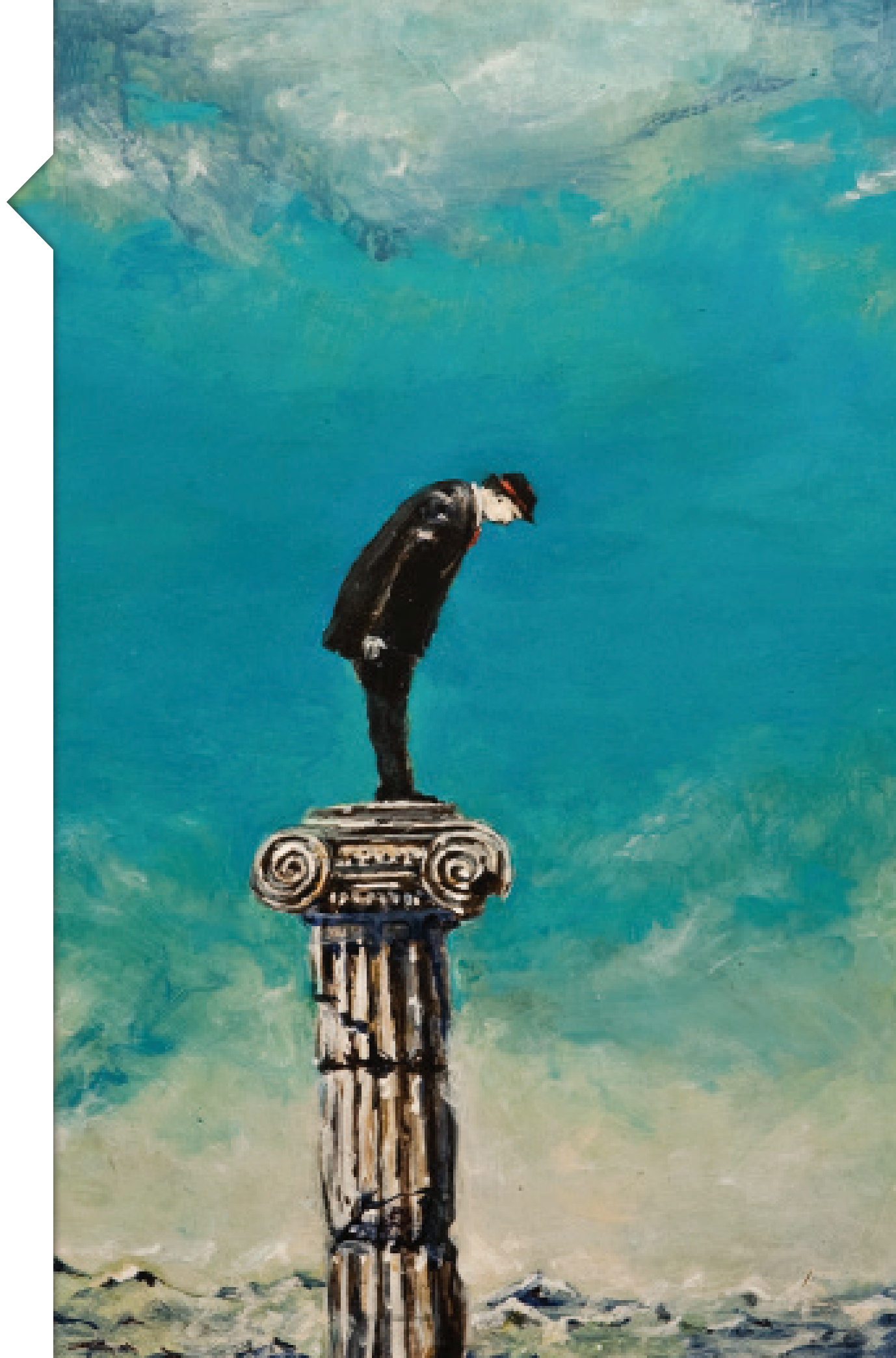


Michael Hermesh



left, Eternity, acrylic on panel, 12" x 16"
above, Lost in the Real World, acrylic on panel, 19.25" x 20.25"

Everyone into the Pool!

written by Brett Anningson

"A perfect metaphor for an artistic act," muses Michael Hermesh, "is diving from a diving board without being sure what is in the pool. Sometimes it is a 10-point dive, sometimes it is a failure. I was 15 when I saw the film *Woodstock*, and I left the theater in tears. My takeaway was that the coming

together for purely aesthetic reasons was an indicator of the power and meaning of aesthetics, and the realization that without aesthetics my life was a void. That certainty has never left me – but it was tempered by self-doubt."

Throughout his early working life, Michael never stopped making art, though he did have two different careers – ticketed as a chef and a cabinet maker. "I finally went back to art full time after taking a business course intending to do something with furniture design and was told by



above, *The Navigator's Dream*, ceramic, 25" x 24" x 26"
 right, *The Window Shopper*, ceramic, 17.5" x 8" x 7.25" (bronze version will be available in 2016)

the instructor to use my art as my potential. It was obvious to him, and I would not be limited by the vagaries of the market. That was 20 years ago and I have not looked back."

All of this perhaps explains why Michael's advice to anyone starting out as an artist echoes a wish for his own teenaged self... Damn the torpedoes. Full speed ahead! Your integrity will be rewarded and admired. Do not fear failure for it may be your greatest strength!

Speaking of diving into an unknown pool. Michael was once commissioned by the city of

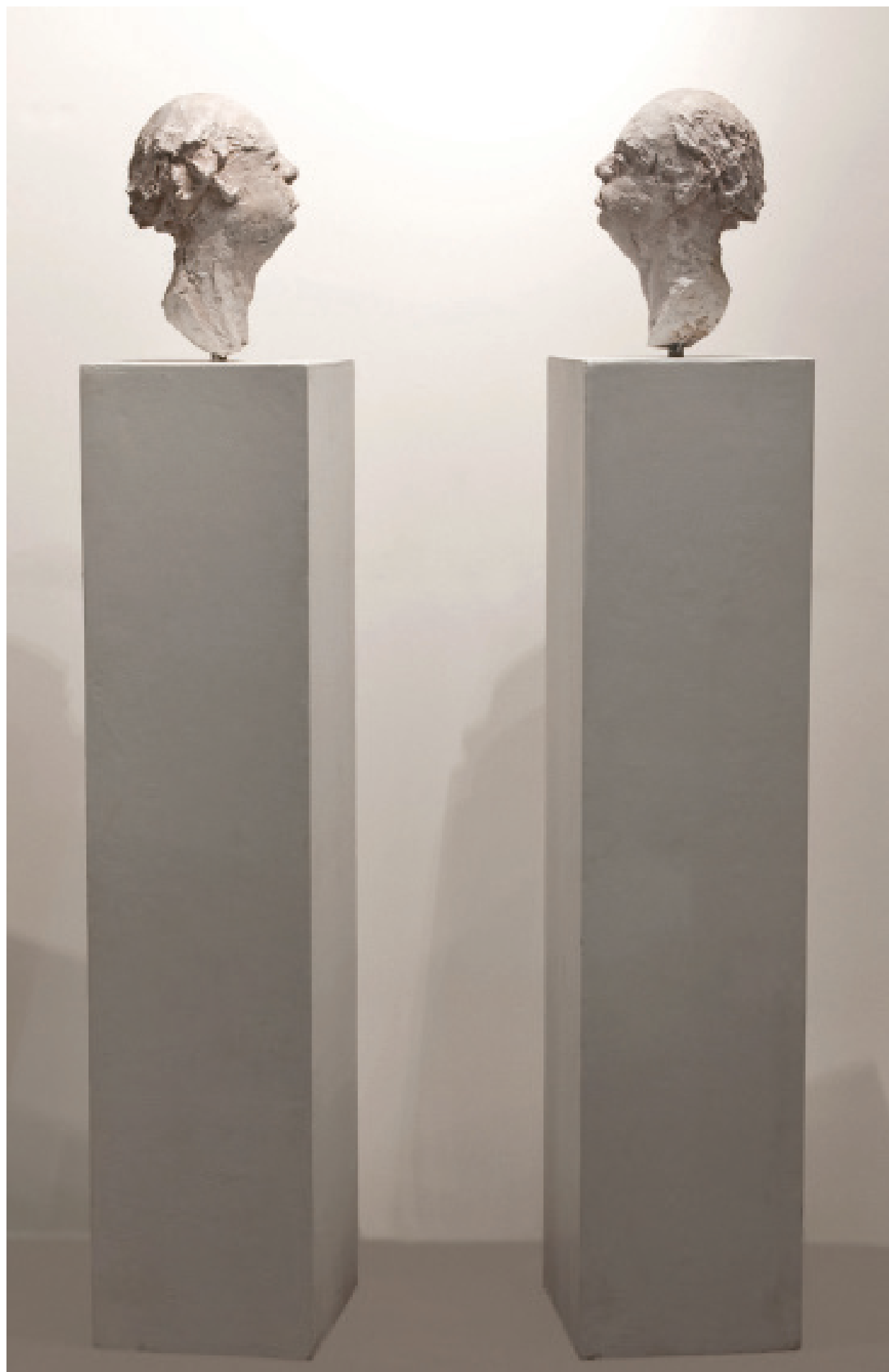
Penticton to create their first ever piece of public art. The sculpture that ensued was an installation outside of the train station called "The Baggage Handler – A Ballet in Suitcases and Memories." It was a middle-aged nude man with a suitcase, surrounded by suitcases. Turns out that this time the pool was filled with international controversy. The nude statue was loved, hated, desecrated, re-created, bronzed, written about, inspired wine – oh, and nicknamed, Frank. It actually only stood in Marina Way in Penticton for two months in 2005. It now graces the landscape of the Red





left, Sometimes We Reach For Who We Are, acrylic on panel, 13.5" x 18"
above, Civilization And Its Disappointments, acrylic on panel, 13.5" x 18"





previous spread and left, Gratuitous Bailee (With a Nod to Gerhard Richter), ceramic, 67.5" x 12" x 12" (bronze version will be available in 2016)

above, A View from the Shore, ceramic, 14" x 14" x 5.5" (bronze version will be available in 2016)

Rooster Winery, which created 'Cabernet Frank', Michael's favourite wine!

"My entire Baggage Handler installation experience was the oddest thing that ever happened to me," Michael admits. "As soon as the piece went up it was denounced in a special session of city council for being a nude or something? Then the work was vandalized repeatedly. I decided to remove it, and was threatened with arrest because they had now decided they wanted it. I ended up suing the city for copyright violations and eventually won in a trial that stretched on for a year. Two of the odder moments in that ordeal: I found myself in court for the first time, and was representing myself."

Within the first 15 minutes of the first day, all of

Michael's arguments were thrown out as hearsay. "So, with a courtroom full of onlookers, friendly and hostile, I simply began to talk as the walls closed in on me. After a half-hour of verbiage, the judge asked me if I was capable of making a coherent argument. I replied everything would make sense shortly, and continued talking. Somehow, I made it through the first day. I had two more days in court and ended up winning the lawsuit against the city of Penticton for copyright infringements. Another snapshot from the ordeal was as the sculpture was being repaired by a conservator on Bowen Island. I found myself on the ferry with a reporter and a photographer from the Toronto Star, who came along to document the re-sculpting of a penis."



left, The Hat Box Man, ceramic and steele, 26" x 11" x 6" (bronze version will be available in 2016)
middle, Forever (The Problem with Forever is that it Ain't right now), ceramic, 37.5" x 6.75" x 8.5"
right, Elephant Race, acrylic on panel, 9" x 11"



above, The Commons II, mixed media on panel, 20" x 25"
 right, It's Been Going On For Some Time Now, acrylic on panel, 9.5" x 11"

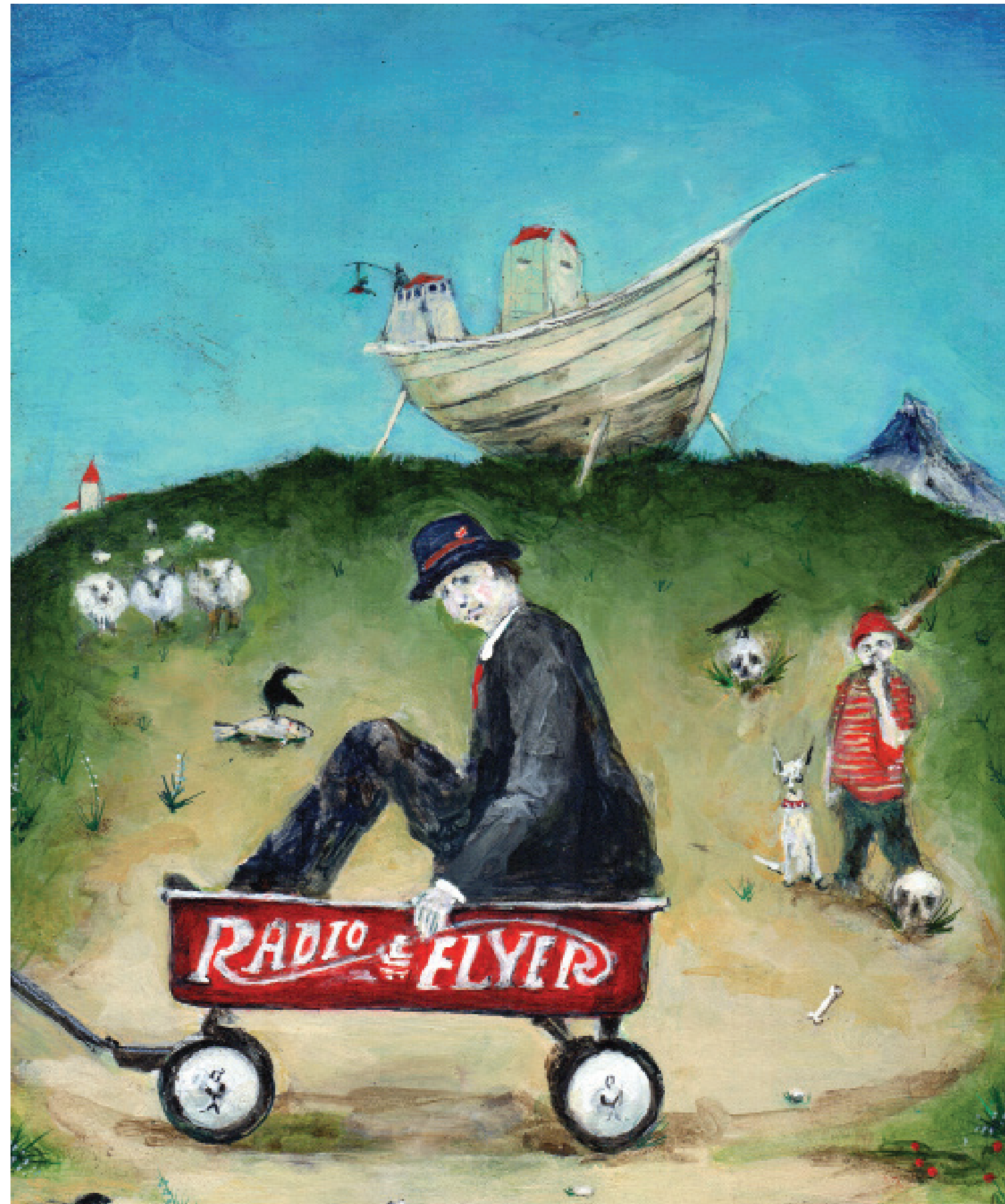
Back to the Beginning

Michael Hermesh was born in 1955 in Spiritwood, Saskatchewan and went on to study art at Okanagan University College and the Vancouver School of Art. Because of his own questioning as to whether or not one could make a living being an artist, he also has extensive experience in furniture design and ornamental carving.

His first public sculpture "The Frieze of the Arts" has graced the façade of the Summerland

Arts Centre since the summer of 2001. This work was recently "rescued" by the Summerland Arts Council, when the city of Summerland sold the building and it was subsequently torn down. The frieze is currently displayed inside the Summerland Arts Council residence.

Many of Michael's previous bronzes are in the same vein as Frank, including such recognized sculptures as: Who Am I (An Excerpt from the Play "Frank's Life"), The Rapture (Frank Gets





The Parable of Free Will I, mixed media on panel, 15" x 18"

Raptured), The Sun Worshipper, Traveling Man, and The Sun Dancer, which are all a part of his Pedestrians in the Ether Series.

A few years ago, Michael found himself shifting focus from sculpture to painting. His paintings embrace narrative in unusual ways – often leaving the interpretation open for the viewer to fill in. But, then again, he has always been influenced by the story, the background, the eclectic, more than the aesthetic. One just has to look at the sculptures of his mentor Ralph Critchlow to get a sense of how the surreal can be melded to the real in ways that force engagement with the story.

"In terms of influences," says Michael, "I would first say Ernst Barlach, for his understanding of our inner lives and his unyielding integrity in the face of forces I can only begin to imagine. As well as his technical ability to conduct strength within strong and simple compositional principals. Also, I discovered what I would describe as ancestral memories within his northern European medieval roots. Then there is Henry Moore, for the visceral animal power of organic forms. Mark Rothko, as a beacon that shines on the concept that pure being can be painted. Finally, for contemporary influences, Banksy, who shows that art can be politically relevant without being sloganeering."



Michael Hermesh Best of all Possible Worlds, mixed media on panel, 00" x 00"

Painting the Stories

In 2012, Michael had a show where a painting called "It ain't about you and it ain't about death" was featured and sold. The following year, he and his wife travelled to Rhyolite Nevada – a ghost town, and artist enclave. All of a sudden Michael found that many of the elements in his painting were a part of the real landscape. "The spiral, the penguin, the zygotes, mountains, mountain climbers, the pole with the figurehead and wings, the building, the fence... It was as if I had pulled the painting together from my own future."

Truthfully, there is this feeling that you can look at the surreal images in one of his paintings

and then find them coming to life in the real world in unexpected ways. Michael is painting a deeper reality, which we all can imagine ourselves entering. "I believe artistic endeavour is the art of failure, in more ways than one," says Michael. "A piece of art is a view of the world that can only exist if another view is destroyed."

So, as far as he can, Michael seeks to work without an agenda; without assumption as to how things are going to turn out. Through this he seeks out the classic questions of humanity, who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. And ultimately the creation of art allows Michael to have insight into himself and



The Gyre, mixed media on panel, 37.5" x 47.5"

the world. With any luck, the people who view his work can gain some of that insight as well.

"One of the truths in my process is that there is no such thing as a final product," says Michael. "I don't believe the piece is finished, even as it stands as a physical object. I sell stories more than I sell objects and so the meaning of the piece is fluid with the viewer. For example: take my work Perfect Symmetry on a Cloudless Day. Someone told me how wonderfully I had represented the way a father protects a son – this was very different than what I thought the piece meant.

"There are several ways to make a piece of art. There are happy accidents, there are grinding efforts, and there are acts of spontaneous creativity. I truly hope the third type actually exists because it makes the world a meaningful and beautiful place. The act of creation is something a lot of people say cannot exist, as it does not fit into a mechanistic universe. As an artist, I feel that it is my highest ideal... that thought is what makes the world a beautiful place. The normal antithesis to creativity is that the artist is merely someone who joins together disparate entities in a happy accident kind of way, not actually creating anything. The act of creation I would consider as a true awareness and a true fulfillment of who we are as beings."

To see more of Michael's work, visit www.michaelhermesh.com or contact him at art@hermesh.ca.

Michael Hermesh is represented by the following galleries:

White Rock Gallery
White Rock, BC
www.whiterockgallery.com
604.538.4452

Lloyd Gallery
Penticton, BC
www.lloydgallery.com
250.492.4484

Tutt Street Gallery
Kelowna, BC
www.tuttartgalleries.ca
250.861.4992