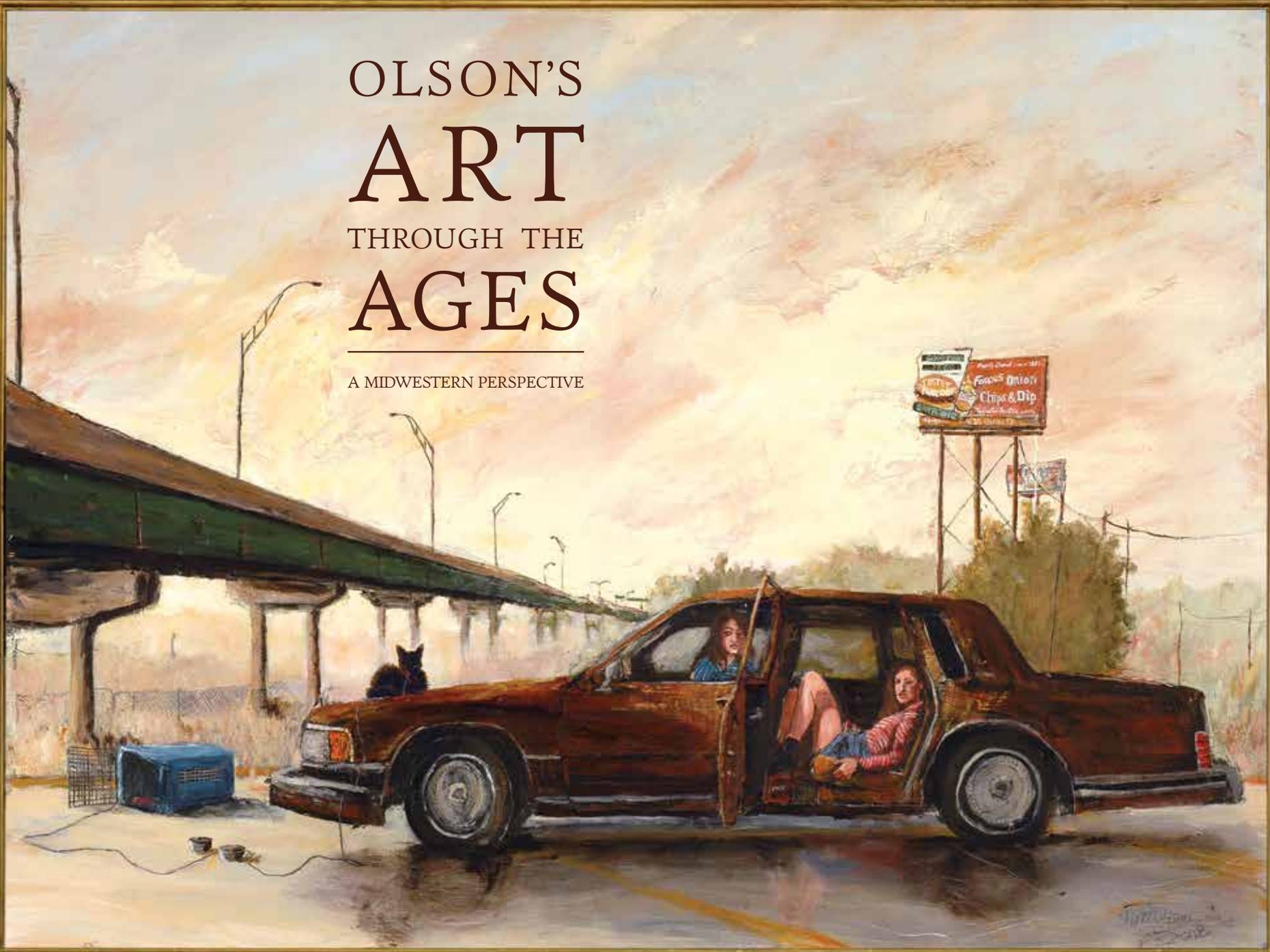
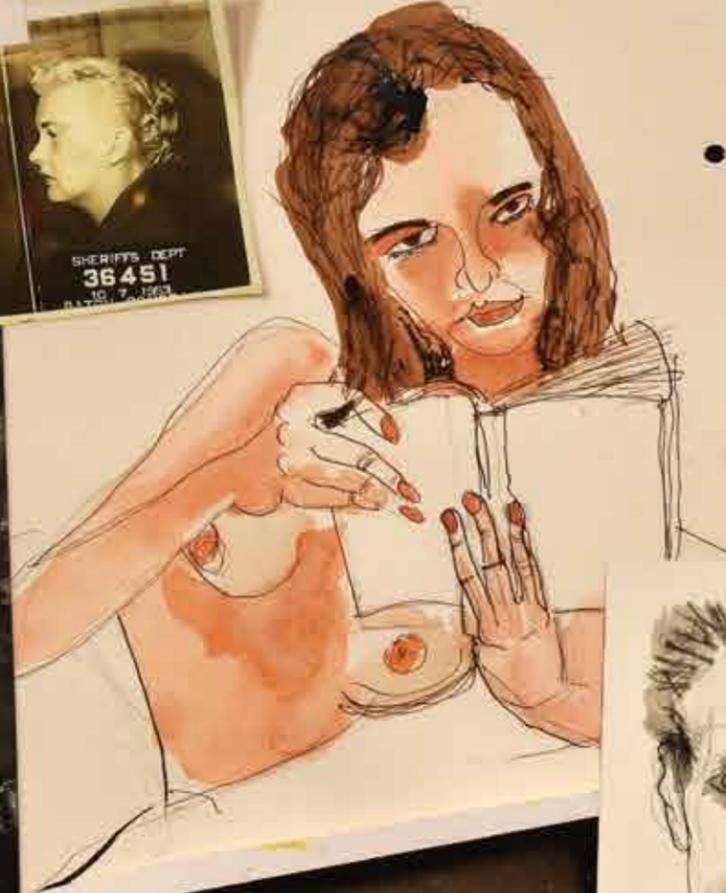


OLSON'S
ART
THROUGH THE
AGES

A MIDWESTERN PERSPECTIVE



EXOTIC PET DEALERS HEADING TO MISSOURI



KENTUCKY REFORMA 2303F

Webster County CRIME STOPPERS MOST WANTED



This catalogue accompanies the exhibition
Olson's Art Through the Ages organized by the
Dubuque Museum of Art in Dubuque, Iowa.

February 20—June 13, 2021
Kris Mozena McNamer Gallery

Support for this catalogue is provided by
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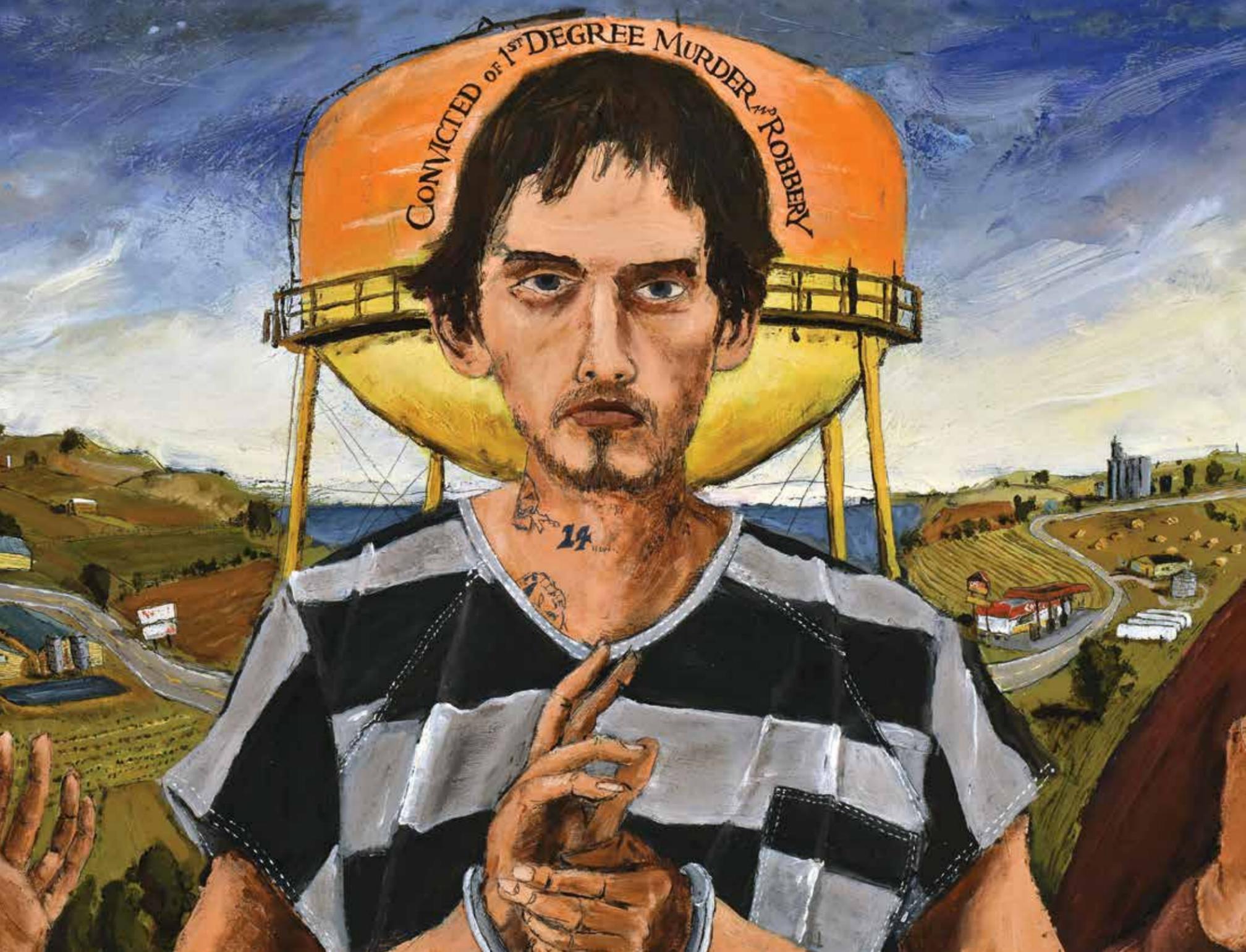
OLSON'S ART THROUGH THE AGES

A MIDWESTERN PERSPECTIVE

PAINTINGS BY
TIM OLSON

ORGANIZED BY
THE DUBUQUE MUSEUM OF ART

FEBRUARY 20 to
JUNE 13, 2021



INTRODUCTION

Stacy Gage Peterson, Curator and Registrar,
Dubuque Museum of Art

I remember when I first saw Tim Olson's *The Arrow Head Motel Triptych*. Going through the latest submissions to the 2017 DuMA Biennial, I stopped short as the extraordinary painting suddenly filled my screen. The first thing I noticed was how closely it resembled the famous *Annunciation Triptych* (1428) painting by Robert Campin. The setting, figures, and symbolic imagery were all unmistakable in Olson's 21st century version but, far from being a reproduction of Campin's *Annunciation Triptych*, Olson completely reimagined the work as a scene from contemporary Midwestern life. *Arrow Head Motel* was selected for the Biennial that year and received the Second Place and Purchase Awards. It also became the first in a series of 12 works by Olson, presented here, where he examines contemporary life using the conventions of classic art.

Artists have long drawn on the art of the past to create something new. French painter Édouard Manet was inspired by past images of the goddess Venus when he created his version of her, called *Olympia*, in 1865 but his decision to portray her as an assertive modern courtesan broke from tradition and shocked even the art savvy French public. Most recently, during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic, art of the past even went "viral," so to speak, when people all over the world began posting selfies online of famous works of art that they had re-created at home using everyday items found there. The home played an unconventional role in Campin's masterpiece. The painting followed a long tradition in art of depicting the Christian Annunciation story but Campin made his version more accessible

to his contemporaries by placing the scene in the dining room of a modern Dutch home—a significant break from the conventional setting of that ancient biblical story.

Likewise, Olson embraces the unexpected in his work. The people and places are pulled directly from the present day and grounded in the everyday reality of the state fair, small-town motels, and the local police beat. These are not traditional sources for religious icons or portraits of wealthy benefactors but, like Campin and Manet before him, Olson makes daring choices that build upon and then break from traditions. His irreverent characters are captivating even beyond the art historical references. There is a handcuffed convict in the pose of Christ, a man in his meth lab replaces Joseph in his workshop, and a husband and wife who have been arrested on drug charges replace a devout count and countess. Examining how the artist elevates provincial, in some cases criminal, life to a level of piety and reverence is part of the fascination and fun of exploring these works. In some instances, it's unsettling how seamlessly the historical compositions are reworked to their modern incarnations.

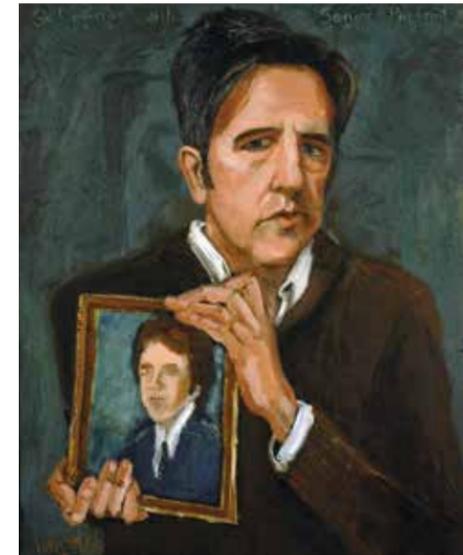
Through this series, art of the past is brought into the contemporary experience. These works allow us to see our world through the canons of art history and discover connections between past and present. Olson's paintings are steeped in art history. It is the language he uses to express his vision while creating works that are distinctly and wholly his own.

A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

DuMA's Curator, Stacy Gage Peterson, and Director of Education, Margaret Buhr hold a pandemic style Q & A with Tim Olson.

What are the elements in artwork from history that attract you?

My interest in art history started with photography. When I was younger I would pick up old postcards or studio photos in thrift stores. My first attempts at drawing were taken from those postcards, film stills and early cheesecake photographs. Part of the attraction was the mystery of the photographs; the “who” and “why” were lost. “Who is the young man in this photo? Why is he posing with a handgun by the beach?” Or “Who is the girl in a bikini? Why is she putting on a spacesuit? Or is she supposed to be taking it off?” And with art from the past—even though I know art historians can answer many of the “who” and “why” questions—I look at it in the same ill-informed way. That sort of mystery and slight disconnect is something I love in art.



Self-portrait with Senior Portrait, 2017.
Oil on panel, 24 x 18 inches. Collection of the artist.

I think what attracts me to the work of the early Netherlandish painters is the mixture of perfection and primitiveness. It varies from painting to painting and artist to artist, but in general there's a high degree of skill mixed with a kind of awkward stiffness and an off-kilter perspective. The paintings create a world with their own physics.

Your work connects the past with the present. When and why did that become one of the defining characteristics of your work?

The first time I tried to do that directly was when I made a version of Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress*. It wasn't entirely successful, but it was a start. I made the piece because other artists had already tried their hand at it, and I just liked the idea of being part of a progression in history, however minor. Most of the artists I like are looking backward and forward at the same time.

Is it important to you that the viewer be familiar with the historical or contemporary references in your paintings?

The more a person knows about painting—or has at least looked at painting—the more they are going to get out of any exhibit or work of art. That's true of any subject—music, football, matchbook collecting. Still, whatever the viewer is willing to bring to these is fine with me.

What artists or genres most influence your aesthetic sense?

I love folk art and outsider art. I look at a lot of those paintings and sculptures, whirligigs and whatnots, without remembering who made them. Stanley Spencer is an influence for these paintings. It seems as if he had two or three slightly different styles, which he alternated depending on the subject matter he was depicting. I'm interested in the way he set biblical scenes in the English village where he lived.

Other artists I looked back to while making these paintings were: Marsden Hartley, Paula Rego, David Bates, Alice Neel, Honoré Sharrer—and of course Robert Campin, Hans Memling, Rogier van der Weyden and all of the other artists whose work I was directly referencing.

Take us through your process from the beginning.

I do a lot of throwaway preparatory drawings of the figures and of all of the cars and beds and beer bottles and birds that I will need. I don't have a great—or even a very good—visual memory, so that if I'm drawing a car or a coffee pot, I really need to look at a car or a coffee pot.

I do try to map things out before I start, but the paintings never come together quite the way I expected, so I still work most of it out as I'm doing it. Oil paint is perfect for me, because it takes me a while to make decisions, so it's always helpful to be able to wipe or scratch things out. I put on several layers, and there has to be drying time between the layers. If I'm working on a big piece that's not a problem, I can just move from spot to spot. If I'm working on something smaller, I need to have two pieces going at once.

What notable and/or unexpected responses have you had to your work?

The piece I've gotten the most feedback from is *The Arrow Head Motel Triptych*. If people don't like it, it's usually because of the subject matter. Someone did tell me it was out of date, “because people don't even make meth that way anymore.” That's a relief, I guess.

Explain the role of humor in your work.

I think people see the world in different ways—some as melodrama, some as magic realism, some as tragedy. I lean toward a “dark comedy” worldview and that is something that is always going to show itself no matter what I paint: bunny rabbits, Florence Nightingale, or Beelzebub.

Tell us how your practice has evolved over time.

I have slowed down a bit, which for me is good. The way I used to work was a bit frantic. I also spend a lot of time making the frames. I make them first, which gives me a bit more time to plan out the painting.

When I was younger my work was all in photography. I took a lot of photographs everywhere I went, without thinking too much about what I was doing. Then I'd take the processed negatives and make collages with scissors, tape and glue, and then I would print the collages. What worked for me then were all the accidental marks and juxtapositions and scratches on the negatives. So when I first started to draw and paint, I worked the same way. I did a lot of drawings hoping for something spontaneous to happen. Often it did, but then I'd go through long stretches where nothing worked at all. It got to the point where just drawing a figure was a sort of white-knuckle experience.

Regarding your life as an artist, what is the most useful advice someone has given you?

I can't remember specific words of wisdom. I have been lucky to have a few people over the years who have really encouraged me to continue what I was doing and to keep working, though sadly I didn't always listen and I wasted a lot of time. I am a slow learner as far as painting goes and making some kind of life as an artist. I feel as if I'm just now starting to figure it out.

What are you working on presently?

I am working on another large hinged triptych, this one set inside a trailer home, but it's not based on any specific painting.

Future plans?

The past few years I've worked a job restoring stained glass windows. Now I'd really love to do a figure in stained glass. Also, about a year ago a friend asked if I would consider making a portrait of Dan Gable (the famed wrestler, coach and all around Iowa diety). Maybe I'll combine the two and do Dan Gable in stained glass.



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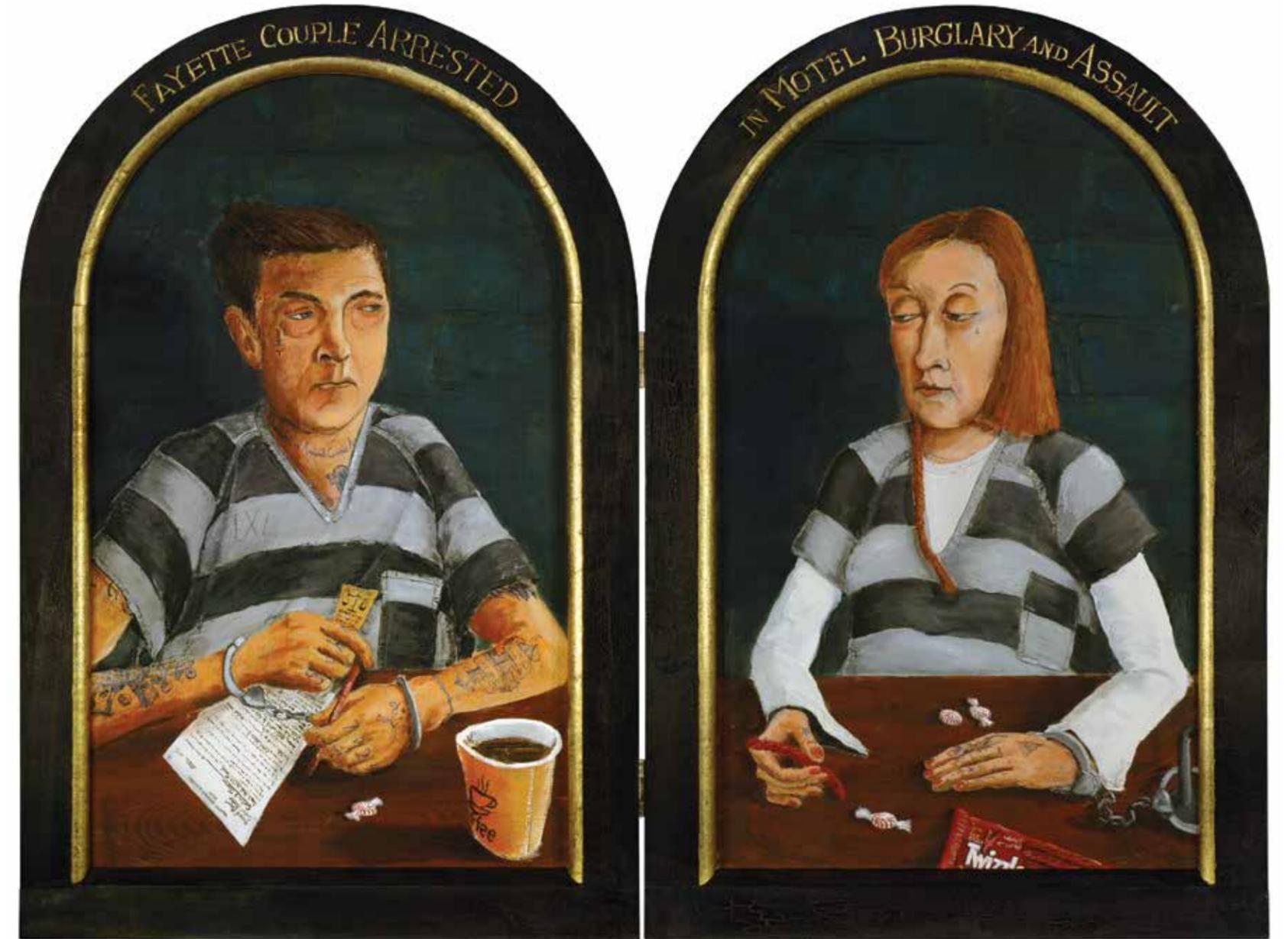
Robert Campin, *The Annunciation Triptych (Merode Triptych)*, about 1427-32.
Oil on wood, 25 ³/₈ x 46 ³/₈ inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



The Arrow Head Motel Triptych, 2017. Oil on panel in a carved frame, 36 x 72 inches.
Collection of the Dubuque Museum of Art, 2019 DuMA Biennial Purchase Award.



Master of Alkmaar, *Jan, first count of Egmond and Magdalena, countess of Werdenburg*, about 1500-1510. Oil on canvas transferred to panel (portrait of Jan), 16 1/2 x 9 3/5 inches. Oil on panel (portrait of Magdalena), 16 1/2 x 9 3/4 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



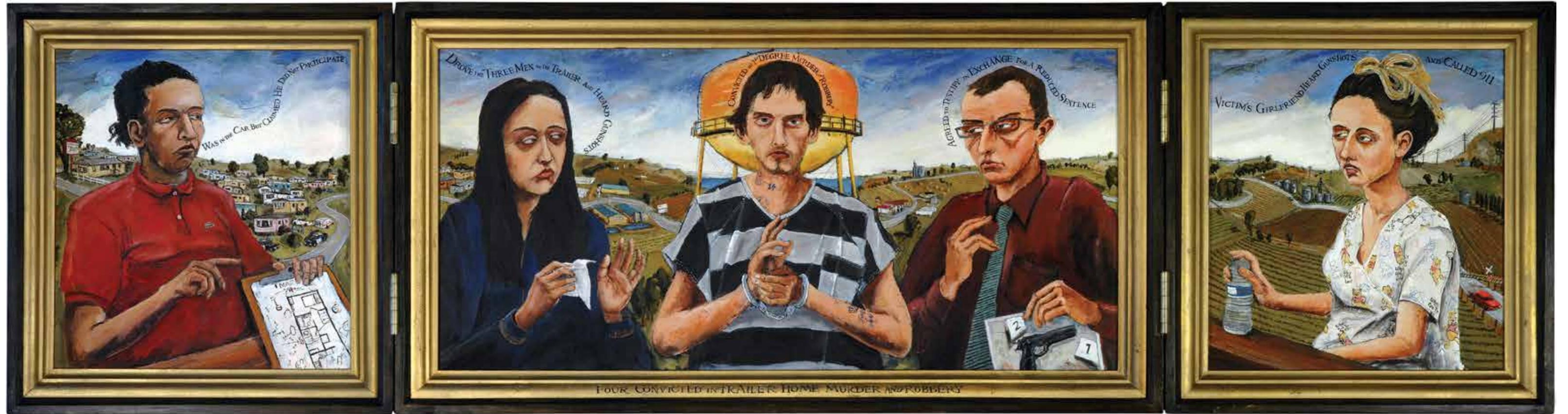
Portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Curtis Anderson, 2018. Oil on panel in a carved frame, 34 x 48 inches. Collection of the artist.



George Caleb Bingham, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri*, 1845.
Oil on canvas, 29 x 36 1/2 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Exotic Pet Dealers Heading to Missouri, 2018.
Oil on panel in a carved frame, 30 x 38 inches. Private collection.



Rogier van der Weyden, *Braque Family Triptych*, about 1450.
Oil on oak panel, 16 x 53 1/2 inches. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Lake View Trailer Home Murder, 2019.
Oil on panel in a carved frame, 21 x 75 inches. Collection of the artist.



Top, Sandra Dyas, *Tickets*, Iowa State Fair, Des Moines, Iowa, 2010. Color photo print on paper, 24 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Bottom, Artist unknown, *The Hospitality of Abraham*, about 1400. Tempera on wood, 63 x 48 inches. Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow.



Hospitality of the Abrams Amusement Company, 2019. Oil on panel in a painted frame, 36 x 70 inches. Collection of the artist.



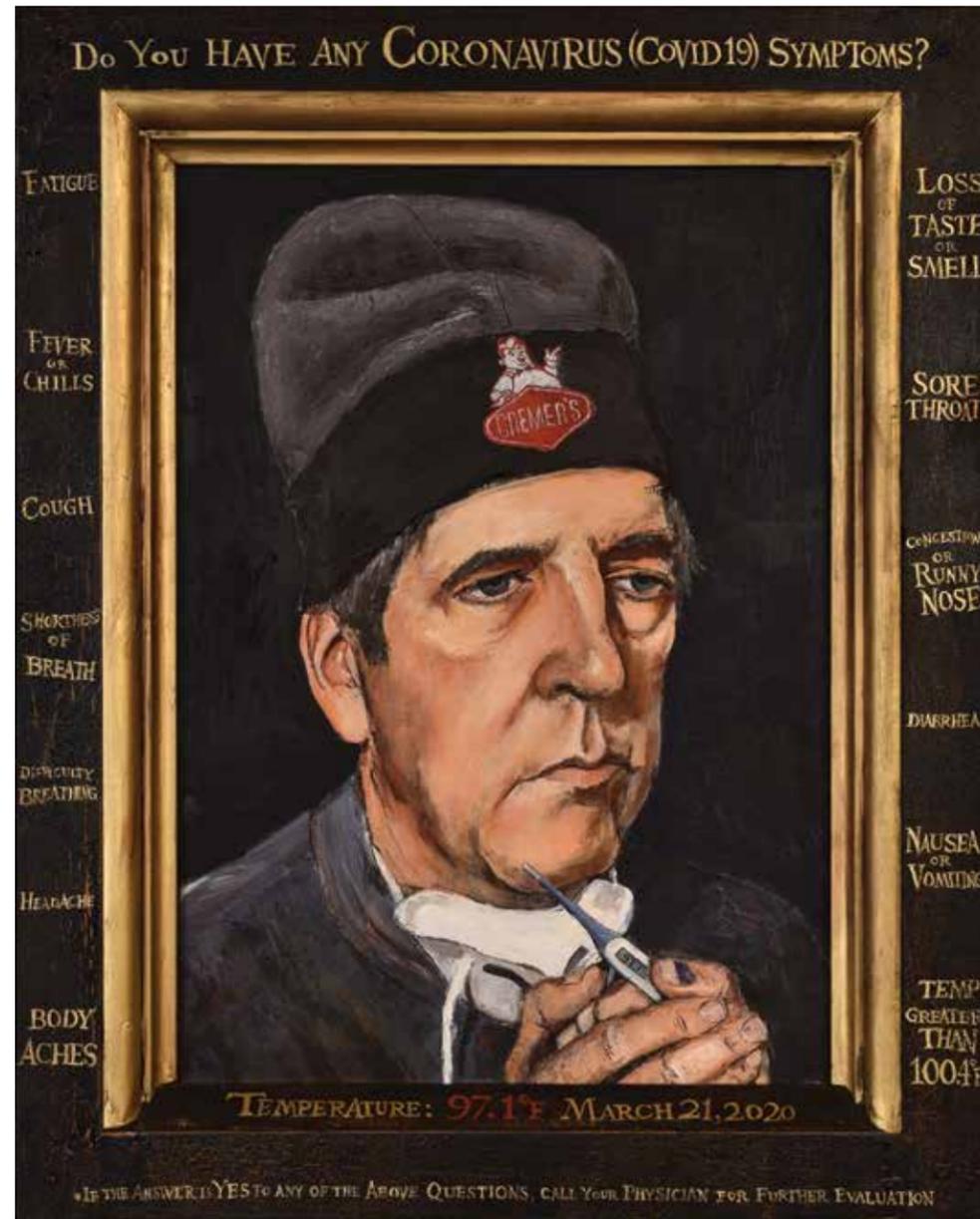
Hans Memling, *Adam and Eve*, about 1485.
Oil on oak, 27 1/4 x 6 3/4 inches each. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.



Adam and Eve at the Paradise Motel (Forty Miles South of Denver), 2020.
Oil on panel in a carved frame, 41 x 66 inches. Collection of the artist.



Dieric Bouts, *Portrait of a Man*, about 1470.
Oil on wood, 11 5/8 x 8 1/8 inches.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Self-Portrait with a Temperature of 97.1°F, 2020.
Oil on panel in a painted frame, 25 x 19 inches. Collection of the artist.



Portrait of a Concessions Vendor, 2019.
Oil on panel in a carved frame, 36 x 26 inches. Collection of the artist.



Hans Holbein the Younger, *A Lady with a Squirrel and a Starling*, about 1526-8. Oil on Oak, 22 x 15 1/4 inches. The National Gallery, London.



Artist unknown, *Calvary and Saints Triptych*, about 1400.
Oil and gold leaf on panel, 21 1/4 x 19 3/4 inches (without socle).
Stedelijke Musea Mechelen.



Webster County Most Wanted, 2020.
Oil on panel in a painted frame, 51 x 50 inches. Collection of the artist.



Top, Master of the Joseph Sequence, *Saint Barbara and Saint Catherine*, about 1495.
Oil on panel. Milwaukee Art Museum.

Bottom, Master of the Saint Godelieve Legend, *The Life and Miracles of Saint Godelieve* (closed), about late 15th century. Oil on wood, 49 1/2 x 63 1/4 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Four Win at State Fair, 2020.
Oil on panel in a painted frame, 40 x 60 inches. Collection of the artist.



Thomas Eakins, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, 1871.
Oil on canvas, 32 1/4 x 46 1/4 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Dean Olson in a DAP Kart, 2020.
Oil on panel in a painted frame, 38 x 52 inches. Collection of the artist.



Hans Memling, *Portraits of Tommaso Portinari and Maria Baroncelli*, about 1470.
Oil on wood, 17 ³/₈ x 13 ¹/₄ (Tommaso), 17 ³/₈ x 13 ³/₈ (Maria). The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Midwest Lubricants Team Leadership Awards, 2021.
Mixed media on a notice board, 37 x 48 inches. Collection of the artist.



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