

Neglected, ignored, unknown, or unrecognised, the artist garnering little or no attention during their lifetime who nevertheless keeps plugging away is a common cliché. A stereotype covering the spectrum from those who toil in obscurity to be forgotten forever, which is normally the case, or the ones discovered and in some cases celebrated posthumously. Very small chance of fame in the afterlife, or absolute nullity in death, either way it's a crap shoot. And adding insult to injury, the deceased artist frequently gets lauded in a way the complicated, perhaps cantankerous and irascible living version never would have been. Additionally, if their history involves anguish, psychic pain, excessive drinking, a messy personal life, and madness, the more attractive they are from beyond the grave. It's the way of the world. On a slightly less lugubrious tack, there's a middle ground encompassing those who study, harbour lofty ambitions, have brushes with illustrious luminaries, but despite how productive and even brilliant, remain peripheral at best. Known mostly

ROBERT BARBER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLE BARASH

only to family and friends, they occasionally might get shown in small venues far away from where the action is, to a possibly indifferent or even hostile gathering of a few people. That's a step up from total oblivion, though no matter how much satisfaction and pleasure they might have gleaned from their vocation, it's hard not to think a slightly bigger audience and a little more validation might have gone a long way. Then there are exceptions to those seemingly preordained and woeful fade-outs that provide an antidote to the tropes, when substantial recognition might be tardy but does eventually arrive. Take the refreshing example of a certain committed, tireless artist, who like many exhibited here and there, sold a few pieces, and had a small number of admirers. Virtually unknown in his adopted hometown and beyond, he wasn't naïve, a primitive, or an outsider in the usual sense, on the contrary classically and formally trained, he diligently kept at it for decades, even if not too many



people seemed to care. And probably that would have been the end of that story if it wasn't for a serendipitous visit Anne-Marie Russell, then director and chief curator of MOCA Tucson, and this interlocutor made to the Arizona Biennial at the Tucson Museum of Art in July of 2013. Chance, luck, fortuitousness, whatever you want to call it, but two small, arrestingly composed still lifes included among the 80 artworks on display, showing broken-down cardboard Dos Equis boxes glowing green, red, and gold—well, they caught our attention. 'We better get on this', I vividly recollect thinking, seeing the artist's birth year listed as 1922. So, as soon as could be arranged, we went to see Robert Barber at his modest house with an added-on studio upstairs on East 16th Street, finding him a joy to meet, gracious, friendly, funny, and possessed of a straight-shooting, down-home demeanour. At 92, painting and drawing on a daily basis, inspired and spry, what he showed us that afternoon left us astounded, thrilled, and honestly, a bit overwhelmed. A year and a half later we opened Barber's retrospective at MOCA Tucson, devoting the entire museum to everything from his early '50s abstractions, the '60s abstract-expressionist period, stacked 'specific object' canvases, a series of 'mountain' forms, hard-edged 'freeway' paintings, pop-infused portraits of his children's toys, to vitrines full of exquisite drawings and collages, cardboard maquettes, and geometrically intriguing painted-steel sculptures. And that's just scratching the surface of a protean, expansive, phenomenally cohesive yet varied oeuvre that has since brought Robert attention far beyond the confines of Pima County. Calling it a triumph might be a slight exaggeration, but unquestionably an unforeseen turnaround that doesn't happen every day. A sudden reversal helped along by good fortune and maybe even karma, allowing for autumnal fulfilment in what he has accomplished and what he's still doing artistically into what is now his second century. The newfound curiosity and interest of mavens who can assess, compare, and evaluate his work with a sense of connoisseurship—that's satisfying, undoubtedly. Equally significant are the viewers who couldn't care less about art-historical precedents or importance, and just love the shapes and colours and the genuinely heart-warming tale accompanying their creation and recent reception. A cause for celebration, evidence

that there's always hope against the odds. That said, this account shouldn't be construed as a feel-good bromide, lacking in depth or struggle. Doing so elides the complex reality of a man with an iron will, belied by an infectious sense of humour, who can laugh about how he would 'send work out, but it would always come back', says the key to longevity is 'riding a bicycle', and always expresses profound gratitude for the support of his beloved wife, Fran. It was she who made one of many critical contributions to this narrative by saving much of his work for posterity's sake. After her death Robert soldiered on, and despite sadness and disappointment stayed driven and optimistic while embodying the melding of art and life, exuding contentment and even blessedness. That's just as much of or more of an achievement than all the great drawings, paintings, and sculptures. With a reserve of perseverance bordering on the heroic, now this extraordinary, humble, and remarkably talented human being can enjoy the fruits of his labours while also finally having an opportunity to share his diversified, formally rigorous, and quite beautiful output with the rest of us.

Being here in your backyard of course reminds me of that first time Anne-Marie and I came over. I'll never forget that day. I thought maybe those two Dos Equis box paintings were a fluke and we were in for a big disappointment. But it was the opposite, in spades. Well, you weren't expecting anything.

We were overwhelmed, to be frank. Then we made plans to come back the next week, and that was what led to your wonderful retrospective. And also, a day or two after our first visit, I called Kerry Schuss, practically declaring, 'You've got to come out here, this guy is unreal, you won't believe it'. He flew out from New York a few months later—which has resulted in a long and fruitful relationship and exhibits at his gallery and presentations at art fairs. Your work has been included in the JPMorgan Chase Art Collection and the Minneapolis Institute of Art, among others, and has been seen, valued, and recognised in a way that was completely unforeseeable when we first met. But for now, let's begin by tracing your life story from 1922, when you were born in Minneapolis.

My father was a chemistry professor, my mother was from Alabama—her father was



a Confederate soldier in the Civil War. She came up to Minnesota to see her sister, whose husband was the head of the chemistry department at the University of Minnesota, and that's where she met my father.

I'm curious what you were you into as a child, and was there art in your home growing up?

The woods of Minnesota were fascinating to me. I always enjoyed the outdoors—skiing, hockey, tobogganing, and ice-skating. I loved sports, but I was too small so I couldn't do anything except wrestling. I won some championships at 105 pounds. Later, I won a national AAU Championship for 123 pounds. As far as art, there were some paintings in our family home growing up, but my parents didn't know master painters from commercial ones. What they had were reproductions of second-rate painters. I would take them down and copy them; I remember one was of a street in Naples, Italy, very painterly, and I copied it in pencil. Also Norman Rockwell covers from *Collier's*. I'd ask everyone if they could tell the difference between the original and my copy.

What kind of art training did you have?

I took art classes all through high school with Ms Irene Roscoe. She gave me a lot of encouragement and support, and she helped me get a scholarship to the Minneapolis School of Art—now the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

And was that when you first started taking life-drawing classes?

Yes, 17 years old, sitting there for two hours doing life studies of muscular males and perfectly proportioned, beautiful naked women. It was great. Drawing with charcoal, classical training, drawing exactly what you saw, down to the fingernails and toenails.

So World War II came along and interrupted all of that.

In the fall of 1942, after two years of university, I was 20 and joined the navy—one reason being I figured I'd rather sleep in a hammock than a foxhole. I found out later, sailors don't sleep in hammocks but in bunks. I went to *USS Green Bay* for boot camp and from that they put me in the Hospital Corps in Corona, California. It had been a resort of some kind with a swimming pool, so it was almost luxurious. James Cagney and Katharine Hepburn came

to perform for the patients, to lift their spirits. So did Red Skelton and Sterling Holloway—he was a funny looking red-headed guy, little and skinny, just looking at him made you laugh. And the swimmer Esther Williams, with her girls, they did their routine in the pool, and some swing bands also came.

You've told me that you were drawn to it because you were helping people and got satisfaction out of it.

It was positive, instead of killing someone in the war. To see if we were candidates, they brought us in as a doctor was cauterising a liver. It was smoky and smelly, but I didn't think



it was horrible because the patient was being helped. I was fascinated and since I didn't pass out or throw up, the head nurse asked if I wanted a scholarship to be a surgical nurse. For one year I dealt with shrapnel in the brain, burns, amputations, private parts blown off, and scrubbing and passing the instruments to the doctor during operations. Once, one doctor finished an operation, handed me a needle, and said, 'You sew him up'. The nurses behind me were nervous, but I did it.

So after a year there you shipped out?

They assigned me to the *USS De Grasse*, a transport and cargo troop ship, and we went up

to San Francisco and got on. I shipped out for two years. Our home base was Pearl Harbor and we picked up troops and cargo there and went to all the Pacific Islands, unloading supplies. I was the only surgical nurse on the ship.

Maybe you don't want to talk about it, but—and this is a huge understatement, and stating the obvious—it must have been really hairy at times.

Yeah, it was terrifying. We were at Okinawa and the Japanese were desperate because the island is only 200 miles away from Japan and the kamikazes came flying in formation by the hundreds to sink ships by blowing themselves up. All the battleships shooting at the planes, and I was right in the middle of it, hundreds of ships—you can't imagine—tracer bullets, and the artillery; the sound was something. Later I saw programs on things that happened during the war that I didn't even know about. I learnt that Japanese teenage boys were brainwashed into thinking they were going to save the country by flying planes into ships. Can you imagine what these young kids were thinking? It was a one-way trip.

It really does seem like they would have fought to the last man. Horrible for the people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but what might have happened if we'd invaded could have been a lot worse.

That would have been me. That was our next trip. We were heading back to Pearl Harbor in August 1945 when we heard the war was over, and that seemed impossible because we were supposedly getting ready to invade Japan. A total surprise, and we didn't actually find out about the atomic bombs until we got to Pearl Harbor. Then we went back to San Francisco, and I was so glad, I thought, 'The war is over, I'm going home'. But they said they had a whole new crew of hospital corpsmen and because of my experience, they ordered me to train them. So in the fall of 1945, I was back at Pearl Harbor. When we were on shore leave there were horrible scenes with drunken sailors.

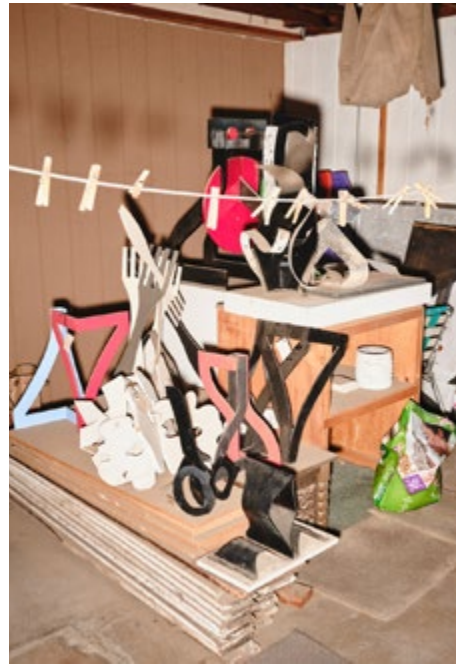
The way you describe it makes me think of Paul Cadmus' *The Fleet's In!*, though maybe not so benign. On a less sordid note, didn't you paddle out on a surfboard at Waikiki?

Yes, another kid and I went out and I got cramps in my legs and he had to pull me into shore. Anyway, finally we went back to San

Francisco, and for years after I had nightmares about going out to sea again. I was sent back to Fort Snelling in Minnesota and we were discharged in a hurry. I remember the sergeant saying, 'You're going back to civilian life. Can you remember not to say, "Pass the fucking butter" at your mom's dinner table?' At first I was living with my parents, and worked at a bookstore for three or four months, then I started school in 1946 at the Minneapolis School of Art, taking commercial art classes.

That's when you met Fern.

She was taking all fine art courses, so our



paths didn't cross until one day I was taking a lunch break on the steps. I looked over, saw her, she looked at me and smiled, I smiled back, and that was it. After I was so speechless and miserable, thinking, 'Why didn't you say something to that girl?' and, 'She's too beautiful for you, I bet she has a dozen boyfriends'. But the next Monday I got off the streetcar and a car pulls up in front of the school, a bunch of guys pile out, and then Fern, and she stopped and waited for me and said, 'Hi'.

What a great and lucky story.

She made the advances. That's the only way I would have met her. We started dating when





she was just graduating; she'd gone through the four years on a scholarship. She'd started at a young age and she really had a talent.

I know from looking at her artwork that she was incredibly skilled and had amazing technical facility. There's no doubt about it. She really was a master of drawing animals and people. The neighbours were hiring her to draw life-sized pastel portraits of their pets, and they were really impressed. She was also illustrating a Catholic magazine edited by two priests and did drawings of kids and things for the money. Also she loved dance—all kinds, modern, ballet, tap—and became a member of the Gertrude Lippincott dance troupe around that time.

You two really connected as artists, and I know that was a profound basis of mutual appreciation and reciprocal encouragement all through your time together.

Fern was much better at that than I was, she did it professionally and was very versatile. Then a priest commissioned her to do an oil painting of his mistress. You wonder why a person would go through all that process of becoming a priest, to live a life of chastity and celibacy, and then have a girlfriend. He lived in a big house on the Saint Croix River and drove a black Cadillac and came by and picked up Fern. She spent a week at the house, and the mistress complained a lot about him being so domineering, but she was happy with the portrait. I went out there to visit and was offered alcohol and cigars, and it was like finding out these things you don't know about, that priests have mistresses, or diddle little boys.

It's an education. So you two got married not long after?

We married in 1948. I felt obligated to support us so I worked at an advertising agency. There wasn't much art involved, I was doing layout and illustrating in a small office with three guys. But I still had two years left on the GI Bill so I went back to the Minneapolis School of Art to get a BA.

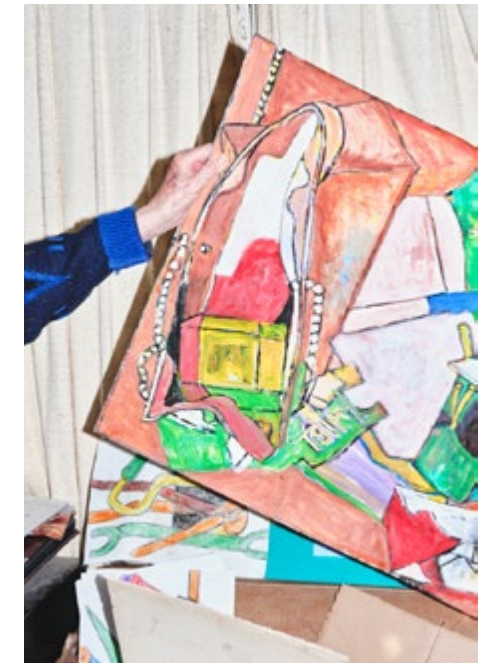
You told me once about an encounter with a particularly galvanising Matisse painting around that time.

Yes, I saw *Boy with Butterfly Net* in Minneapolis and that was it, that was what convinced me. I thought, 'I'm changing my major today'—to be

a fine artist. I was taking a painting class at the time and trying to paint the figure, and I saw how Matisse simplified things and thought, 'Oh, you don't have to paint every single finger and eyebrow'. He taught me how to do it.

Well, you could do a lot worse for a teacher than Matisse. After that you started getting your MFA at the University of Minnesota. Who were some of your teachers?

Ray Parker. He was my favourite teacher and became a friend. He was the same age and we'd hang out at his studio. He was a talented wonder boy who always won prizes. In 1950 he was in a MoMA show called *New Talent*



Exhibition in the Penthouse with two other artists, Seymour Drumlevitch and William D King, then in the early '50s moved to a loft in New York. Around that time, I remember I was struggling with composition and Ray said, 'Oh, design is easy'. And I thought, 'C'mon! Boy, how lucky you are'.

Then Philip Guston came as a visiting teacher, that must have been sort of a big deal. Didn't he leave a painting behind a radiator when he left, something like that?

It was a little thing, not too big. Probably he was in the process of painting it, hid it, and it got left there.

I wonder if that painting was found and ever attributed to him. Who else?

Cameron Booth, who taught in New York and came as a guest teacher and brought along Seong Moy, a woodcut artist. Because of him I got really into doing woodcuts. And John Beauchamp was a very talented guy and he really made a name for himself. The Whitney Museum of American Art bought one of his paintings. To be honest, I was envious, I could barely get paintings into shows in Minneapolis.

So you mingled with all these artists, learnt a lot, were in that ferment and stimulation of graduate school. What did you do afterwards?



I was fed up with academia so I got a job as a shipping clerk at a clothing store downtown. Then I had a friend who was an art handler at the Walker Art Center and he told me they had an opening. HH Arnason was so ambitious that he'd wrangled a position as director there. I was downstairs doing shipping, and Arnason was upstairs; he was a real jerk and never showed any interest in the workers' art. But one day I got called upstairs and he said someone was on the phone from Bloomington, Illinois, and wanted to talk to me. It was Rupert Kilgore, from Wesleyan University. He asked me if I was interested in teaching there, so I went down on the train, did an interview,

and they offered me a job. That was 1953. I went back to Minneapolis, said, 'I'm hired', and we moved.

Were you happy with that change? Was it an aspiration of yours to teach?

Well, I thought it would lead to something, instead of being stuck someplace packing paintings. It would be a step up. I had opportunities to do work and had a one-man show at the Kilbride-Bradley Gallery in Minneapolis, and they sold one. We lived in barracks for free because I didn't get paid much. Leigh Ann was born there. They had a good drama department and they put on *Death of a Salesman*. I got to be good friends with the opera teacher; he asked me to design sets, so I spent an Easter vacation painting flats for the opera and also designed posters for it. I had opportunities to utilise my skills. Also Fern had a small show of abstract paintings there—it must have been hard on her because she was also bringing up two little kids. She was so busy.

Why did you leave Bloomington after only three years?

Fern said, 'This weather is killing me, and we need to go to a hot, dry place'. Her arthritis was really bothering her. I'd just gotten tenure, but they were only paying 4,000 dollars a year, so—what the heck, we were in our late 20s and adventurous. We got out a map; we'd heard Tucson was an interesting small town. A couple of people we knew had been here and described it nicely, with mountains.

It was a bit of leap into the void.

We just knew that the sun shined brightly. We packed up and left that summer, 1956.

Right into the midsummer cauldron of the Sonoran Desert.

Boy it was a shock to get off the train. It was like walking into an oven. We got off at Hotel Congress and stayed at a motel one night. Soon I started to look for a job, taking the bus, and Fern looked for a place to live with the kids. We made a down payment on this house—8,500 dollars was the price, and I had to borrow money from my father. We repainted the walls immediately and we didn't have any furniture, so Fern spent six months in the living room making everything out of cardboard boxes—for economic reasons, but





also as a creative outlet. She made the kid's Christmas presents out of papier mâché and a dollhouse out of boxes. It was kind of tough, starting out, and it's a good thing we were young, relatively.

I was doing odd jobs for a year. Then one day I was sitting in front of the library, really depressed, and I saw in the newspaper, 'Public schools need teachers desperately', so I went to the education department. They kept shuttling me around until finally some sympathetic person told me to take a correspondence course, and after that I did my student teaching at Menlo Park Elementary, fifth grade, with a lot of Mexicans. The kids were nice, but it was sad how they were admonished for speaking Spanish. I was teaching geography, reading, spelling, and math. It was a big adjustment, not teaching art. Then I was assigned to John B Wright Elementary to be a sixth-grade teacher in 1957, and stayed there for 24 years, two miles from here. And I figured, 'Here's a constant job, and I can continue doing my art'.

So you got settled. What were the advantages to the teaching routine?

I had three months of vacation, so there was time for travel and painting. We went to Saguaro National Park, up through the state, the Grand Canyon. One time we drove to Montana to visit my sister in an old Ford. We put two boards over the seats in the back to sleep on and the kids slept below. Every summer we went some place, to California, Minnesota, or Tennessee, because my parents had moved there after retiring.

And the whole time you were an educator, you kept making your own work. Can you describe your interactions with the Tucson art community? Even now with all the growth it can still seem downright provincial and narrow-minded. It's a bit strange for a city of a million people. But man, back then it must have felt real poky and unsophisticated.

Talk about a small town stuck out here in the desert. The city limits were about a mile east of here, just past Swan Road. Bunny Wheeler had her gallery at the Temple of Music and Art, and she liked my work, so I had a show there of watercolours, one of abstract paintings, and one of woodcuts. She sold some little collages at 25 dollars a piece, nothing big. I started submitting paintings to the Tucson Museum of Art, which was in a house on Franklin Street at

the time. An early watercolourist had a little gallery downtown, Gerry Peirce; he was the best-known artist, who also gave classes to old ladies on Swan Road. And of course Ted DeGrazia, who was a real promoter of himself.

He's the one person from here who had worldwide visibility at that time. Did you ever meet him?

Briefly. We were both chosen to judge a show and we shook hands and that was the end of that. He was in it for the money, he was a very successful commercial artist.

And he's still quite popular 40 years after his death. The artwork can be nauseating, especially his trademark blankly black-eyed Native American urchins with angel wings wearing pink blankets. Sort of creepy, but supposedly those postcards he did for UNICEF were the bestselling postcards in the world at one point. What about keeping up with what was going on in the arts in New York or Los Angeles, or internationally?

I was looking at magazines, and we took trips to New York, going to museums. I remember a Franz Kline exhibit at the Kootz Gallery that made a huge impression. We also took one two-week trip without the children to Europe in the late '70s. We landed in Rome, went through Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, Paris, and ended up in London. Getting to go to the Louvre, that was amazing, and it was nice to get to England where we could speak English.

There are some easily perceived influences on your work, especially Matisse, Guston, and Kline. What about some others?

Isenheim Altarpiece by Nikolaus Hagenauer and Matthias Grünewald inspired my woodcuts during college. Over time, Matisse and Picasso—they're just giants. As far as contemporaries: Guston, I watched his career evolve; Parker; Hans Hofmann; Richard Diebenkorn; and Jasper Johns, with the letters and numbers. Ellsworth Kelly has always been interesting. Fern and I often liked the same things, that was lucky.

With Kline there are some obvious parallels, particularly with your black-and-white phases. I've come back to black and white often because there's always something interesting there that can be interpreted in different ways.

Almost endless permutations and variations that can be found in the absence of colour. I know you'd had a long-standing desire to make sculpture, and when you were in your 50s you finally were able to start doing that. I took a sabbatical for one year and went to the University of Arizona to take sculpture courses, and I spent every day in the studio. Don Haskin was the teacher, he said, 'We can help you with the steel, cut it, and weld it'. He was older and we traded stories from World War II. Bob Tobias was the other teacher, and they both let me do whatever I wanted. I devoted a whole year to sculpture and that was a wonderful feeling. There are



shapes just like in the paintings, so why not make them three-dimensional?

Intertwining negative and positive space. I'm so glad you were able to because the sculptures are a fantastic addition and complement to all your two-dimensional work. They're not always good. I think of myself as majoring in quantity instead of quality.

I'm going to have to disagree with you on that one, Robert.

Well, I think in terms of a series, and that's why I did so many. I'd think, 'I did this one so why not do a little bit different version of it', and

I just kept going and going. For the next 10 years, through the '80s, I did a lot of sculpture.

Also at that time, you made a rather radical departure away from abstract work and swerved into realistic figuration. When I first saw those in your studio, they really took me by surprise. Though there's a different emphasis on the delineation of objects, with repeated viewing, they totally make sense as an integral part of your overall artistic journey.

I got more interested in figuration around the late '80s—the ones with the surgeries, those realistic dreamlike paintings. For the sculptures, I was making things up, no models. But then I saw some old gloves on the back porch and thought, 'Those look more interesting than anything I can make up'. So I got into details, trying to represent what I could actually see or handle or copy.

One thing is those paintings ostensibly eschew abstraction and could even be considered borderline surrealist.

I call those figurative. I didn't think about surrealism or anything, just about interesting shapes and contrasts.

The darkness, the almost gruesome aspects of those, given the era they were painted in, I've wondered if you'd seen some flyers around town for punk shows, like for Conflict or Al Perry & The Cattle, or whoever. Maybe that's a stretch but even a fleeting encounter with that aesthetic might have been a contributing factor. Also some people might think they are a reference to your experiences during the war. Well, no. The surgical ones aren't autobiographical and they aren't connected to my war experience. They're just intriguing subjects to draw, and the challenge is to put them together so they all work as a painting. After, the viewer can think of a theme. An abortion clinic, a dirty medical office, prosthetics, marching with flags—that could perhaps be seen as an anti-war statement. Or the dolls, they look brutal, like an abused child created those, took out their anger and pain on the dolls.

But, to be honest, I just wanted to draw the shapes, I got greedy, put more in, and figured nobody cared one way or the other. People seemed to be more interested in details and more impressed by that than abstraction. Guston's later figurative work was probably





the most on my mind: the ashtrays, cigarettes, books, brushes, and palettes. And I began looking at Picasso again and seeing what a draftsman he was.

It's not that you abandoned abstraction at all, it's more that it got folded into works that were figurative and realistic at first glance, but when looked at closely, can be seen as interlocking configurations of many abstract parts. After that I got interested in car parts, then bike parts and cardboard cartons, like the 12-pack beer boxes I find in the dumpsters. There are infinite amounts of combinations of folded and unfolded shapes and through the last 20 years I decided to stick with it, it's my motif.

I love that you were dumpster-diving in that alley behind Broadway, not for food but for old pieces of cardboard and other detritus. Nattily dressed, wearing those white gloves to pick up your booty to bring home. Are you still doing that?

Several times I got chased by dogs and knocked off my bike onto the street and one bit me. People were around and came to my rescue, but after a few times I'd had enough of that. They were people's dogs, let loose, not strays.

That's a bummer and such a Tucson phenomenon. I used to ride my bike a lot deep in South Tucson and had some scary close calls—pit-bulls chasing me, biting at my heels, and feeling their hot breath on my ankles. Returning to your artistic odyssey, I don't want to harp on your persistence too much but it's admirable and impressive to me that in the face of repeated rejection you kept sending out slides. Case in point, if you hadn't sent your slides to the Arizona Biennial that were noticed by the guest curator René Paul Barilleaux, we wouldn't be talking today. Before that were there any other public outings of note?

I had a show at the Jewish Community Center in 2000, a two-person show with a woman painter, her last name was Ross, she was from Europe, and she had done book illustrations. I showed my 'rag doll' paintings and Margaret Regan wrote a review in the *Tucson Weekly* that said I was a retired schoolteacher and my work was 'rigid and hard'. Her critique was based on my technique, that it wasn't 'loose' like Ross' work.

From my first exposure to your work it seemed a bit odd and inexplicable that locally nobody seemed to notice how good it was, especially compared to the customary dreck on display. But there were some supporters, right?

I saw Jim Waid at the Arizona Biennial opening in 2013, he was the only person I knew there. He liked my paintings, so that was a compliment. Fern and I met David Aguirre from Dinnerware and we were both in juried shows there. Then I met Steven Eye at an opening at the YWCA downtown, he introduced himself and told me about Solar Culture gallery. He was open to anyone who wanted to exhibit. He'd call up every four months saying, 'We're having a new show, bring something down'.

He's been a major and instrumental figure in Tucson for so long, first at the Hellrad Club, which then became Dodajk International, where Fugazi, SNFU, Helios Creed, and Tragic Mulatto played, just to name a few. And then at Solar Culture he kept at it. Back in 2013 I tried to find you in the phone book, but it was difficult since your name is so common. I actually called a barbershop thinking it might be you. But thankfully someone suggested Steven and he was happy to provide your number. To sum up, do you have any overarching or all-encompassing theoretical underpinnings to propound, or thoughts on painting and art that ties it all together and articulates a personal credo?

I don't have a philosophy about art. I see a shape of something that interests me, and I want to, I need to draw it. Doesn't matter if it's a car part, a hat, or a banana. And to put these disparate parts into a painting so that they work together, for me that's the greatest satisfaction. Really it comes down to, and how you can describe my work in three words is, shapes and colours.