



"COSMETIC EMERGENCY," 2005

COLBURN: Filmmaker uses images from popular culture

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painting them.

Q: What do you hope that people who come out to see your work take away from the experience?

A: I see people viewing my films when I am making them. When I'm creating, I'm communicating. There are a lot of contradictions, untruths and trickery in this world that concern me enough that I must exorcise them in a way. I commandeer and manipulate images within pop and political culture.

My work utilizes some of the same visual tactics that "the media" employs to captivate us. I think my work resonates with others because it turns imagery all too familiar to them inside out before their eyes. I'm not out to shock. I just find the world such a shocking place that it sometimes just comes out, well, in a rock 'em sock 'em cinematic style.

Q: What will you be showing in Harrisburg?

A: I look forward to screening in Pennsylvania. I see it as a welcome update to my art presentation memories there, which consist of 4-H Fairs and the smell of manure. Having grown up in rural Pennsylvania (Gettysburg) will always have a

specific influence on my work. It gave me a peculiar way of looking at the world. I desired to visualize real things that I could not see. I was making sculptures of homeless people and starving Ethiopians in high school, having never seen either.

Now I'm returning to that same idea. In my last film I have a section about the U.S. military offering free cosmetic surgery to new recruits, for which no footage or even media coverage exists. Animation was traditionally and is still today used to illustrate those things impossible for the human eye to see.

Q: What was it like teaching animation in China?

A: The students were incredible. I was teaching mostly art and design students. They only had access to super traditional classes. We made a film in one week. We painted underwear on important politicians, tore up the fashion magazines, one girl animated their "drinking holiday." Another focused on Hitler. One guy had all their historical monuments flashing like a rave was going on. We called the film "Drunken Globalization."

The students had never done that kind of animation. That's what was so fascinat-

ing. How fast they picked it up, and it was all I could do to stop them at nine minutes. I mean nine minutes is 12,900 frames of animation.

Q: How does writing and working with music influence your filmmaking?

A: I played music and put out six records and toured Europe playing music in the 1990s, but I don't anymore. Now I mix old recordings, collaborate with musician friends and do all the sound design for my soundtracks.

Music and poetry were the primary inspiration for my films. Songs gave me thematic and structural material to spin my ideas around and gave me something to which I could time my animation and editing. In film, like in music, you're conscious of rhythm and its opposite, which is chaos, noise, feedback. I play with a lot more than the beat, and in-between the beat, but in the end it's always some kind of rhythm, some kind of visual melody or dissonance.

Q: Anything that you would want to address that I haven't mentioned?

A: Information on my films can be viewed at www.marthacolburn.com.

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THEATER REVIEW

BY BILL BLANDO
For The Patriot-News

After the mostly silent page beseeches the audience to hear his speech and see his curtsy at the end of Sunday's performance of Shakespeare's "Henry IV" and suggests that is might be "a displeasing play," another voice is heard with an equally simple and direct plea: "If you enjoyed this show, please tell your friends. We have some reservations, but not enough."

The request is a fair one. It's hardly a displeasing production — long, yes; displeasing, no.

The voice belonged to J. Clark Nicholson, who not only directed this 20th production of the Harrisburg Shakespeare Festival but also served as half of the team that consolidated parts I and II of "Henry IV."

It's a shame that the unusually cast show doesn't seem to be generating larger audiences. But the hope is that his request will ignite a rush to the box office of the Gamut Classic Theatre on the third floor of Strawberry Square. Because of the energy of a large and talented cast, it's more than worthy of consideration by area theater lovers. Shakespeare fans will get more than their money's worth as the program runs 3½ hours, including intermission.

In addition to putting together the parts that Shakespeare wrote as separate plays in 1597 and 1598, Nicholson assigned women to play the four major male roles and many of the less prominent ones. In another gender reversal, he cast two men in female roles. It does make an audience sit up and take notice when they see Melissa Nicholson (the director's wife) sitting on the throne as the title character discussing the events of the day with male and female members of the court. They're all supposed to be men, of course; that's what the Bard had in mind.

Then, Amber E. Wagner shows up as the king's playboy son and heir apparent, Prince Hal, looking pert and pretty in short bob. And Karen Ruch, properly padded and blustery, appears to more than fill the role of Sir John Falstaff, the plump and aging