

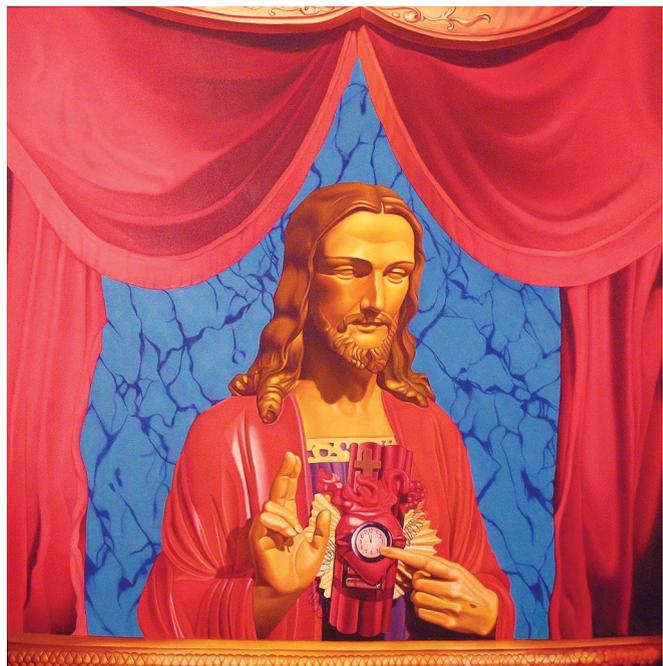


# DAVID DREHER

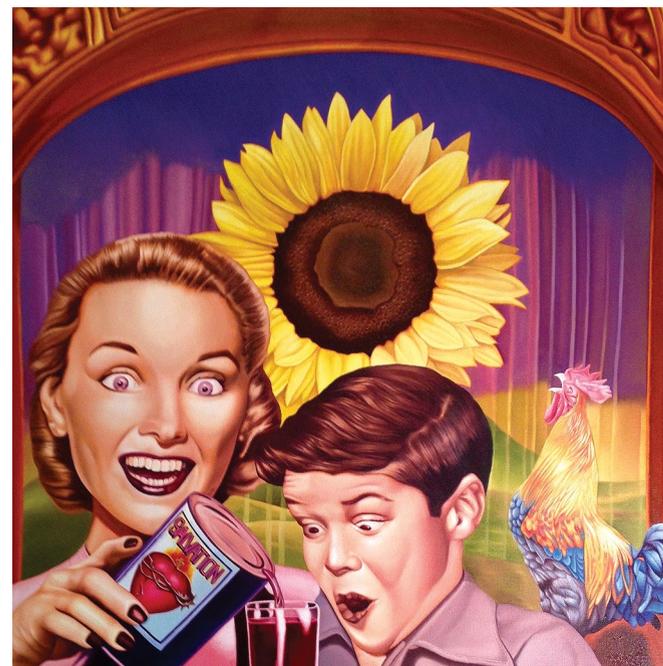
VELVET SOAPBOX



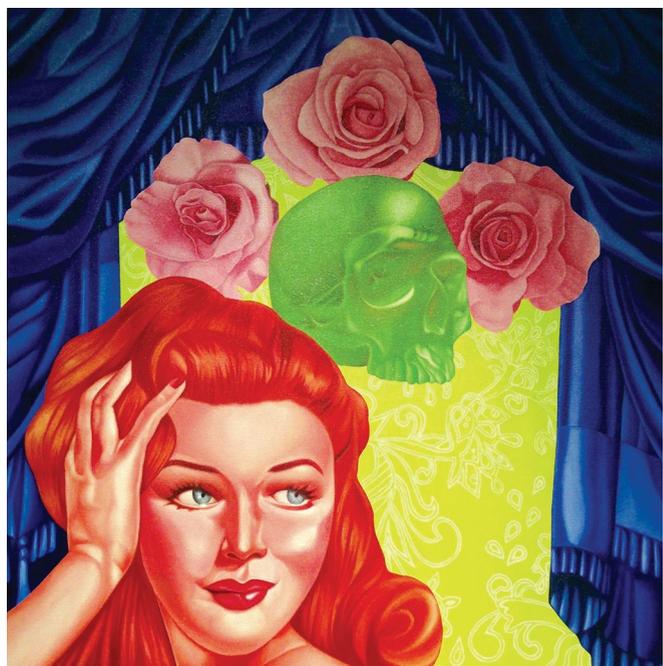
ART GALLERY OF REGINA



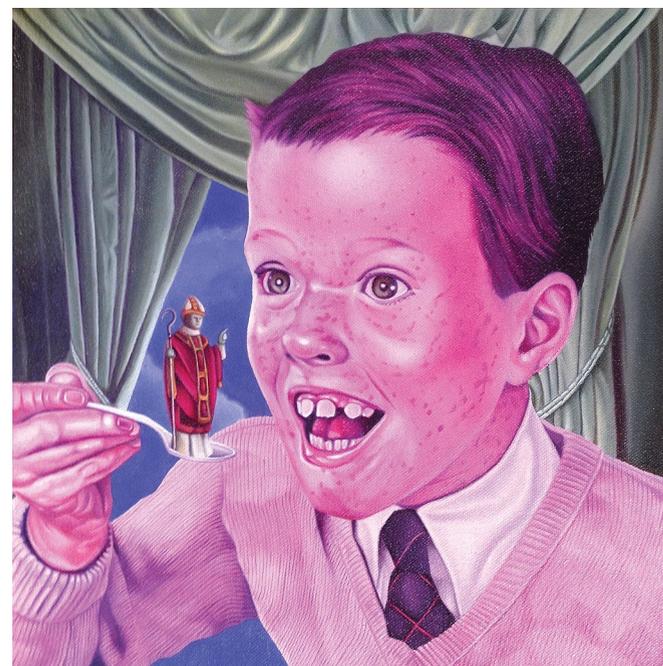
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3



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4

1. *Bread & Wine with Leonard Cohen*, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches  
2. *Ephemeral*, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches

3. *Carpe Elitismum*, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches  
4. *Part of This Pernicious Breakfast*, oil on canvas, 12 x 12 inches

"The best place to hide is in plain sight."

Edgar Allan Poe

In the earlier part of his ministry, Jesus gave explicit public sermons. However, there came a time in the ministry of Jesus where His most profound theological concepts were presented almost exclusively in parables. When asked by his disciples, why he chose this particular method of instruction, he explained that he used parables first to reveal truth to some people and, second, to hide it from others (Matt 13:11-15).

Parables are short stories grounded in everyday life that are rich with allegorical and metaphorical overtones. As a method of communication leaning heavily on allusion, they had a social effect. For those who were looking for explicit explanation or clear and direct instruction, they served to frustrate. For others, however, they were a challenge to apply long periods of contemplation in order to understand their deeper implications. It was this attribute which Jesus leaned on in achieving his goal to, simultaneously, reveal and conceal.

When considering the most recent work by David Dreher contained in *Velvet Soapbox*, this is an important model of communication to consider. It is the formal pattern of expression of these paintings that lends the greatest insight to the meaning of their diverse and demanding content.

The images of the *Velvet Soapbox* use a common visual language which emerges from the *grammar* that Dreher uses to shape them. This is a way of saying that these images are grounded in unifying principles that have guided their production. Each of the images begins as a digital montage of internet search images entirely composed through the artist's intuition, impulses and preferences. Once produced, he translates and interprets this collection of popular images into paintings reminiscent of work by the American artist Audrey Flack.

These diverse images also share a common use of *staging*. Each painted montage is presented amidst curtains, suggesting theatrics as a significant element that unites them. In this, they elude to the concept of acting and performance; ideas that elude to perception and reality.

These images are also linked together by their titles which, for the greater part, reference a canon of musical inspirations for the artist. The names of the paintings pay homage to specific songs or the general musical expressions of various artists ranging from Tom Waits to Alt J.

As well, these images share common ground in elements of the artist's biography. In form, they represent his education. Holding a Diploma in Visual Communications from the Alberta College of Art and Design, Dreher is trained in advertising, graphic design, and illustration. These images clearly unite around this element of his biography with their proficient use of graphic design elements and their use of advertising motifs. His background as an usher in a movie theatre also explains his use of *staging* as metaphor for social performance.

More importantly, though, *Velvet Soapbox* is a logical extension of his historical explorations of religion and spirituality in his art practice. Within this newer work, however, he brings these abstract and universal subjects into a territory which is significantly more particular, actual and personal. By means of his own confession, these newer images are Dreher's overt attempt at coming to grips with his own past. In this, he is exploring the private and public implications of his inward thoughts regarding the spiritual and existential experiences and crises which have marked and guided his own life.

Though somewhat visually reductive and deceptively simple, these images are significantly complicated by Dreher's use of montage as a form of

communication and as a means of exploring the exact nature of his relation to Christian and other spiritual identities.

It is the nature of montage to bring diverse elements into close proximity, raising questions about their exact relation. This is difficult enough to determine if the images are fundamentally simple. Each individual painting in this exhibition is a diverse collection of symbols and allusions which are highly-charged. They arrive within each painting carrying complicated historic and conceptual baggage which are incredibly nuanced. A significant series of paragraphs, if not entire essays, could be written about the historical backgrounds, inter-relations and theological and conceptual implications swept into each of these paintings.

Beyond this, these images also fuse elements we typically keep apart for the purpose of ideal clarity. Simultaneously, they montage elements of the *low* culture (pop music and graphic design) with the *high* culture (visual art) while fusing aspects of the sacred (religious iconography and symbols) with the profane (sensual desire in the form of advertising and symbol). This breeds even more conceptual complication into the work.

It is inescapable that private and individual identification has public and collective implications. Identity is, after all, a two-edged sword. It is grounded in the irony that what defines and includes the individual also serves to distinguish and make commentary about those who the identity and self-understanding exclude. There is an inevitable social result of a personal and individual view.

In his deliberate move toward a more conscious self-understanding, Dreher uses his art practice as a means to both explore and express his spiritual history. While doing so, Dreher has found a means to avoid making iron-fisted over-statements to or about others. His enterprise is fundamentally a personal inquiry, he has no desire to persuade or coerce. There is no ideological agenda here. There is no iron fist in a velvet glove working to manipulate toward conclusion. In this exhibition of work, there is just a *Velvet Soapbox* as a public means of self-exploration and self-expression.

Much like Jesus used parables, Dreher uses montage to communicate his convictions and to hide his most intimate thoughts and personal experiences in plain sight. This genius approach serves to bar those who have a superficial and immediate negative reaction to elements within his dialogue while allowing access to those who have a persisting and empathetic interest. Like the biblical parables, these works reward in direct proportion to the extent of the contemplation. This is their ultimate meaning.

Ross Melanson

# ART GALLERY OF REGINA

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Hangover*, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches  
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