



Yonge Street

GLENN PRIESTLEY



1 POPCORN WAGON oil on canvas mounted on wood, 12 x 12 in.

Yonge Street
GLENN PRIESTLEY

ART DEALERS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
ASSOCIATION DES MARCHANDS D'ART DU CANADA

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GLENN PRIESTLEY'S YONGE STREET SERIES

By the start of the early 1990s, Glenn Priestley had established himself as a figurative and landscape artist to whom attention was due. These two genres exert a forceful pull over artists, and they can serve as a kind of measure of ability and interpretive promise.

In Priestley's case, his talent and innate sense of visual poetry distinguished him among his contemporaries. Here was an artist who came to his subjects with a command of line and tone, a deep appreciation of colour theory, and the skillfulness of applying them to their best effects. He also had an acutely perceptive eye to human nature, and an understanding of the ways gesture and manner can convey either the beauty of inwardness or some raw truth in the body politic. These are Priestley's defining traits as a contemporary Realist.

Single figures, self-portraits, multiple figure groupings, dramatic, raucous tableaux of boxers and punk rockers, random people lost in thought, others caught in the headlight glare of the artist's pen, pencil and brush, this portfolio constitutes the range of his artistic taxonomy.

Landscape: the genre in Priestley's hand comes in for wide interpretation. There are the suburban streetscapes that are exceptional both for their ordinariness as for the way they are depicted. More than just mind-numbing banalities, Priestley invited us to look closely is to allow the miracle of a perceptual moment to take hold of us. Beyond the facts of visual description, he tells us that finely tuned and colorfully complex painterly essays can elevate mind and soul. He riffs off what we take for granted as just another street and transforms it into a kind of zen lesson on interconnectivity.

There is something behind the zoned out eyes of his people stuck on a bus, in the bored crowd at a carnival, in the screaming audience watching midget wrestlers that wants release. Priestley's gift is that he perceives in the maelstrom of the urban landscape something that is true, and yet deeply strange.

Recognizable yet foreign, these are the paradoxes that define the edges of his subject matter. On the one hand, the exquisite lyricism of his line and the wondrously sensual way in which he knits together a crowd of people into a unified aggregation seduce us into his compositions. The invitation to roam around imaginatively in a Priestley picture, to be involved in the story and drama of a composition's narrative, to be just one more soul in roiling current moving up

and down the street is just too good to pass up. We give ourselves over to this artist's magic of creating a believable, coherent reality as art. By suspending our disbelief, the world as Priestley sees and describes it tells us much about where we come from and where our paths might, in fact, be taking us.

Such is the allure of Priestley's masterfully conceived compositions. The manner of their making appears out of time. Technique and application have a genetic code that goes back to earlier centuries when drawing and painting, line and colour were all harnessed by talent to convey a seamless truthfulness of thought, a depth of insight and inspiration that held to human axioms, and which formed the seeming incoherence of day-to-day reality into something understandable and just a little less chaotic.

The essence of immutable values of craft grafted to plumb ordinary crudities of modern urban life, Priestley mines the rich promise that this mash up provides. Toronto's Yonge Street is the very real and also mythical stage on which his theatre of the real and the strange is played out through the characters that passed before his eyes.

In many significant respects, Priestley's Yonge Street series brings together the several threads that have defined his work of the past three decades. There is a nearly musical sense of lyricism in the way he uses lines to describe his subjects. His characters and scenes appear to have been conjured onto the surfaces of his paintings and drawings through the graceful way he handles lines. Line provides the energy and gesture that animates his compositions. In their flowing cadences, Priestley has an unerring sense of unifying elements of this turbid street into coherent visual statements.

Priestley also displays a highly attuned sensitivity to the way colour relationships, harmonies and tones can define his pictorial spaces. There is a tight, taut calibration of hue and value to incarnate a reality that is believable, imagistic, yet which remains compellingly artistic. Line, colour, tone, gesture, space, all of these formal elements he puts to the service of giving life to his uncanny reality.

The subjects themselves, all flowing from the mosh pit that is Yonge Street, also witness the simple fact that Priestley never abandoned his interest in describing the cold, urban environment. However, in this series, the downtown main drag has supplanted the mind numbing sameness of the suburban street. His choice



of Yonge Street likely also reflects a kind of ambivalent affection that the “strip” holds for one of Toronto’s native sons. Its magnetic pull promises delights and dangers found behind the tawdry doors and buildings that are the street’s fusty palisades.

Priestley brings to this very Canadian subject, though, a quizzical manner. For him every face has a story. In the alluring pitches of charmers and hawkers, behind the glazed eyes of a be-speckled businessman, in the pantomimes of clowns and balloon vendors, Priestley teases out something peculiar but true.

Beyond the surface veneer of this shopping district, Priestley decodes a kind of baseline character portrait of his hometown. He tells not just place-specific stories, but gives us a kind of wry, honest narrative that is loving and accusatory.

Something is just a bit off in these depictions of a street we think we know. Priestley is just vague enough in telling us exactly what that disconnect is between

what we expect to see and what really has fallen before our eyes to make the compositions’ unbalance a subject all by itself.

In the kinetic interval, Priestley’s Yonge Street takes on a very different character. It moves into a place of open-ended allegory populated by human types that drift in and out of consciousness in the manner not unlike a medieval pageant, whose purpose is to expose conceit and provide moral lessons on how best to traverse the road of life.

Priestley’s Yonge Street is a similarly fraught path, attended by all sorts of characters and filled with challenges that need to be exposed and overcome, not the least of which are disinterest, indifference and apathy. His street is a carnival to be embraced, a slough of anxiety to be navigated, and a delightful, truthful, fabulous, and roiling community of living souls.

Tom Smart



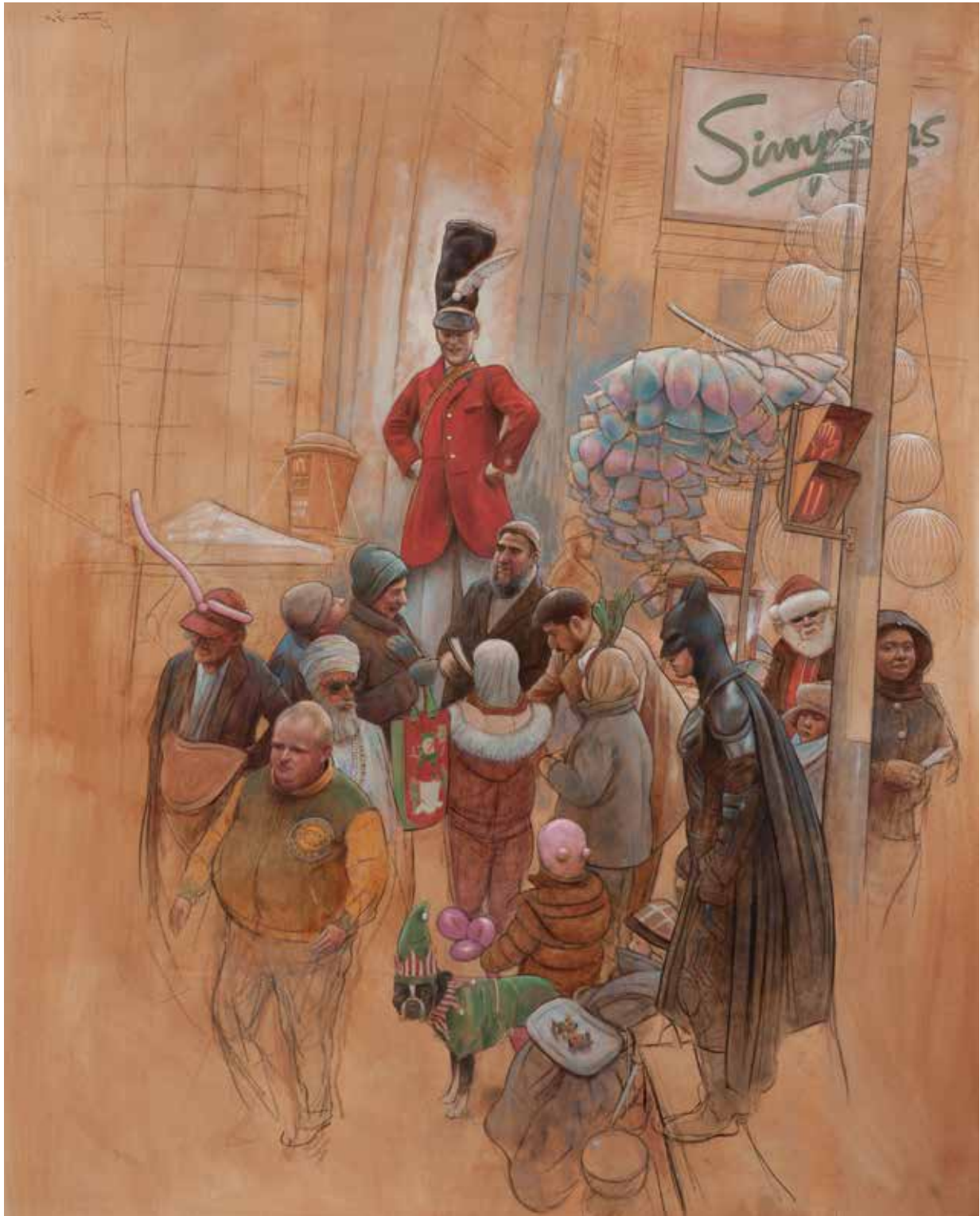
2 DOWNTOWN oil on canvas mounted on aluminum, 33 x 33 in.



3 BALLOON MAN oil on canvas, 49 x 68 in.



4 COLLECTOR mixed media on paper, 60 x 49 in.



5 PARADE DAY mixed media on paper, 65 x 49 in.



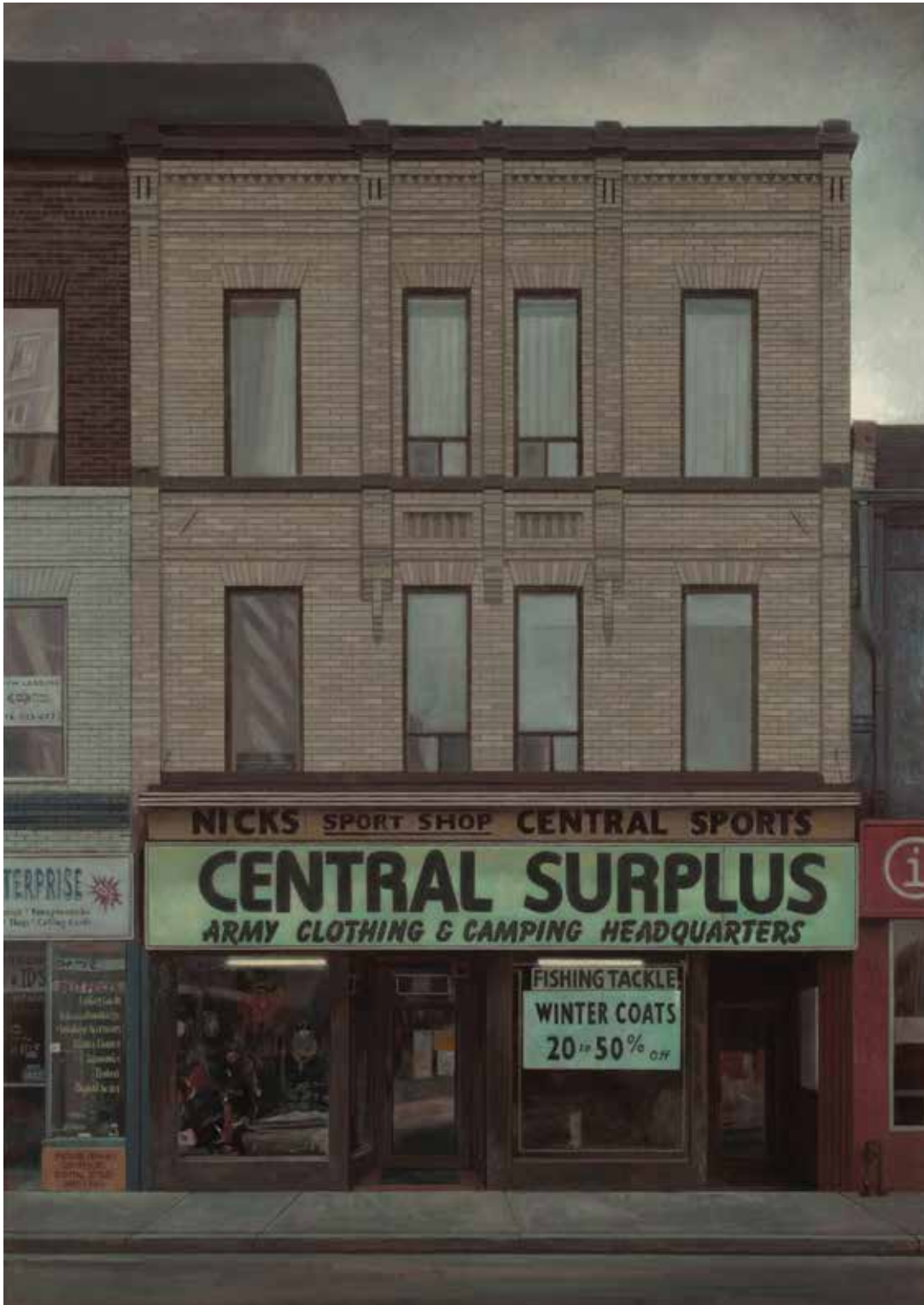
Glenn Priestley | Yonge Street



6 YONGE STREET
oil on canvas, 66 x 86 in.



7 WORLD OF POSTERS oil on canvas, 60 x 27 in.



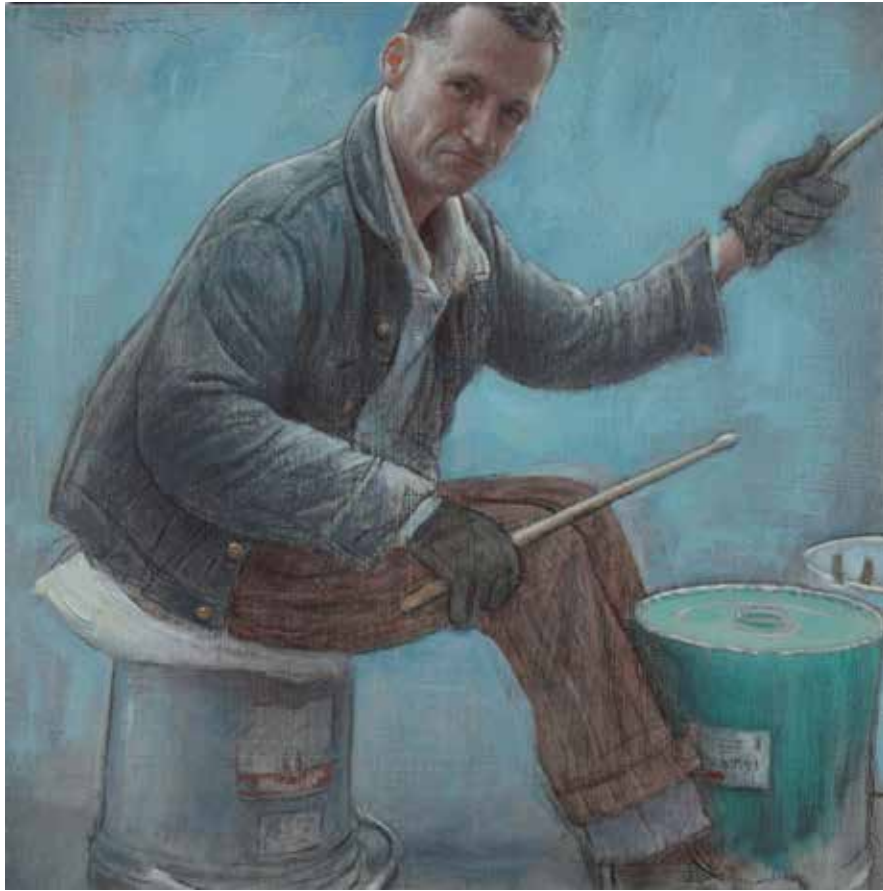
8 CENTRAL SURPLUS oil on canvas, 46 x 33 in.



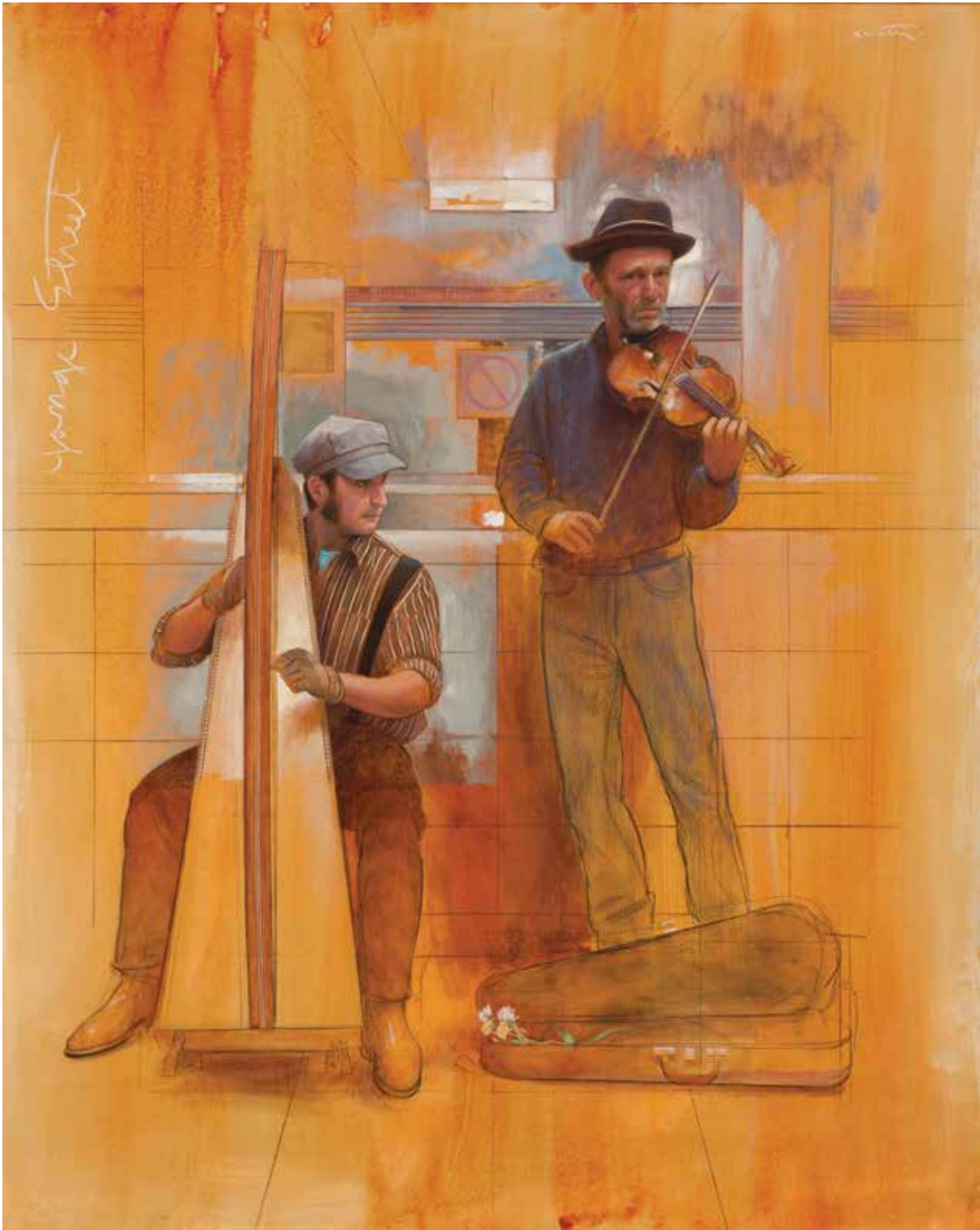
9 UPTOWN charcoal & oil on paper mounted on aluminum, 50 x 66 in.



10 NOON charcoal on paper, 14.5 x 10 in.



11 DRUM CAT oil on wood, 12 x 12 in.



12 SUBWAY MUSICIANS oil on prepared paper, 62 x 49 in.

GLENN PRIESTLEY

Glenn Priestley is a Toronto-born artist, painter, printmaker and teacher now living in Fredericton, New Brunswick. He lived his formative years in Scarborough, Ontario, where he attended the Vocational Arts Program at Cedarbrae Collegiate Institute. Priestley is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art Fine Arts Program, where he spent a year in off-campus studies in Florence, Italy, and graduated with an Honours Diploma in 1976. His understanding of the figure was further enhanced through study of Anatomy at the University of Toronto. He has taught drawing and painting at numerous locations and institutions, most notably on the faculty of the drawing and painting department at the Ontario College of Art, now OCAD from 1989 through 1996. Priestley's work has been the focus of two museum surveys: The View from Tabor Hill, organized by the University of Waterloo Art Gallery which traveled to the Art Gallery of Windsor, and Glenn Priestley: Variations, at The Beaverbrook Art Gallery.

EDUCATION

1982-83	University of Toronto, Continuing Education Department, Anatomy
1973-76	Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Honours Diploma (AOCA)
1975-76	Ontario College of Art, off-campus studies, Florence, Italy
1969-73	Cedarbrae Collegiate Institute, Scarborough, Ontario (Vocational Arts)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014	Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
2010	Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
2006	Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, NY
2004-5	Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
1999	Tatistcheff & Co. Inc., New York, NY
1997	Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, ON
1994	Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, ON
1992	Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, ON
1991	Rodman Halls Arts Centre, St. Catharines, ON
1989	The University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON The Art Gallery of Windsor, Windsor, ON
1986	Nancy Poole's Studio, Toronto, ON
1981	Lemay Carell Gallery, Toronto, ON

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2013	Ingrid Mueller Art + Concepts, Fredericton, NB Toronto International Art Fair, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
2012	Ingrid Mueller Art and Concepts, Fredericton, NB Toronto International Art Fair, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
2011	Toronto International Art Fair, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
2010	Ingrid Mueller Art + Concepts, Fredericton, NB Toronto International Art Fair, Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto, ON
2009	Arcadia Gallery, New York, NY Arcadia Fine Arts, Los Angeles Art Show, Los Angeles, CA Ingrid Mueller Art + Concepts, Fredericton, NB Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON Toronto International Art Fair, Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto, ON Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
2008	Ingrid Mueller Art + Concepts, Fredericton, NB Toronto International Art Fair, Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto, ON New Brunswick Art Bank Anniversary Exhibition, Fredericton, NB
2007	Toronto International Art Fair, Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto, ON Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, NY Ingrid Mueller Art + Concepts, Fredericton, NB Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
2006	Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas, TX Art 20 at the Armory, New York, NY
2005	Art 20 at the Armory, New York, NY
2004	University of Toronto Art Centre, Toronto, ON
2003	Edith Caldwell Gallery, Sausalito, CA
2002	Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, ON

2001 Art Gallery of Peel, Brampton, ON
 2000 The Marion McCain Art Exhibition, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
 Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, NS
 London Regional Gallery, London, ON
 Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, SK
 Michael Gibson Galley, London, ON
 Peter Buckland Gallery, Saint John, NB
 London Regional Art and Historical Museums, London, ON
 1999 Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, New York, NY
 Gallery 78, Fredericton, NB
 1998 Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, ON
 Art Gallery of Mississauga, Mississauga, ON
 Tatistcheff & Co. Inc., New York, NY

GRANTS & AWARDS

2010 Canada Council Project Grant
 2009 Strathbutler Award Nominee
 2007 New Brunswick Arts Board, Creation Grant
 2007 Strathbutler Award Nominee
 2001 New Brunswick Arts Board, Creation Grant
 1988 Ontario Arts Council, Materials Assistance Grant 1985 Canada Council for the Arts, Arts Grant "B"
 1982 Graphic Litho Plate Purchase Award, Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colours

COLLECTIONS

Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, AK
 Art Gallery of Mississauga, Mississauga, ON
 Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, NS
 Bank of Nova Scotia, London, England; Toronto, ON; Halifax, NS
 Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
 Blackburn Group, London, ON
 Dupont Canada Inc., Toronto, ON
 Harvard Business School, Cambridge, MA
 McIntosh Art Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London, ON
 MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, ON
 Onex Corporation, Toronto, ON
 New Brunswick Art Bank, Fredericton, NB
 The Market Gallery of the City of Toronto Archives, Toronto, ON
 Private collections in Canada, USA and England
 Rodman Halls Arts Centre, St. Catharines, ON
 Standard Broadcasting Inc., Toronto, ON
 Stephen B. Smart, Toronto, ON
 SunLife Financial, Toronto, ON
 University of Toronto Collection, Toronto, ON

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CREDITS

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