

CRAIG CARLISLE

# Positive emotions

Craig Carlisle's genderless paintings, which he calls his *Big Heads* series, are a pathway to the artist's spirituality and connection to other people, each creation an attempt to draw an emotional response from the viewer. "I feel a sense of responsibility as an artist to help carry a message and, in the case of my career thus far, a positive one," says Carlisle, an artist for more than 20 years.

"When one chooses to be in touch with their own feelings and emotions, there becomes a moment of healing. Possibly it's a chance to help another heal through their visual experience with a work of art I've created."

Carlisle, who has lived and maintained studios in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City, was initially inspired as a young artist to try and capture the viewer's

attention, resulting in his large-scale paintings. "When a viewer is confronted with a 6-foot head, it's pretty easy to assume they will at least give it a moment of contemplation," Carlisle remarks.

March 29 to April 23, Carlisle's paintings are on display at a new exhibition at George Billis Gallery in New York City. He says his newest *Big Heads* works harbor more of a human quality. After almost 25 years, Carlisle says he is referencing and focusing more on people around him rather than on just painting emotions.

"My most recent motivations and inspirations for both the [*Big Heads*] and the gardens would be attempting to give the viewer a positive place to rest their eyes," the artist explains further. "The head paintings as well as the garden paintings are reflective and capture a moment. My hope is for the viewer to allow themselves just one moment of stillness as they come in contact with my work."

When Carlisle begins a new painting, he rarely draws it out first, instead opting to symbolically close his eyes and "allow the brush to communicate," he says. "I generally have an idea of a message I want to translate on the canvas but the shape of the work can change many times as I paint toward the completion."

In addition to his *Big Heads* works, Carlisle paints gardens, particularly in nocturnal settings. His first series out of college featured large paintings of gardens. "Many of them were more abstract, but as I realized what they meant to me, I quickly found them becoming more realistic," Carlisle says. "My goal at that point and even today is to have them viewed more as a sanctuary, or a visual of where one might go to experience their own moment in time alone."

In the late 1990s, Carlisle had the opportunity to work with a man who constructed penthouse gardens for Manhattan's wealthy and elite. "After working that job for a summer, I found myself wanting to revisit the old garden



series and attempting to translate on canvas the experiences I had," Carlisle says. "I found new motivation for the gardens and [began] coupling them with the *Big Heads* as well."

While Carlisle's creative intention is to communicate "something optimistic, almost healing," he does not put restrictions on what he creates for the *Big Heads* series. The artist has produced just as many dark pieces as those that are bright.

"The true gift and healing of my work comes from being in touch as I create them," Carlisle says. "If I'm having a bad day, paint about it! A good day, do the same! In the end it truly is a visual journey of one's life experience, and to me that is success." ●



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1  
*The Fairy Garden*,  
oil on canvas, 30 x 24"

2  
*Night Garden #5*, oil on  
canvas, 40 x 30"

3  
*Precious*, oil on  
canvas, 40 x 30"

4  
*Soul Mates*, oil on  
canvas, 16 x 20"



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VIDEO



3



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