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Ed Drask

has been called the godfather of Richmond muralists. He is an artist through and through, whether beating out percussion on drum skin, or stroking brush across canvas, plywood or mortared brick. It's a compulsion and a habit of being that began when he was a boy of nine. Ed transformed art in Richmond, beginning with a rejection of the local "academy", and a punk rock penchant for illegally tating decrepit buildings in the city he calls home. His work appears on buildings throughout the world, and his canvases hang in scores of private and public collections. One of them even graces the VMFA's permanent collection. At a critical moment some years back, Ed separated his ego from his art. "I knew it had to be less about me," the artist says. And everything changed.

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DIVERSIONS

The New Richmonder Not a Richmonder at All

by FAYERUZ REGAN

TONY CORSANO WAS a corporate lawyer living in Brooklyn, New York and he was miserable. Working at what he describes as a “sweat shop law firm,” he left behind his law career to pursue his dream of being a musician.

He found work as a drummer, but his band toured six to eight months out of the year, which he found difficult. The promise of happiness still proved elusive. Then one day, he happened upon a concert in a park. A musician was singing children’s songs to a big crowd, filled with strollers and enthusiastic families. “It looked fun,” he said casually, belying the dedication he put into his next step.

He taught himself how to play guitar and created a children’s music program. Around this time, he was intrigued by a woman he met on the subway. Anais Alonso was a shy woman from a Puerto Rican family, and was also a musician. They quickly fell in love, got married and had a daughter they named Amara.

“There are two New Yorks” Anais explained, laughing. “A New York for single people, but a whole other New York once you have a kid.” Ready for a change, they delved into online research. “We drove down 95 and checked out different towns – places within a day’s drive to New York,” she said. Virginia Beach felt more like a tourist destination, and was a little too quiet in the winter. They sought an arts and culture scene that thrived year-round. Anais remembered an online article that listed Richmond as one of the nation’s top towns for people seeking careers as singer-songwriters.

While touring Richmond, they stopped at the Children’s Museum. They struck up a conversation with a parent who had moved down from New York, and were promptly invited to their party that night. There, they mingled with other parents, asking questions. “There’s a university scene and a music culture – everything from hip-hop to bluegrass,” Tony learned.

Music is what brought Pittsburgh native Lori Larson to the river city. “Rich-



Tony Corsano and Anais Alonso of Serenata.

mond had a rare opening for a music therapist. That’s the type of job where if it’s offered, you pack up and move. Richmond is growing in a way that I love. We’re making leaps with social progress, and it’s exciting to be a part of.”

There’s no doubt that Richmond is being flooded with outsiders, particularly from up North. “There are the people from New York and New Jersey that want to go to a prestigious college, but nothing around them is affordable. So they come to Tech and the University of Richmond,” says New Jersey native-turned-Richmonder Christina Drake. “Richmond has a beach to the east and mountains to the west, and we’re a perfect city right in the middle.”

Anais and Tony continued their research, checking out city parks. “We were standing on the banks of the James River, and it was 60 degrees on a winter’s day,” Anais recalls. Their decision was made.

The James River seems to have an effect on others as well. When Robert and I lived in Los Angeles, we frequented Richmond for weddings as soon as we hit our thirties. Friends gave us tours of revitalized Jackson Ward and the expanding VCU campus, excited about the change in the air. “Why don’t we live here?” Robert asked, as we bobbed

in the James. We had just eaten a big lunch at O’Tooles in Forest Hill, and were cooling off at Texas Beach with some friends. “You’d...live here?” I asked. “Why not?” he shrugged. I had assumed that just by virtue of living in California and being from Philadelphia, that a move to Richmond would be off the table. Writing that now seems almost silly.

Tony and Anais made the move, and he began a lucrative career as Tony Tunes, playing children’s parties and regular gigs at places such as Perk! in Bon Air. Anais followed her dream of moving out of administrative work, and becoming a teacher. As their dreams came to fruition, they expanded upon them. Together, they created Serenata – an incredibly smooth Latin music duo. From salsa to cumbia, sprinkled in with crowd-pleasing hits from Selena to Frank Sinatra, they grace stages from Brambly Park to The Tobacco Company.

Tony recalled, “At a party, I asked someone what made them move here? They said that Richmond is still a place where if you have a dream, you can make it come to pass.”

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Whistler to Cassatt

A Revolutionary Movement

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

IT WAS A TIME NOT UNLIKE

other times. A time of almost climatic change, as new ideas blew away the archaic prevailing norms. Not much different than the time we now inhabit.

As you move from one gallery to the next at this exhibition, you witness that period—shortly before and shortly after the dawn of a new century—when America, through its artists, glimpsed the beginning of the modern era.

“That conflict between old and new, between the traditional and modern, is the underlying theme of this exhibition,” says Dr. Susan J. Rawles, who curated



One gallery entrance hung with wisteria, underscoring the natural themes of the Impressionist artists.

this exhibit which was organized by the Denver Art Museum.

In this exhibit titled “Whistler to Cassatt: American Painters in France,” more than 100 paintings by this country’s most renowned artists of the period—everyone from James Abbott McNeill Whistler to Mary Cassatt, from Winslow Homer to John Singer Sargent—are represented. They were expats who left their homeland to study in Paris, ground-zero of a revolutionary art movement that most of us know as Impressionism. When these artists returned stateside, their welcome, in some cases, was anything but warm.

“Because of these revolutionary devel-

opments, when American artists return home their French-inspired work is often accused of being ‘un-American,’” Dr. Rawles says.

At the gateway to the exhibit, you encounter a massive photographic panel depicting the Eiffel Tower, still under construction. “The partially completed view of the Eiffel Tower confronting you at the exhibition entrance is meant to drive home the fact that this is a transitional moment in art and history,” says Dr. Rawles. “Advocates of the Tower called it ‘the art of the modern engineer’; yet academics despaired of its ugliness – as something ‘even the Americans didn’t want.’”

My daughter Catherine, an artist herself, and I slowly meandered through one gallery after another, baptized in a dizzying array of form and color. As with all exhibits at the VMFA in recent memory, this one was created to whisk the visitor through rooms that emit a sense of time and place. Each gallery space is visually distinctive with the addition of music that further enhances the journey through this radical period in American art.



Springtime, ca. 1884, John Henry Twachtman, oil on canvas. Cincinnati Art Museum

Of the galleries, Dr. Rawles says, “They traverse the distance from the academic to the modern. The path isn’t smooth, nor is it consistent, and it is peppered with important actors along the way – including James Abbot McNeill Whistler, whose intellectual and artistic impact changed the trajectory of contemporary art; and Mary Cassatt who, in addition to her extraordinary achievements as an artist, facilitated the creation of American private and public collections.”

In the very first gallery, there are a number of paintings by American artists that were embraced by the Academy because they adhered to the time-honored themes, both historical and biblical, that visually preached a gospel of virtue. But the very last painting in this hall breaks with that tradition. It was made by a woman named Elizabeth Nourse, and it foretells the shape of things to come. It is dominated by purples and greens and the subject is a woman in her home. And it has nothing to do with the old themes. This one seems to speak of the sacredness of the ordinary—sans symbols and sermons—panegyrics to the beauty inherent in nature and the mundane.



Young Girl at a Window, ca. 1883–84, Mary Cassatt, oil on canvas. Corcoran Collection

Each gallery widened our eyes. As Catherine put it, when we neared the end of the exhibit: “They’ve done an incredible job at showcasing these crucial moments in art history in novel ways. The curator has highlighted an aspect of one of the most well-known movements in art and has contextualized it into an American viewpoint.” A perfect assessment.

Along the way were scores of visual surprises, including a small piece by Winslow Homer, and another painting titled Springtime, by John Henry Twachtman, with vast negative spaces and amorphous trees and gauzy colors

that seem to be drifting into expressionism.

For the longest while we moved through



The Sketchers, 1913, John Singer Sargent, oil on canvas. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

the large gallery space that was inhabited by the spirit of Mary Cassatt, the most famous woman artist in the world at the time, who preferred to be called an Independent rather than an Impressionist. Her paintings create calm and reflection, and demand dignity to women and motherhood and children, who for the first time are treated as individual beings with their own sensibilities, instead of adornments to a mythic narrative dominated by patriarchs.

As we left the museum and made our way to my daughter’s car, parked on Arthur Ashe Boulevard, we both stopped in our tracks at the same moment, responding to a massive shadow, and turned to look at the massive bronze sculpture of a triumphant young Black man mounted on a steed. This nameless man sports dreadlocks and is clad in torn jeans, and wears a pair of high top Nikes.

On about the time, a couple years ago, that this sculpture by Kehinde Wiley called “Rumors of War” was being unveiled, equestrian monuments from another age were coming down, one by one, to the hue and cry and a general gnashing of teeth by those unable to relinquish the past for the future; but art, like life, always moves forward, and there’s no stopping it. **NJ**

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

200 North Arthur Ashe Boulevard

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UPCOMING SHOWS

Unstill Life

At Eric Schindler

KATHELEEN HALL IS A Virginia-based painter working primarily from direct observation. Kathleen has been a resident at numerous artist colonies including Yaddo, the Cité Internationale des Arts, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

This exhibition, Unstill Life, will feature recent oil paintings as well as a series of miniature gouache paintings of trees inspired by illuminated manuscripts. Through May 28.

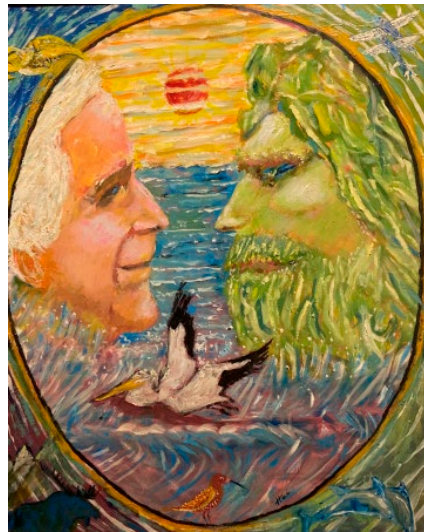
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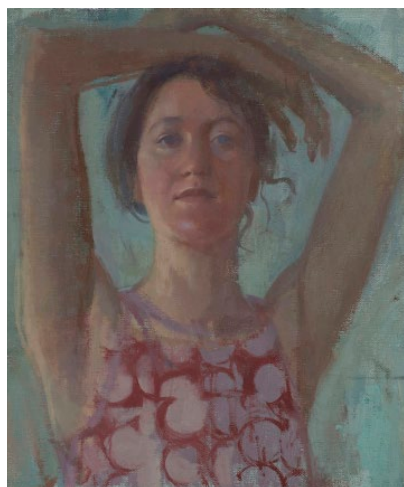
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HeatWave by Kathleen Hall at Eric Schindler

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Vladimir Putin

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

by JACK R. JOHNSON

IN ROBERT PENN WARREN'S famous novel, "All The King's Men," Jack Burden, the protagonist is charged with digging up dirt on an old judge who opposes Willy Stark's rise to power. Burden protests that there may be nothing with which to incriminate the judge.

Willy Stark laughs and retorts, sententiously, "Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud. There is always something."

That 'something' in the case of Vladimir Putin is not difficult to find. Like Sergio Leone's famous Spaghetti Western, Putin's got a bit of good, a bit of bad, and a lot of ugly.

Beginning with his first appointment under former Russian President Boris Yeltsin, Putin essentially began in corruption. Yeltsin appointed this former KGB agent as acting prime minister of the Government of the Russian Federation. Yeltsin also announced that he wanted to see Putin as his successor. Despite a lot of infighting by rivals in the Dumas, Putin successfully navigated the appointment and when Yeltsin resigned in December 1999, Putin became acting President. His first act as President was to sign a Presidential Decree titled "On guarantees for the former president of the Russian Federation and the members of his family." This ensured that "corruption charges against the outgoing President and his relatives" would not be pursued. A similar pattern developed shortly thereafter with various 'decrees' exonerating either himself or other allies in the Dumas.

According to Richard Sakwa, Putin also managed to win a power struggle with the Russian oligarchs who had grown reckless under Yeltsin's rudderless leadership. He achieved what Sakwa describes as a 'grand bargain' that allowed the oligarchs to maintain most of their wealth, in exchange for their explicit support of Putin's government. This was probably necessary for reconstruction of the impoverished Russia state, but it was handled in a typically pugilistic fashion. As David Remnick put it in *The New Yorker*, "Putin read them the riot act, saying, you can keep your riches, but stay out of politics. Those who kept their nose in politics, like Mikhail Khodorkovsky, were punished, sent to



prison. Others left the country with as much of their fortune as possible."

Vladimir Putin won his election to presidency for two more terms, but he was barred from a third consecutive term by the Russian Constitution. He essentially handpicked his replacement, First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. According to *The New York Times*, "In a power-switching operation on May 8th 2008, only a day after handing the presidency to Medvedev, Putin was appointed Prime Minister of Russia, maintaining his political dominance."

In terms of foreign relations, Putin has not always acted as erratically as the current Ukrainian invasion might indicate. In fact, on the 'good' side, Putin strongly objected to President George W. Bush's decision in 2001 to abandon the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. In response to the September 11 attacks on the United States in 2001, Putin pledged Russia's cooperation in the U.S.-led campaign against terrorists and their allies, offering the use of Russia's airspace for humanitarian deliveries and help in search-and-rescue operations.

Putin also joined German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and French Presi-

dent Jacques Chirac in 2002-03 to oppose U.S. and British plans to use force to oust Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq. Arguably, these actions show a wiser sense of statesmanship than anything on offer from the United States at the time.

Domestically, Putin was not all bad, either. He restored some nominal economic vitality and stability to Russia. He commemorated the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the post-Soviet Constitution in December 2013 by ordering the release of some 25,000 individuals from Russian prisons. In a separate, somewhat ironic move, he finally granted a pardon to Mikhail Khodorkovsky whom he had imprisoned for more than a decade.

But there was a shift in tone when bordering states started joining NATO. Foreign policy experts suggest that Putin's vision of Russia is through a historical lens, a "Russkiy Mir" (Russian World) view. Putin sees Russia as having a sphere of influence that extends to neighbors on her borders, just as the U.S. considers South American nations as its sphere (e.g., "The Monroe Doctrine").

Foreign Policy's Benjamin R. Young makes the case that "Putin believes an invasion of Ukraine is a righteous cause and necessary for the dignity of the Russian civilization, which he sees as being genetically and historically superior to other Eastern European identities." A statement that curiously makes Putin sound as "Nazi" as he accuses the Ukrainians of being.

In April 2014, groups of unidentified gunmen outfitted with Russian equipment seized government buildings throughout southeastern Ukraine. Putin referred to the region as Novorossiya ("New Russia"), evoking claims from Russia's imperial past. One might say this moment was the beginning of Putin's ugly period.

On February 27, 2015, opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was gunned down within sight of the Kremlin, just days after he had spoken out against Russian intervention in Ukraine. Nemtsov was only the latest Putin critic to be assassinated or to die under suspicious circumstances. In January 2016 a British public inquiry officially implicated Putin in the 2006 murder of former Federal Security Service officer Alexander

Litvinenko. Litvinenko had spoken out against Russian government ties to organized crime both before and after his defection to the United Kingdom. He was poisoned with polonium-210 while drinking tea in a London hotel bar.


Aleksey Navalny, an opposition activist who had first achieved prominence as a leader of the 2011 protest movement, has been repeatedly imprisoned.

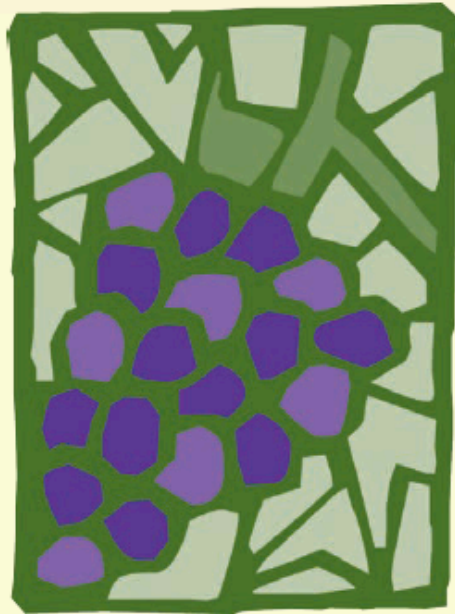
In the September 2016 legislative election, voter turnout was just 47.8 percent, the lowest since the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to The Britanica, “voter apathy was attributed to Putin’s steady implementation of so-called ‘managed democracy,’ a system whereby the basic structures and procedures of democracy were maintained but the outcome of elections was largely predetermined.”

Apparently, attempts at “managed democracy” was not limited to Russia. “In the months prior to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, a series of high-profile hacking attacks targeted the Democratic Party and its presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. Computer security experts tied these attacks to Russian intelligence services, and in July 2016 thousands of private e-mails were published by WikiLeaks. Within days the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation opened a probe into Russian efforts to influence the presidential election—this investigation also examined possible connection to the Trump campaign.”

In February 2022, Russia formally invaded Ukraine, but many think Putin miscalculated. Putin’s popularity has plummeted, at home and abroad. The decadent West has been surprisingly united in its response, with even neutral Switzerland considering sanctions. In fact, Putin’s aggression may very well bring about the very results he feared; a further retreat from the old Soviet Union borders with a newly strengthened NATO thrown into the bargain.

As Stephen Kockins noted in The New Yorker, “Very few people talk to Putin, either Russians on the inside or foreigners. [But] he’s getting what he wants to hear. In any case, he believes that he’s superior and smarter. Despotism creates the circumstances of its own undermining. The information gets worse. The sycophants get greater in number. The corrective mechanisms become fewer. And the mistakes become much more consequential.”

If this is true, then here’s hoping Putin’s invasion of Ukraine is the very mistake that begins to undo Putin’s 20-year rule. Turns out Willy Stark was right. There is always something. 



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ED TRASK GREW UP IN LOUDON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

just outside Purcellville, on the edge of a suburban tide from the east that would eventually swallow a good portion of the county, but in those days, it was still largely rural, spread across hills that gently rolled into the Blue Ridge. As a boy he learned self-sufficiency; how to cook his breakfast and launder his clothes. His parents worked, and his brother and sister, both older than Ed, were seldom around after school. So Ed had the run of the house and the fifteen acres that surrounded it. He would wander the woods, soaking up nature, and on still, cool, cloudless nights he would see the nearness of the stars overhead, and could feel the thickness of the profound silence like a blanket, which he would become one with, and his soul would soar.

We're sitting at a table in Ed's studio over top a retail business down in the Bottom. It is a working space with a modicum of clutter, a number of surfboards, two drum sets, several large canvases—commissioned works; two landscapes, one of an interior—soon to be installed. Ed is framed by one of the four windows looking out on the city skyline. Just over his shoulder I can read the legend, *La Bodega* in a white cursive script on a red background that is set against a field of turquoise.

Two things have been creative constants in his life since boyhood: visual art and music. As a child, Ed would draw logos of his favorite bands or skateboard brands, and would play the drums almost incessantly. When he was just nine, Ed began taking drum lessons, which he continued to do through high school. "I was getting really serious about concert percussion and drums," says Ed. "So my dad would drive me to Winchester twice a week to get lessons under the percussive group at the Shenandoah Conservatory of Music."

In a high school art class, Linda Ackerman, a perceptive teacher, noticed an innate talent in Ed, a shine he possessed like no other. Linda had laid out small packs of oil paints and brushes and 11-by-14 canvas boards. She'd also placed a stack of National Geographic magazines on a desktop.

"Now," Linda said, "Pick an image out of a magazine and paint it. I'll be back in forty-five minutes," and she left the room.

Three-quarters of an hour later, she returned and moved among the students like a fish among its spawn. Lin-

da looked at the work of her students, one by one, and nodded and smiled, but when she came to Ed's work, her mouth opened and her eyes grew wide. He had perfectly replicated the image from the magazine.

"Whoa!" she said. "You've done this before."

Ed shook his head. "I've never ever painted before," he said.

For the remainder of the semester, Linda continued to challenge her charge. "She kept throwing painting projects in front of me," Ed remembers. "And I just kept doing it, and it always felt right."

Linda eventually set up a meeting with Ed's parents, and she told them this: "The reason why your son is not getting straight As is because he doesn't think the same way other people do. He's an artist."

Ed's father, Newell, didn't miss a beat. "All right," he said. "We'll just push him that way."

Like his son, Newell had an extraordinary and inventive sort of brain. But where Ed's thrived on artistic expression, his father's roamed the corridors of scientific inquiry. Newell's scholastic pedigree was as pure as it gets—MIT, Harvard, Caltech. He was an astrogeologist with NASA for years, working on the Mercury and the Apollo missions. Newell helped the first man land on the moon. He was actually being interviewed by Walter Cronkite just as Neil Armstrong was making

"one giant leap for mankind." Newell, who passed away five years ago, also worked for the U.S. Geological Survey. "My mother was that way, too," says Ed. "They saw that I didn't really process things on the same side of the brain as they did."

As high school graduation neared, Ed had a tough choice to make. He could either go to VCU and study painting, or attend Shenandoah Conservatory of Music to major in percussion. But there was a third choice—George Mason University. "I thought maybe I could do the academic route," Ed says.

That was not to be. "After the first semester at George Mason I was like, this sucks," says Ed. "Get me out of here."

So he headed a hundred miles south to Richmond, and everything opened up for him. "I came to VCU, and I think within the first week of being here I was like, 'This is where I belong,'" Ed says. "These are my people."

He hit the ground running, majored in painting and printmaking, immersed himself in the punk culture and art scene, explored the city, and made it his own. Ed also did a fair amount of drinking.

In his junior year, three of his art professors conducted something of an intervention in a studio classroom in the old Pollack Building.

"This is ridiculous," one of them said.

"You're showing up half drunk sometimes," said another. "We see a lot of talent, but you're not doing it."

And the third one said, "You're just wasting your parents' money."

Ed was outraged. "F*** you, I quit," he yelled and then walked away, slamming the door behind him. He did not look back.

"That pissed me off so much that all I wanted to do was prove them wrong," Ed says.

Almost immediately he found a rundown place in the 300 block of West Broad Street, the space that is now occupied by Black Iris Gallery. He negotiated with the realtors who were managing the property, and got it for song with a lease that ran for two short months. But Ed and other local artists had a vision for the place. They transformed it into a sort of anti-gallery gallery.

"It was me and five other underground VCU artists," Ed recalls. "We knew we didn't belong at 1708 or in that whole realm of academia. For us it was like a big middle finger to the establishment."

When the two-month lease expired, the gallery was thriving, so Ed renegotiated and ended up renting the space for the next year and half. "The artists made money and we made our rent and power, so it became viable," says Ed.

It was during this time that Ed did his first illegal mural, and he did it out of something that was akin to necessity. "I couldn't get into the commercial galleries and I just don't honestly think

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN
PHOTOS BY REBECCA D'ANGELO



Ed Trask applies the first brush stroke last spring for a mural at Bellevue and Brook.

I was all that good of an artist," he says. "I didn't know where I belonged or what I was doing, but I knew I had to put a brush to a surface."

Ed had just finished reading the collected stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer, a thick tome of biblical proportions. "So I started putting stuff on sheets of

plywood on the sides of buildings that I thought were ugly," he says. "At first, it was the thrill of doing something illegal. But then I started realizing that it was a beacon call to a lot of these buildings. Some of these buildings were tax write offs, sitting there rotting."

Armed with a can of black paint and a few brushes, Ed attacked a large plywood panel surrounding the renovation and expansion of a building near 14th Street. Working from a photo of Isaac Singer of the dust jacket of the book, an image not much larger than a postage stamp, Ed began painting. He'd finished his work within two hours—an eight-by-eight foot portrait of one of the greatest storytellers of all time. It was rough, it was fast, and the immediacy of it all appealed to Ed.

After he finished, Ed packed up his gear and walked up the hill toward Bank Street, and from that height looked down on his handiwork. He watched as a business suit slowed his pace, which seemed partly impaired by a two-martini lunch, and inched up to the mural on plywood which was still tacky to the touch. Several seconds later, the suit shook his head and walked away.

Ed could hardly contain his thrill. "Oh my God," he thought, nearly out loud. "I won, I did it. I just stopped him in his tracks, made him contemplate his position. I just made art that was for him, that was for everybody, not just for the bourgeois gallery crowd. I made something that everybody can either hate or love."

He had a studio on 14th Street in the old American Die Company building that was later raised when the city built the Flood Wall. "I would spend every waking moment at that studio," Ed says. "I would sleep, wake up, make art on wood on paper, and sometimes just attach it to buildings. I was putting it everywhere."

More often than not they were quick portraits of authors he had read, or people in the news, or artists he admired. "Anything from J.D. Salinger to Vonnegut and Mother Theresa, to Rauschenberg," says Ed.

During this entire period and for years thereafter, Ed also played drums for a number of punk rock bands, starting with Backlash and others along the way. He also decided to return to school and finish his college degree. "I added a ton of art history classes and loved it and thrived and saw it in a whole different light," Ed says.

As drummer for bands like Avail and Kepone, he was often on the road both stateside and abroad. And he would bring along his art kit and paint murals in Amsterdam, in Germany, or wherever else he landed. On a couple occasions he had run-ins with cops, but nothing much came of it. Not overseas at any rate.

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an iconic image that gives identity to a neighborhood?"

As his name spread, he began picking up jobs in other states. He did a mural in Florida and shortly after that was asked by Partners in the Americas to help create a mural in a city just to the south of Sao Paulo, Brazil. It was an experience that would change Ed Trask for good and all, would awaken him to a new truth about himself and his art.

He traveled down to Florianopolis, Brazil, and for the next three weeks he would help create a sixty-foot long mural along a fifteen-foot high wall

in the center of the town. His objective was to tell the story of the town. To that end he worked closely with an older man who supplied him with scores of photographs, and narrated, through a translator, the entire story of the city.

"And I worked with kids from the town and some of these kids came from pretty humble environments," says Ed. "It was a very profound time for me because that's when I started to divorce my ego from what I was doing. I started seeing how impactful public art could be. Working with these kids

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and seeing just how powerful it was to have this kind of creative outlet. I knew it had to be less about me and what I was putting up on the wall, and more about using my creativity to inspire another generation of younger artists and to inspire creative conversations that could really bring about positive change. That is what became my goal.”

Not long after that, Ed got a call from Hands On Greater Richmond. They wanted Ed to head up a giant volunteer piece about a hundred feet long. “I decided I was going to try this almost paint-by-number approach where I would draw everything out, and even-

Bill’s Barbecue on Arthur Ashe Boulevard near The Diamond, a unique part of Richmond’s culture that was unceremoniously reduced to rubble to make way for corporate boxes.

The VMFA, on a Sunday, was going to host a reception for Ed’s family and friends as the museum welcomed his painting into their permanent collection. The day before, a cloudless Saturday, Ed was at The Diamond overseeing the latest incarnation of the Street Art Festival. He watched in utter joy as his daughter and her friends painted a mural. His eyes shifted to his son who was playing softball out in center field.

that features the Lost Trail on Belle Isle. “Canvas is turning into the biggest thing now,” says Ed. “Visually, I’m going to interesting places on canvas, and I’m seeing light and a rhythm within nature a lot differently than I used to. I feel like I’m in a different place with canvas painting now, and I love it. And I was lucky to have Jennifer Glave and BJ Kocen who really have faith in me. Every time I would have a show she would push it, and the shows would sell out.”

Which is not to suggest that Ed no longer paints murals. As a matter of

breakfast bagel and an iced coffee, and then he saw her.

“This is true,” he says. “It was like she was walking in slow motion. It literally was that love at first sight thing.”

“What the f***?” he said in a whisper. “Who is that?” His friend Michael Bishop shared her name with Ed.

“I’m totally in love with that woman,” he would tell other friends in the days to come.

But he could never quite find the nerve to ask her out. That is until very early one morning at the Hole in the Wall, when Ed had consumed a lot in the way of liquid courage.

“So I walked right up to her and said, ‘Hey I’d like to take you out to lunch tomorrow,’” Ed tells me.

“It just bloomed from there,” he says. “She’s such a stunning woman in every way, and she’s so grounded, and she is wicked smart. She believes in the best of all people. She has always had faith in me, and has pushed me when I needed it.”

In fairly short order, the pair married and now, more than two decades later, have two children, a son and a daughter.

This fall, their daughter will begin the journey of her life. She heads up to New York on scholarship at Parsons School of Design in the heart of Greenwich Village. “She is so talented and we are so proud of her,” says Ed. “We’ve always been open with our daughter and our son.”



The Mechanism Of Love, Light & Protection.

rybody paints it in,” he says. “And I saw the impact it had on a lot of these volunteers and realized, I’m gonna be doing this for a while.”

About twelve years ago, Ed Trask and Jon Baliles had the foresight to realize we were entering a sort of Renaissance in Richmond where murals were concerned. Jon had just returned from Europe and was excited about a mural festival he had seen there.

“It turned out he had a lot of the same interests I had,” Ed says. “So we had a great conversation at that point. We kind of said: ‘Let’s come together and create a festival of street art and murals. So more than ten years ago now we had the very first Street Art Festival, and we brought in some of the biggest hitters of street art from all over the country.’”

Over the next several years there would be other Street Art Festivals here, and they were all successful. In 2017 there was a sort of alignment in Ed’s long career as an artist. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts had just purchased Ed’s painting of the iconic

The boy’s face seemed to say, “Can it get any better than this?” No, thought Ed, this is it.

And then he felt the vibration of his phone. He hesitated answering for a second so as not to shatter the memory of this singular moment.

“I pick it up,” Ed remembers. “It’s my mother. She says, ‘Your father just had a stroke and he’s in the hospital.’”

He planned on leaving immediately, but his family told him to attend the event at VMFA, that their father would have wanted him to. They believed their dad would be fine. “Do not come here,” one of his siblings said. “Sunday is the biggest moment you’ve had in your life. Dad’s not dying. Come Sunday night.” Which is what Ed ended up doing. By the time he arrived in Loudon Country, Newell Trask had passed.

“It’s such a balance between beauty and loss and forgiveness,” Ed says. “It took about a year for me to get back in the right mind frame.”

As he looks around the studio, his eyes fall on one of his recent paintings, one

fact he’s about to begin one along the wall of the former Dry Cleaners at the corner of Bellevue Avenue and Brook Road. The objective will be to tell the story of Northside, an extremely complex and intricate web.

“It’s gonna be almost a collage of different imagery that I think represents Northside in a very broad way,” says Ed. “There are so many historical story lines that have happened to shape Northside. I think I would have to use a whole city of walls to portray all of it. So I’ve picked certain ones that I’m attracted to and that reflect a broader range.”

Among other people, places and things, the mural will feature Arthur Ashe and Gabriel Prosser, the entry to Bryan Park and the old trolley line that ran through the Northside.

Ed met the love of his wife more than 25 years ago in one of Richmond’s earliest coffee shops—World Cup Coffee over on Robinson in the upper Fan. He had just come off tour with Kepone and he was hungover. He ordered a

His brow furrows a bit as he considers his daughter’s move to the north, but then the muscles relax as he recalls a discussion he had with Kelly not long ago.

“We were remembering what it was like when we went to college,” he says. “You were kind of scared, but you knew you were supposed to take that step. You were supposed to get out of your comfort zone, and you had to go, but you were petrified.” That memory brought instant joy to husband and wife.

“We felt great remembering that,” Ed Trask says. “We were nostalgic about it, but at the same time we realized it put us in the place where we are today, and that made us feel good about where we were then, and where we are now.” **NS**

Editor’s Note: To watch a brief interview with Ed about the Bellevue mural, visit our website.

Monthly Update

With Third District Councilwoman Ann-Frances Lambert

by **BRIGETTE KELLY**

REDISTRICTING

THE CITY'S POPULATION over the past decade increased by 11%, from 204,000 to 226,600, according to last year's census data. Each district needs 25,000 residents to make them equal. Based on the national headcount, the city needs to adjust four of its nine council districts: the 2nd, 3rd, 6th and 7th.

City officials initially agreed only three districts deviated from the ideal population size, but later found that the 7th District exceeded the needed population due to residents currently incarcerated.

On May 26 the adopted redistricting plan will take effect.

DIAMOND DEVELOPMENT

The city announced on March 23 that six development teams have been chosen to provide more information on their visions for the Diamond District. After the request for additional information is answered, the Evaluation Panel will issue a Request for Offers to the most qualified teams.

BROOK AND MARSHALL PLACEMAKING PROJECT

The intersection of Brook Road and West Marshall Street in the Arts District and Jackson Ward now features a new pedestrian place, an intersection mural, a parklet, shade umbrellas and bike racks.

UPCOMING '23 BUDGET

Mayor Levar Stoney released his budget for next year on March 4. Councilwoman Lambert submitted two amendments to the operating budget. One calls for a study that would look at options for a mixed-use development. This includes a



Ann-Frances Lambert

parking structure in the area around the North Avenue Branch Library.

Councilwoman Lambert also requested a Chamberbrook small area plan that includes assessing infrastructure, parking, traffic control, zoning, land use, public safety and economic vitality in the area.


GUN VIOLENCE

Last year, Councilwoman Lambert secured \$1.5 million from ARP funds that will go to gun violence prevention.

\$500,000 will be used for a gun buy-back program to help take illegal guns off of the streets. Last year the Richmond Police Department recovered 947 guns.

VDOT PROJECTS

The Virginia Department of Transportation is rehabilitating to I-64 on-ramp bridge over I-95 from Laburnum Avenue.

The project includes joint replacement, deck repair, structural steel repairs, bearing rehabilitation, concrete substructure surface repairs, concrete color coating on the bridge rail and painting ends. 



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BOOK REVIEW

“The Sign For Home” Is Sublime

by **FRAN WITHROW**

ARLO IS A DEAF-Blind Jehovah’s Witness who lives with a strict and controlling uncle, Brother Birch. Arlo is isolated and lonely, and has blocked out his past, as it is one of heartache, mystery, and loss.

Before coming to live with his uncle, Arlo was at The Rose Garden, a boarding school for the Deaf and DeafBlind. At school, Arlo made two close friends and was deeply in love with a girl. One chaotic night, however, alters everything, and ends with Arlo being wrenched from school and sent to live with his uncle. Arlo was told the girl he loved died, but Arlo has never forgotten her.

Things change when Arlo begins a college writing class, assisted by his long time interpreter, Molly, and his new interpreter, Cyril. During the class, Arlo is asked to write a personal essay, and doing so dredges up memories he has long tried to suppress. Cyril’s entrance into Arlo’s life and writing the personal essay are pivotal points that begin to change Arlo’s life. Cyril encourages him to look at the past. What really happened that fateful night at school? Are people lying to Arlo? What really happened to the girl he loved?

The story itself is brilliant, but the writing is what makes this book unique. Told in alternating voices, Cyril, a gay man who mourns his own lost love, and Arlo make realistically flawed yet sympathetic and endearing storytellers. Arlo expresses himself using the syntax and grammar of American Sign Language, and that style of communication is beautifully translated on the pages of this book by its talented author.

communicate their consumer’s words to hearing people, and vice versa. But in this story, Cyril finds himself becoming more than an interpreter as he watches Arlo struggle under Birch’s heavy hand. As Cyril stretches the limits of his job description, the story picks up the pace. Arlo finally discovers the truth about that night at The Rose Garden and decides to act on what he learns.

This book is not only a rousing good tale, but gives the reader better insight into the potential isolation of the DeafBlind community. (The scene where Arlo is caught in the rain, with only Snap, his guide dog, and no way to get help, is especially compelling.)

Fortunately, technology is ever-evolving to allow DeafBlind and hearing people to connect. This story introduced me to some of the latest tools available, as well as other ways of expanding horizons for the DeafBlind, including the fascinating Protactile touch.

You may remember that I am a fan of stories that don’t end up tied in a neat little bow. This is one of those books. Not everything is resolved by the last page, but there is love, contrition, forgiveness, and courage enough to fill your heart.

“The Sign for Home” is a winner. Watching Arlo find his voice, stand up for what he believes, and step forward with conviction and strength is just “sublime.”

You’ll have to read the book to see why “sublime” is the perfect word. Trust me. It is. **[N]**

“The Sign for Home”

By Blair Fell

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416 pages

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BRIEFS

NotJ Wins 1st Place and 3rd Place VPA Awards



Fran Withrow took 1st place for her book reviews in this year's VPA awards.

HERMITAGE RICHMOND'S 2ND ANNUAL BLESSING OF THE PETS

On April 23 more than sixty pets—dog and cats alike—received a blessing on the front lawn of Hermitage Richmond in Ginter Park. The Northside retirement community's chaplain, Steve Flowers, performed the blessings. The event raised \$369 for the Richmond SPCA. “We look forward to blessing even more pets next year,” says a Hermitage Richmond spokesperson.



Member of RCC's Legacy Cycling Team.

NORTH OF THE JAMES
James magazine won two awards from the Virginia Press Association.

Fran Withrow, our book reviewer, took first place in the columns category. Rebecca D'Angelo, Dale Vanderheyden and Charles McGuigan received third place in the combination photo and story category.

North of the James wishes to congratulate all journalists, photographers and designers across the Commonwealth who were also recognized for their work by our press association.



Chaplain Steve Flowers blesses a dog at Hermitage Richmond.

LEGACY CYCLING TEAM FILM PREMIERE AT THE BYRD

Richmond Cycling Corps (RCC) is hosting the world premiere of a short film about the Legacy Cycling Team at the Byrd Theatre on May 16 at 7 pm. Proceeds will benefit RCC, a non-profit that educates and empowers youth living in Richmond's East End. Along with the screening there will be food, drink, raffle items, and a silent auction.

The film was shot in 2021 and features the local team practicing in Richmond and racing in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Shimano, a bike component manufacturer, sponsored the film which was shot by Anthill Films. Shimano also donated ten bikes, helmets, new shoes and other equipment to RCC.

Tickets, which are \$20, can be purchased at rccxshimano.eventbrite.com



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