

Statement for Ophelia Magazine

I was born in 1944 in Long Beach, California, to a hard working lower middle class family. My father owned Eddy's Garage, and my mother worked in an aircraft factory. It was a troubled family, and my parents were divorced while I was very young. We moved five times before I graduated from high school, struggling to settle down. I was an insecure, unhappy, angry young boy that underachieved in school. But, I was also driven. I started working part time for my father at 10 years old in the auto refinishing department of his shop. We did not get along, so at 13 I opened a custom car painting business in my mother's garage. That is when I purchased the airbrush that I use to this day to make my paintings. The neighbors protested my business. I closed it down, but I soon opened a surfboard shop that after some time also failed. By then I had graduated from high school.

After graduation I left home to study at the University of Hawaii, in Honolulu. My high school grades were poor. The University of Hawaii was the only school that would accept me. This is when I really came alive. I changed my major from history to art, and got a job doing tourist photography to support myself. That began my introduction to and use of photography that would become central to my art. I was transformed. My mind came alive. I loved my academic studies and my art classes. I began to develop an art that accepted and utilized aspects of the unique experiences of my life. I integrated the airbrush and photography into my art. More was to come. I had my first exhibition in 1968 at Ewing Krainin Gallery in Honolulu. I was 23 years old. The rest is history.

1968 was also the year that I returned to California and began to work in earnest. Because I was determined to make art that grew out the unique social, economic, environmental, and cultural circumstances of my life, the work has evolved as my life has evolved. Though the work has evolved continuously, it can roughly be divided into three large arenas. The first stage could be called Formal. I was concerned with exploring representation, illusion, and the canvas surface. I wanted to create a tension between the desire to read space into the painting and the inability to do so. The second stage of my development could be called Perceptual. As time went along I realized that I needed to explore the nature of perception rather than take it for granted. In this work, the imagery changed, becoming more field like, and I invented the process that I use to this day of breaking all imagery down into little circles. In truth, to this day, in an important sense, there are no images in my painting, only millions of little circles. The third stage of my evolution could be called Experiential. Slowly, I found myself contemplating philosophical and spiritual questions. The dominating question became not just how we perceive the world, but how we experience our lives. This has remained the central concern up to this day. The current multi-paneled work is built around the notion that don't see the world at once as a whole, but assemble it into a "believed" whole through bits and pieces, filtered through our place, circumstances, acculturation, socialization, etc.

Of course, at the same time that I was immersed in these explorations, I was beginning to exhibit and build a career. Early in the development of my public life, I was labeled as part of a movement called alternately, Hyperrealism, Photorealism, Sharp Focus Realism, etc. As you might guess from the preceding paragraph, none of those labels fit my vision of my work. They were all commercially generated labels to market art. I have learned to live with the labels, but not like them. Nevertheless, I have been blessed with a long and rewarding life in art, mostly due to the unwavering commitment of my dealer of 54 years, Nancy Hoffman. My goal has always been to make transcendent art. I hope I shall get there.

The art world has grown and changed immensely in those 54 years. It seems a wonderful, if sometimes troubled place. It is so big that there seems a place for every esthetic position. Oddly, it seems a more inviting place for representational painting than in the past. Gone is the early intense hostility. Most every gallery I visit in NYC has one or more representational artists. Young artists are not at all shy to use recognizable images in their work.

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List

1. My favorite Spanish painter is Antonio Lopez Garcia
2. A favorite painting is The School of Athens by Raphael
3. My favorite piece of music is Shostakovich's Symphony #7 "Leningrad"
4. The film that changed my life was Lawrence of Arabia. It made me want to make a contribution.
5. At the moment, my favorite book is The Buddenbrooks, by Thomas Mann
6. I will forever enjoy any dinner at Pierre Gagnaire restaurant in Paris
7. My favorite city to visit is Vienna.