

JOHN TARAHTEEFF

Blending Spaces



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John Tarahteeff's paintings take you somewhere new, yet familiar. You don't entirely know where it is, but it feels like you've been there before. His paintings—a 60/40 blend of realism and surrealism—occupy the space between imagination and reality. They evoke the sentiments of being a child, like pretending the blades of grass in a field might transform into reeds in a marsh.

"I experimented with abstraction and all different styles, and eventually settled on something closer to a more realistic representation. But the thing is, from the get-go I never thought of myself as a realist...I'm always taking liberties," says Tarahteeff.

The California-based artist began exhibiting works in Sacramento around 2000 but was painting well before that. "Increasingly over the years I've noticed the idea of artificiality seeping in. Very rarely do I use references in the ways a realist artist would use them...I've never approached it in that traditional way. I just start off with sketches, usually a head and then a body," he explains of his process. Often, it's about where the moment and the feeling take him. "Later,

I review all my sketches and decide which ones might go together...From the ground up, it's always from my imagination. Later on [in the process] is when the references start to come out," he says.

He sees his paintings almost like dioramas, akin to when a child gathers things together to play make believe. For instance, Tarahteeff might bring a diecast model car in as a reference for a full-size vehicle, but he'll paint the toy car exactly as it is. "In particular, this latest body is dealing with that idea of artificiality... [I realized] why don't I just use a toy car and depict all of the little scratches and imperfections...It draws out some of those childish implications, sitting down in the grass as a child pretending all of the blades of grass are giant reeds in a marsh," he says. "It's like bringing a child's perception of the world into my paintings to some degree."

The Escape, for instance, takes elements of reality and abstracts them just slightly, the way a kid would. The girl leaning against the tree is bigger than the tree itself, the car in the background on the cliff is technically too large relative to its location, and the

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Frollic, acrylic on
canvas, 38 x 28"

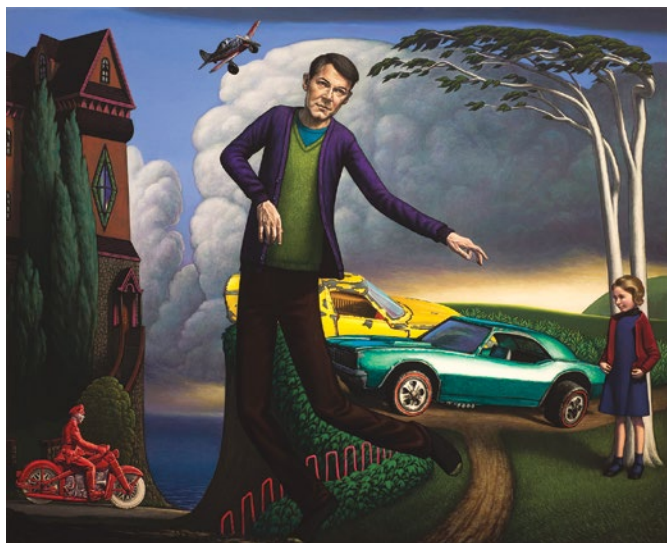
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The Trick, acrylic on
canvas, 36 x 30"

3
The Escape, acrylic on
canvas, 32 x 42"

4
Twixt, acrylic on
canvas, 42 x 52"



3



car in the foreground is clearly a toy. "I could have painted the car like it's a real car, but I intentionally picked this really crappy looking toy car. And it's better somehow, and that's the artificial surreal quality...Maybe the initial feeling I had is that she took her parents' car and went off on her own," he says, "but then I realized that this is more [a depiction of] the world she comes from. There's this mixture of real and kid fantasy happening."

Tarahteeff's new paintings will be on view during an exhibition at Nuart Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, from September 10 to 26. The show is called *Twixt*, for that space between the real and the imaginary. ●

Nuart Gallery
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