



An Interview with Artist Skot Olsen

by
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Charters.

Skot Olsen's cartoon-like paintings explore a fantastical world of rural folk, freaks and bizarre creatures, encompassing historical, religious, occult, and supernatural themes. Working in the lowbrow style embraced by artists like Robert Williams, Todd Schorr and R.K. Sloane a trip into Skot Olsen's always witty and sometimes chaotic, demented and hysterical world is tasty visual candy



Are there any other artists in your family?

Mostly my whole father's side of the family are artists. Both my grandparents are still alive and they paint. My dad's aunts and uncles - some of them are professional artists, and other ones just do stuff for a hobby - my dad's aunt in California makes tapestries. My dad's uncle is a cartoonist and painter in Denmark.

When did desire to be a painter hit you?

I started painting seriously in the middle of '93, and I was just doing it. I wasn't sure why I was making the paintings, and then I started going to more gallery shows and I became more aware of the whole a underground, lowbrow scene and I started learning that you can actually make a living doing these cartoon like paintings. Then in '95 I started showing around here more and then last year I started doing it full time.

Didn't you work as a commercial artist before you painted?

Yeah, I went to school to be a cartoonist. And I learned animation and all that, but I wanted to be a commercial artist or an illustrator ... I wasn't sure where I fitted in.

Did you do art direction on horror films?

Oh Yeah! There was this guy who had a cheesy, low - budget special effects studio in New Jersey who hired me to be the head art director guy and I'd design most of the make-ups along with him and I'd paint a lot of the stuff and sculpt it.

So would I know any of the horror films that you worked on?

Oh, definitely not.

Sure?

There's only one that I worked on throughout was Vampires and other Stereotypes.

I really love the sense of humor that comes through in your paintings.

Thanks. I also do a comic strip down here for a paper. It's called Milk.

What kind of characters are in it?

Actually, it's myself and my friends. That's who the drawings are of. But you'd still get it if you didn't know us.

Do you carry that over into your painting - the autobiographical thing?

Oh no. Except for my views on religion.

Are you religious?

No, very anti-religious.

Did you have a religious upbringing?

No, not at all. I haven't believed in God since I was in second grade. Kids made fun of me. The teacher made me stay from recess 'cause I said I didn't believe in God.

Are some of the characters in your paintings from H.P. Lovecraft's stories?

Yeah. I've loosely based things on Lovecraft writing. I have I think everything he's ever written. There is a town called Innsmouth which I've put in a couple of my paintings. The only one painting I did which was

straight up Lovecraft was a watercolor ... The only thing that has kept me from really painting a portrait of Lovecraft and some kind of wacky thing going on is that my favorite artist- Todd Schorr did a really great painting about him. And it was just so well done that I thought, "why bother?"

I noticed the recurring character of the old sea captain. Does he come from Lovecraft?

Yeah, he writes a lot about old sea captains and old sea towns. The character in my painting is Obed Archeteuthis and Obed Marsh was a famous character from his stories. He was an old sea captain who, I think, ended up interbreeding with this race of sub-aquatic beings.

I notice the theme of the sea recurring in your work.

Did you grow up by the sea?

I did a lot of sailing as a kid around the Caribbean. I'm Danish and pretty much everyone in Denmark is into the ocean in some way. My favorite animal on the planet is the squid. Just because it has a name doesn't mean it's not a monster ... They communicate in a really complicated language of color. By changing the pattern in their skin ... that's how they talk to each other.

Do you have any uncontrollable fans?

Well no, not uncontrollable. I get a lot of weird mail. I get mail from all over the world - Singapore and England - loners. Sometime I get weird phone calls at night.

Where do you find beauty in life?

Flowers, Women ... Medieval Art and Cathedrals ... the ocean. The usual stuff, I'm not that weird of a guy. I mean I am but I'm not.

The caption for Appalachian Love Song reads ... "A sick old man has murdered a little girl and buried her in the woods. He is not only wondering if she will be missed, but is paranoid and thinks everyone already knows". What made you think of this?

I find rural folk really creepy. Out here in the

Everglades you get a lot of weird swamp communities. So we drive out to there and check out all those people. It's a lot of fun.

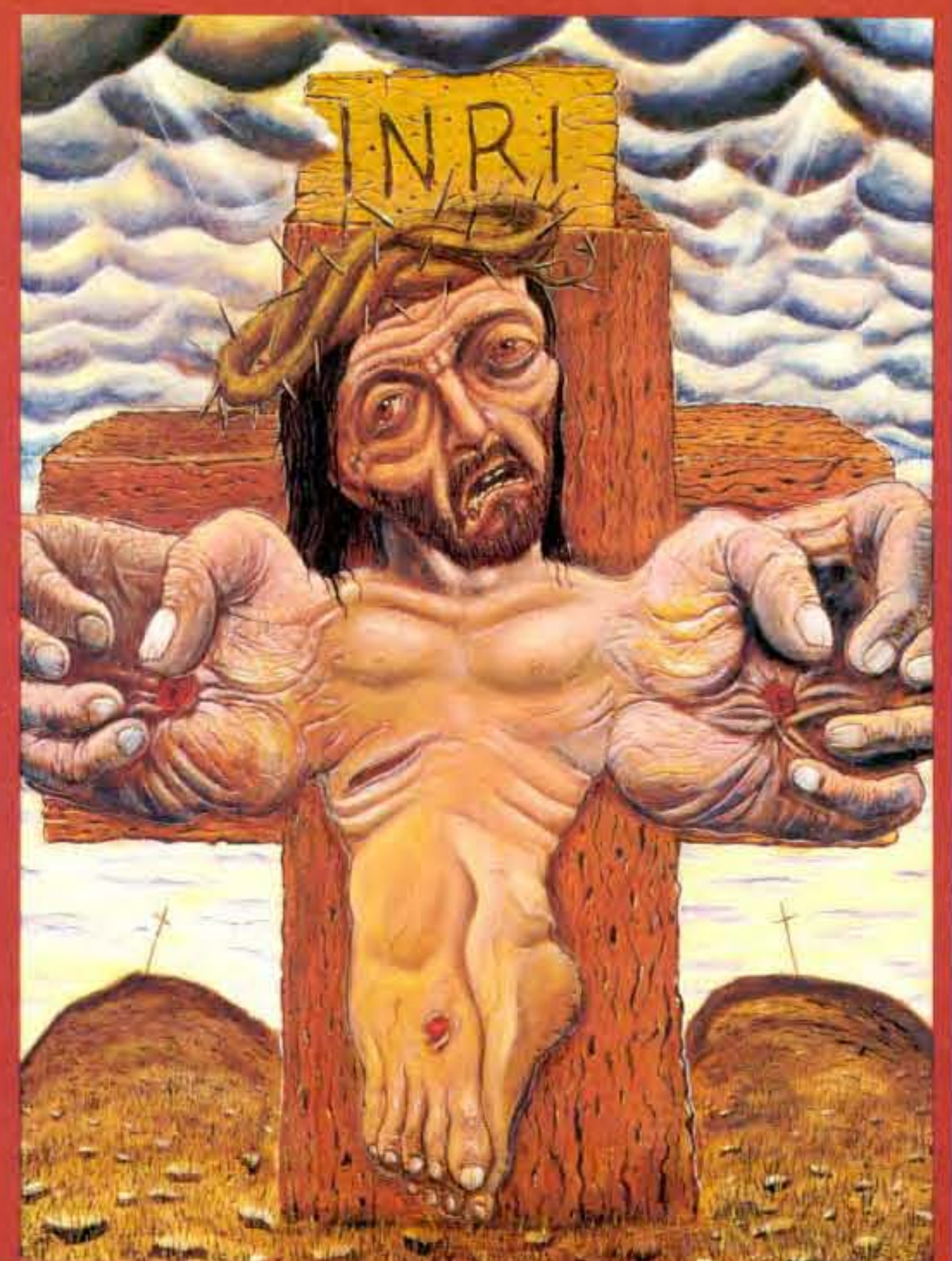
Tell me about your painting Finger Trap.

It's about an English sailor when England was occupying Hong Kong - and he bought one of these finger traps and he got his finger stuck in it. And in it [the finger trap] lives a demon that takes fingers. He has fingers on a string around his neck and on his hat is a symbol that is missing a forefinger. And also on the back of the postcard ... where the stamp [goes] ... there's the little symbol that's on his hat.

Yes, I like those postcard symbols. I was going to ask you about them. I noticed that each one is different.

They look like they would make great tattoos.

Yeah. I was thinking about that. Actually I'm gonna get a few tattoos pretty soon.



“Captain
Obed
Archeteuthis”



“Finger Trap”



What are you going to get?

A squid ... I'm not sure if it's going to be on my upper arm or my lower arm. I haven't decided. And an old nautical octopus design on the back of my neck. I have to be symmetrical about everything so I'll probably get the same tattoo on both of my forearms or both of my wrists.

Tell me about Jethro's Epiphany. I think it's hilarious.

Yeah, it is funny. A hillbilly is out in the morning, hunting and Vishnu - the Hindu God and preserver of life ... comes through the time space continuum. See how he rips through the fabric of the world there to tell Jethro that hunting is wrong?

Ten generic questions

1. When you were a kid what did you want to be when you grew up?

An artist

2. Do you look at yourself as an overachiever or underachiever?

An underachiever.

3. What is your favorite pastime?

Video games.

4. What is your favorite color?

Prussian or cobalt blue.

5. Do you have a saying that you live by - a motto?

Tolerate no-one.

6. What are you going to do New Years Eve 1999?

I don't go out amateur night on the road.

7. Do you have any pets?

A wonder dog, he's half pitbull and half Welsh corgi.

8. Name an item on your wish list if you have one?

A machine to stop time. Hand held. So I could alter things to fit my needs.

9. If you could have a dinner party and you could invite anyone in the world living or dead - who would you invite?

Of course my wife would be there, Vlad the Impaler, Todd Schorr ... I think Salvador Dali was too flaky, but I would really like to meet him ...so I'll say H.P Lovecraft.

10. Which sideshow freak do you most identify with?

The Elephant man because he was a really good artist. 🐘

