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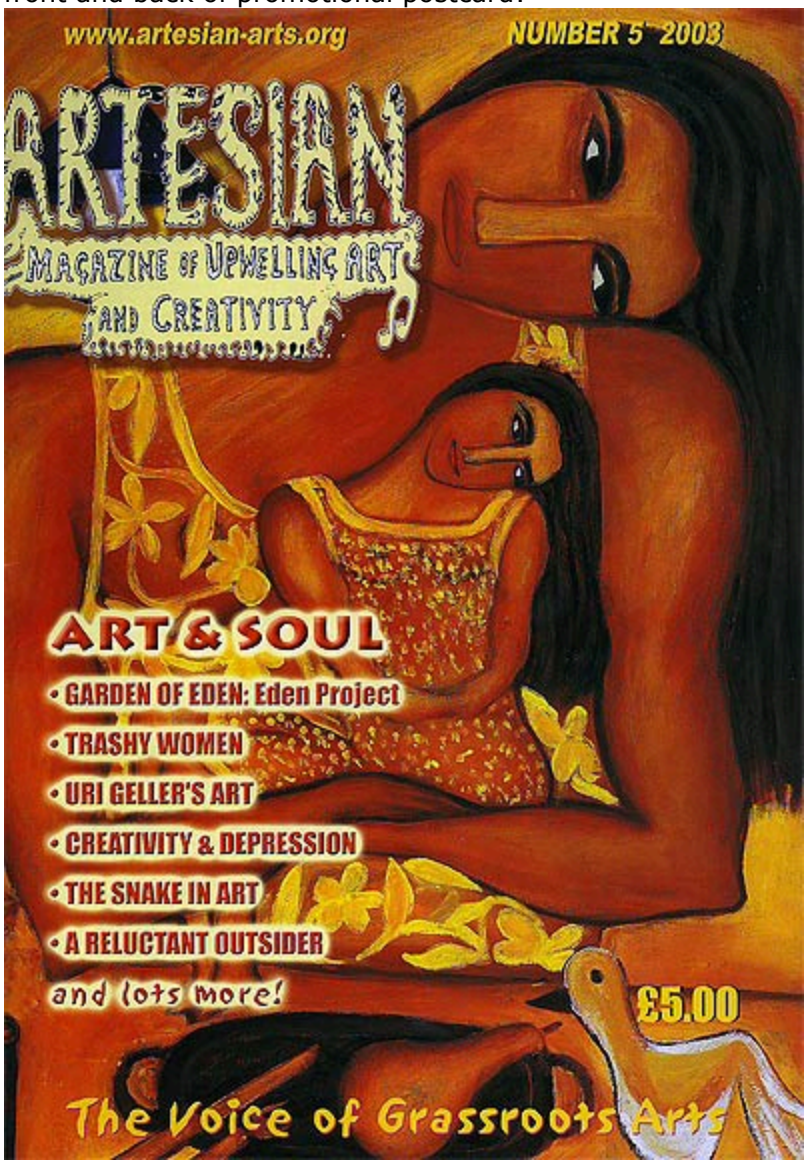
Article written by Matt Sesow for Artesian Magazine

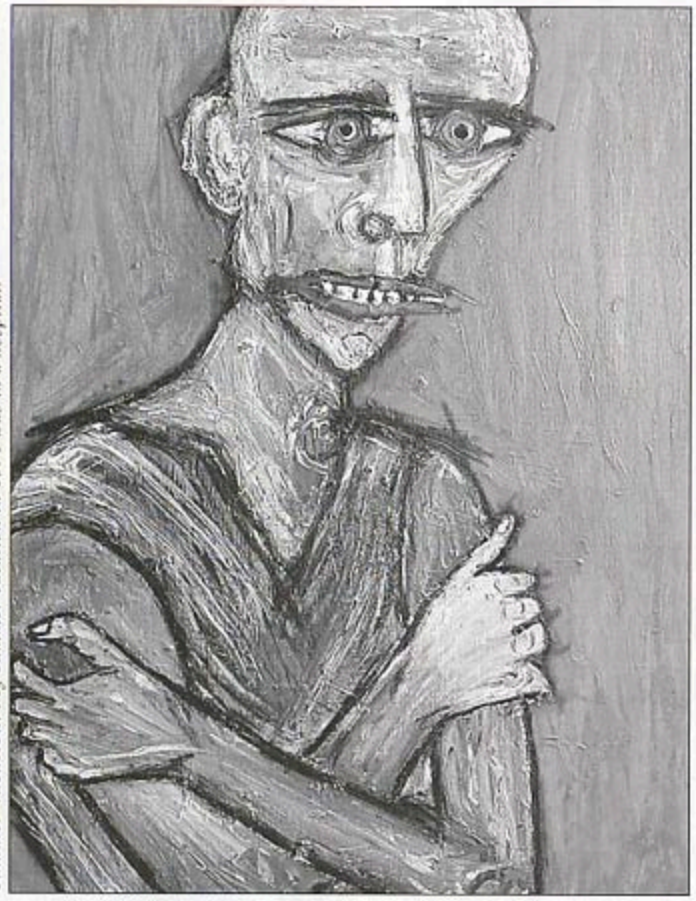
2003

front and back of promotional postcard:



Call me Whatever you Want - I am Matt Sesow

by Matt Sesow



Summer Vacation. My summer vacation in 1974 was in a hospital.

THE ACCIDENT

The first thing I remember was the feeling of knowing I had done something monumental, maybe even miraculous. It was as if I had watched everything unfold, made a calculated decision to bring me to this moment. But it was the look on my parents' faces, their red eyes, the forced smiles, the impending truth about to be revealed to me that was the beginning of this strange journey ... I was an eight-year-old boy lying in a hospital bed in Lincoln, Nebraska; I was a boy that had just survived being hit by a landing airplane.

From my viewpoint, everything was fine. I had survived the plane's propeller striking the arm that fed blood to my dominant left hand. I had survived being dragged over 100 yards down a grassy runway in front of my playmates and siblings, who had come together that summer evening in 1974 for a friendly game of ball-tossing called 'SPUD'. I had survived the stillness on the runway as neighbors removed my shoes and used their laces to apply a tourniquet as I lay motionless and bleeding. Yes, everything seemed just as it should be, as I lay in that hospital bed. Although I felt a bit groggy from the six-hour operation to reattach the arm, I figured I'd soon be back out on the cool grass on warm summer evenings throwing balls and running from propellers.

But wait. I followed the eyes of my parents and noticed they were no longer looking at my face, but instead at my very sore arm which was draped in a white yellow-stained sheet. Soon a doctor came in and removed the sheet. When my eyes joined those of my bedside visitors I felt as if I was looking at someone else's body. You see, the arm that had so faithfully guided blood to my left hand had just suffered a bit of trauma... we had been separated, briefly, on that grassy runway. And despite the best efforts of a terrific team of doctors, some of whom had performed similar procedures in the Vietnam War, it had not been possible to clear and reconnect a perfect path from my heart to the left hand. My left hand was now a purple-blackish wrinkled cold appendage. I remember being able to move the fingers ever so slightly. The next thing the doctor said was something to the effect, 'Matt we need to remove your hand'.... my response, without hesitation, was 'yes of course, that is fine with me'. Everything was going perfectly as planned. And so my fantastic journey begins.

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I'm not as innocent. A bit of a self-portrait that, even though I may paint things that are critical of things, I am not so innocent and perfect myself.

At one of the first "dates" I attended at the group house, an art-school graduate/housemate of my ex-wife's brought out some of her school supplies to a large dining room table and suggested we all paint something. Hoping to impress the group, and not wanting to reveal that my true desire that evening had nothing to do with painting, I said 'sure, I paint all the time'. That was a lie, I had never painted *per-se*. Sure, I had doodled and sketched and even did a series of pen-drawn free comic books in elementary school with my best friend Jack (we used to place them amongst the other books in the school's library and see if anybody took them ... nobody noticed). But this night was the first time I'd be using color and hearing funny names like gouache paint, Craypas crayons, and Bristol paper.

That night was followed by several blurry nights. Several nights of several red paintings by Matt Sesow. Those 'group-house paintings' hung there for years, the paintings became wallpaper numbering over 100. The nights were long, often times lasting into the next day... And I'd go to work the next day at IBM barely able to recount the output from the previous night. Yes, oftentimes it was just me at the table painting after everybody else in the group-house had long retired, and they were tired, of painting. I couldn't get enough, I was getting something out of my system it seemed.

Looking back on those paintings, it is obvious to me that I was healing. I was taking about 20 years of bottled-up emotion from my childhood trauma and putting it on paper and canvas. Most of the figures I drew and represented were in various stages of amputation and uncertainty. There was lots of red and lots of black sharp lines and lots of emotion. The approving reaction I got from many of the people that saw the work I felt was in jest and sympathy. I never believed when anyone said they 'liked' what I did, how could they? To me, the paintings were funny, glorified my heroes, and disgraced my enemies ... I didn't know much about art, but I knew I liked powerful and shocking imagery. My imagery and influence comes from a lot of places, not just childhood trauma.

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Most of the work I create today is done on the floor and on easels in my 600 square foot apartment in Washington, DC. My walls are plastered up to three deep with paintings from the last nine years. The only framed piece is my college diploma. The only other artist hanging on the wall of 300+ works is a small piece by Sue Coe, whom I credit as being my favorite artist.

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THE END

So in conclusion, I see my current body of over 3500 paintings as 'studies' or training. I am not just a 'self taught' artist, but I am a 'self teaching' artist. I am growing, I am accessible, I have an education. I am not just an outsider, but I've lived in places you'll never go. I am not just folk, but I've dabbled with the bourgeois. I am not just visionary, but I'll paint one thousand Buddha if I feel like it.

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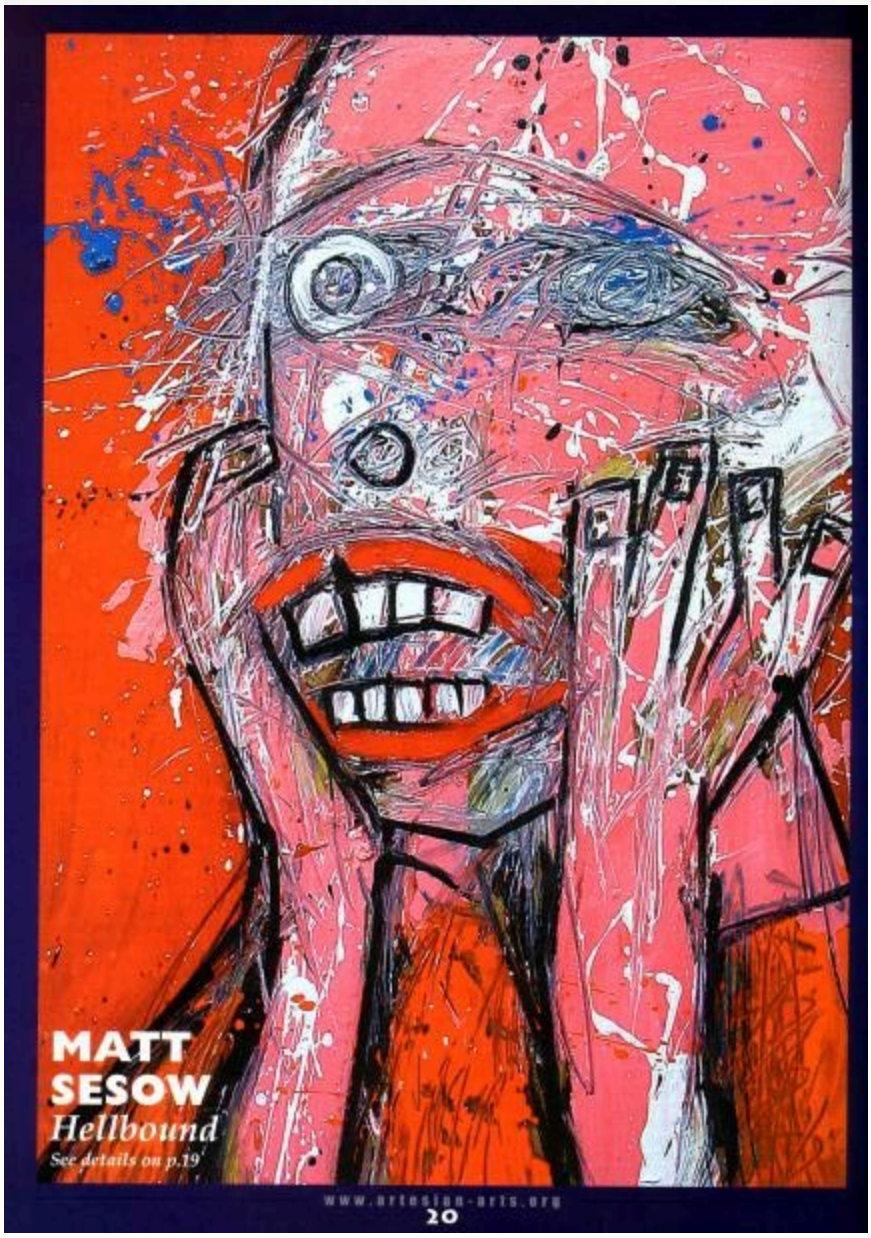
OVERLEAF: Hellbound. By Matt Sesow. 30"x40" oil on masterboard depicts a person that





"**Matt Sesow's Artist Statement (2002)"**

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