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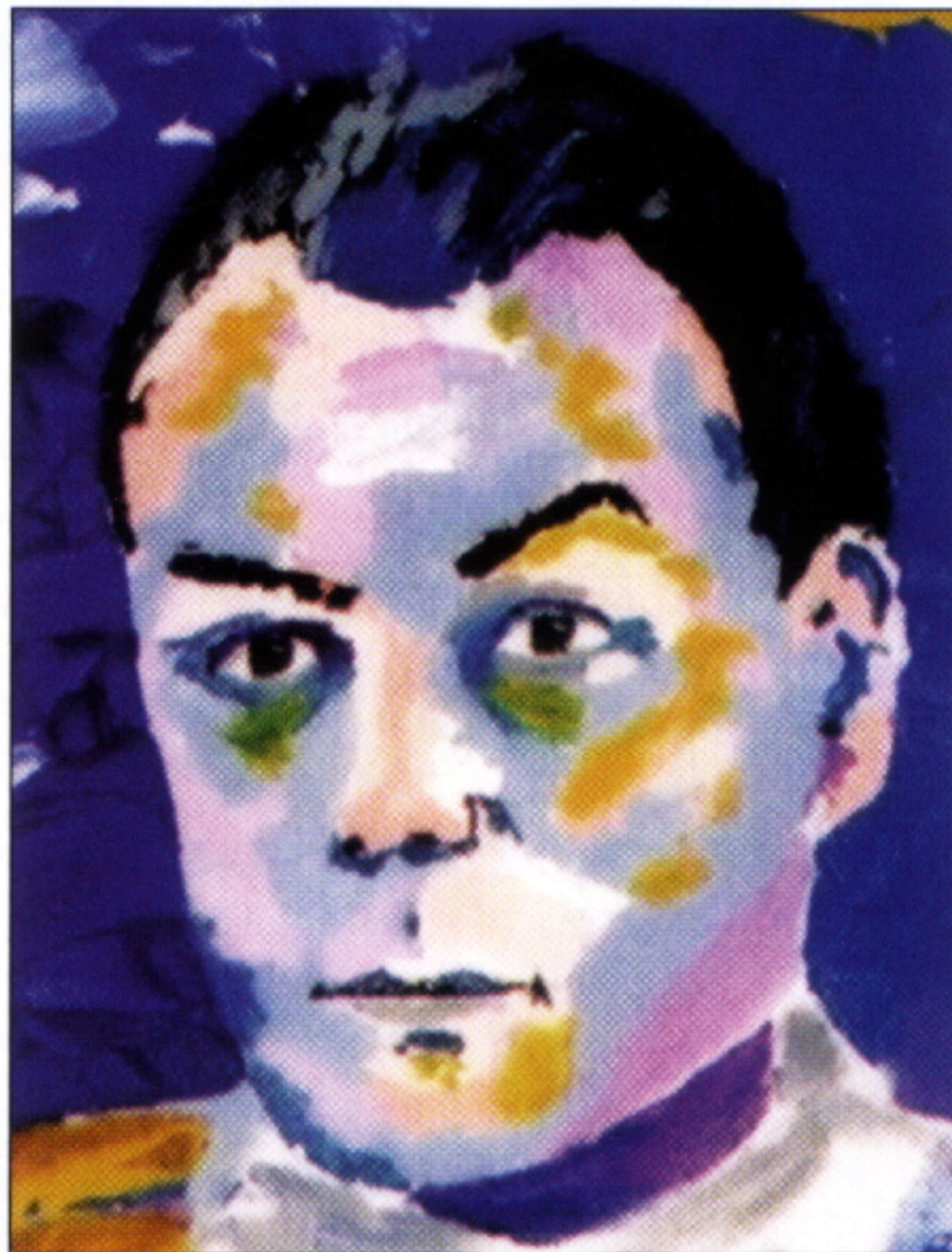
"THE GREAT CARDINI," ACRYLIC, BY DEAN CARNEGIE

JULY/AUGUST 2005



ESCAPE ARTIST

BY DONNA CEDAR-SOUTHWORTH



DEAN CARNEGIE AND SELF-PORTRAIT

It isn't often that an artist finds success in both the performing arts and the visual arts, but grand illusionist and portraitist Dean Carnegie has managed this quite well.

"Anybody can learn how to do magic," the Clifton resident says, "but there's a thinking behind it—you have to be able to think like a magician to really 'get it.' Doing tricks is a whole different thing than creating something awe-inspiring or beautiful or dramatic."

For the most part, magic is either learned from books or passed down by word of mouth—making the "true art

form" all the more intriguing and authentic. Dean has read thousands of books and has studied the secrets of sleight of hand at the Chavez College of Magic in Los Angeles. He also has learned from some of the greats, including Cesareo Pelaez.

"Cesareo's show is not like regular magic shows," says Dean. "The

costumes are all handmade by the company. They paint their own posters, make and decorate their props, paint the scenery—it's a very beautiful, beautiful production patterned after the shows around the turn of the century." After a life-changing experience when Dean was invited to spend a week-

end with the cast and crew of Pelaez's Cabot Street Cinema Theatre in Beverly, Massachusetts, Pelaez became Dean's mentor. "Cesareo is kind of a bridge to the past," says Dean.

A respect for the past is what makes Dean's art unique: "I'm clearly tied to history—it's in my paintings, in my show, my writing—everything I do has a historical perspective." While there are other magicians who paint, Dean could very well be the only magician—if not the only painter—who paints the greatest magicians who ever lived.

The Underground Magic Theatre, the Sterling venue that Dean

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FACING PAGE, TOP: "THE DEVIL HIMSELF," (HARRY JANSEN, "DANTE"), ACRYLIC

co-owns, features a museum of historical magical memorabilia and a collection of Dean's paintings. On a recent morning, Dean recollects the high points of his artistic journey.

As a teenager, Dean dabbled in pen-and-ink portraits featuring the likes of Harry Houdini and Howard Thurston. Upon graduating from high school, he was awarded a scholarship for art school. But he chose instead to pursue magic. Still, he never lost his touch, and when he's not performing, he paints.

In 1997, Dean began producing abstract, multi-colored images of figures such as the infamous illusionist Dante. "He's an interesting character," says Dean. "An older gentleman—he was mischievous." Other subjects include such greats as Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, a 19th-century French magician noted for performing with a mechanical acrobat he called Antonio. Experimenting with abstract monochromes, Dean created a portrait of the great English magician David Devant. "Devant created a whole story around a dream he had about a moth that landed on a candle, went up in a puff of smoke, and disappeared," says Dean. "From that he created the 'mascot moth,' part moth, part woman, who would walk up to a candle and disappear in his show."

As Dean's painting style "changed and morphed," he began incorporating more color into his portraits and working in more of an impressionistic style, as seen in his paintings of Cardini, noted for his signature monocle, and the flamboyant Richiardi. Dean eventually turned to the palette knife, which he used to paint his magic mentor Cesareo Pelaez. He's painted two self-portraits as well along with countless others depicting the world's all-time great magicians.

The painter calls himself an "Artist of Mystery" because it "covers everything—I do big illusions, I do magic, I do escapes. Escapes are one of my interests, which came from my interest in Houdini. I became friends with Steve Baker, who is probably the most famous escape artist of our generation. After Houdini, in my opinion, there wasn't another great escape artist until Steve came around. He's my mentor of escape; I do one of his escapes called 'The Tug of War Rope Tie.' He sort of has the crown of Houdini, and Steve is another bridge to the past."

And Steve Baker has high praise for Dean: "Though he's a young

man, he's of the old school of magic, and he's made his magic fit modern time, still with the crisp, personal presentation. He's probably one of the hardest working magicians—he works everywhere [throughout the U.S.]. One day he showed me his paintings—his pen-and-inks of Houdini and Howard Thurston—he had them down to a T. I said, 'There's no end to your talent.'"



Now we can add author to Dean's fields of endeavor; he is now working on a book about Houdini. Performing, painting, writing—"They're all connected," he says. [Painting is] probably an extension of a certain way of thinking about things and seeing things that relates to the magic and performing—you've got to be creative to be a performer. Art has magic to it.... Sometimes I find myself thinking, 'This is nothing but colors on a canvas,' but some-



how it morphs itself together and creates a picture... And that's what magic is, yet, there's only a sustained moment of magic in a given routine and the magical moment goes by like that," he says, snapping his fingers. "Sometimes you look at abstract things and start seeing things there you'd never seen before."

Dean would like to be known for his paintings as well as his performances: "I would like to take the show to performing arts centers around the country, and when people enter the performing

arts center to see my show, they will first see my paintings on exhibition in the lobby. People will feel and see [and realize] that they are experiencing culture."

To contact Dean, visit www.carnegiemagic.com. His images are posted at www.artistofmystery.com.



FACING PAGE: "BEWARE THE EYES OF MARCH 24," (HARRY HOUDINI) ACRYLIC; THIS PAGE: "WONDER OF DOUG," (DOUG HENNING) ABSTRACT CARICATURE/ACRYLIC