

TRUEL | ACRYLIC ON COLLAGE | 21 X 47 INCHES

## in Arts 2020, Feature Stories, Features | Written by Melissa Mylchreest

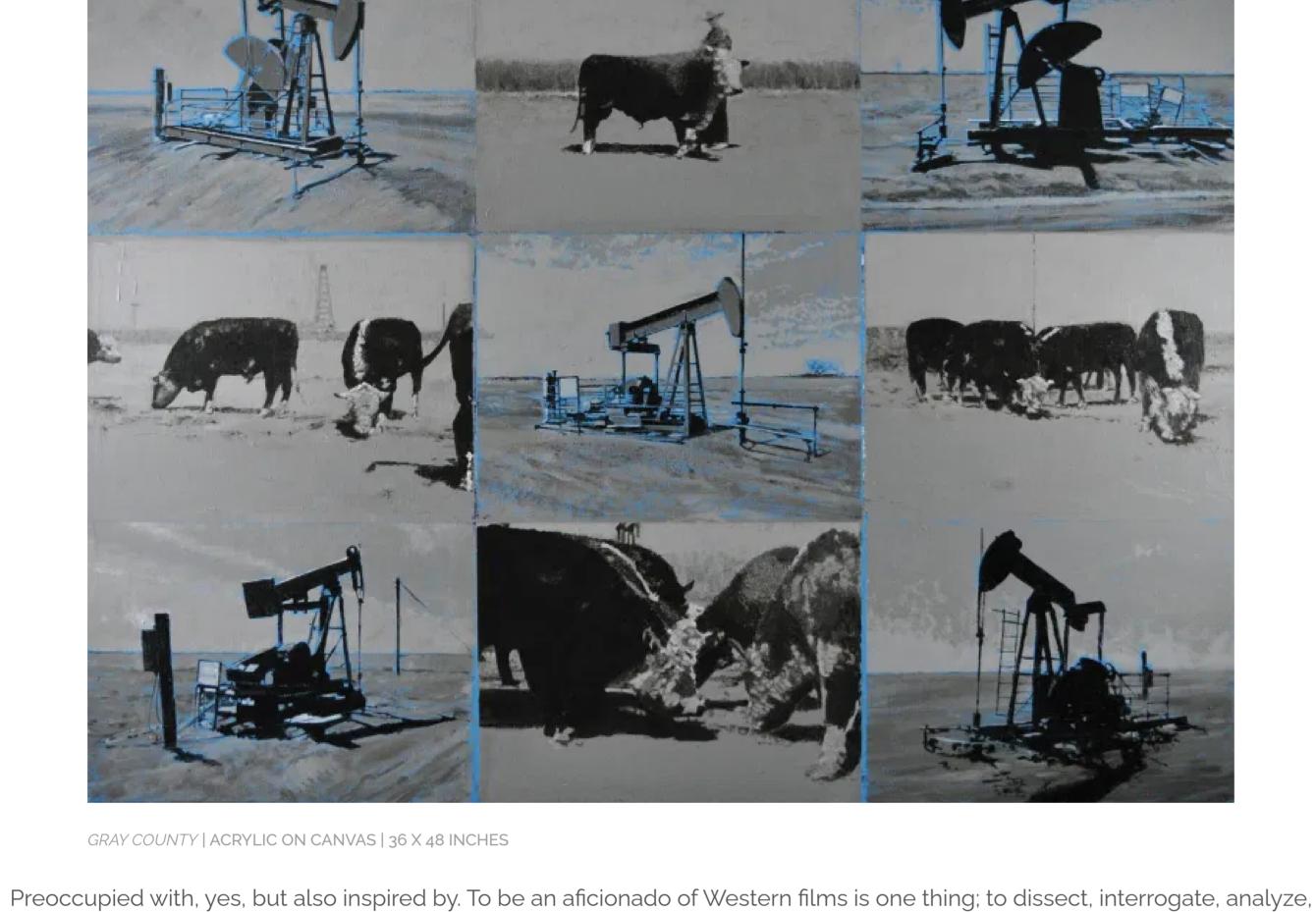
THE MYTH OF THE WEST

"EVERYONE IN THE WORLD KNOWS WHAT a cowboy is," says Nikki Todd of Visions West Contemporary in Bozeman,



archetypal figure speak directly to the world's preoccupation with the American West, and how the narrative of the cowboy

looms large in our national psyche. "When I was 7 or 8, we got our first TV, and it was dominated by Westerns," McConnell says. "We were living in the West, I had all these toy figures, and every figure had a gun. It was all about the gunfighter nation. ... To have so much entertainment and play activity constructed around this violent narrative, and the mass popularity of that too, I've internalized that; it's something that I've been preoccupied with all my life."

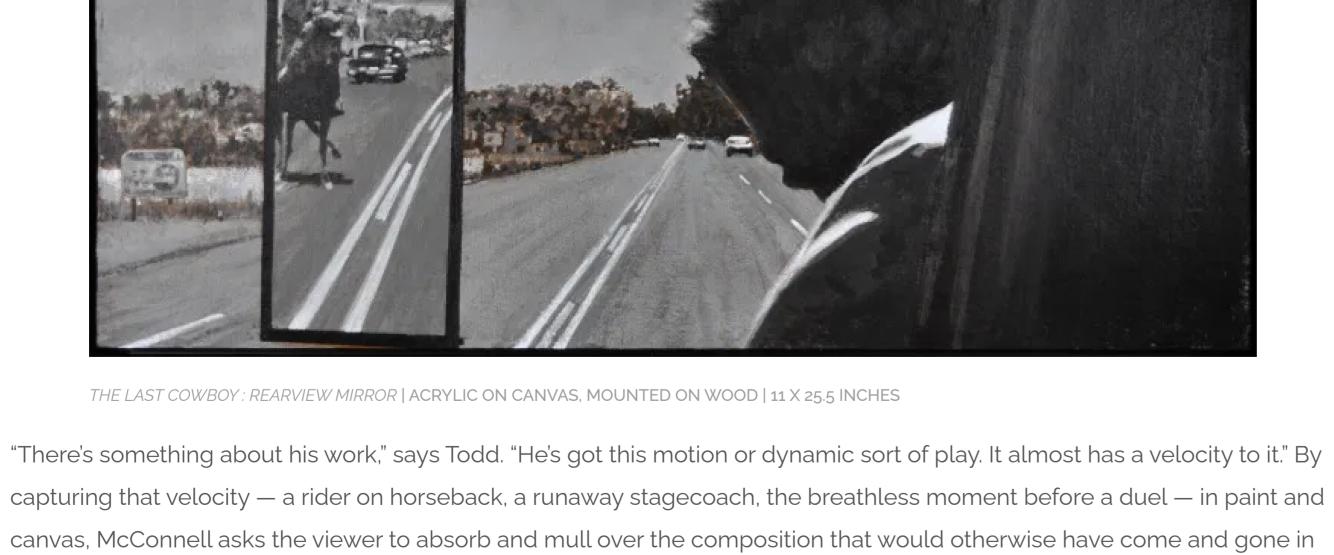


and abstract the genre is another entirely. "I began photographing the television screen in the '70s ... and I began to draw and paint those images in the early '80s, beginning with colored pencils, ink, and oil pastels," McConnell recalls.



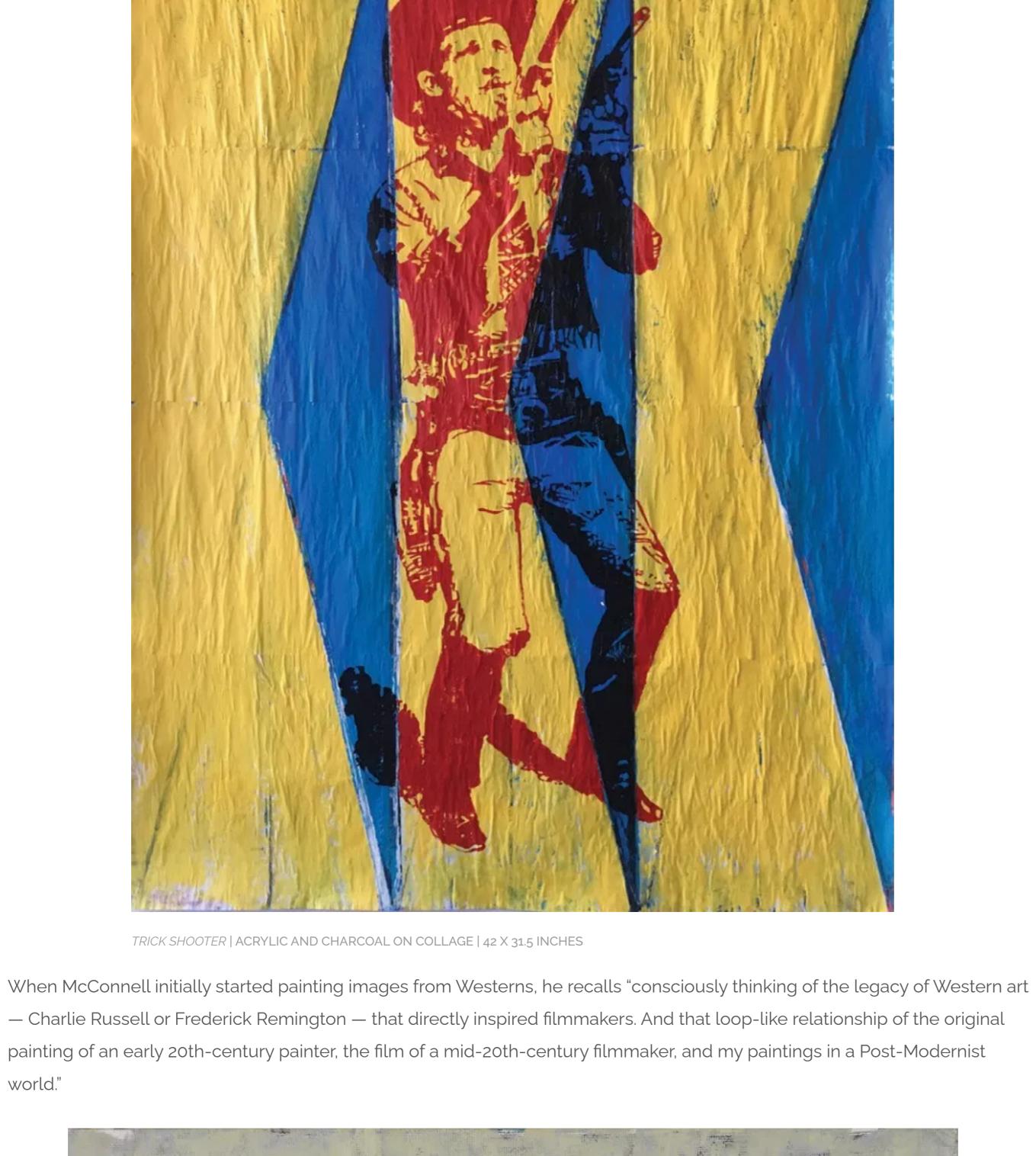
in 1982, he began focusing specifically on cowboys. "Consciously or unconsciously, I wanted to make work that fit somewhere on the spectrum between Modern and avant-garde art and the traditionalist art of the West; work that would be accessible

and relevant on multiple levels." Drawing on those early techniques and impulses, McConnell borrows from films and freezes split-second moments of drama, gesture, and tension in high-contrast black-and-white renderings.

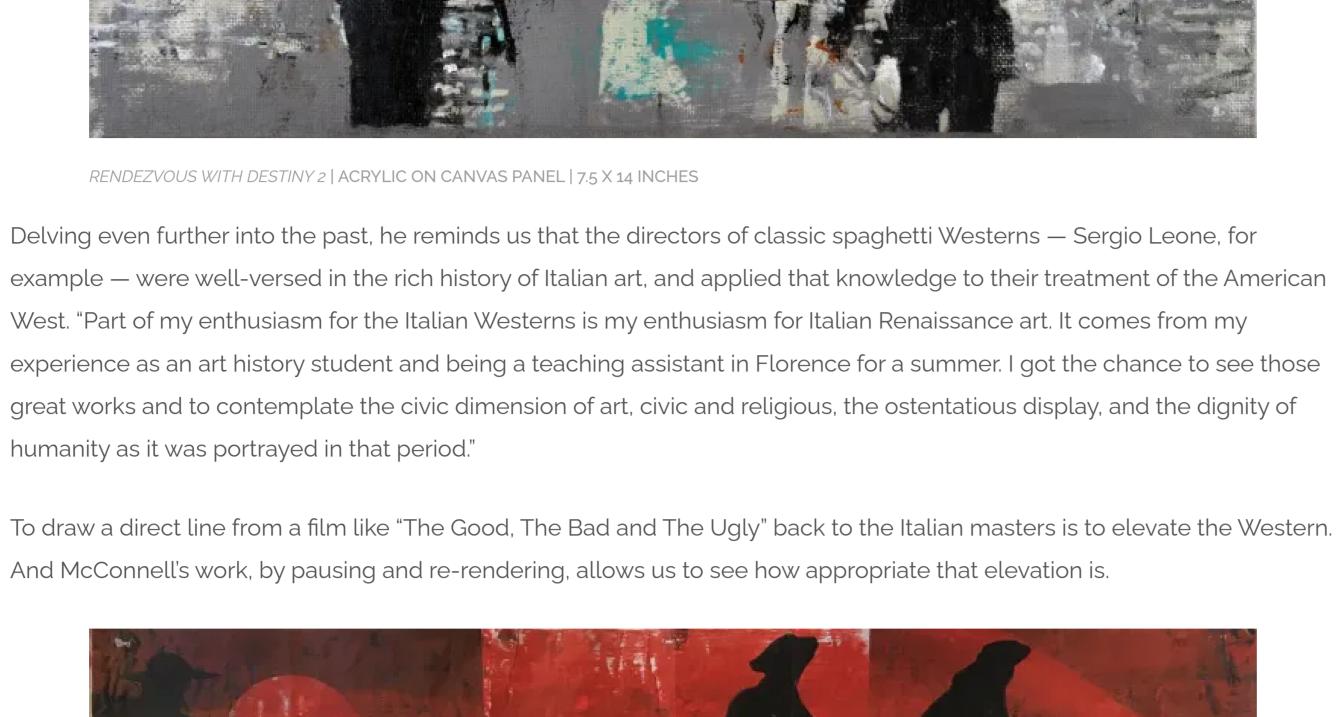


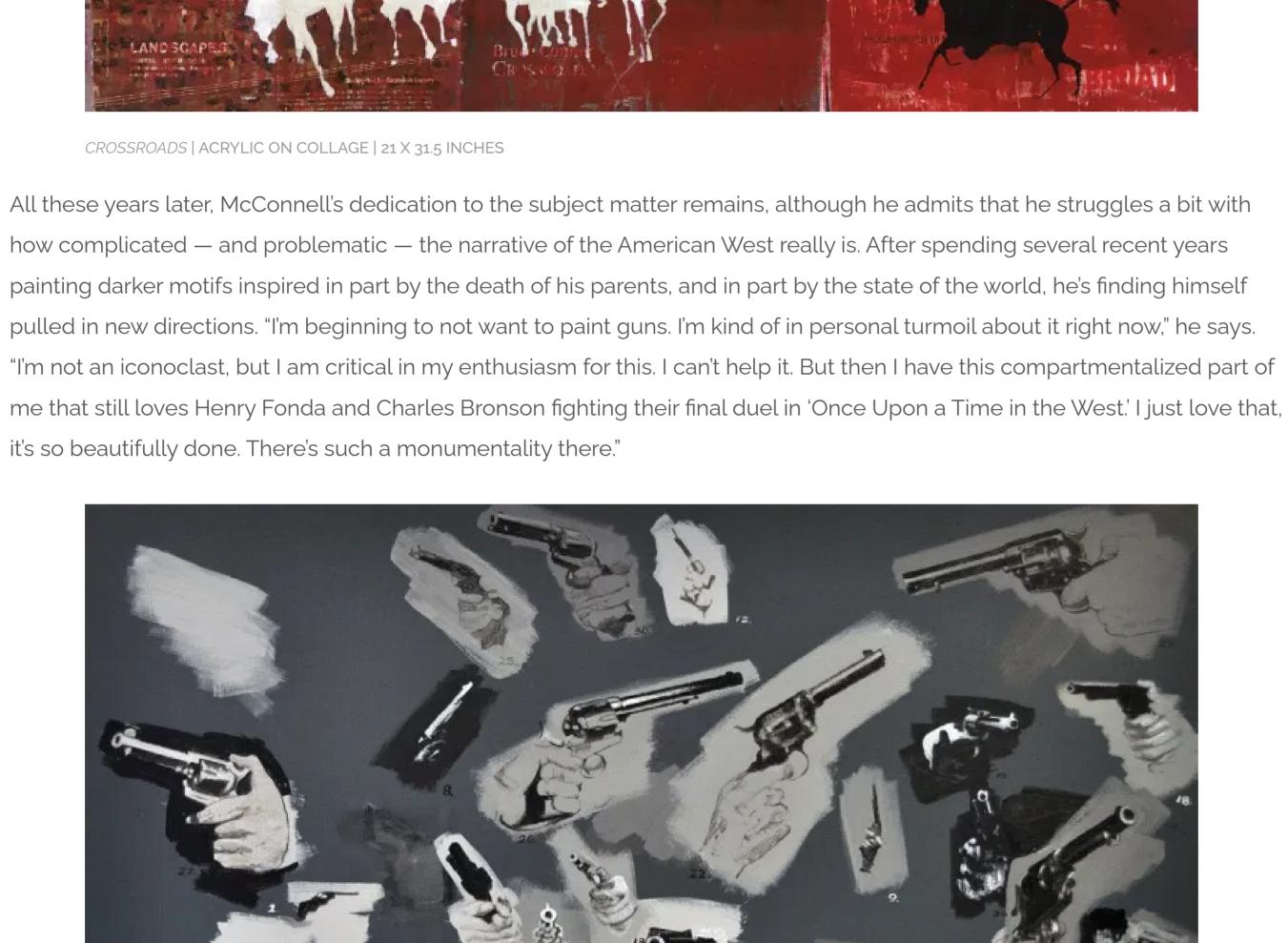
the blink of an eye. As a consequence, we become aware not only of the beauty of the moment, but also of the multiple

layers of meaning within the frame: the storyline of the film from which the image was drawn, the more complex narratives about the mythological American West, and the multi-layered origins of the imagery itself.

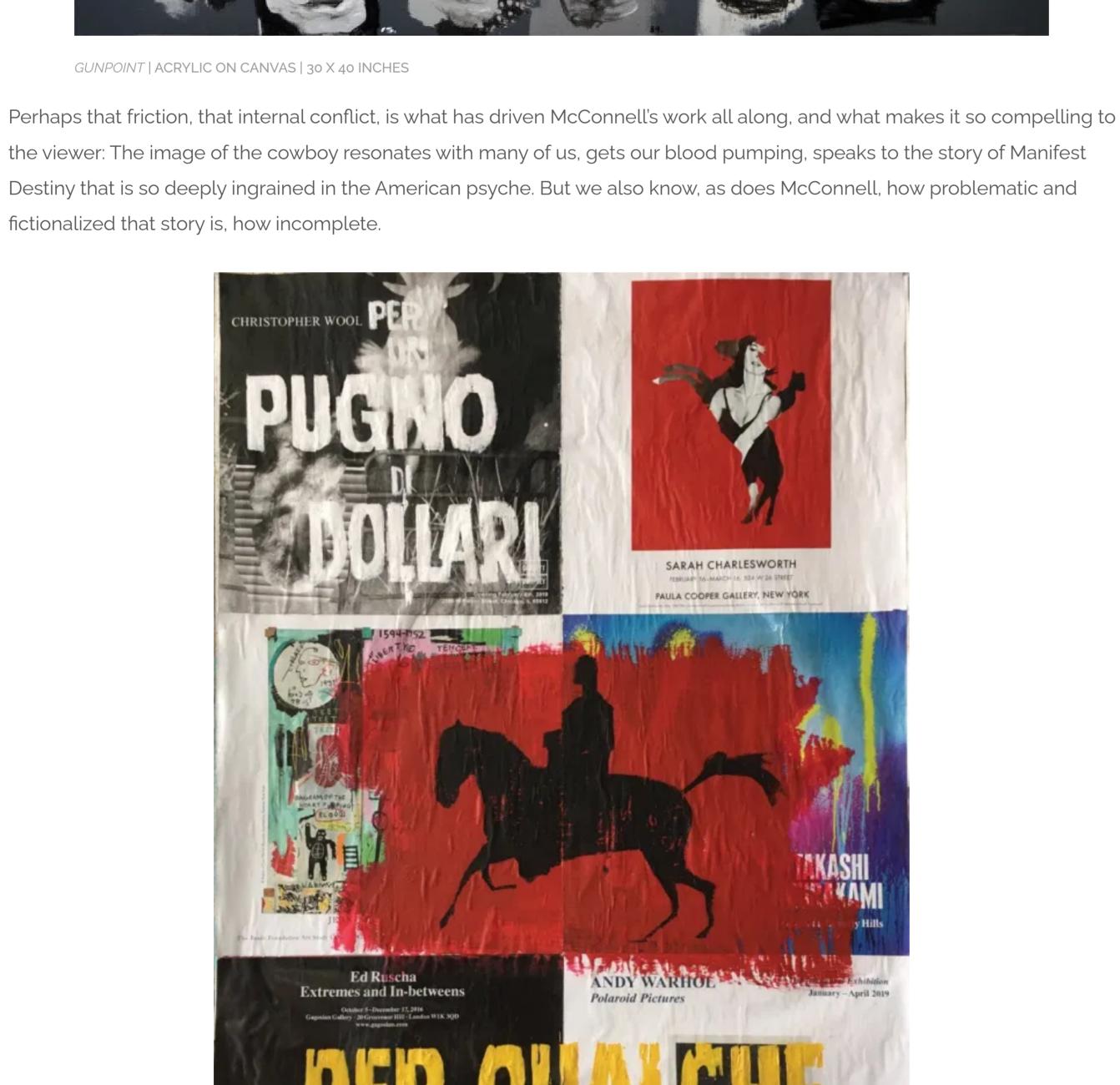


world."





GUNPOINT | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS | 30 X 40 INCHES



McConnell's work, luckily, makes room for all of this. Like the Italian masters, he distills these complexities into narrative

RIDER | ACRYLIC ON COLLAGE | 31.5 X 21 INCHES

images, portraying the cowboy as flawed, beautiful, and entirely human.



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