

masters' profile

C O U R T J O N E S

Court Jones paints landscapes, renders ink cartoons, illustrates album covers, teaches anatomy classes, digitally renders, and commissions portraits, but his passion still lies in caricature, landing him a place in the Masters category of the NCN, winning the Golden Nosey in Las Vegas. What keeps him going? Joe Bluhm interviews one of our most active artoholics.

Joe: Congrats on the Golden Nosey, this past February. It was well-deserved.

Court: Thanks Joe. I'm in good company. Although, I feel like that last awards night confirmed me as the most overrated caricaturist in the NCN. I think I did some nice renderings and flashy paintings. But I remember so many more funny illustrations and more extreme exaggerations on the walls, than what I did that week. I'm seldom very satisfied with the level of exaggeration in my work. I don't want to sound too hard on myself. But I could always be better and bolder in my work.

What started you in caricature? Was there something that caught your interests? How did you make it part of your career?

Well, I've been drawing since I could remember. But when I was young I only drew cool things like motorcycles and robots. The first time I ever tried caricatures was my senior year in high school. I was in the Advanced Placement art class, and had to choose an area of focus for my portfolio. And for some reason, I chose caricature. To this day, I do not know why I went in that direction. I had never even got a caricature done of me at a theme park or anything at that point. Destiny maybe. After college, I used those caricatures I did in high school to apply for a job at Sea World. I saw an ad in the paper for an artist at a local San Diego theme park. It turns out that Steve Fishwick was the park manager and he was the one who hired and trained me. Shortly after starting there, I began doing parties and it wasn't long before Steve introduced me to Krüger's books. After I saw those, I knew what I wanted to do.

Your work seems to pull pieces from all

forms of art, primarily painterly qualities, heavy with draughtsmanship. What other artwork do you do?

I'm perpetually in painting and drawing classes. Going to classes where you're constantly drawing and painting from life is like going to the gym, for an artist. You have to do it every week and keep on top of it or you'll get soft. I do a lot of plein air landscape painting on my own or with friends. I've also taken a lot of classes in illustration, studying from the masters, a bit of anatomy, color theory and other semi-technical classes. I mostly draw in charcoal these days, because it is the dry medium that is most like painting. You can lay down line or tone with the same instrument quite easily. And I've been taking classes in gouache, pen & ink and digital painting. So I consider these last few years as learning years. I'm doing so many different things to gain as much experience as I can. I don't want to be held back in my art career by what I don't know. All those classes have helped me a lot. Especially for the concept design stuff I've been doing lately. I have been doing some spec work for a screenwriter on and off for a few years, doing concept design and illustration for his science fiction scripts. And one project looks like it is going to be picked up.





I'm keeping my fingers crossed. It could be a great opportunity for me to go in a different direction for a while.

I've also gotten involved with a humorous

author to illustrate his book, and an album cover for a startup band. That's what's been keeping me busy besides gigs so far this summer.

You seemed to be inspired quite a bit - What artists excite you? Who do you look at, and where do you go to "get your fix?"

I seem to get the most pleasure and feel the most drive when I am doing caricature illustration. I love figuring out the puzzle of the human face. Traditional portraits and likenesses are hard enough to paint with realism, subtlety and grace. It adds a whole new level of challenge to do all that and exaggerate. So it's extremely rewarding to do a successful illustration. I love to see the reaction people give to my work. It's good to feed the ego every now and then, as long as you are honest with yourself about your shortcomings and remain open to improvement and criticism.

And I am very lucky to have such accessible mentors and teachers right now. At my school, I get to draw side by side with some of the best artists I have ever seen: Jeff Watts, Erik Gist and Ron Lemen, among others. They are a constant source of inspiration and motivation, mostly because I see what kind of drawings they are producing. I see how it can be done. And it fuels my desire to get to that level. A couple of years ago, it was so frustrating because I knew I was so far away from drawing and painting at their advanced level, and I was constantly filled with self doubt and impatience. But staying in that environment has taught me that it has nothing to do with natural talent. It's all about putting in the time and correct mileage. And it's not enough to merely draw everyday. The artist needs to study and draw correctly with challenging feedback. Otherwise, you just spend everyday reinforcing bad habits that become harder to break, further on down the road.

Historically, I am moved by the portrait

artists of the nineteenth century and Golden Age Illustrators. John Sargent, Anders Zorn, Joaquin Sorolla, James Whistler, William Merrit Chase were some of the most amazing painters to explore the human figure and face. The dexterity of their brushstrokes, the genius of their palettes and the accuracy of their drawings are a constant source of inspiration. And an artist today can learn so much about composition, technique, storytelling, and mood from the great illustrators from the first half of the 20th century. Artists like Dean Cornwell, Howard Pyle, Alfonse Mucha, J.C. Leyendecker, N.C. Wyeth, Norman Rockwell, and Andrew Loomis are some of my favorites.

Some contemporary fine artists whom I really admire, but have not met yet, are Richard Schmid, Scott Christensen, Brian Blood, Harley Brown and Mian Situ. They do mostly plein air and figurative work. And there are of course, my caricature and cartoon idols, like Kruger, Opdebeek, Dean Yeagle, Peter deSeve, David O'Keefe, Claire Wendling and Dan Adel.

As far as going out to galleries or museums... it seems like I don't get out very often to go to do that. The choices are pretty limited in San Diego. But we do have a few good places to see art. I'm just so glad I have the internet as a visual resource to view artists' portfolios and online galleries. I would love to make a trip to the East Coast again, to New York and Pennsylvania to see the Met, Illustration House, the Brandywine, the Frazetta Museum, among others. Artists in the Northeast are very lucky to have access to have all those great facilities.

What artists excite you? - What medium and methods do you use and recommend?

Well, most of you know of my recent explorations into the digital realm. I absolutely love the ease and convenience of digital painting for my illustrations. I can work much faster and do things that I just could not do as easily in traditional media. But I will never stop using oils. They are the classic medium. And I don't want to get sucked into the computer so much that I forget how to mix paint. Right now, it is best for me to do both, because the two mediums feed on each other and I learn things in one that I can apply to the other. Gouache and watercolors give great effects too. I want to do some sculpted pieces soon as well. I will be teaching a class in caricature illustration techniques this summer. So I will be experimenting a lot in the next couple months. And I recommend everyone do that. You

never know what turns you on until you try it. Artistically speaking.

You seem comfortable in digital painting, yet at the '05 convention, it was fairly new to you, and you handled it like a veteran. What inspired this movement? Where would you like to take this medium?

I actually did a few digital caricatures at the '04 Con as well, but I had only been experimenting with computer painting for a couple weeks, at that point. So they were pretty rough. I have been inspired to keep on using the computer because of the amazing work I see being produced by it online and by people at my school. My digital painting article, which also should be appearing in this issue of EF talks a lot about how the computer is simply another tool for the artist. And the same basic rules apply when using it. And it does make some things easier. But there are drawbacks and obstacles to overcome as well. It will never replace traditional media, but will get added to the artist's arsenal of tools and toys.

I plan to continue using the computer in my art, and finding ways to become more expressive with it. I want to go beyond just using it to render, and use it to create works of art that actually say something. That's the goal I have for all of my art and caricatures - To give them a style and a personality that is uniquely my own.

That's a great goal. Thanks for your time, Court. I think I speak for every member when I say that we look forward to seeing you and your inspiring work at the next convention.

Thanks. **EF**



Court Jones lives in San Diego where he completes freelance illustrations, concept art, commissions, caricatures (live and studio) and is an active student and instructor at the Jeff Watts Atelier. More of Court's work can be seen at www.CourtJones.com