

THE ARTS ISSUE

MAY 2009

WNC

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OF WNC'S
TOP EMERGING
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MERCÍ, MERCÍ ME
by Gabriel Shaffer

On the Verge

10 OF THE BEST EMERGING ARTISTS IN WNC



BEING AN ARTIST IN THIS REGION HAS ITS BENEFITS, NAMELY A community that embraces creativity and fellowship among the wealth of imaginative professionals who live here. While there is strength in numbers, it can also be difficult to break away from the crowd. That's why *WNC* magazine and the Asheville Area Arts Council collaborated to establish our first On the Verge competition, a contest to shine light on Western North Carolina's top up-and-coming artists.

Submissions from more than 150 local artists who work in a multitude of media flooded our office. We reviewed each piece with a jury of local arts professionals and settled—with no shortage of debate and discussion—on 10 winners to be featured in a May show the AAAC's gallery. Though many of these artists support themselves solely with their talents, none have yet had their own major solo exhibition.

From woodworking to fiber to painting, meet 10 people who bring fresh voices to our arts scene. Artists, welcome to the spotlight.



- DETAIL-ORIENTED**
1. Simmons: *untitled*
 2. Brownlee: *Special Delivery*
 3. Rosenthal: *Gravity*
 4. Shaffer: *Bless the Beast*
 5. Maples: *Airspace After Turner*
 6. Johnson: *Steel Blue Swell*
 7. Van Deusen: *Failed Deception*
 8. Mijanovich: *Solaris*
 9. Knight: *Thieving Magpie*



PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Patrick Cavan Brown



WNC MAGAZINE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE FOR VOLUNTEERING THEIR TIME TO HELP MAKE **ON THE VERGE** POSSIBLE:

ANGELA MARTINEZ *Executive Director, Asheville Area Arts Council*
 ROB PULLEYN *Curator of the exhibit, Director, Marshall High Studios*
 SARAH MEYER *Gallery Associate, Asheville Area Arts Council*

JURISTS:

ANNE BATCHELDER *Arts Writer, Independent Curator*
 ANNE RAWSON *Executive Director, Fine Arts League of North Carolina*
 BRENT SKIDMORE *Director, University of North Carolina Asheville Crafts Campus*
 YONA WADE *Outreach Coordinator, Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual*



Ian Brownlee

MYTHS HAVE FUELED ARTISTS' IMAGINATIONS

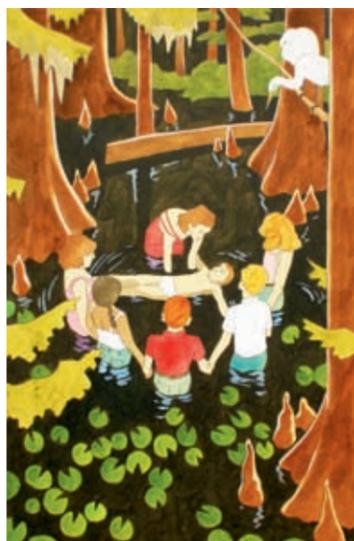
for the better part of human history—from the Egyptian hieroglyphics to the Renaissance revival of classical philosophy and religion. While folklore and creation stories have universal appeal, they provide more specific insight for artist Ian Brownlee. “Mythology lays out people’s assumptions about themselves and the world,” he says.

Many of Brownlee’s paintings in the collection *American Myths* are based on old photographs, chosen as starting points for allusions to bigger stories. Children dressed in archaic fashions, farm boys posing on the back of a cow, and synchronized dance troupes are woven into fantastical narratives under his brush. For the wiry and serene 32-year-old from Augusta, Georgia, the subjects of his paintings take on life outside the frames he finds them in. “I came across a picture of these kids dressed up for a parade in really ornate costumes. They were just dressed that way for a day, but in my mind, that’s the way these kids always dress,” Brownlee says. “They’re from a culture like ours, but only slightly different.”

A full-time painter at Minerva gallery in Asheville—he also created the pastoral mural at Rosetta’s Kitchen—Brownlee spends a fair amount of time focusing on natural beauty. But landscapes play a supporting role in this body of work, adding meaning to repeated motifs of children, music, rituals, and anthropomorphic birds, whales, and foxes. The content ranges from playful to subversive. In the world of *American Myths*, boys take thousand-mile journeys through mountain ranges, cranes witness a child’s baptism in black swamp water, and foxes lead (or possibly lure) dance lines of young girls through the woods.

Brownlee’s humor is present in each, but so is the hint of danger. In most myths, he explains, “there’s something kind of magical and something kind of scary. They’re dream-like and don’t always make sense.” And while humans have used myths to make sense of the unexplainable, Brownlee leaves his stories open to interpretation. “If you look at it and you can see the whole story, then you’re finished. That’s it,” Brownlee says. “I want the mind to make up the rest.”

—BRIAN GALLAGHER



“There’s something kind of magical and something kind of scary. They’re dream-like and don’t always make sense.”

AMERICAN MYTHS

(clockwise from top)
Flights of Fancy
Dying Words
The Heroes' Journey
Immersion
Coyote Calls the Gopis