

# The tao of tattoos

By DOUGLAS MICHAEL

Sometimes good things really do have a way of coming back around. Take for instance Dominick Lombardi, who got his start in the art world 10 years ago as a roving art critic for The Record-Review.

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"Head," by Dominick Lombardi

"It was my first job after getting my B.A. in art criticism from SUNY's Empire program," said Mr. Lombardi from his home in Valhalla. Up until then, Mr. Lombardi was a hardworking artist looking for his first break but was unable to penetrate the peculiar labyrinths of the modern art scene. "When my wife became pregnant, we agreed I needed to find a job with a salary and benefits. Luckily, The Record-Review offered me a job as an ad salesman. This was back when the paper was just getting started, and I said I would definitely take the job, but would it be OK if I could write art criticism. I argued it would be good for readership because the paper covered an area with so many important arts institutions. They agreed, and that's how I got my start."

Mr. Lombardi's tenure at The Record-Review lasted about a year as ad rep and several more as contributing writer, before he branched out to The New York Times. "I knew they had someone already covering the arts scene in Westchester, but they liked the way I wrote and encouraged me to keep submitting my clips," he said.

Mr. Lombardi credits The Record-Review for helping him develop a certain writing style the Times favored. "I felt there was a strong need for the kind of writing I learned at The Record-Review," he said. "It's somewhat academic, but there are elements

in it anyone can understand, and there is so little of that kind of writing in the art world."

When the call finally came from the Times, Mr. Lombardi was ready. "One day I got the call I'd been waiting for, and they said we need you to cover a show," he said. "It was like, you're in, get to work! I didn't even have to interview."

During his seven-year tenure with The New York Times, Mr. Lombardi continued to make his own art. However, his arrangement with The Times forbade him from selling or even promoting himself as an artist, at least within the area he covered for The Times as an art critic. "They were worried about the wrong perception," said Mr. Lombardi. "And I agreed with that. It would not look good if I, as an artist, sold a painting to a collector

who was, say, on the board of the Katonah Museum, and then I, as an art critic, wrote a review favorable to the museum."

Accepting his arrangement with The Times did not preclude Mr. Lombardi from getting an insider's look at the art world, an experience that demystified the whole process of how art is selected and how artists make it. "I learned quickly and well how all these things worked," he said. "Stuff that's obvious if you're on the inside but not so obvious if you're trying to break in. I should probably write a book."

Mr. Lombardi, who is never at a loss when it comes to putting his creative bent to good use, developed an even wider reputation when, shortly after 9/11, he organized what he called, "art safaris," or explorations into the then

ailing gallery district of Chelsea. "I sent out blanket e-mails telling people where to meet and at such and such a time, and then we'd make the rounds of the galleries, and at the end of the day we'd go out to dinner and talk about what we had seen." In this way, Mr. Lombardi not only got to meet several gallery owners and directors but important people in the art world started coming to him. Of the latter, Beth Gersh-Nesic, the gallery director for the Anderson Chase Gallery in Katonah, was instrumental in bringing Mr. Lombardi back to northern Westchester.

"She had heard about the art safaris, and that got her interested in me, and then she asked me up to Katonah to work on a juried show the gallery was

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## Artist exhibits tattoos



Dominick Lombardi

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putting together."

That show, called, "Floors and Ceilings," is, according to Mr. Lombardi, all about opposites and contrasts. At the same time, Mr. Lombardi is culling through submissions for this year's Westchester Biennial, held at the Castle Gallery in New Rochelle.

However, as 2006 begins, judging and curating shows will likely have to take a back seat as Mr. Lombardi's own career as an artist is taking off. He explained, "In May of last year my career got a huge boost, and now there's so much interest in my work and so many opportunities that are opening up for me that I had to cut back and leave The Times."

That turning point in May was the opening of Mr. Lombardi's show titled, "Post Apocalyptic Tattoos" at the LunarBase Art Gallery in Brooklyn. "The show got a review in ArtNet, which was great because the way that Web site works is, one day your show is the only show they feature, and that got me a lot of attention in itself. Then I was featured in New York Gaho — which is a magazine out of Tokyo — and then New York Arts Magazine covered the show and, best

of all, I got reviewed in ArtNews." With the international art world clamoring around his work, Mr. Lombardi easily cemented representation with Lisa Boyle of Lisa Boyle Gallery.

Describing the paintings in Mr. Lombardi's "Post Apocalyptic Tattoo" collection is a little like imagining what might happen if an artist in the old Disney style of classical animation survived a nuclear holocaust and opened a tattoo parlor. The human anatomy is twisted, sometimes distorted out of recognition, and yet the line work is consistently crisp and often whimsical, while the colors are flat and tonal. On the whole, the work seems to evoke popular cultural references from both the golden age of design and, if possible, its future.

Mr. Lombardi explains, "I started working on this series when my daughter was born and all these [anatomical distortions] were stewing inside me, and now I feel like this is my way of showing that this is where we're headed as a species. And while I try to illustrate that idea in a tongue-in-cheek way, it's also very serious. I try to mix the hideous with the beautiful, and classic form with good color theory."

Mr. Lombardi is looking forward to his next major show, scheduled for March at the Paul Sharpe Contemporary Arts Gallery in Chelsea.

And how does he feel now that he's finally arrived after a 30-year career of searching out the right entrée into the art world? "I left my studio last night at one in the morning, and I still had that feeling of being on such a high. I was still in this creative place and happy about that, and that's where you are always looking to be, if you can walk out of your studio feeling good, smiling, with that little smirk. I think if you can say that, you're in the right place."

"Ceilings and Floors" opens Jan. 14 and will run through Feb. 22 at the Chase Anderson Gallery in Katonah. For more information, call the gallery at 232-4843.