

## Wilderness House Literary Review 4/3

### *Bridget Galway* **Of Muppets and Monsters**

I first met Michael Costello in 1979; I was modeling for the Provincetown Art Association Museum. One day I received a phone call from Michael. He had a cheerful voice, said he was an artist and asked if I would be interested in modeling for him. I had heard through the grape vine that Michael was quite talented, I agreed to meet with him, and we set a date.

I arrived dressed in my usual somewhat Madeline of Paris ensemble. Michael greeted me with a cheerful smile and seemed quite pleased with my eccentric fashion statement.



As I walked into his apartment studio, I was taken in by how the light reflected the artistic spirit of his space, and I immediately felt comfortable and at home.

Michael lived on Bradford Street in a third floor flat, from his kitchen window you could see a landscape of wood-slatted rooftops that lead your eyes to the Provincetown Bay.

Those were the wonderful days that artists with limited financial means could still afford to live in an apartment that had light and character and a view, and his had all three.

Through his appreciation of my whimsical wardrobe, and my appreciation for his humor and great respect for his creativity, we became good friends. Later we became roommates, me with my newborn baby and my mother, and others, which often seem to form a Mad Hatter Tea Party. Michael drew snap shots of it all and these humorous depictions kept me sane.

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Michael once again found his own space; we continued to keep in touch for a while. We both went on our separate paths. I would hear about him through mutual friends. He was doing well with his art, exhibiting his work through out the country as well as in Europe.

Since I have moved to Boston, I now have the opportunity to reestablish my friendship with Michael. He has been living in Boston for quite some time, although taking sojourns too many interesting places around the world gathering inspirations and returning to his studio to paint.

I have just become the arts editor of the Wilderness House Literary Review, and so I immediately called Michael and asked if he would honor us with the opportunity to exhibit his work as the featured artist for the month of October. He was pleased to do so. Editor and Chief Steve Glines and I set a date to meet with him at his studio to view his most recent series "*Gods and Monsters* " and "*Muppets, and Models* ", interview him and do a photo shoot.

I would never presume to write about Michael's art without his impute. However as it has been many times in the past, Michael's humor and stimulating conversation, although does relate to his work, can distract from the focus on speaking about any of the artistic language one may look for in a review. Fortunately, I am an artist and it is easier for me to recognize and speak about his process.

Therefore, I will tell you that Michael Costello has become a successful artist recognized for his talent and unique artistic voice, which is shown, through his choice of subject. His artistic excellence is highly visible through his application of the mediums, whether it is through drawings, pastels, or oils. The viewer can see a powerful focus on light in his paintings. Michael's color is always vibrant whether the painting is mainly composed of a layering of whites with only a very limited use of color. His flesh tones are created through a layering of colors, sometimes blended, or straight from tube to palette brush to canvas. It is through Michael's striking use of light and play of color that pulls the viewer into the painting.

I asked Michael what artists have most influenced his worked; he replied Courbet and Balthus.

I can see the influence that Courbet has had on Michael through his application of paint. Courbet used light on dark, often times using geometric shapes to accent form. In his portraiture, his focus was on intensity of expression to create an intimacy between the viewer and his subject. As Courbet evolved as a painter, he wanted to paint the model in every aspect of its form. He challenged himself as an artist, and therefore challenged society to evolve as well. Society looked upon these works as unseemly and vulgar. One of his paintings, "*The Origin of the World*", was painted in 1866 was exhibited for the first time in Paris in 1988.

Balthus Influence was of a surreal nature. Balthus focused on symbolic imagery to create intensity through a psychological viewpoint, and forced the viewer to confront taboo thoughts, aspects of society they knew to be true but were uncomfortable to take in. One of the paintings that exemplifies this the most is "*The Guitar Lesson*."

Since this review is about Michael, you can check out these two paint-

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ings by Courbet and Balthus as well as their works in art history literature or online.

Michael Costello's unique voice is matched with an artistic excellence of the highest caliber. Because of this, Michael Costello will be revered by future Art Historians.

Michael Costello is highly collected by numerous public and private collectors. He is a prolific artist, and although his website gives you a sense of his talent and diversity of subject, it cannot begin to touch upon the tremendous scope of his body of work.

The Wilderness House Literary Review is honored to have the opportunity to exhibit a selection of Michael Costello's work. More of Michael's work can be found at [www.michaelcostelloartist.com](http://www.michaelcostelloartist.com).



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### Statement by the artist:

#### *Muppets and Models*

After my granddaughter was born, I went into a toy store and that is where I first saw the puppets. At first it was economical the idea of posing a puppet with models was like getting an extra body for free, but when I started working with them I realized how innocent the model looked with them. We all remember events from childhood, as our innocence made us so emotionally vulnerable. I think these puppets bring out that child still in all of us.





Incubus



Julien and Grover



Playing Train



Rachel and Elmo



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### Statement by the artist:

#### *Gods and Monsters*

*"No object is so ugly that, under certain conditions...it will not look beautiful, no object is so beautiful, under certain conditions, it will look ugly" — Oscar Wilde*

My recent body of work "Gods and Monsters" is inspired by "The History of Beauty" and "On Ugliness" by Umberto Eco. The work speaks of the marginalization of the individual in a society based on esthetic. It is part of our cultural heritage, both philosophical and theological to acquaint all that is good with beauty and to acquaint all that is beautiful with levels of whiteness. Due to the medieval concept that God is clarity and thus visualized as white, the cult of the celluloid goddess with her palette of paleness becomes the angel of sex.

These paintings are an unbiased presentation of those who would be called "Gods and Monsters." Masks, wigs, wax lips and prosthetics hide the identity of the individual and at the same time recall to us the fashion of the modern world to break beauty down into a collection of body parts.

As gods or monsters, these beings are meant to inspire empathy for our universal humanness whether or not they horrify or titillate.





Joe Davis



Marilyn Mueta



The Age of Enlightenment 4: La Princess du Sange



The Age of Enlightenment 2: The Empress



The Age of Enlightenment: The Maja



Karla