



Artist Profile: The Many Colors of T. Mikey

by Ken Tamke

The moment you walk through the front doors of the downtown institution, the B.O.B., you're compelled to exclaim, "Dorothy, we're not in Kansas anymore." Such is the reaction when you first lay eyes on Please Ignore the Man Behind the Curtain, one of three, 3-D ultraviolet (3DUV) shadow boxes artist T. Mikey has on display and entered in ArtPrize. As you slowly move past the 4 foot high by 8 foot wide by 1 foot deep multi layered panel the lion's eyes follow, eerily. Mount Fuji looms large in the background. You catch sight of Dorothy, and yes, that's Toto in the lower corner; must be the Cowardly Lion. We really aren't in Kansas anymore!



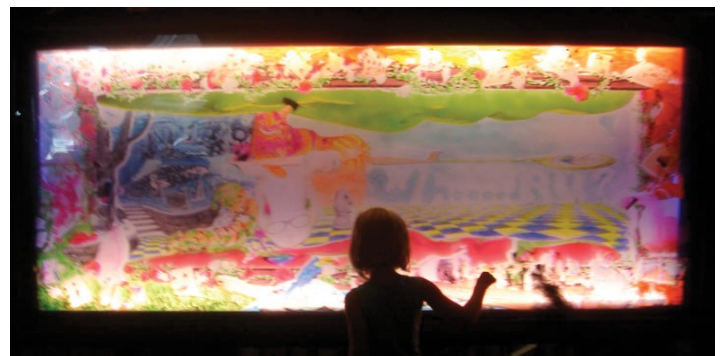
"Please Ignore the Man Behind the Curtain" in the B.O.B.'s main entry

"I'm painter, assembler, electrician, engineer and even picture framer," he tells me. Mikey in fact invented the whole process of creating his 3DUV pieces. His patented secret paint concoction, the use of 5 layers of transparency to display his images, the application of light; they hypnotize the viewer.

Please Ignore the Man Behind the Curtain utilizes the characters of The Wizard of Oz to tell the story of 9/11. T. Mikey's patented painting technique across transparency in multiple layers then backlit with ultraviolet light gives three dimensional life to his images. The colors and forms explode out of every piece; they're mesmerizing. Moving around the corner into the grand entry hallway, 2 more of Mikey's entries are displayed, side to side, running the length of the foyer. First, Picnic on the Moon then Alice in Mikeyland comes into full view. The observer is drawn into the art, face to the glass and pulled back, to absorb its scope. You're moved along from piece to piece and back again as you seek new discoveries and revelations.

"Want to see a magic trick?" T. (for Thomas) takes me around to each piece. On the upper right side of the panel there are 2 switches. One switch controls the ultraviolet light, the current setting, which exudes a mystical quality. The second switch controls phosphorescent, white, light; a heretofore unobserved setting. Illuminating the phosphorescent light changes colors, making them more vibrant, and alters images, giving them more transparency. I make the rounds flipping all the switches with the glee of a child. Picnic on the Moon, Mikey shows me, has fluorescent paint interspersed so when both light sources are turned off "interstellar stars" glow in the artist's galaxy much like my vintage rock posters from the psychedelic era.

T. Mikey stands quietly in the corner of the foyer, watching the procession of patrons file past, each pausing to soak in his art, the media and the messages. I learn after our introduction he's not just there to "people watch" but to keep an eye on things at the behest of Greg Gilmore, owner of the building. This art is the first to be unveiled inside The B.O.B. When all is said and done 155 pieces will be exhibited in and around the landmark. There is a worry that an intoxicated reveler may stumble into one of Mikey's massive panels.



"Alice in Mikeyland" with curious onlooker.



"Picnic on the Moon" (left) and "Alice in Mikeyland" (right) in the B.O.B.'s lobby

The last in the trio of installations, Alice in Mikeyland, presents a looking glass in which you, Alice, are allowed to look in. It is the most bizarre and surreal piece of the three. Alice, the March Hare, the Cheshire Cat are all present. Playing cards decorate borders. Pharmaceuticals float above Buckingham Palace. One is drawn into the madness that was the world of Lewis Carroll. Memories of the Jefferson Airplane and their classic anthem to altered states, White Rabbit, invade my mind as I stare in.

Of his 3DUV art Mikey says, "It'll take you weeks to see it all." Of that, I can attest, each of my viewings produces something new; a reflection, an image. He invites me to come again. He makes no bones about why he is in Grand Rapids, "I'm here to win." Little does T. Mikey realize the big win here is for Grand Rapids and the supporting businesses like The B.O.B. Both artist T. Mikey and restaurateur Greg Gilmore suggest... "Eat, Drink, Art, Repeat."



Fascinated viewer peers into the multi-layers of "Picnic on the Moon"