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34 West Main St. Bozeman, MT 406.522.9946
2605 Walnut St. Denver, CO 303.292.0909
130 S. Jackson St. Jackson, WY 307.264.1553
108 S. Main St. Livingston, MT 406.222.0337
visionswestcontemporary.com

By Charlotte Strick August 1, 2012

STUDIO VISIT

*Years ago, while biding my time at a doctor's office, fortuitously flipping through a stack of well-exhausted magazines, I spotted an article on affordable portraiture. **June Glasson** was one of the featured artists, and I scribbled her name down and contacted her later to do a drawing of my better half as part of her "Near and Dear" series. My husband and I had many times joked about how we wished we were royalty, deserving of grand portraits. June captured my husband so completely that I'm sometimes taken aback by the likeness. My twin toddlers frequently point to it and announce "Da-da!" with great delight.*

*June was a natural choice to do illustrations to accompany Rich Cohen's "**Pirate City**" essay in the **current issue**. I'm drawn to her gorgeous layers of colored ink that make using this unforgiving medium look easy. She paints landscapes and people with equal charm and interest. As June lives in Wyoming, she was kind enough to be interviewed via e-mail and to send photographs of an enviable studio space filled with natural light and plenty of inspiration.*

I recently moved to a studio located a few blocks from my house, in a public-works high school that is now a civic center, in Laramie. My studio was once a counseling room, complete with two-way mirror, carved out of an old classroom. It has two big, south-facing windows, so I get amazing light, and I spend most afternoons happily working away on various projects. I used to be very good at working almost anytime and anywhere, but now that I have a small child who loves to pull over bottles of ink and tear up paper, I have to be a bit more careful about my workspace.

I've never been to New Orleans, and I had never really worked with historic, sea-faring themes before, but "pirates and New Orleans" immediately called to mind such strong visual images that I was excited to work on the project. The way I start a portrait commission differs greatly from how I went about working on this series of paintings. For "Pirate City" I started, of course, by reading Cohen's piece. After looking it over, I knew that I wanted to create a portrait of Lafitte, of the island Baratavia, and of New Orleans. I gathered every image I could find of Lafitte's New Orleans, which didn't amount to much, so I extended my search to include anything related to pirates, ships, bayous, river boats, et cetera. Because there were so few images of Lafitte and period New Orleans, I felt free to just make things up. In the beginning I struggled a bit, especially when working on Lafitte. I found myself relying too much on stereotypical pirate signifiers, like the eye patch, pirate hat, scarves, sword, and so on, which resulted in portraits that came across as cartoonish. So instead I focused on the written descriptions that Cohen provided: "his

good looks ... A shade over six feet tall, slender as a string, with dark hair, side-whiskers, and eyes that shade of blue know as robin's egg. He had delicate hands and long fingers ... Dandyish in dress, he preferred silk shirts, velvet tailcoats ..." and "a pirate with mournful eyes, his hair swept across his forehead ..."

I find, too, that I have a strong tendency, when working figuratively, to unintentionally insert myself into my work. When stepping back from a portrait I often see my own features peeking out from it. I believe all artists do this in some form, and it's something I try to be aware of and work against.

As soon as I read Rich's piece I knew I wanted to do pieces in ink with a process of layering and washing out. It would be perfect for creating hazy, dark images of the bayous, New Orleans, and Lafitte. What I love—and sometimes hate—about working with ink is that it is messy, unpredictable, and dries quickly, which in the end means I have a lot less control. I can have a plan for a piece, and I can spend a lot of time working on an underpainting, and then in a moment it can be ruined. Or it can suddenly go in a wonderful, unexpected direction. Over time I've learned how to work with Parker Quink and how, with this process of layering and washing, I can pull out really interesting and subtle colors from a supposedly "black" ink.

I also used a technique from some of my other series where I "mask out" an object or person, creating a blank or negative space in the painting. By "masking out" the figure of Lafitte I thought I might be able to address the gaps in his portrait that are emphasized in Cohen's piece, or any portrait done from such a great distance and after such a long passage of time. One can try and paint the world around the person and sketch them in, but so much is lost to time that what is left is a lot of blank areas.

While painting and drawing have always been my first love, I studied sculpture at college. Sculpture appealed to me because it was everything that painting wasn't. I also wanted to learn to weld, to pour bronze, to build things with my hands. I enjoyed the physicality of it. I loved the wonderful old foundry that housed Cornell's sculpture department. In the end I produced some very, very bad undergraduate imitations of Eva Hesse's work involving too many pantyhose and a thesis statement that had too many references to "the body as a site for..." That said, it was an education that taught me some invaluable skills, like how to build things with my own hands.

I come from a creative family. My father is a sculptor and my mother, while she would never call herself an artist, is also a very visual person. I think I actually got most of my sensibility from her. I always saw myself making art and being creative, and so I've spent most of my adult life focused on finding ways to support myself doing this. While I've been able to find some success with my painting, I've also really enjoyed supplementing it with more design-oriented work as well, which means I've got a motley resume filled with stints working in wood shops, design firms, and windows on New York's Fifth Avenue.