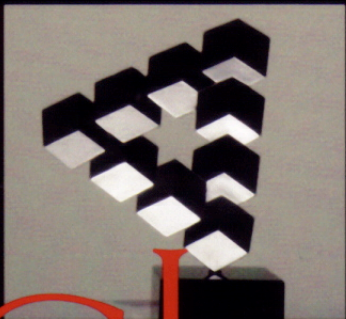


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THE ART OF MAGIC ART



BY ALAN HOWARD

Conjuring, when presented properly, is much more than merely showing tricks or puzzles. It can attain the status of not only a performing art, but of “art” in the broader sense. A creation in a specific medium that makes the viewer experience the world in a new way, perhaps exploring universal beliefs or attempting to connect with a personal, emotional outlook. And while it is possible for magic to become art, the reverse is true as well: art can become magic. From an impressionist painting that defines a glimpsed moment in time to a surrealist landscape that morphs into faces or bodies, art can trick us into seeing that which we did not believe could be captured.

In the past, *MAGIC* has often focused on magicians and tricks that have been depicted in art — not merely the colorful posters advertising coming performances by globe-trotting magicians, but less common tributes as well. Recent examples include conjurers both natural and supernatural appearing in comic books and strips [April 2007], and Cindy Atmore’s unique candy statuettes of famous magicians and mentalists [August 2007]. An even more unusual media was utilized in carving noted magicians’ faces onto pumpkins [October 1996]. This latter art form is practiced by the Senft twins, Jason and Justin, part-time magicians and full-time graphic designers who also have created magic-themed pieces in other media, such as paintings, drawings, sculpture, and jewelry

In many cases, some of the more interesting and insightful works of art depicting our world of illusion have sprung from the minds and hands of conjurers themselves. An escapist yarn of magic served up by comic book legend Stan Lee may be entertaining, but how much more interesting would that graphic tale be if it were told by Jim Steranko, a man who walks with equal ease in the realms of conjuring and comics? A true insider’s view would surely have more weight, depth, and insight. It is a magician’s job to see things that others cannot, and present them to the public... who may or may not be allowed inside the illusion themselves.

There have been artists who lived in both worlds, yet rarely if ever brought the two to-

gether. *Now You See It, Now You Don’t* author Bill Tarr created immense steel sculptures, but kept his magic and his art separate — many fans in each of the fields did not know of his fame in the other. Curiously, Tarr the artist is known to magicians for his wonderfully illustrated instructions in the art of manipulation, but he did not do the art for them. Those drawings were created by Barry Ross, a full-time artist, who seems to have had no other connection to the world of conjuring.

Graphic artists need not be conjurers to utilize illusion concepts in their own work. M.C. Escher, the famed artist from The Netherlands, was not a magician, yet he employed magical principles in his work. The visual transformation of one creature to another may be done in a flash by an illusionist with an effect such as the Lion’s Bride, or visibly, gradually in Escher’s drawings of birds becoming fish, or reptiles crawling on and off a flat page. Other illustrations of Escher resemble the scientific principle of the Möbius strip — the unending single-sided loop of paper that can be cut in half to form a larger single loop or magically interlocked loops, a principle that has been used by stage magicians as well.

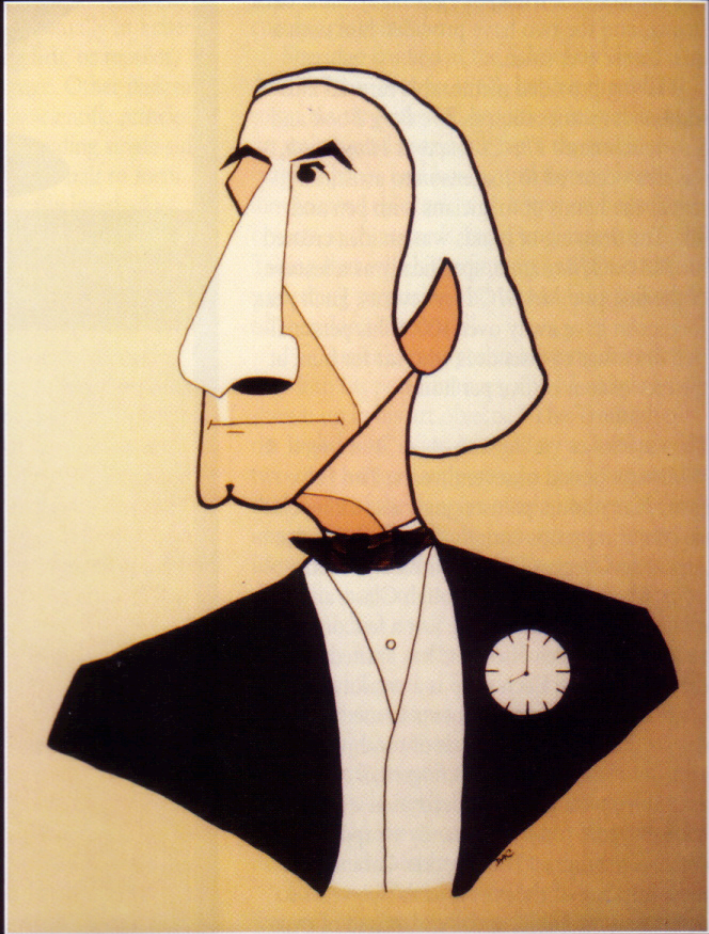
Art created *by* magicians *of* magicians may be a sub-genre of two overlapping fields. The area is not uncommon, but yields interesting parallels. Most practitioners of legerdemain in fine art have brought their stage mindsets to canvas or clay; it seems that fewer have truly embraced the idea of inhibiting paintings and sculpture with magical animation. Yet there are some performers, such as Nicholas Night, who have created tricks and routines based on “The Magical Artist,” creating paintings that produced a live girl or sculptures that took on a true life of their own. Night has since largely left the magic world for a career in art and animation, but other magicians, such as Arthur Trace and Horyu Nishimura, continue to create illusions with the fine brushstrokes of a painter.

There are many more magician artists, present and past, who are not mentioned here, but this is not intended to be an all-inclusive examination. We have bypassed the field of creative photography and lit only briefly upon illustra-

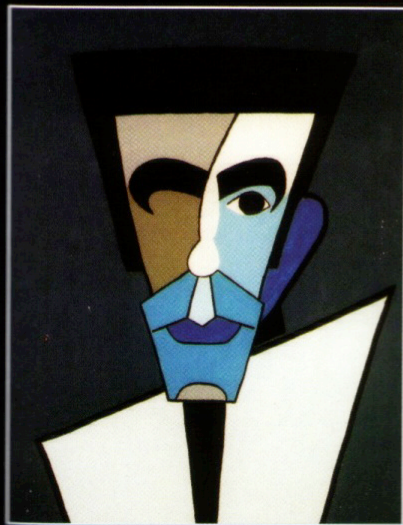
tion that is intended primarily to be instructional rather than inspirational. What follows are but brief glimpses at some of those artists of today who not only walk the line between magic and art, but freely jump back and forth across that boundary.



THE ART OF MAGIC ART



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Dean Carnegie's paintings
of Cesareo Palaez, Doug
Henning, Robert Houdin, and
David Copperfield.

**Abstract
Caricature** ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

It was the Water Torture Cell that first piqued Dean Carnegie's interest in magic. He thrilled to the Tony Curtis *Houdini* movie and soon after was captivated by Doug Henning's first television special, in which Doug escaped from the Upside-Down restraint. Eight years old at the time, Dean was at first more attracted to escapes, but soon developed an interest in other conjuring arts as well. As he admits, "There was not much call for a kid escape artist." Not unlike the others featured here, an interest in art developed around the same time. Between performing birthday parties and school shows, Carnegie nurtured his painting

skills and received several awards for his work, including the Senior Art Award from his high school. Although he was later told that he certainly would have won a scholarship to art school, he did not bother to apply for it, since he wanted to be a magician.

Carnegie entered the workplace instead, with a job that involved neither art nor magic. Again, his story is a familiar one, as a decade later his artistic urges returned. He has now been a full-time magician for the past twelve years, primarily as a stand-up act, working corporate shows. This season, he also has a full schedule of appearances at summer camps, with more than 160 shows over the ten-week period. He has recently been working on escapes, getting back to the genre of magic that first got him hooked.

Dean's return to painting came with an urge to try some work in watercolors. His first piece was a picture of Houdini that, he says, "turned out really well." He continued exploring more art styles and media, and now generally works in acrylics on canvas. Many of his portraits are abstract caricatures, but he has also experimented with some realistic images, as well as impressionistic stylings. One such piece was the image of Cardini seen on the cover of the August 2007 issue of *MAGIC*, for which Dean says he was "just playing around with colors." *MAGIC* was the second magazine cover on which Carnegie's work has appeared, the first being the Sept/Oct 2005 issue of *élan*, featuring artists of Northern Virginia.

With no formal art training since high school, Dean has since been "self taught, by trial and error." So far he has produced 32 paintings, all but one of them magicians — the lone exception being a portrait of Edgar Allen Poe. He has painted a few different versions of some of his subjects, with variations on Henning, Copperfield, Houdini, and Kellar, but says, "Usually, if I get a painting right the first time, I won't do a second version."

In past years, when Carnegie produced an illusion show in his own fifty-seat theater, his artwork adorned the interior walls of the building. But for now, most of the paintings are stored away, as are the illusions.

Dean has to feel the inspiration to do his art; "I can't just sit down and start painting." When he first started creating the acrylic images, he did seven paintings in a row, working straight through from Christmas Eve to New Years Eve. Then he did not do another for over a year, when he felt inspired once again and turned out six more pieces.

"In the back of my mind, I always figured I would do magic for a living, and when I retired I would become a painter. I hoped to eventually gain some sort of notoriety with my magic so the artwork would have a little more value to it, once I started letting people know about it. But," he laughs, "somehow my artwork started getting more famous than I am!"