direct observation and experience with fascists said that they contribute absolutely nothing other than murder – is also suggesting that there are no perfect role models. He's correct; people are deeply flawed. On some days, we are saint-like; on other days we betray ourselves and others and turn to sin. And, it is not easy to escape the influence of the Other, be it good or bad. This, of course, is not a new idea. Countless philosophers, writers and artists have already given voice to the truth, and the struggle. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, "He will make that innocent discover the Other in himself; he will make him recognize the Other's most improper thoughts as his own."

"Saints, Sinners and the Collective Unconscious" is on view alongside "Self Indulgence," a group portrait exhibition featuring the work over 20 artists, including Lombardi, who is co-curator. The exhibitions should be



viewed together and the concept of Self should be considered. This is an important time to figure out who you are and what you will do, and we thank artists like D. Dominick Lombardi for forcing the topic into our consciousness.

| J. Fatima Martins

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