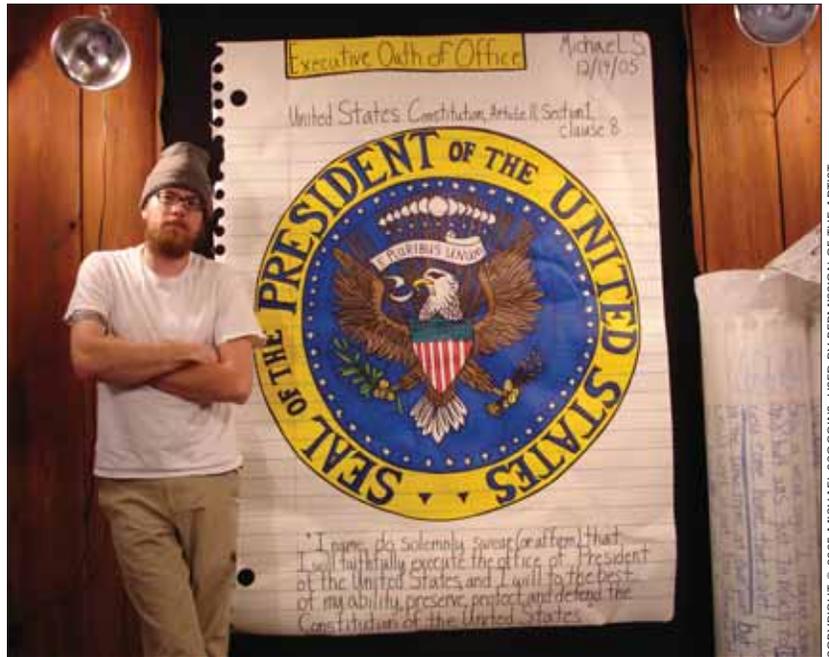


MICHAEL SCOGGINS DRAWING ATTENTION TO HIS ART

INTRODUCTION AND INTERVIEW
BY STEPHEN KNUDSEN



Michael Scoggins with his work, *Oath and Seal*, 2005. Marker, Prismacolor on paper, 67" x 51". Scoggins' feelings about the pitfalls of an overzealous populist culture and overreach of an executive branch were at the heart of his 2008 solo show, *Sic Semper Tyranis*, at the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia.

A BROOKLYN-BASED ARTIST just seven years into his career, Michael Scoggins has taken major art sanctums by storm. A stir formed around Scoggins when MoMA in New York acquired four of his large drawings while he was still writing his thesis in the Savannah College of Art And Design Graduate Painting Program. Other museums and 16 major international solo shows then followed. Scoggins is now represented by six galleries, including the Diana Lowenstein Gallery in Miami who exhibited his work during Art Basel Miami 2010.

Using rag paper, pens, graphite and a razor, Scoggins creates super-sized spiral notebook pages with the drawings of Michael S., his childhood persona: superhero doodles, love notes, sketches. Scoggins' works make no bones about getting political, but he does it with such sleight-of-hand that even those skeptical about politics in the gallery are often won over. He stays amicable with self-deprecating humor, making intimate statements that play off our inner adolescence.

In the interview below, Scoggins offers a look into both the qualities of his work and how he found success in such a short time:

Professional Artist: *Immediately, a viewer is engaged by the familiarity of your work, but walking up to the work reveals that these are not adolescent sketches but images charged with re-contextualized meaning. Is this shift a vital force for both you and for your viewers?*

Michael Scoggins: The notebook format is something very familiar and recognizable. To enlarge the work draws the eye of the viewer ... I do call them "drawings," but I now have started to think of them more as "art objects." All of these characteristics conceptually place the viewer in a different state of mind.

PA: *What does your work mean to you personally?*

MS: This 'Michael S.' persona was first created to comment on political and social issues without the restrictions of my adult self. A "kid says the darnest things" mentality. I think now that has shifted, and the two personalities are coming closer together.

PA: *Work that is political is often confrontational, but even your most socially-charged works like Dear God #6 (page 28) seem disarming, possibly because they are intensely smart and yet still attached to personal and widely familiar sensations of youth.*

MS: I have several pieces where I have written letters to God, and I think I approach issues that everyone has thought about. It's socially unacceptable to openly talk about religion, especially when you are questioning it. Growing up, I attended Sunday school, and I'm now trying to recreate that time period with an adult perspective. A lot of my questions still haven't been answered.

Making good political work is challenging sometimes because I feel if it's too specific it can become quickly dated. To overcome this shortcoming, I try to touch upon more universal thoughts even when referencing current events ... I feel all art is political, or, at least it should be in some fashion — maybe not as direct as my work — to be successful.

PA: *Your work is conceptual. Before this conceptual leaning did you go through a period of more traditional painting/and or drawing? If so, what prompted you to make the change?*

MS: I entered grad school painting very politically narrative works. I have a very expressive painting style [similar] to Philip Guston ... As my style developed, I was looking more at my sketchbook and realized I was trying to paint my sketches, but my sketches always looked better in the end. I figured that my ideas could not be expressed properly



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Happy B-Day, 2006, by Michael S. Marker, Prismacolor on paper, 67" x 51". This work shows Scoggins willingness to poke sardonic fun at himself, highlighting his need for recognition by making a drawing of a birthday cake for himself.

or efficiently through painting, and that's when I put the brushes down and tried to figure out a new way ... I think the method of delivery has to complement the concept. Is it the medium carrying the idea or vice versa? I feel I'm using the necessary materials to carry and convey the concepts.

PA: *What might you say about the practical elements of your career, insofar as breaking into the elite exhibition/gallery scene with conceptual work?*

MS: I have been very fortunate in my career. There are many people who have been very supportive and believe in what I'm trying to accomplish. It has also been a lot of hard work and always pushing ahead even when some doors close. I chose where I sent my work carefully and tried to be patient. I have found a little research goes a long way and saves you energy and time.

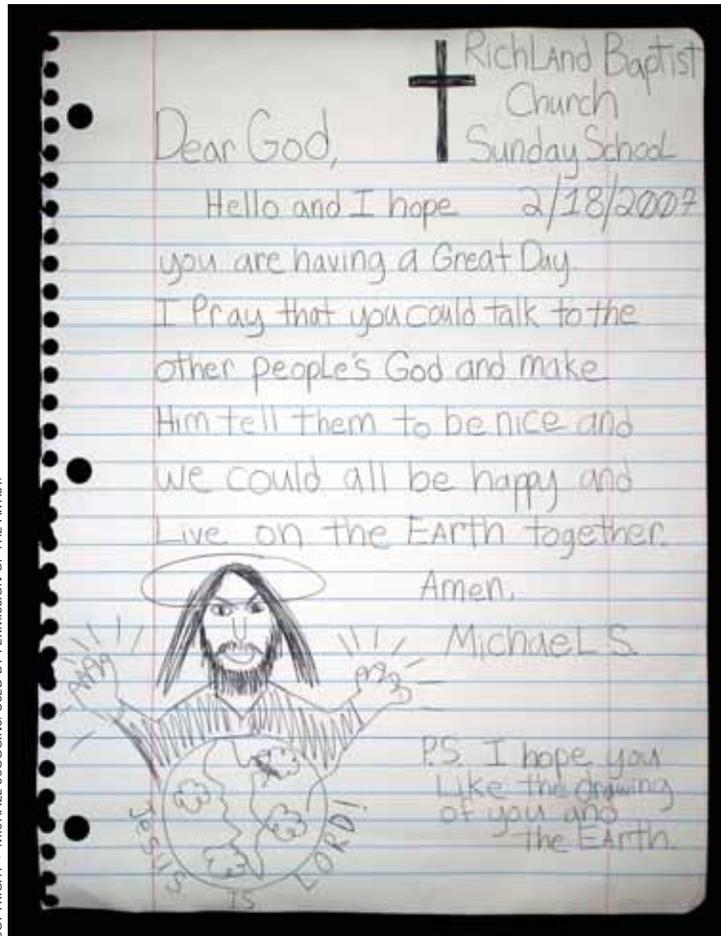
Things started to happen and then snowballed from there. My collector base is wide and extremely dedicated to the work, and that has made a huge impact on my career. I think they genuinely like the work and see it as more than just a financial investment, which is great. I try and treat my day-to-day work like a job. I'm at the studio in the morning and work a full day. I think being positive and having a strong work ethic is really important to be successful.

PA: *Your exhibition record includes solo exhibitions abroad — your recent show at Galerie Jean Roch Dard in Paris, France, is an example. Do you notice any marked difference in reaction to your work when it is abroad as to when you show, say in New York? Does the work retain similar accessibility across cultures?*

MS: I think there is a universal quality across the board, and people from different cultures can relate, or at least that's been my experience thus far. There are times when I reference something that is specific to America, and that takes some explaining, but for the most part the reactions have been similar. I was very curious when I first started showing internationally how the responses would be, and I have been pleasantly surprised.

PA: *Your gallery representation is now spread across the world. Have you found that most of the galleries are amenable to the non-exclusive representation of your work?*

MS: This can be tricky. I deal with a lot of galleries, and I juggle a lot



Dear God #6, 2007. Graphite, Prismacolor on paper, 67" x 51".

of work around. Sometimes they are competing with one another over collectors, but since everything I create is one of kind, that can diffuse any issue that may arise ... I think the really trying issue is how much of my time is spent in contact with each gallery. A lot of my studio day consists of writing e-mails, talking on the phone, updating files, etc. It's like running a small business. There are days I don't get draw because there's other work to be done. It's a frustrating fact that many artists might not realize when they first start out.

PA: *What is the story behind your work being acquired for MoMA's permanent collection shortly after you finished graduate thesis exhibition?*

MS: The MoMA works were purchased out of my first New York solo show back in 2004. They were bought by the Judith Rothchild foundation and given to the museum after that. The foundation was gathering contemporary drawings so there would be a

survey, and I was fortunate enough to be a part of that. It really blew me away, and I didn't know how to handle the immediate success of that entire show. I was just happy to be showing and having works sent to the MoMA went well beyond my expectations.

PA: *What advice would you give to someone with strong work but with a minimal exhibition record regarding how to work toward representation with a major gallery?*

MS: You have to just keep plugging away. Do your research, and find the right gallery that would suit you. There will be a lot of rejection, and you can't let that get you down. Go to shows, network, and get your face out there. I know that's not a lot of fun, but that's how it works. **PA**

Stephen Knudsen has been a painting professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design for 19 years. He has exhibited his paintings in New York (Broome Gallery), London (Cork Street Gallery), Cologne (Amerika Haus Gallery), Hong Kong (LFK Gallery) and Shanghai (Jian Gallery). Also, his retrospective exhibition, Decade, was in 2003 at the Bergen Gallery, Savannah, GA. He has published groundbreaking color theory and has developed the Knudsen Dual Color Wheel, used in universities across the country. He is a regular writer for Professional Artist and theartstory.org on topics of design and critical art theory and analysis. E-mail: sknudsen@scad.edu. Web site: www.stevknudsen.com.