

North Dakota Museum of Art

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NORTH DAKOTA ARTIST TODD HEBERT COMES HOME

“TODD HEBERT: A SURVEY”

OPENS AT THE NORTH DAKOTA MUSEUM OF ART, OCTOBER 28 AT 2 PM

Born in Valley City in 1972, Todd Hebert spent his early years in McHenry, North Dakota. His father, a high school teacher, moved the family to Dickinson in 1980 to accept the job at Dickinson High School coaching basketball and teaching social studies.

Todd played football, basketball, and baseball. He also drew and painted and took art classes from Michael Dunn, a wildlife watercolorist. According to Hebert, “Dunn made watercolors by carefully observing the outdoor world. He taught me to observe and work with great precision, something that is still important in my paintings and drawings.”

He was fortunate in high school as well, studying under teachers such as Lilly Stewart. Next came UND and painting and drawing instructor Brian Paulsen, sculptor Pat Luber, and printmaker Ron Schaefer. The aspiring artist continued to develop his techniques, especially what seemed to be his innate ability to render the objects of everyday life. Above all, however, he saw that Paulsen and Luber were always working, always making art. “Their work method was important to me. I observed that the intellectual side of art and the material side of making art had to be married in order for the art to succeed.”

Hebert continued, “After graduating with a BFA in painting and drawing from UND, I applied to the Rhode Island School of Design. I saw that North Dakota artist Nancy Friese was teaching there and thought I might get in.” And he did. He graduated with his MFA in 1998, the same year he accepted a year-long fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA. A second invitation followed from the prestigious Core Residency Program at the Glassell School of Art where he spent two years in a postgraduate residency for art critics and visual artists.

It was in Houston that he met his wife, Lillie.

His career took off with invitations to show in solo and group exhibitions both nationally and internationally. In 2005, Connecticut’s Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art gave him its prestigious Emerging Artist Award. Today, he is represented by Devin Borden Gallery in Houston and the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City. His art, however, stays grounded in the mundane, the ordinary existence of North Dakotans.

According to Los Angeles art critic David Pagel, writing in the brochure that accompanies the exhibition, Hebert’s art is “worlds away from the elitist esoterica that holds so much contemporary art in its thrall. The simple things in his straightforward pictures are familiar to baby-boomers of all shapes and stripes, as well as to anyone else who grew up in the suburbs and countryside of postwar America, from the first batch of citizens for whom consumerism would define a way of life that was promising and pleasurable, until today, when the American Dream seems naïve, or at least more difficult—and distant—than it once was.”

Pagel continues, “Plastic jack-o’-lanterns, sparkling sparklers, plump snowmen, and sturdy wood picnic tables suggest holidays and the seasons in which they are celebrated. In Hebert’s hands, such yearly rituals are standardized events that welcome folks from all walks of life into the fun, because the religious and historical attributes often associated with these festivities have been left in the background, if not out of the picture altogether. Preferring, for example, the user-friendly accessibility of a snowman to the specific signs and symbols of Christmas, or, for that matter, Hanukkah, Eid, or Kwanzaa, Hebert’s paintings evoke the general spirit of the holidays without getting caught up in the historical particularities or spiritual sides of various groups, sects, or movements.”

“Similarly, the unlabeled water bottles, uncluttered decks, hardware-store scarecrows, and spider webs that appear in Hebert’s paintings evoke a world both commonplace and shared, its mundane ordinariness anonymous in its un-special everydayness while simultaneously precise in its evocation of what it is like to live like this—both a part of and apart from one’s surroundings.”

Hebert stated, “Last summer I was offered a terrific position as Associate Professor of painting and drawing at the University of North Dakota. My wife Lillie and I have two children, ages 2½ years and four months. We decided we wanted to raise our children near one of our families, Houston for Lillie and North Dakota for me. The job offer came from UND and we grabbed it.”

The North Dakota Museum of Art included Hebert’s work in several Autumn Art Auctions in the 2000s. Late in 2010, Museum Director Laurel Reuter invited Hebert to mount a solo show in the Museum. The resulting “Todd Hebert: A Survey” opens on Sunday, October 28, 2012 and continues through January 20, 2013, showcasing paintings and drawings made over the last thirteen years.

Museum Director Laurel Reuter commented, “This exhibition will be of particular interest to our northern audience because the artist is painting our light, especially in snowy winter. What might be mystical to those who live in other places is simply how things look when the atmosphere is alive with snow crystals, blowing snow, fog growing out of snow, and disappearing snowmen against a field of white.”

The North Dakota Museum of Art is located on Centennial Drive in Grand Forks. The Museum hours are weekdays from 9 am – 5 pm and weekends from 1 pm – 5 pm. The Museum Shop is open during these hours. There is no general admission; however, there is a suggested donation of \$5 from adults and change from children. In addition, the Museum Café is open for lunch, weekdays from 11 am – 3 pm. Parking is available in front of the Museum in the metered parking lot or a block east of the Museum on Centennial Drive in the Visitors Parking. For more information, please call 701-777-4195 or visit www.ndmoa.com.