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In the Studio

From the January/February edition of "DC Style" Magazine:



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VANGUARD

Local artist Matt Sesow has sold more than 4,000 works in his 11-year painting career.

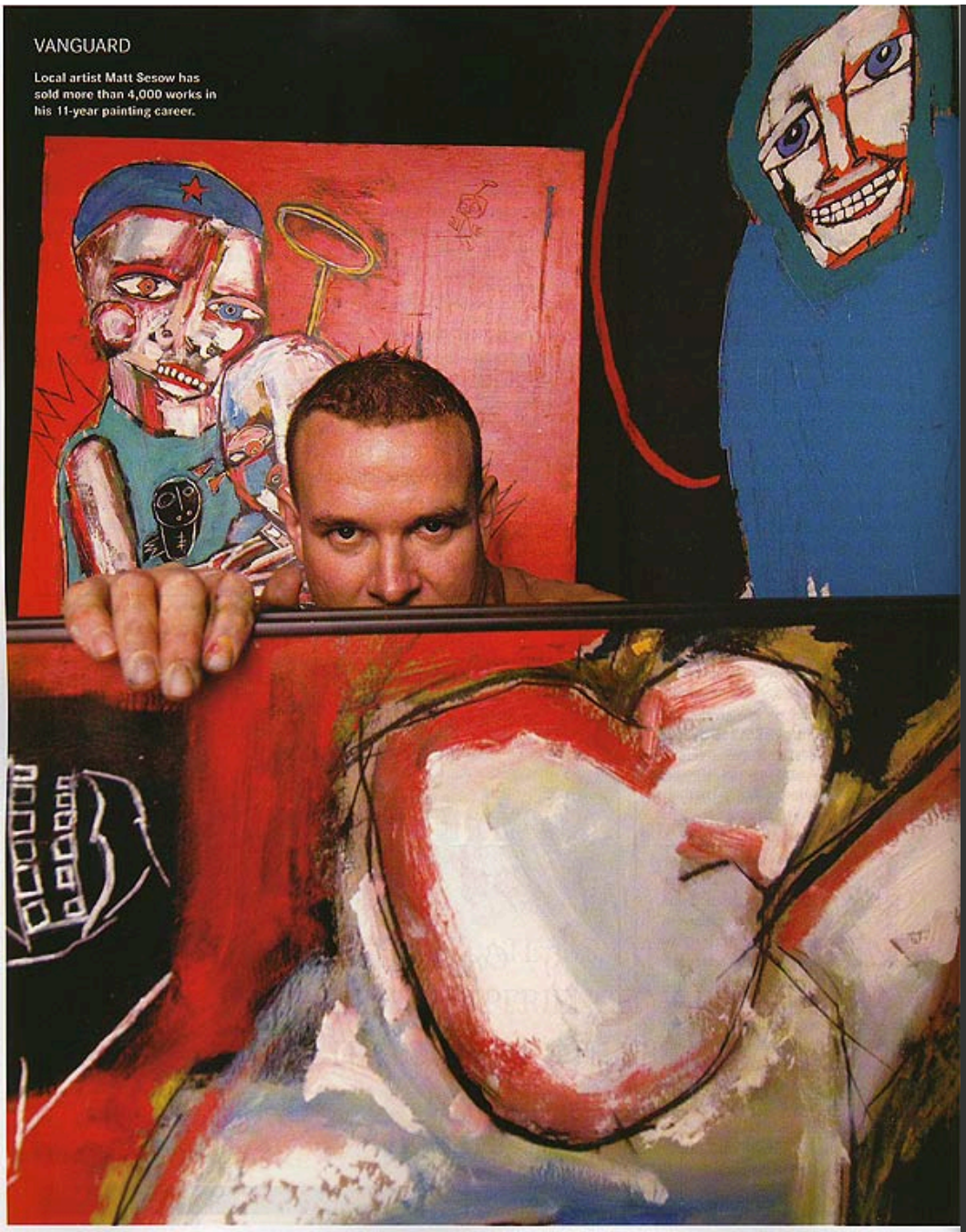

PHOTO BY ED CUNICELLI

DRAWING LINES

Artist Matt Sesow pushes his creative boundaries.

INSPIRED AND EXTRAORDINARILY PROLIFIC, Washingtonian Matt Sesow is a self-taught artist who has sold more than 4,000 works in his short career. Still, the software engineer-turned-painter isn't satisfied. If he were, Sesow explains, "I'd be bored."

"I've done a lot of thinking about what I want to be doing 20, 30 or 40 years down the line," Sesow says. "And I fully intend to keep going at this pace." Instead of taking a break from feverishly creating, Sesow prefers holing up in a paint-splattered Washington studio where he often works well into the night under self-imposed deadlines. Hundreds of his paintings, many bold and emotionally charged, line the walls of his space.

Sesow, who took up art 11 years ago to impress a girlfriend, insists on challenging himself with tasks such as completing one large canvas a day for an entire month, each one inspired by the headlines of *The Washington Post*.

The paintings in his *31 days in July* series convey the chaos of the world in angular lines. The compositions—brimming with distorted shapes and primary colors—grapple with everything from unrest in Iraq to the Supreme Court. "Rather than sit back and be an artist who lets the obvious things dictate my inspiration, I wanted to look into the world and the news," Sesow says. He confesses that it's a daunting task, particularly when the headlines are dominated by suicide bombings and terror alerts. "It's an emotional trip, as well as a creative one," Sesow says.

His ability to channel painful emotions onto a canvas stems in part from his own childhood trauma. When he was 8 years old, a plane that landed near his rural Nebraska home struck Sesow; its propeller severed his left arm. Over time, Sesow has expressed this life-changing experience in his art. "I can get really dark when I need to, but I've taught myself to be comfortable with it," he says. "I walk up to that edge, but I'm very careful not to fall over."

That creative intensity has garnered the interest of both collectors and critics from across the country, though few of his collectors reside in the District. Sesow, whose apartment boasts a view of the Capitol dome, says he loves Washington because of its "intellectual discourse and its diversity," but laments that there's little support for working artists. "The art sold in D.C. is more decorative, the kind of art that would go well with a couch," he quips.

Sesow's canvases would hardly complement floral-print furniture. But the personality behind the art is anything but dark. A polite, affable man with bright blue eyes and closely cropped blond hair, Sesow chuckles often and appears to be enjoying life.

"I'm living the American dream, really," Sesow says. "I'm doing something I love, and I'm making a living off it." Yet when he ponders his future, it's clear that Sesow is possessed by an artistic drive that won't stop until he's truly satisfied.

"I'm human, so I know that burnout could happen," Se-

sow says. "But for now, I'm just excited about what's next."
—*Molly Knight*

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-Molly Knight

on the way to paint in Morocco, January 2006:



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