

Birds of Mars Digest

Number Seven

April—October 2021



The History of the Birds of Mars Digest

The 8 by 10 Series [01-24]
2021 12x12” Paintings [01-37]

City Collaboration (2013) with Sam Gas Can

The History of the Birds of Mars Digest

Welcome to issue number seven of the *Birds of Mars Digest*. This is the first digital issue of this publication—the previous ones were printed, hand-bound collectible books. The original idea behind these digests was to create a monthly publication which was a collection of art, creative writing, synchronicities, screenplays, and other things related to the Birds of Mars cinema and associated art, music & writing projects. By April 2021 I had published six volumes, which primarily contained all of the art, writing, video and music projects I was involved with during that time.

I also asked some of my poet friends—Rufus Chaffee, Tommy Twilite, Sage Meadow, and Julia Adamo—to contribute their works.

Digest Number One (September 2020) contains images and comments about a series of ‘art cards’—a collection of mixed media and/or collage on 5x7 inch archival cardstock [1-50]. For these I used just black, white or gray mark making devices. The art includes studies, happenstance, process, drawings, paintings, collage, and cut-ups—sometimes made with stencils or stamps.

Also included is writing about my style of writing, which I call Alt-Lit (not to be confused with the alt-lit writing movement which occurred around 2010), an explanation of “the coda’ within alt-lit writing,

synchronicities, and three movie scripts—*The Burroughs Movie We Never Made*, *The Coda (a movie)*, and *The Audition*.

Digest Number Two (October 2020) includes images and writing about the art cards [51-100], more creative writing, synchronicities, and three scripts—*The First Music Play*, *The Great Debate*, and *Making A Movie*.

Digest Number Three (Nov—Dec 2020) begins with a continuation of images and comments regarding the art card series [101-150], and additional creative writing. Five poems were contributed by the Beat Poet Laureate of Massachusetts—Tommy Twilite.

Digest Number Four (January 2021) includes the last of the art cards [151-175]. Beginning in this issue I began to document the ‘drawings sheets’ which I had started making in December 2020 [01-35]. In January 2021 I continued making the drawing sheets, restarting the numbering at 01 [01-38]. Also included are images and comments about a 12x12 inch series of grayscale paintings [01-05], started at the time.

Also included is “Haiku Voice—An Autobiography” by Rufus Chaffee, which contains an extensive collection of his haiku as well as an interview I conducted with him from 2019. There are also five poems contributed by Tommy Twilite in this issue.

Digest Number Five (February 2021) contains a continuation of the drawing series [032-068], and the series of 12x12 grayscale paintings [06-11]. Poetry by Rufus Chaffee, Julia Adamo, Sage Meadow and Tommy

Twilite are included, as well as a collection of short stories that I penned that month.

Digest Number Six (March 2021), the last printed issue of the digest, includes additional poetry by Rufus Chaffee, Julia Adamo, Sage Meadow and Tommy Twilite, and a novella I wrote about returning to bird watching.

The documentation of the drawing sheets [069-096], and 12x12 grayscale paintings [012-016] continued as well. Also within this issue are comments and song notes about *Prometheus Bound* a musical adaptation of the classic Greek play by Aeschylus, which I had composed at the time.

Digest Number Seven (April-October 2021) is this, the first digital issue. It includes a summary of what ended up happening with the 2021 12x12” grayscale paintings, a continuation of the documentation of the drawing sheets [97-183] through October 31, 2021, and images & writing about the “8 by 10” series of paintings I am currently working on. Also included are several collaborations with Sam Gas Can, including one from 2013.

Chris Gentes
Northampton, Massachusetts
November 2021

This PDF is the 1st Digital Edition.
All errors are unintentional.
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The 8 by 10 Series [01-24]

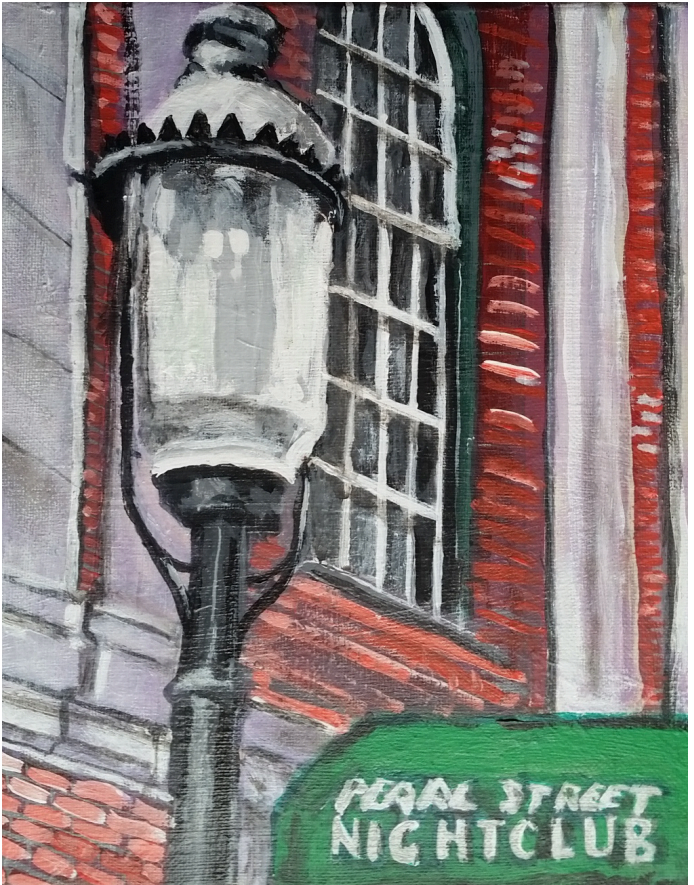
Comments by Chris Gentes

I started this series in late August 2021 with two portraits—one of 01 Vincent van Gogh and one of 02 Frida Kahlo. They quickly got to a point where it seemed that whatever I did next would mess them up. So I've left them unfinished until the time arrives when I'll know how to finish them. I was encouraged enough by the progress I had made painting them that I decided to continue with more paintings, focusing on scenes of Northampton.

So on September 6 I roamed around town looking for some subjects. I took photos of Pearl Street Nightclub, and the Tunnel Bar. I decided these two would be the first two paintings. I began right away by making a study for the **03 Pearl Street** painting—the lamp post.

By September 21, completely unsatisfied with how the painting was working out, I gessoed over it and started over. Meanwhile over those two weeks I had started another eight paintings [04—012].

Think of this writing as fiction by a fictional artist. I'm writing it as fiction. It's fiction anyway since it is my memories of things, and my memories may be faulty. Plus, I'm interacting with a lot of people and if this was factual, then I'd feel obliged to contact everyone I mention to see if what I wrote accurately reflects what they remember as having happened. So I'm just making it all up. Think of it as creative writing about making art. Keep in mind too that whatever I write in here is based on the experiences



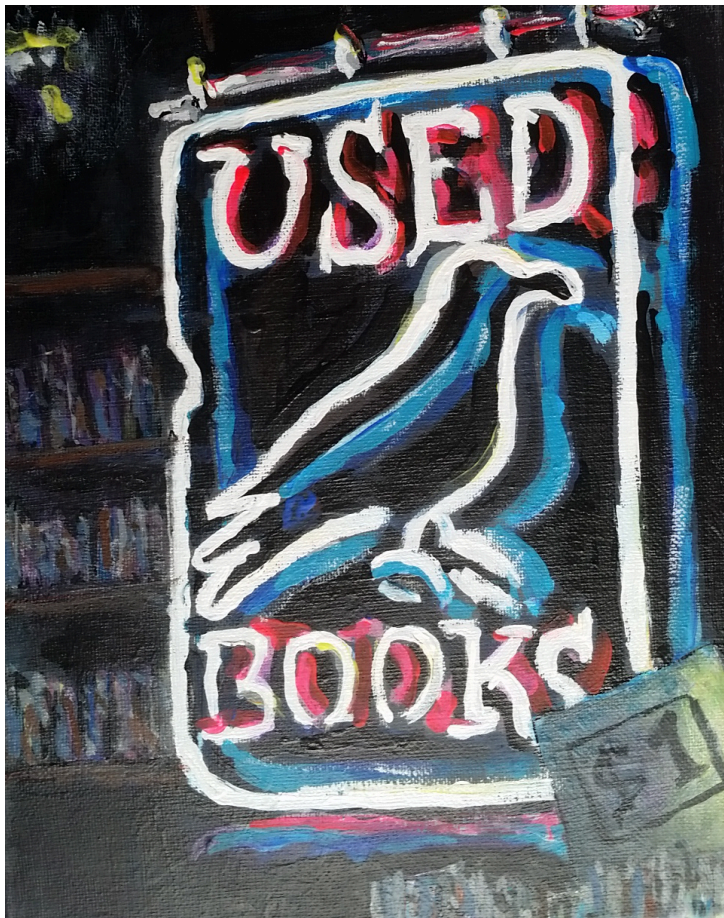
03 Pearl Street. 10x8". Acrylic on canvas. Private Collection.

I've had up to this point. Making art is a dynamic process, and sometimes I'll have a new insight which alters what I previously believed. It can happen moment to moment. So things that I've written in here, seemingly true now, may not reflect my future beliefs.

I decided to make paintings of some of the paintings I had already made. I picked **04 Used Books** for the first of these 'art of art' paintings. I love Raven Books. Everything about it is just about perfect. I have memories of going there in the 1980s. It is so cool going down those steps. Going down steps into a used book store seems important.

Anyway, this painting is a milestone in that it is the first I've made with the deliberate intention of creating an artwork of a previous artwork. It is the first in that manner that I've made.

I've made small drawings, small paintings, and large paintings of Raven over the years. In 2016 I made some works on paper using an airbrush with some stencils I had cut. I love using an airbrush, but haven't in about five years. The way the airbrush creates gradations can look really cool even if the art itself isn't that interesting. I've made hundreds of small works using airbrush and stencils. That is the whole "modern pochoir" series from 2016—2017 which was made using stencils and an airbrush. Pochoir is French for stencil. I have to go through everything to see specifically how many artworks of the Raven I've made. Eventually I'll include pictures of those artworks in a future issue of this digest.



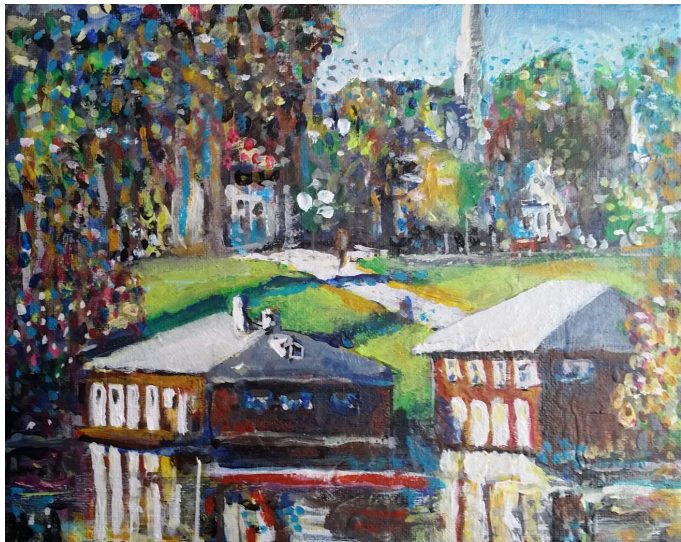
04 Used Books. 10x8". Acrylic on canvas. Collection of Gina Gaetz.

So there I was looking at some postcards of my old art trying to decide what else I should make a new work of art of. I decided on **05 Boathouse** because I've always liked how that one had turned out.

So that is how this series began. The two unfinished portraits, and then starting the Pearl Street painting and next Used Books and then the Boathouse painting. I should probably mention that I eventually finished the Pearl Street painting on October 9, so it ended up taking a whole month to paint. I painted it twice. The first version, then gessoed over that and then did a second version.

So while I was having trouble with Pearl Street, I was really enjoying painting the boathouse. I was just copying what I had already painted. All kinds of strange ideas and notions came into my head while I was doing this. I realized that I couldn't think of painting it as being difficult, since it was something I had already painted. I had already done it. It might have been difficult the first time I had painted it, but whatever those challenges may have been had already been overcome.

This experience was unique to me. I had never painted a painting of a previous painting before. I had made new versions of an old image, but I never thought of those artistic forays as being an intended painting of that existing image. No, those were starting afresh with the image. At a certain point I was just responding to the painting as it progressed. I wasn't trying to make it exactly like the original artwork anymore. I made some things different. There were things that were different.



05 Boathouse. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas. Private Collection.

Here is a view of the boathouse at Paradise Pond. Two buildings on the water in sunlight. Beyond this the rolling lawns on the campus of Smith College, and in the distance the Helen Hills Hills Chapel can be seen. This painting has a pointillistic quality to it. I mention this because there is a tie-in to the Hills Chapel—this is where I once observed part of a concert in which Erik Satie's *Vexations* were performed, and at which I made a series of small drawings of the pianists with markers. Satie was connected with the impressionist artists.

While scanning the drawing sheets I noticed that the first mention of the 8 by 10 canvas size is March 24, 2021 on drawing sheet 102. Then it looks like around April 10 or 11 I was beginning to do some painting on some 8 by 10 canvases. That additional information is on some other drawing sheets. I could probably piece more of the origins together. In a way the specifics aren't too important. The end of that part of the story is that the first attempt at creating a series of 8 by 10 inch paintings didn't go as planned. By the end of April I had painted over all of them and that was the beginning of my 'art pause.' The 8 by 10 story picks up again at the end of August—which is this story so far up until here.

There is more to it than that though. Because even though I was on an art pause all of May, in June I was working on four 12x12" canvases—the Coffee series. And then I painted a Batman & Robin painting. I write a little bit more about this in the chapter about the 12x12" paintings. I suppose there never really was an art pause.

06 Fitzwilly's is based on one of the paintings I had done back in 1997. The 1997 Northampton series of mixed media on paper. Last time I counted there were 46 artworks in that series. They are on paper, but there is acrylic paint on most of them, but applied liquid-like—like a watercolor. Then I drew over that with different markers and things. I had a show of them at Pahana Gallery. Pahana was a gallery on Main Street run by Bob Doyle. We had some memorable group shows. There was one with Paul Laffoley and Mark Bode.

I sold some of those old 1997 drawings in 2011 for \$250 each. That is what my 'market' was ten years ago. In 2011 an 11x14 inch mixed media drawing made in 1997 went for \$250. And 16x20 inch paintings were going for \$400 that year. So pricing some of these new ones for \$40 seems a little underpriced, but I'd like them to be as affordable as possible for anyone who would like one. Some of these new ones are over \$100 because they either take more time to paint, or otherwise have that value.



06 Fitzwilly's. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas. Private Collection.

I'm not sure how much of all of this is important enough to actually write down, so I'm just going to write it down as I remember it, and maybe edit this later on. Hopefully it will come out ok the first time though, because I don't like revising. I don't mind reading through something once or twice, but I don't want to be revising a lot. That is why I initially came up with the idea for those writing sessions last year. It was a good way to interview people and get all the words written down while they were saying them, and not having to do it later by transcribing a tape. I know that I'm getting way ahead of myself even mentioning the writing sessions, but I think this is a good place to mention it, since it is my intention that future issues of the digest will include material from such sessions. I'm going to call them 'conversations'.

07 State Street Fruit is a strange and unsettling painting on one level. Even though I painted it, I am still somewhat intrigued by it. This photo doesn't really seem to look like the actual painting, but when I look at that painting it looks like the picture. But just in a certain light. It's weird. This painting is kind of cool in that it looks different in different kinds of light.

There are hundreds of ways to paint this neon sign.

Since I'm writing *this* on November 13, 2021 I might as well mention now that I ended up making a second version of this painting. I was actually making two paintings at the same time (10 State Street Fruit 2). What happened was that once I got started on the first one I thought that I should cut a stencil of the letters because it

seemed like I would be making a lot of these paintings. Having the stencil would make it easier to make them. So on September 17 I cut a stencil and used that to start the second version of this painting. I am now working on a third version—a close up. That will be in the next digest.



07 State Street Fruit. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

08 Local Burger was started after 07 State Street Fruit and was originally based on another painting I had made of Local Burger—a similar composition, but at night. Eventually, after a few weeks of miscues I painted over the whole thing and started afresh. And this time I made a few studies.

I guess this is a good place to mention the “Drawing Sheets.” These are 8.5 x 11” sheets of loose paper that I will write or draw something on. It is something I started doing in December 2020. I put the date on them and number them. The idea behind it was that I didn’t want to be drawing in notebooks, because I have a lot of notebooks and I don’t even know what is in most of them.

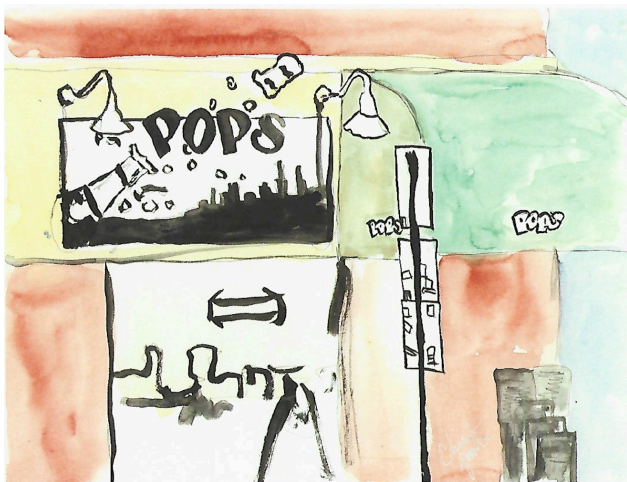
I also think of them as being art, and since I had been doing a lot of organizing and cataloging of my art I wanted a system in place that would catalog new art *as* I made it. I didn’t want to have to go back later on to do that. Because that later on might never arrive.

The drawing sheets contain all different kinds of things. Lately they are mostly studies of the paintings I’m going to be working on. Once I decide on the subject for a painting I give myself two days to work out the design and composition. I’ll try to figure out what I will have to do technically. I’ll try to plan it out as much as possible to make my job of painting go as smoothly as possible. So the Local Burger is the first painting in this series that I deliberately did that with from scratch. It got to a point where it seemed finished so I stopped working on it, even though I feel like there are still a lot of things I could alter.



08 Local Burger. 10x8". Acrylic on canvas.

The image **09 Pops** is based on goes back to a piece I made in 1997 (pictured below.) This is a painting of that painting. I tried to be as true to it as possible. The way the newspapers on the bottom right are painted, is how they are on the original—blurry and messy. The rest of the painting is somewhat cleanly painted, with black lines. I don't know why, but I really like this painting. Maybe because it reminds me of the 90s, which was a fun time to be an artist in Northampton. I had a show on cable access called The Shape of Art, and I interviewed different



Pops (1997). 10x14 inches. Acrylic on paper.

artists that lived in town. I was also involved with Bob Doyle's Pahana Gallery on Main Street. I had a solo exhibition there one year—the 1997 scenes of Northampton paintings. That gallery was great. I curated a few group shows there. In one of them Paul Laffoley exhibited a very early photorealist painting of a house. It was from the early 60s as I recall. Mark Bode was in one of those shows as well.



09 Pops (2021). 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

As mentioned, I was still working on the first State Street Fruit Store painting when I started **10 State Street Fruit 2**. The reason being was that I had made a stencil of the letters. Not the white neon part, but the letters underneath that part, minus the shadows. So once I had cut that stencil I wanted to make a painting and test it out. So that is why I made a second one.

This is right around the beginning of October when I though I was going to end up making dozens of these paintings a week so I wanted to test out the stencil.

Stencil art is one of the techniques I like to use sometimes to make art. I like how there is a certain amount of control, but there is also a certain amount of unpredictability. Especially with spray paint and stencils. The first few are usually nice and clean looking, but then the stencil starts getting paint accumulating on it, and eventually there is a lot of paint getting everywhere on everything. It happens with acrylic too (if hand painting with acrylic), but that is more manageable and dries quicker. That is the main problem with spray paint. Once it accumulates on the stencil it can take a long time to dry. You need a place where there is ventilation and where you can let the stencils sit to dry over a few days.

I don't have much more to write about this painting. That is the funny thing about writing this. I'm not sure what to write. I'll ask people what they want to read about for future issues. I'm going to keep writing about writing this too. It is all part of the process. I just had a memory of something I read in one of John Steinbeck's novels. It

was at the beginning of the book in an introduction. I might be getting the details wrong. He wrote a book called *Cannery Row*, which was based on people he actually knew. Then he asked them to read it and he wrote a whole thing about the suggestions they gave him about what he had written. That appeared at the beginning of *Sweet Thursday* as I recall, which was kind of a sequel to *Cannery Row*.



10 State Street Fruit 2. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

As I type this I am looking at a large (2x3 feet) framed giclee print from 2011 that is leaning up against the wall in my studio. It is a print from the one of the paintings from 1997. It and others were on display at The Woodstar in the fall of 2011. A lot of people liked those prints and I sold a few of them at the time. The Northampton Survival Center has a collection of them decorating their offices. It was that image on which I based the painting **11 Upper Main Street**. I enjoyed making this painting quite a bit. It went really easy. It was easy and fun. I dabbled a little with some pointillism.

I can write about a specific painting—how it looks. I can write about the process of creating the painting. The theory behind it and choices I made. Art decisions. I can write about what happened to the painting. Did someone buy it—the story behind that, and what happened to the painting. How much it sold for and what happened.

I can write about artist things. What it is like to be an artist and the successes and failures associated with this. I could write about the shows I've been in over the years and the experiences associated with all of that. I could write about specific paintings or artworks. Collaborations with other artists that happened. I could write about shows I've curated. There is a lot I could write about.

Right now I can't think of anything to write about, so I will demonstrate a little technique I invented when I was writing 5000 words a day back in 2019. What you do is just start typing whatever you are thinking. Just type it. It doesn't matter what it is. Just start doing it. I can't think of

anything so I am still writing about just typing what I am thinking. I am typing. I can see my fingers hitting the letters on the laptop. This is alt-lit writing. This is how you do it. Soon you will have words. Sentences add up and become paragraphs and then you have a bunch of words written down. That was easy to do because I was going to be thinking anyway. Now I don't need to keep doing this. I've got enough words to fill this space.



11 Upper Main Street. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas. Private Collection.

Do you remember how this story began with me talking a walk around town on September 6? Do you remember how I wrote about taking pictures of Pearl Street Nightclub and the The Tunnel Bar with the intention of making paintings of them?

Well, on September 18 I started **12 Tunnel Bar**. On September 23 the painting was still in the works. That day I wrote the following in my art journal, which I call *The Lost Codas*:

“I restarted pearl street, and still working on tunnel bar as well. Two photos I took the same day a few weeks ago. It may be that I should do more drawings before a painting and really get the whole idea of the composition figured out before painting. Figure out things in another place, not the painting itself while painting.”

It seems funny to me now that I wrote that, because of course it makes sense to make some preliminary studies. I had made a few studies of Pearl Street, so I knew to do this and was doing it. But I hadn't gotten into the habit of making a study or two *before* starting a painting. I seemed to be making studies after already having started a painting. The studies were undertaken to solve problems I had encountered while painting without a roadmap.

It wasn't until the third week in October that this painting was finished. The major sticking point was getting the letters to look good enough. I'm still not fully satisfied with this one, but since these paintings are not meant to be labored over for months and months until they are absolutely perfect, at a certain point I just have to

wrap one up. But this image I will return to and paint another version of at some point. Maybe a closeup of that entranceway without the letters. That way I could focus more on those giant blocks of stone and the dimensional aspect of that arch. If it says Tunnel Bar on the window of the door I could include that there. I like to get some letters of a sign. Some of the signs on some businesses are way too intricate to try to paint.



12 Tunnel Bar. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

At some point in the middle of October, I got the idea to ask my friend Sam Gas Can, a fellow artist and musician, if he might want to collaborate on a painting. We had collaborated a few times before in the past. Back in 2013 I had created a half dozen or so large works on paper of a city scene, made with stencils and spray paint and then asked different artist friends if they would add something to what I had done. These were all exhibited at a Meat for Tea release party at Sonelab. I call those works “City Collaboration”. They are an amazing collection of art, also including contributions by two street artists who were active in Northampton at the time—Raze and Dvila. The collaboration with Sam was part of that show.

I am a fan of Sam’s art and have collected a few pieces he’s made. I always get to his art openings when I know about them, because there are always amazing paintings to look at. He was in a group show at Flywheel in Easthampton one year, and he had some great paintings there, one of which I still wish I had purchased. He has collaborated with other artists as well. I bought one of his small paintings for \$100 once. So I am a real fan of his art and really happy he worked on this one.

For **13 King Street** the part I painted is based on another one of those 1997 drawings. I painted that part and gave it to Sam to work on it, and a few weeks later he had finished his part, and here it is. I guess I could have added to this one more if I had wanted to, but I liked how it looked. Sam said he would sit and look at it and then

decide to do something—he didn't do everything all at once.

I just remembered that sometime around 2014 there was a cool group show that Sam was in in Hadley. It was called Mask. All the artists made masks. I interviewed him on video at the opening, and I also took video of the whole opening. A lot of artists got videotaped that night. Kim Gordon was there too.



13 King Street. 8x10". A Collaboration with Sam Gas Can.

14 News Boxes is another one of the new paintings that I made based on one of the 1997 paintings. This was a fun painting to make. This is what it looked like in front of City Hall in 1997. The street lamps were a weird green teal color. There was a trash can, but no recycling cans like there are today. Then there was a box for The Optimist. That was a free weekly magazine similar to The Advocate. So that was really cool that they had both here at the time. The Advocate is still here I think. I'm not sure, I forget to look at it. The boxes are still here. And then there is The Gazette, which is also still here. I think. I'm not sure. Sometimes these boxes are empty, that much I know. Sometimes it'll be the same headline on the paper in a Gazette box for a month.

I'm just commenting on what I see. Probably most of it is online somewhere. The news.

I don't think The Optimist box was actually blue, but it looked better that way in this painting. If I was going to make this like a Warhol painting I would make a silk screen of all the black parts of this painting, and then I would hand paint all of the other parts in color, and then put the silk screen over that. I would figure out cool color combinations and change them around and make a ton of paintings. I would make The Optimist box blue in one painting and then red in another one. In the past I might just start doing something like that, and then I'd have a ton of paintings sitting around, and eventually I'd probably throw them away. I've thrown away a lot of art over the years simply because it was too much to continue

carrying around. It's kind of sad because there was some nice art that I threw out, but the plus side is I have pictures of most of it so I can always make a new version. I've learned that it is ok to just think about art that I might make, and sometimes that is good enough. I don't have to actually make every idea I think of.



14 News Boxes. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

This painting, **15 'Alvin**, ended up with somebody for \$20, and I'm not sure who they are. I was practicing my sax downtown one day, and I had some of my paintings on display as well. I wanted to see what happened. What I observed was that for the most part nobody noticed them. Maybe one out of fifty people noticed them. Once in a while someone would look at them as they scurried by and they would smile, so that was cool. One day someone I know as an artist, but don't know anything more about, stopped to look at them. And he stopped and looked for a long time. So that was rewarding. He was not just looking, but seeing what I had attempted to do on a technical artistic level.

But mostly what I learned was that even standing there playing saxophone hour after hour very few people noticed the paintings. Maybe if there were three or four artists out there and we each had twenty paintings it would be more like an art fair and more people might stop to look closer.

So there I was playing my sax near Birdhouse Music, and a car pulled up and a woman in the car was waving a twenty that she wanted to give to me, plus she was saying something about how happy she was to see me playing, and how it was 'the old time Northampton.'

I'm not really sure what she meant by 'the old time Northampton.' I don't remember it as being a great place to do any busking. I used to busk in Savannah, Georgia. Now that is a great city to busk in, down by the river with the wide promenade. I love Northampton, but Savannah

is a different kind of place altogether. Anyway, she kept saying it—"old time Northampton."

And she wanted to give me a twenty so in the moment I thought that I should give her a painting since she was being so generous. I said, "Take a painting—they're of old time Northampton." She jumped out of the car and after looking at them she picked this one. I was happy, but also kind of sad to see that painting go, because I really like how it looked, and kind of wanted to keep it for myself. I wonder who she was.



15 Alvin. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas. Private Collection.

I started **16 Under the Bridge** on October 1, 2021 and finished it October 30. So it truly is a painting that can be thought of as having taken the entire month of October to paint. It went through a lot of different incarnations over all of that time. I would paint on it now and then over the course of the month. I would look at it a lot. I spent more time looking at it than I did painting it. I would hang it on the wall and look at it and think of what I should change to make it better. Then the next day when I sat down to paint I would try that idea. Then I'd see how the changes looked. Sometimes it made it better, and sometimes it made it worse. So I was engaged with this painting in that manner over all of that time, slowly moving it toward completion.

But I feel like it really was worth that effort. Just about everything is just how I want it. I don't think there is much I would think of altering now.

Two other paintings are connected with this one. I am referring to 20 A Snowy Day and 23 A Snowy Day 2. After having worked on Under the Bridge for about a week, I decided to start a new painting—a close up of the person with the umbrella. So I spent about a half hour and made a drawing on the canvas and then a real basic underpainting. Not even an underpainting, but just the first rough draft of an underpainting.

I let that dry. For the next three weeks I just looked at it. It looked so cool that I didn't want to paint anything on it because I felt that that might mess it up. And then eventually I realized it was done. I made a few

improvements that my sister Julie suggested, and then it was done. So that was really cool to experience. A painting might be done quickly and it might take a long time to make. But time in and of itself is not necessarily a determining factor in whether a piece of art is pleasing to look at or not. However it should also be kept in mind that certain painting processes take a lot of time. Pointillistic paintings take time. This one sold for \$125, which I only mention here because that is part of the story.



16 Under the Bridge. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas. Private Collection.

By the second week of October I had finished the first seven paintings in this series, and I had another ten in various stages of completion. By November I figured out that it is better to have four or five paintings going at a time instead of ten. There's a whole ideal logistics behind it that I am still figuring out. It may be three is even better.

17 Boathouse 2 was an interesting painting to make. I had finished 05 Boathouse by the beginning of October and it seemed like it might be a good painting to make a few versions of. So I began right away to make a new version, but this time I used 05 Boathouse as the image to base this painting on. So that was kind of different—a new painting of a recent painting of an old painting.

I don't want to have to worry about anything while painting. I don't want to ever feel stressed. If a painting isn't going how I'd like it to go, I just accept that as something that sometimes happens. I give it more time until it gets resolved. There is a certain ineffable look that I'm after in a painting, and when it all clicks it is a great feeling.

Sometimes a painting will look really great in a certain light, but then in another light it won't look that great. I try to get them to look good in all lighting situations.

I vaguely remember a story about how one of the great artists of history had made a giant commissioned painting that had taken years. It was finally completed and delivered. The person who had commissioned it

absolutely hated it. Then the artist went over there and had to tell them just where to put it and with what kind of lighting situation and exactly how far away to be from the painting when viewing it. Everything was ok after that.

That is how some of these paintings are. I might look at one from three feet in daylight and it looks cool. But later that night, from ten feet in incandescent light it looks terrible. I try to figure out why and then I'll change it so that it looks good in both situations.



17 Boathouse 2. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

Since there isn't much to write about **18 Pops 2** other than it is another one of those paintings of a painting, I'll write a little bit about what it is like playing a saxophone on Main Street. First a shout out to the three other sax players I sometimes see in Northampton—Martin, Mick and the alto player from Westfield. I don't recall her name, but she is an excellent musician.

I like playing my sax downtown. Most people roaming around seem to enjoy it too. I'm just out there practicing with some backing tracks. There are twenty tunes I'll play on—two hours. By doing this I've developed a belief system about improvisation which is different from what I thought improvisation was. I've really come to understand that any tune has an infinite number of ways it can be interpreted.

Maybe not a literal infinity—since infinity doesn't actually exist, but something that 'acts like infinity' or 'might as well be infinity.' So when I say infinite, I don't mean the popular notion of what infinity is. The idea of infinity exists, but infinity itself doesn't. I don't believe it exists because you could never prove it to exist. How could you? If it went forever you would never be able to get to the end of it to say, "Yes, infinity goes on forever." Because there would always be more. Maybe that's that proof.

The point I'm trying to convey is that any song can be improvised with as much interest as any other tune. I'm always hearing about how musicians get tired of certain tunes, and the changes are boring. But I don't see it that

way. Songs are made of the same basic four chords. So it can't be the chords in the song that are boring or limiting. Is it the arrangement of the chords that seems limiting and boring to some? Well it's all the same basic progressions. Most tunes are pretty similar. And if you are improvising you can embellish the chord any way you want, so it isn't the chords or progressions that are boring.



18 Pops 2. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

Eventually I will add a picture of the finished painting of **19 Broadside Books** here. This is another collaboration with Sam Gas Can and he is currently working on it—his part. The image shown is how the painting looked when I gave it to him. I'll put a photo of the final version in a future digest. I'm looking forward to seeing what he ends up doing.



19 Broadside Books. 10x8". Acrylic on canvas.

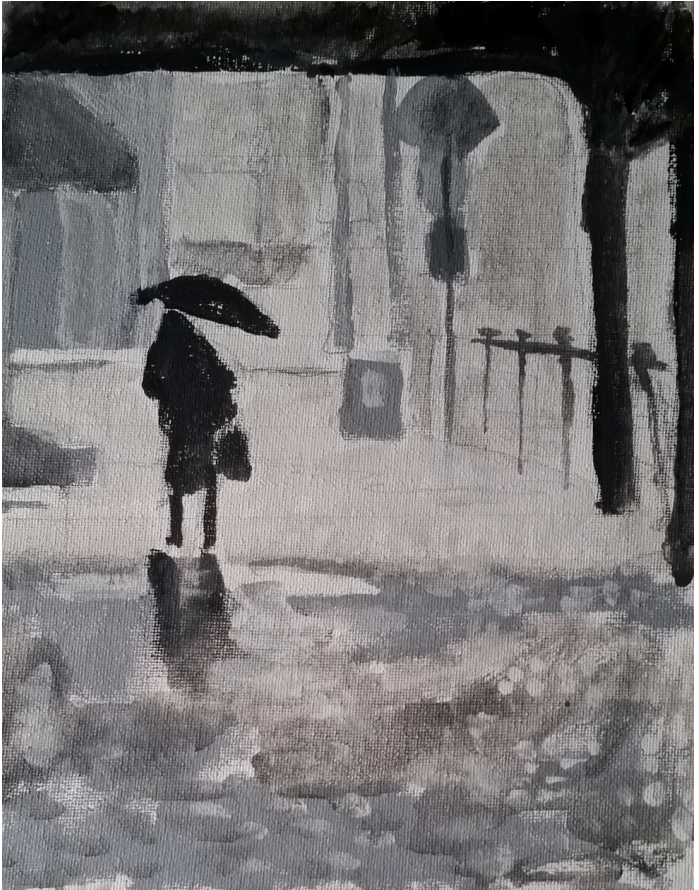
20 A Snowy Day is the painting which I made as a study of part of 16 Under the Bridge. I wanted to work out some of the specific items that are seen beyond the person with the umbrella. The storefronts and street poles and trash cans and things in the distance.

This is the underpainting, but I liked how it looked so much that I decided it was finished. Every time I sat down to work on this painting I didn't know what to do, so I ended up leaving it how it was. That sometimes happens with art. There was one little change that my sister Julie suggested. This had to do with how she was reading the painting. It had to do with darkening the street signs at the upper right. This would bring the focus back to the person with the umbrella. So that little change really brought the whole painting to a new level.

But I felt that I wanted to actually 'paint' a version of this, so I started a new painting based on it (23 A Snowy Day 2).

This group of paintings is based on a photo I took last winter. I was walking around in the snow and saw this scene up ahead so I quickly reacted and took a photo. It was just one of those moments that are sometimes stumbled upon. I'm always ready to take some photos when I find something interesting to photograph. This was one of those times.

I just want to mention that the white square area above the umbrella is a sign for Pop's. That big sign wasn't around in 1997. So ironically this painting has a Pop's sign in it, which is also on some other paintings.



20 A Snowy Day. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

One day in early October a friend and I went on a walk around Northampton. We walked around one of the neighborhoods where I used to live over near the levee. The woods there now have maintained trails. I remember seeing old tennis courts in there back in the 90s. They were all overgrown though. I'm going to have to take a walk over there to see if those courts are still there.

We also went down Pleasant Street and I got the idea to paint **21 Art Sign**—a painting of the big sign outside of Liberal Arts—Pop UP. There's the metal of the sign itself, which is spray painted a little bit unevenly. So that was an art problem that had to be figured out. Then the art sign itself is printed on what looked like some kind of vinyl that has weird reflections. That took a long time to figure out.

Then when the painting was about done, my friend and I decided to go back over there and look at the art in the shop since it was closed when I had taken the photo. Well, this time around it was open and we got to go in and look at all of the art. It was great. Then later that night we went back because there were some deejays, and that was really cool. They had tarot card readings and all of the art in there is amazing. I felt my collector's inclination kick-in, and I was looking at what I would want to buy if I was still actively collecting art. There were a few.

So all of that happened, but this is the weird thing that happened as well. When we went over there and I saw the sign again in real life, after having worked on that painting for several weeks, it was weird to be looking at

the actual sign. Because I had created in my mind, through the art, an image of what I thought it actually was. But how it actually was looked different. It looked small even though it was towering above me. And I could see all the parts to it. It was a trippy experience to say the least. I'm not sure why it looked so small to me as I looked up at it in real life.



21 Art Sign. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

22 Boathouse 3 is a curious painting. I started it early on and didn't really finish it until November, just as I'm finishing up writing all of these comments. I was working on it along with the two Pissarro studies (which will be in the next digest) during the same time. So it was influenced by those two paintings.

I mentioned before how everything I am writing relating to these paintings gets outdated fairly rapidly. Simply because I am continually making new paintings, and each new painting will alter my previously held beliefs about what painting is. Sometimes the experiences I have painting the new paintings is of such a nature that it supersedes previously held beliefs or insights.

Or I may stumble across a new painting technique or method which may be a better means to an end than previously used methods were. So a lot of what I am writing here has the potential of being outdated. That is why I suggested thinking of this as fiction.

This one ended up being very delicate and cotton candy like. I didn't plan it that way. It is just how it evolved. I left the people out of this one because I liked how those big soft brushstrokes looked and I didn't want anything to distract from them.

The thing I like about painting in the 8 by 10 inch format is that since it doesn't usually take months to make a painting I can try different things without worrying about it. If something I try doesn't work, it isn't a big deal. At least I know it didn't work and I'll try something else. As a result of allowing this type of experimentation I

sometimes end up with a painting like this one. Something unexpected that looks good and is unique.

So that is part of the experience of being an artist. How sometimes a painting ends up looking a certain way. A way which was unplanned. Serendipity. The development or occurrence of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way. This can be guided by having a deep understanding of the elements of painting, but can not be predicted, yet can be recognized when it occurs.



22 Boathouse 3. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

23 A Snowy Day 2 is a painting I made of a previous painting in this series—20 A Snowy Day—that painting which is really an underpainting that looked so good I considered it finished. This is the painting I decided to make of that painting. I suppose that 20 A Snowy Day could be thought of as a study as well as a painting. In the end every painting is really just a study for the next painting. There is so much to it all that it can't possibly be expressed in a few paintings.

Once the forms were in place I would just paint the different values. Trying to get those looking a certain way. I would glaze over different areas a lot. I just kept building it up. While painting it at certain times I forgot the form entirely and was just painting within what I saw.

I painted over things a lot. If something looked wrong I would just paint over it. I'd rework it and figure out things. For example the street poles. I didn't want the bottoms of them to intersect the trash can thing. I didn't originally know that, but I did as I painted it. In 20 A Snowy Day those poles connect more to the trash can, which is fine there because the person is dynamic. Here I wanted to have a more complete form. At a certain point I was just responding to the experience of painting and how much I was enjoying building up the paint.

The image of this painting has a lot of fun elements to consider. The underside of the railroad bridge for example. The trestles and the girders. Metal and the fluorescent light. Abstraction of form. Contrast of values. Light. Reflections. Flatness of plane, but still some depth.



23 A Snowy Day 2. 10x8". Acrylic on canvas. Collection of Jim Viola.

The painting **24 Upper Main Street** marks the end of the first group of paintings in this series. These are the ones that were painted sometime in September or October 2021. This painting is another one of those paintings of a painting. That teal color awning is Synergy, and to the left near the mailbox is Crackerbarrel Alley that leads to the Woodstar eventually.

So this concludes this part of Digest Number Seven. It is kind of funny to me that I had no intention of making any more Birds of Mars Digests any time soon, and then I ended up getting the idea to put it into digital format on November 6, and here on the 15th I'm just about done putting it together. So everything up until here includes the paintings that I made through October. During the first two weeks of November I've completed a few more paintings, and I am working on still more. When the next digest comes out, images and comments about those paintings will be included.

Here is a little sneak peak of what those paintings will be. The ones that I've completed are: 25 Coffee & Car, 26 Osaka, 27 Pissarro Study, 28 State Street Neon, and 29 Pissarro Tree.

The ones that are in the works are: 30 Faces, 31 Van Gogh Church, 32 Harold's Garage, 33 Fitzwilly's & Owl, and 34 Provisions. And probably three or four more still that I haven't decided on yet.

So that brings everything up to date for the 8 by 10 series of paintings.

There is, of course a lot more I could write about, but I'm not sure how important all of the minutiae is. I've pretty much written out the main details about everything. I will just continue in this manner and whatever happens will happen. If nothing else, I plan to start three paintings a week. That is what I just determined is a good number. At least that is what it is right now. I will keep refining things based on what I've learned by doing things.



24 Upper Main Street 2. 8x10". Acrylic on canvas.

Drawings

Within a Birds of Mars Digest there will be documentation of whatever art I happened to have made or be making. The first few issues document a series of 5x7 inch art cards I was making. Then, beginning in December 2020, I started making ‘drawings’ on letter-sized sheets of paper—8.5x11 inches. Before beginning a new ‘drawing’ I would number the sheet sequentially, date it and title it. Then I would start the drawing. Recently that has meant studies of the next paintings, but back in the winter or spring it might have meant almost anything.

I also keep an informal journal in which I write things in every few days or so just to document what was happening or how I was feeling. But these drawings are more for working out ideas or writing things that I really want to impress on my mind into the future. Either something I want to have in a way in which I can easily refer back to, or an idea or a concept that I had.

In Digest Number Six, which went through mid-March 2021, the list ended at 096. So in the interest of continuity I am including this list of drawings, here in Digest Seven, starting at 097, which is dated March 21, 2021 and going through 183, which is dated October 31, 2021, bringing this list current through November 2021.

Please note that the month(s) listed on the cover of any specific digest is the month that the art within that digest was made. Usually that is how it works out anyway.

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- 097 Sketching in park with a friend
- 098 Sketching
- 099 Oxbow Sketch
- 100 Design Grid Template
- 101 Short-eared Owl Study
- 102 8x10 Canvas
- 103 Open Mic Sketch
- 104 Hemingway Study
- 105 Painting Idea
- 106 Basic Shapes
- 107 Two Inch Forms
- 108 April Painting
- 109 Grid Maker Test
- 110 Grid Contents
- 111 Basic Shapes
- 112 Square Contents Theory
- 113 Birds of Mars Digest
- 114 Grid Theory Consolidated
- 115 Overview
- 116 Web Design
- 117 Prometheus Bound Characters
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- 119 Characters—Prometheus Bound
- 120 Van Gogh Study
- 121 Painting Schedule
- 122 Painting Sheet
- 123 Painting Progress 8x10
- 124 8x10 Theory
- 125 Worksheet Design

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- 137 12x12 (9) Grid
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- 139 Painting Gradation Ideas
- 140 Doodles
- 141 Pearl Street Studies
- 142 Postcard Sign Design
- 143 Vague Sketches
- 144 Dream Maps/Intentions
- 145 Thumbnails
- 146 Beethoven, Chapter 5 Page 49
- 147 Beethoven Chords, Page 51-52
- 148 Piston Chords of Six, Page 87
- 149 Pep Talk
- 150 State Street Stencil
- 151 Artist's Proof 1. State Street Stencil
- 152 Tunnel Bar Thumbnails
- 153 Paint Mixing Ideas
- 154 Green Observations

155 Further Thoughts on Painting

156 Mixing Design

157 Glazing Results

158 New 8x10 Paintings

October 2021

159 September Summary

160 Glazing Tests

161 Weekly Painting Sheet (A)

162 Schedule Plan for Art

163 All 8x10s

164 Weekly Sheet (B)

165 Harmonic Range

166 Study: Art Sign

167 Study: Broadside Books

168 Study: Under the Bridge

169 Study: Local Burger

170 Study: Art Sign

171 Color Grid

172 Weekly Painting Sheet (C)

173 Study: Tunnel Bar

174 Study: Under the Bridge

175 Study: Coffee & Car

176 2 Day Plan

177 Weekly Painting Sheet (D)

178 Study: Osaka

179 Study: Under the Bridge

180 Study: Pissarro

181 Study: Pissarro Close Up

182 Study: Osaka

183 October Summary

2021 12x12” Paintings [01-37]

To see images and text relating to the first sixteen grayscale paintings in this series refer to the following:

Digest Number Four, January 2021

- 01 Chickadee on Branch
- 02 Chickadee Close-up
- 03 Polar Bear
- 04 Frida Kahlo
- 05 Silverscape

Digest Number Five, February 2021

- 06 Carolus-Duran (after Sargent)
- 07 Hemingway Typing
- 08 Sylvia Plath
- 09 Ernest Hemingway
- 10 Marilyn
- 11 Bicycle in Studio

Digest Number Six, March 2021

- 12 Short-eared Owl
- 13 Short-eared Owl Close-up
- 14 Short-eared Owl Eyes
- 15 Hemingway Writing
- 16 Hemingway Up-Close

The story picks up in mid-March 2021. At that time I had finished the first sixteen grayscale paintings in the 12x12” series. I was still making more. The following list with comments is an attempt to put these subsequent paintings in some kind of context. Most of the paintings listed below are unfinished, and it is unlikely that I will work much more on them since I am involved with the current 8 by 10 series.

What I’ve decided to do is to look at these paintings one by one, and write down my comments about each as I look at it. I haven’t looked at most of these since before May—six months ago. What follows are my reactions, my thoughts and comments as I looked through them. Since most of them are unfinished I decided not to put any photos.

17 Glass Vase in Studio is a grayscale painting that I worked on extensively in the spring. It is based on an amazing photo my friend Jim Gipe took of a vase that was in my studio back in 2017. This painting is unfinished. At the time I couldn’t quite get it to work, but look forward to giving it another try. It was begun as the logical continuation of the grayscale series.

18 Sylvia Plath 2 is grayscale and was unfinished at the time, but looking at it now it seems fine how it is. A finished unfinished look. It is kind of dreamlike and real looking. I think that is a painting that I was afraid to keep working on because it looked good and I didn’t want to mess it up accidentally.

19 Plein Air 1 is unfinished. It's a grayscale underpainting of a woman in a field painting. There is an easel and an umbrella. A canvas. She is wearing a broad hat and an apron. Otherwise dressed in black. Around this are messy brushstrokes of blue above and yellow below. It looks unfinished, but also kind of finished, but it isn't intended to be finished in this state. In April I stumbled across a group of plein air painters. I took some photos and this painting is based on one of them.

20 Plein Air 2 is similar to 19 Plein Air 1 in that the artist is at the easel painting. Here is the painter, but now at the easel in a studio. On the wall are many paintings. Abstracts and color-fields. It looks like the same studio from 17 Glass Vase in Studio. With this painting, for seem reason I painted the plein air artist in my old studio and there were lots of paintings everywhere on the walls. This is the painting with which the grayscale series stopped being grayscale and I started using color again after spending a year investigating the grays.

21 Plein Air 3 is a close-up of the woman artist. Here we see the canvas on the easel, the umbrella, the hat, the hand. A blue wash is on the otherwise gray monochrome painting. This is unfinished, and to my eye doesn't seem like it could be considered finished, even in an unfinished finished kind of way.

22 Van Gogh is of interest for a lot of reasons. This grayscale painting was done in the spring at the time I was first trying to figure out how to make a series of 8x10" paintings. What happened was that those dozen or

so canvases I was working with ended up getting painted over and used for the 8x10 series that I began at the end of August. I would consider this painting done.

23 Color Studies looks like a Hoffman painting. Just areas of different colors and within most of these areas something happens. There is either gradations, or mixing studies. There are blocks of color which get lighter or darker. It is like an arrangement of thoughtful color studies. This is finished.

24 Color Chart along with the previous painting and the following two can be considered a group of interest primarily because these are the paintings with which I started painting in color after the long foray into grayscale art. This painting is interesting in that it is a grid with squares and I painted a different color in each square. The colors were from a box of 24 colors that I had bought. This is finished and seems like real art. Like a Jasper Johns or Robert Indiana type painting. One of those paintings that was in-between abstract expressionism and pop. Rauschenberg and Johns. That kind of art is what this reminds me of. Abstract expressionism-like without looking like abstract expressionism.

25 Cerulean and Deep Magenta and Yellows is a beautiful painting. It is more of a delicate color chart with different areas where colors were mixed. Of interest is that the different names of the paints are written on the canvas with ink. It is like a color chart, but also a painting.

26 Test Palette is one of those abstract paintings with areas of big color where you can see big swaths of paint. It looks like it might have been applied with a knife. Those big heroic gestures. This one is finished. I don't really like how it looks, but somebody might. It is finished.

27 Glass Vase in Studio 2 is another attempt at making a painting of that great photo Jim Gipe took of that vase in my old studio. I must have thought that starting over would get better results. It's ok, but needs more work. It occurs to me as I look at these paintings now, after having painted extensively over the past few months, that I now know what to do regarding solving some of the technical painting problems I was having at the time. So I look forward to tackling this image again.

28 Julie is a portrait of my sister that I am still working on.

29 Glaze Study has the following written on the back of it: "Start 4/27/21. Woke up with idea in mind from dreams." What it looks like is a chart of grayscale permutations. Black, dark gray, light gray and white are used. It looks like a glazing study with these paints. Most of them are fairly opaque by the looks of it. This is a kind of process art. It is kind of clunky looking, but it might appeal to someone.

30 Under the Bridge Study is shown out of order. It was actually painted sometime after the Coffee paintings [32-35], but before I started the 8 by 10 series for the second time. I think what happened was sometime in the summer I found the photo I had taken the previous

winter of the person with the umbrella under the bridge in the snow. And I thought to make painting of it. I made the first underpainting wash and it looked good, and I was afraid to paint anymore on it. Just like what happened in the 8 by 10 series with 20 A Snowy Day. I suppose this one is finished for the same reasons as that one is.

31 Batman and Robin was the painting I made after the art pause ended. It was intended to be the first in a series of 12x12 painting in color. It is over at Electric Eye records in Florence with a \$500 price tag. There's a whole back story about this painting.

32 Coffee 1 and the next three paintings are a little series of four paintings, all of which have the Coffee Cafe on upper main street in the picture. I believe that these four were started in April or May, and then set aside until mid July when I worked on this one until completion on July 27, 2021. This painting was well received, and I was optimistic that I could make one like it each week and begin to create a new body of work.

33 Coffee 2 is the second in this series of four Coffee paintings. This one is finished as is the first, however the next two remain unfinished. It ended up taking me most of August to complete this painting. So my plan to paint 'one a week' went by the wayside. I eventually based one of the 8 by 10 paintings (19 Broadside Books) on a part of this painting. 19 Broadside Books is also a collaboration with Sam Gas Can.

34 Coffee 3 is a painting which I find to be vexing. It remains unfinished, but could be brought to completion fairly rapidly.

35 Coffee 4 is unfinished. It could maybe be made into one of those finished unfinished paintings. I think I was still working on this one into September—after I had started the 8 by 10 series. I was hoping to finish it for real at the time. I added a car that I saw in an Estee's painting. That made it look cool. Eventually I stopped painting this one and just worked on the 8 by 10 paintings. I ended up making an 8 by 10 version of a part of this painting (25 Coffee & Car), so I'll probably never come back to work on this one.

36 Color Chart and **37 Color Chart 2** are two that I've been working on in November of 2021, concurrent with the 8 by 10 series. That brings all of the 2021 12x12 paintings up to date and listed in one place. I'm not anticipating starting any new ones at this time since the two color chart paintings will be keeping me busy. I am trying to make a painting that is a color wheel of the different paints I am using, showing all of the different values of these paints, in one place, neatly organized, for reference. Eventually these paintings will have all the colors on it somehow. I'm using over fifty different hues so this is a monumental task. It doesn't even take into account all of the possibilities of glazing. I'm just now working out where each color will be and what I'll be able to show regarding that color, since I don't have room to show everything, and I will have to leave something out.

City Collaboration (2013) with Sam Gas Can

This is a mixed media on paper artwork made in collaboration with Sam Gas Can for a group show held in the Spring of 2013 for a Meat for Tea release party at Sonelab. The idea I had was to make a design, cut some stencils, and spray paint the design on some big sheets of paper. I then asked a few artist friends of mine if they would add something to what I had done, and I gave them each one of the sheets. We showed all of them at the opening. So that was the idea, and Sam Gas Can was one of the artists I asked to participate, and he agreed, and this is how it ended up.



City Collaboration (2013), mixed media on paper, 22x30".
Chris Gentes, Sam Gas Can.



City Collaboration (2013), mixed media on paper, 22x30". Chris Gentes, Sam Gas Can.



City Collaboration (2013), mixed media on paper, 22x30". Chris Gentes, Sam Gas Can.



City Collaboration (2013), mixed media on paper, 22x30". Chris Gentes, Sam Gas Can.

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