

# Brandon Bauer Recent Work



Barrow & Juarez Gallery  
Milwaukee Wisconsin

# Brandon Bauer and the Poetry of the Polemic

## By Robert Lewis Smith

Contemporary Works on Paper- Barrow and Juarez Gallery, Milwaukee, WI  
September 2006

Brandon Bauer's work is an artistic statement of his principles. Like countless artists who have gone before him, Brandon is willing to express his values by taking an ethical stand, in this case directly in the path of the Bush/Cheney/K Street war machine. His new work is a vehicle for expressing his sense of outrage, his sense of sadness and above all his deep concern for the wrongheaded direction of our country. Sociopolitical concerns, notwithstanding, Brandon's highest passion is for art. Through deft use of color, of layering of paint, and of carefully placed compositional elements Brandon honors the highest aesthetic principles while making a powerful political statement. In the best traditions of Heartfield, Goya, Picasso and scores of others, Brandon makes art that has a message. For millennia, artists have been the conscience of society, daring to express outrage when it was unpopular with the power elite or with the aesthetic cognoscente. There is, however, a very real trap inherent in making political art. Namely, that the work becomes more polemic than art. Brandon adroitly dodges this barrier by keeping his focus squarely on the *art* half of *political art*. In short, he creates art that also makes a political point.

The work exhibited at Barrow and Juarez Gallery in September of 2006 came from a torrent of creativity. The 28 pieces were all completed in the first six months of 2006 and half of them were completed in August. Pieces like *Legacy* or *War* pulse with vitality much as the artist must have done amidst an explosion of creative energy. The searing reds evident in those pieces, and in many others, speak of blood, of fire, of burning energy. That condensed power burns into the viewer's consciousness enlivening our experience with the work. The intensity also enriches our experience with the textural messages that are an integral part of the pieces. On face value, most of the text elements are straightforward, they make unambiguous statements like: "*destabilizes*", "*10 killed*", "*stealing an election is okay*", but they are transformed by a masterly treatment of the aesthetic elements.

Technical competence, smart use of color, skilled layering and a potent message do not in and of themselves make a work art. Competence and content are essential ingredients for Art, but the work must also surprise, transform or upset the internal world of the viewer. This occurs in a number of the pieces from this series. For example, what is one to make of the piece *Boy Has Mind-Expanding Experience*? Many of the other pieces seem straightforward. They condemn the war in Iraq specifically and they question the zeitgeist of American politics more generally. But how does a *Mind-Expanding Experience* relate to unsavory politics? And what is the function of the red, blue and black corpuscle-like shapes found in *Mind-Expanding Experience*? The piece speaks to an awakening, to a realization, to a mind that has expanded in order to admit a new

awareness. This piece, along with *Everything*, *Logo*, *Persistence*, *These*, *Smaller*, *Spring*, to name a few, interrupt our experience with the more straightforward political expressions seen elsewhere. This subgroup forces us to stop, to question, to experience the work in a more personal way. What is the artist saying *to me*? How does this relate to the larger political theme? Most importantly, after contemplation, the two questions merge to ask how the politics of war and of influence peddling affect the viewer personally. As the conversation shifts from direct condemnation to open ended questioning it causes the personal disruption so essential in Art. Art doesn't offer predictable answers it educates, it instigates, it insinuates itself into our subconscious just as the sum total of Brandon's pieces in this series do.

The scale of his work also invites personal connections. The largest pieces measure a diminutive eight by ten inches while the smallest are four by six inches. Because of the scale, we are forced into an intimate relationship with the work. Closeness reinforces the personal investment made by the viewer allowing Brandon's art to work on a particularly private level. In the 4 x 6 inch pieces, family snapshot size, photographic elements merge with linear and painted elements in a kaleidoscope of emotions. The sum of those diverse impressions forms our response to the work. It is a personal response made more personal by the work's small scale.

Scale creates a personal experience while also referencing photography. 8 x 10 is popular size for photographs such as portraits, proof sheets, commercial proof prints, etc. Photography, particularly photojournalism, has long been the media of choice for artists of conscience. The fact the Brandon employs photographic scale, for mixed media pieces, subtly conveys a veracity most evident in photography. The astute connection to photography lends verisimilitude to Brandon's work. As a result the work takes on additional intensity. It's not just fine art, but also real and truthful making it impossible to dismiss the work as an artistic invention.

Finally, we are invited into the interior of the work by idiosyncratic forms. Integral to much of the smaller work is an organic fringe of river-like forms that are sometimes blue, sometimes green, sometimes red, frequently outlining the central shapes in the image. With their reference to aerial photography or to topographic forms these elements could suggest the violence being done to the Earth. War, profiteering, the special interests promoted by K Street lobbyists, can do violence to our planet as well as to its people. But there is a purpose larger than ecological protest. Those forms exist as a foil for the political messages. The political messages are dark. The forms are soothing. The simultaneous inclusion of dark and light elements delineates the distinction between them intensifying the political message by contrasting it to the lighter elements while concurrently making it more palatable by offering elements of beauty.

Brandon's latest work is the best of art with a conscience. His estimable values are clearly stated, but it doesn't end there. His political point of view is enriched and expanded by his accomplished visual sensibilities. Visual and textural elements join creating a unique third entity. It's an essence fused from passion, from beauty and from

intelligence, both visual and cerebral. From this interaction emerges art that transcends its component parts. It's the alchemists' dream come true. The resulting creation is of inestimably more value than its ingredients. From noble ideas and masterful invention emerges Art.

Robert Lewis Smith is an award-winning photographer who lives and works in Milwaukee. Smith's personal projects concentrate on family and landscape. Smith's work has been exhibited at: Benham Gallery (Seattle), Bucknell University (Lewisburg, PA), The Center for Fine Art Photography (Fort Collins, CO), Elaine Erickson Gallery (Milwaukee), Haggerty Museum of Art (Milwaukee), Hood Museum (Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH), The Houston Center for Photography, Meridian House (Washington, D.C.), Michael H. Lord Gallery (Milwaukee), Milwaukee Art Museum, Photo Midwest (Madison, WI) and the Wustum, Museum of Fine Arts (Racine, Wisconsin) Further information can be found at: <http://robertlewissmith.com>

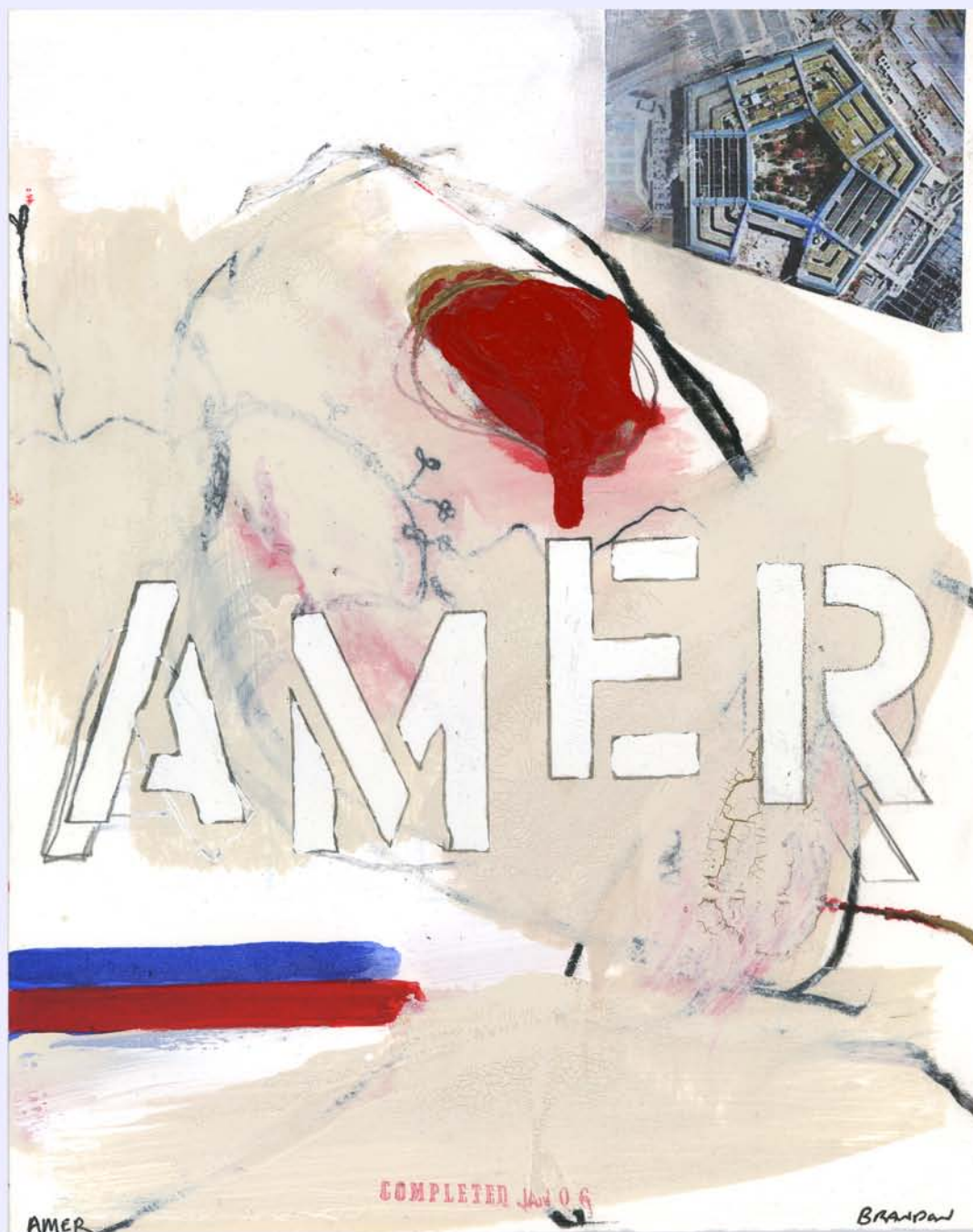


10 Killed, 11 Wounded  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard



Aftermath  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard



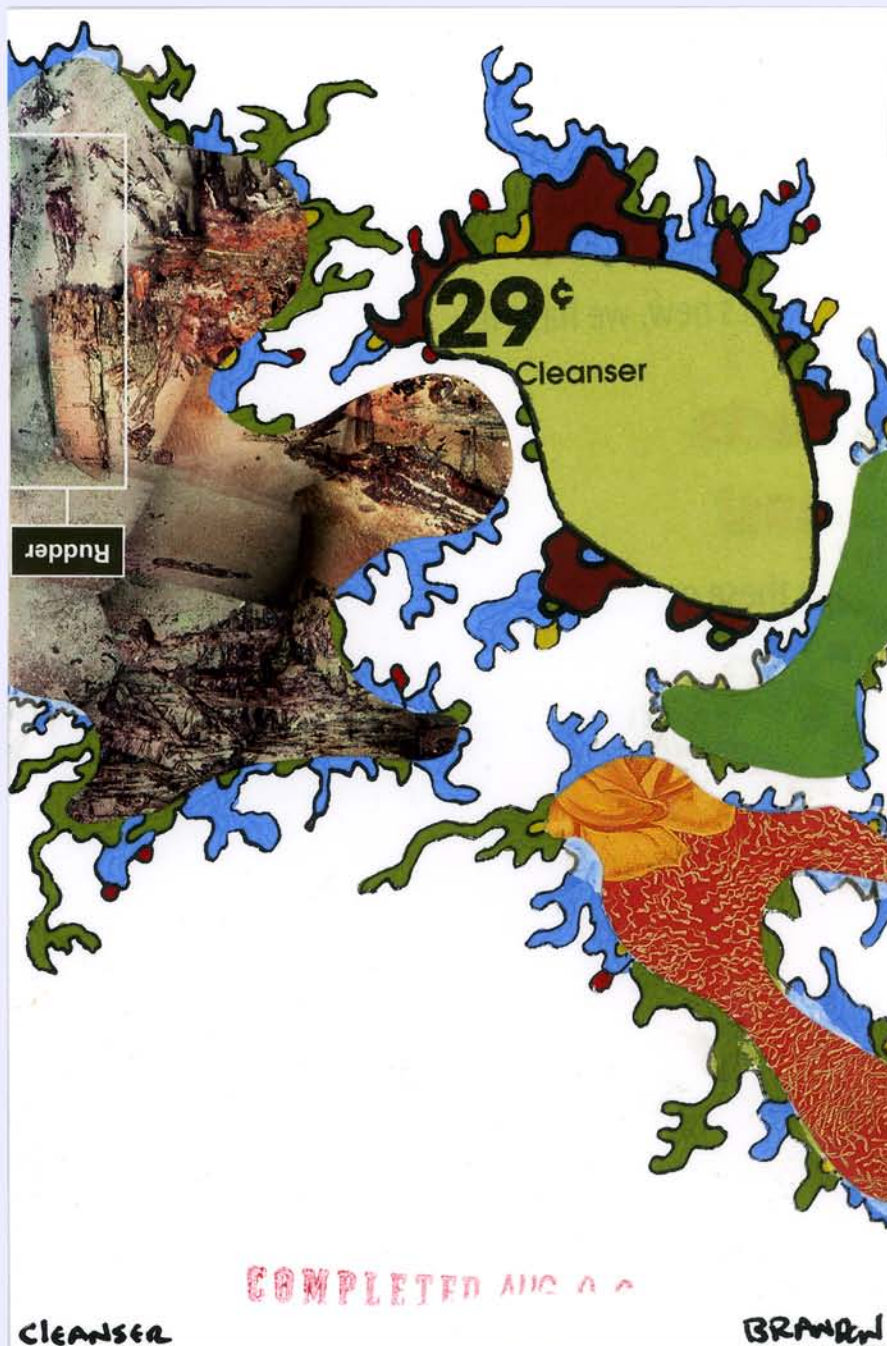


Amer  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper

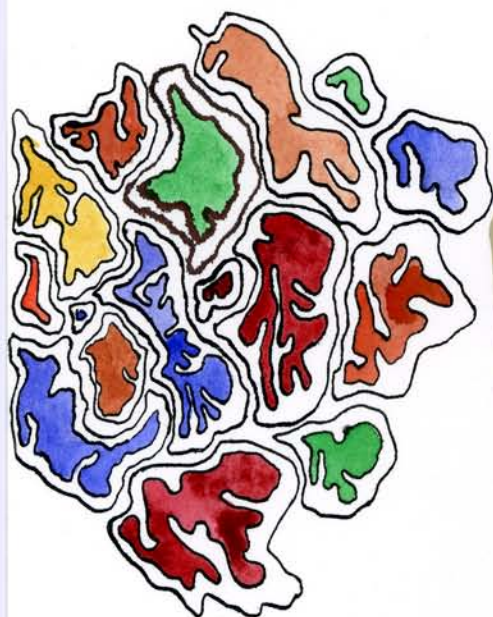


And  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper





Cleanser  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper



N almost any group of people endeavoring to amuse themselves with talk you will find: (1) The individual who talks all the time yet says nothing; (2) the silent listener; (3) the occasional speaker who usually has something to contribute; (4) the man or woman who speaks once; every one listens, and what is said is the last word.

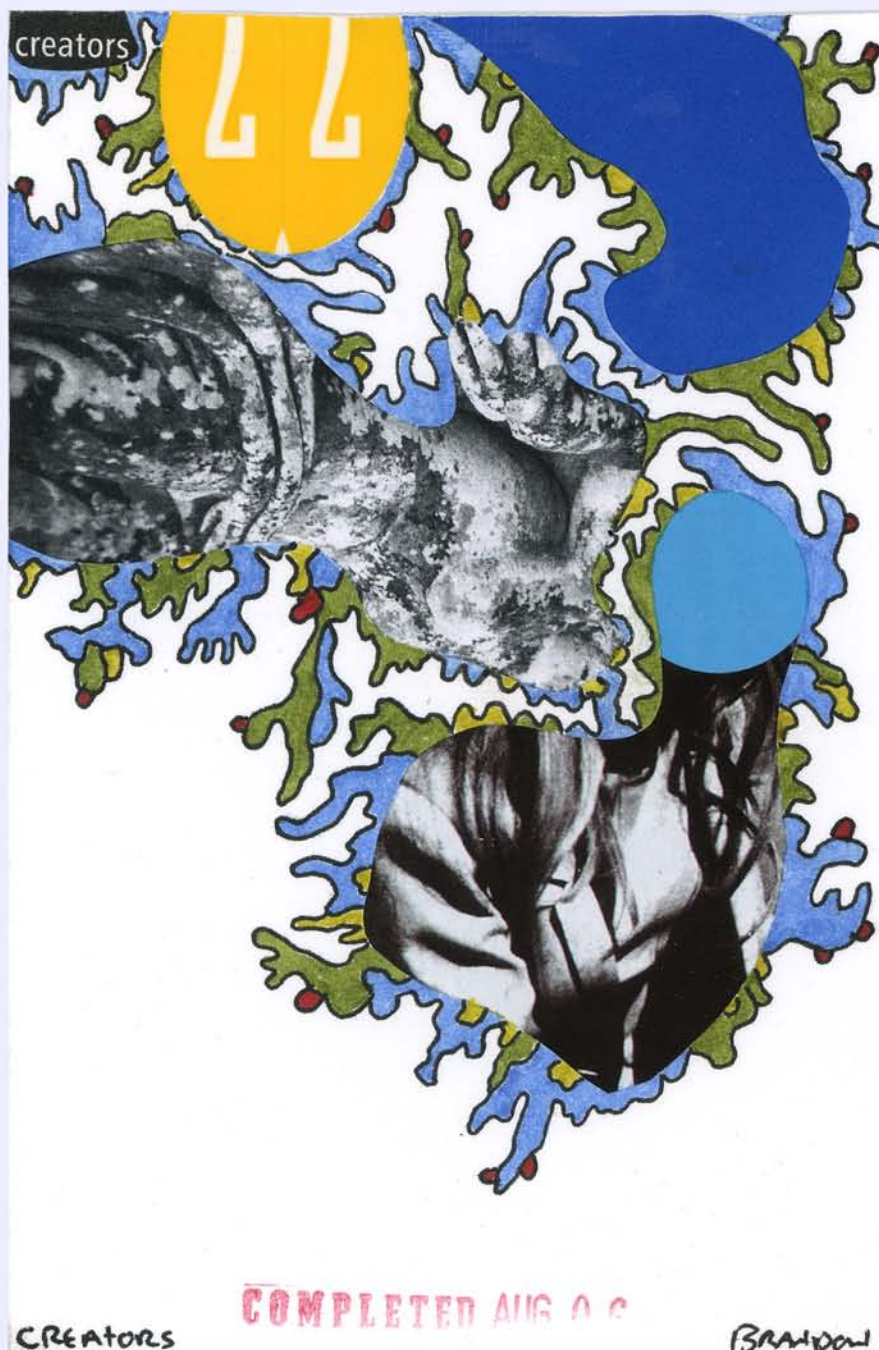


CONVERSATION

COMPLETED JAN 06

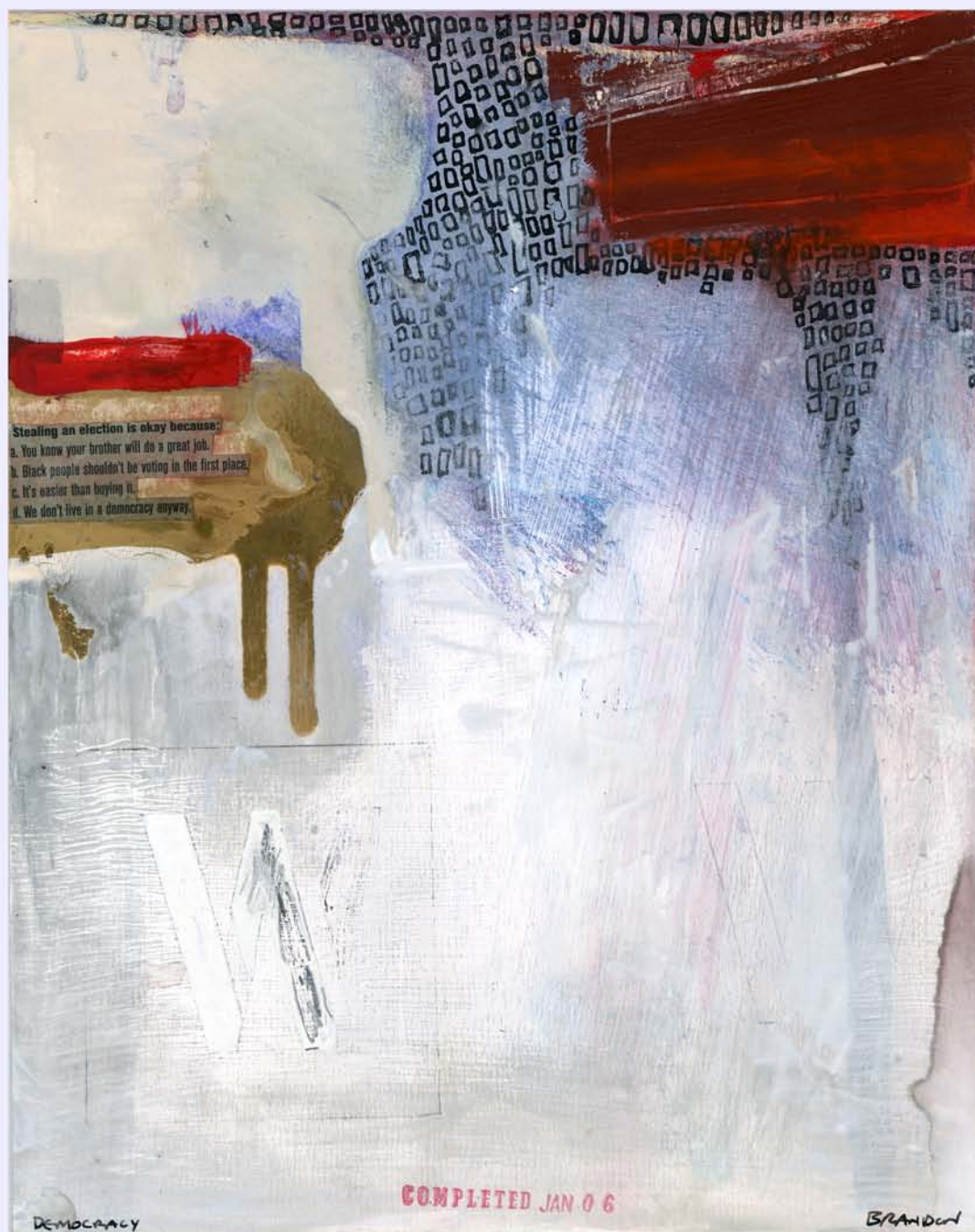
BRANDEN

Conversation  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper



Creators  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper





Democracy

8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard



Do Not Paint  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper





8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper



Generation

8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard



Grassroots Congress  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper



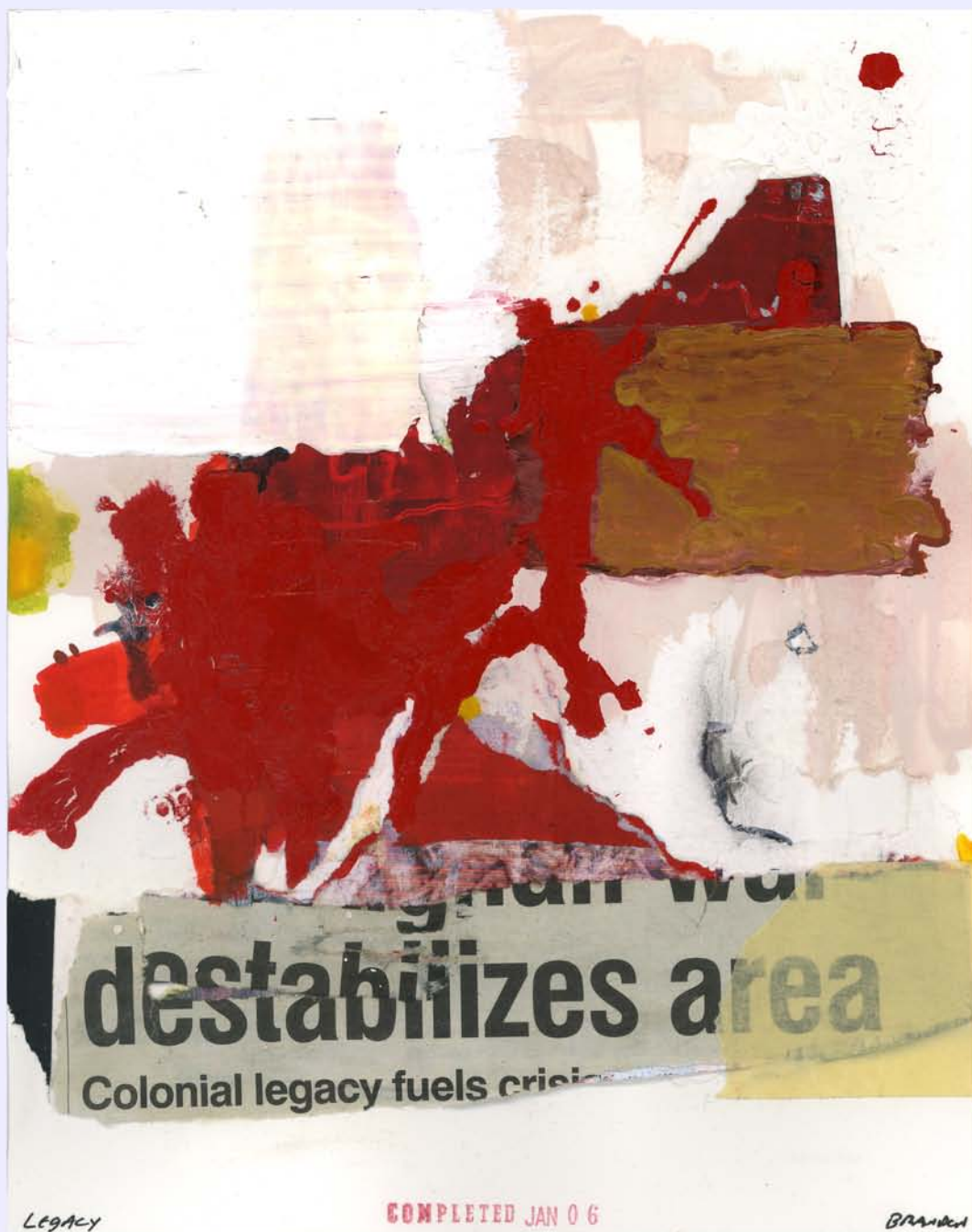


IR  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper



K Street  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper

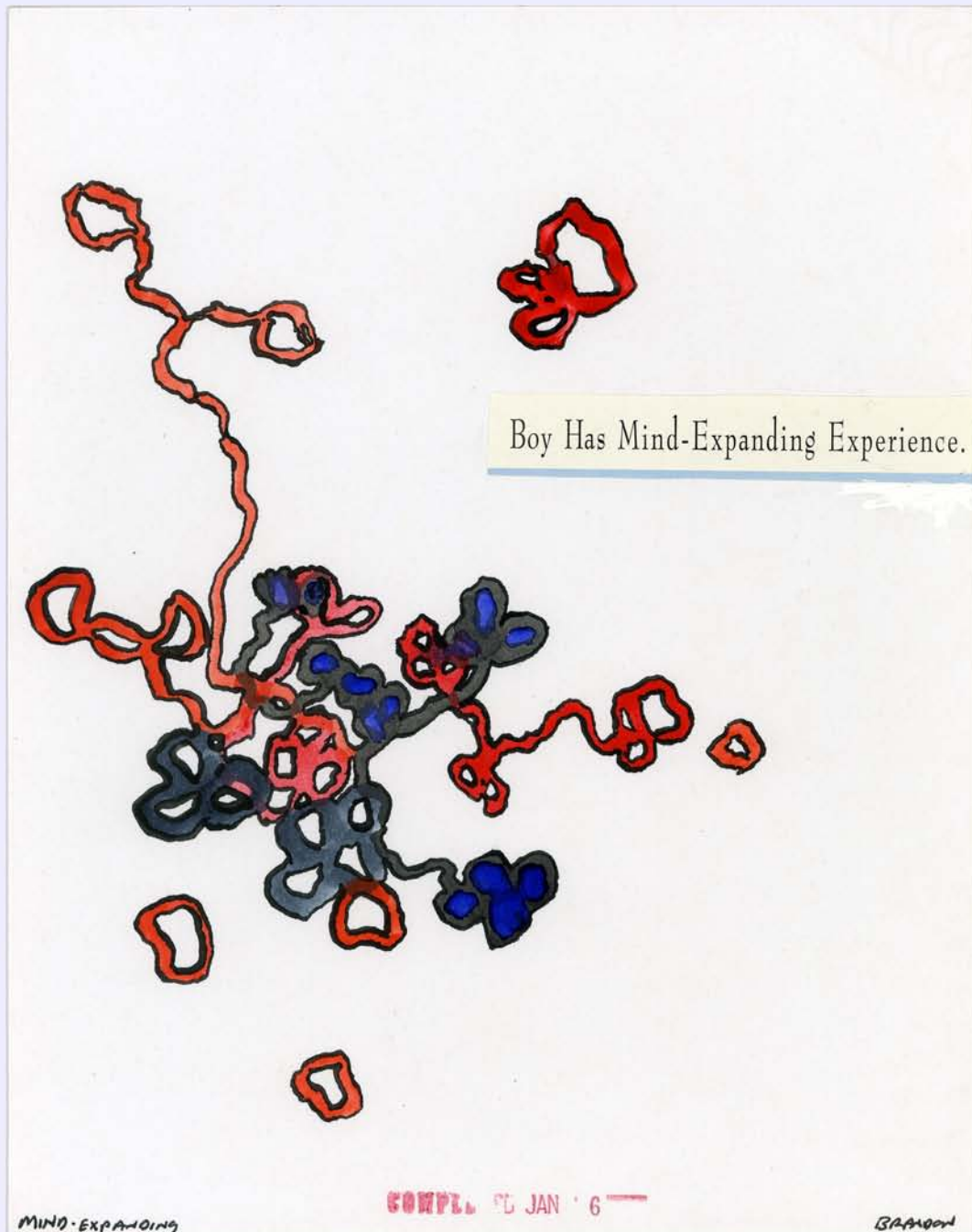




Legacy  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper



Logo  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard



Mind-Expanding  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard



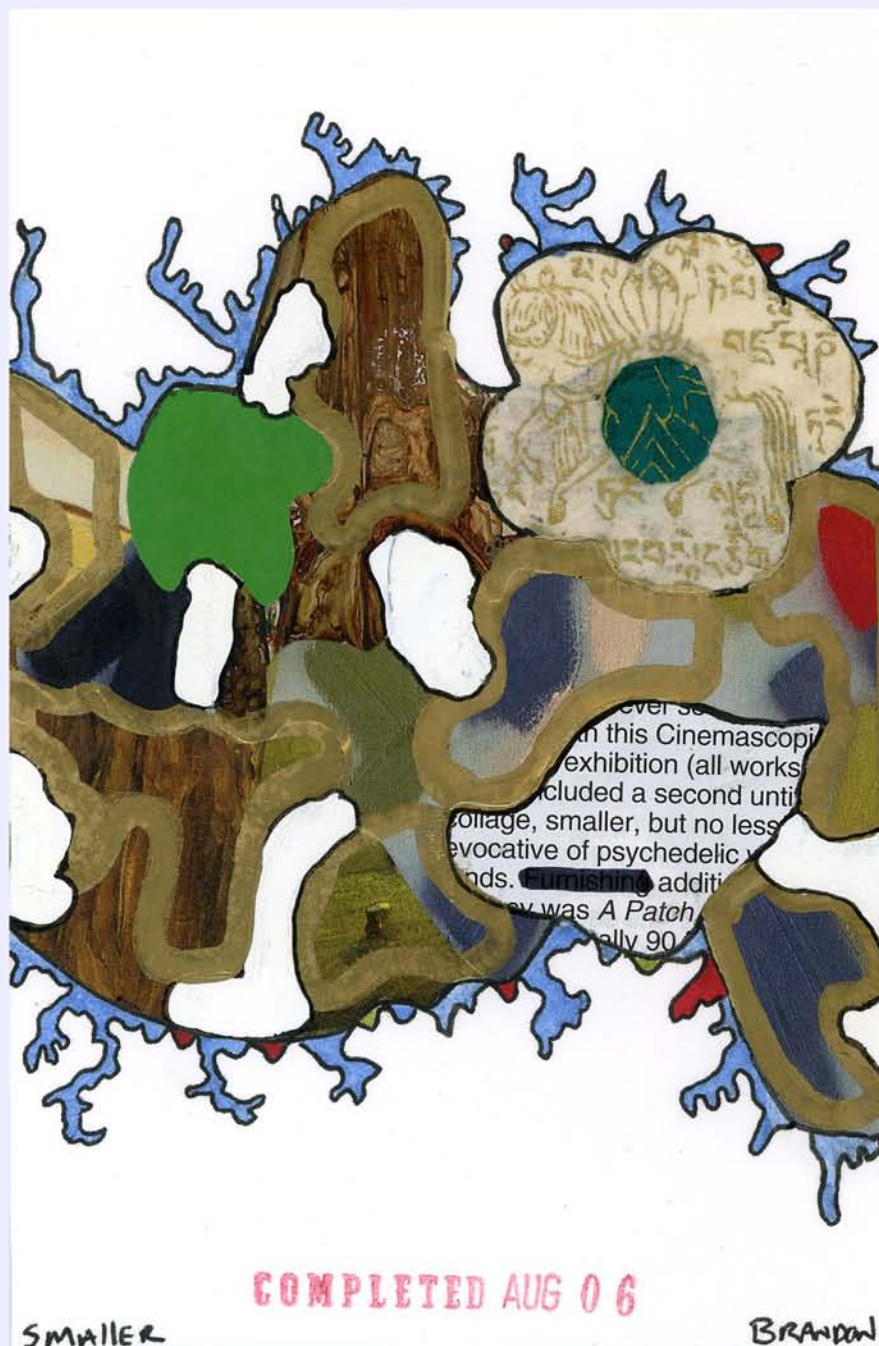
No  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard





Persistence Of Forms  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper

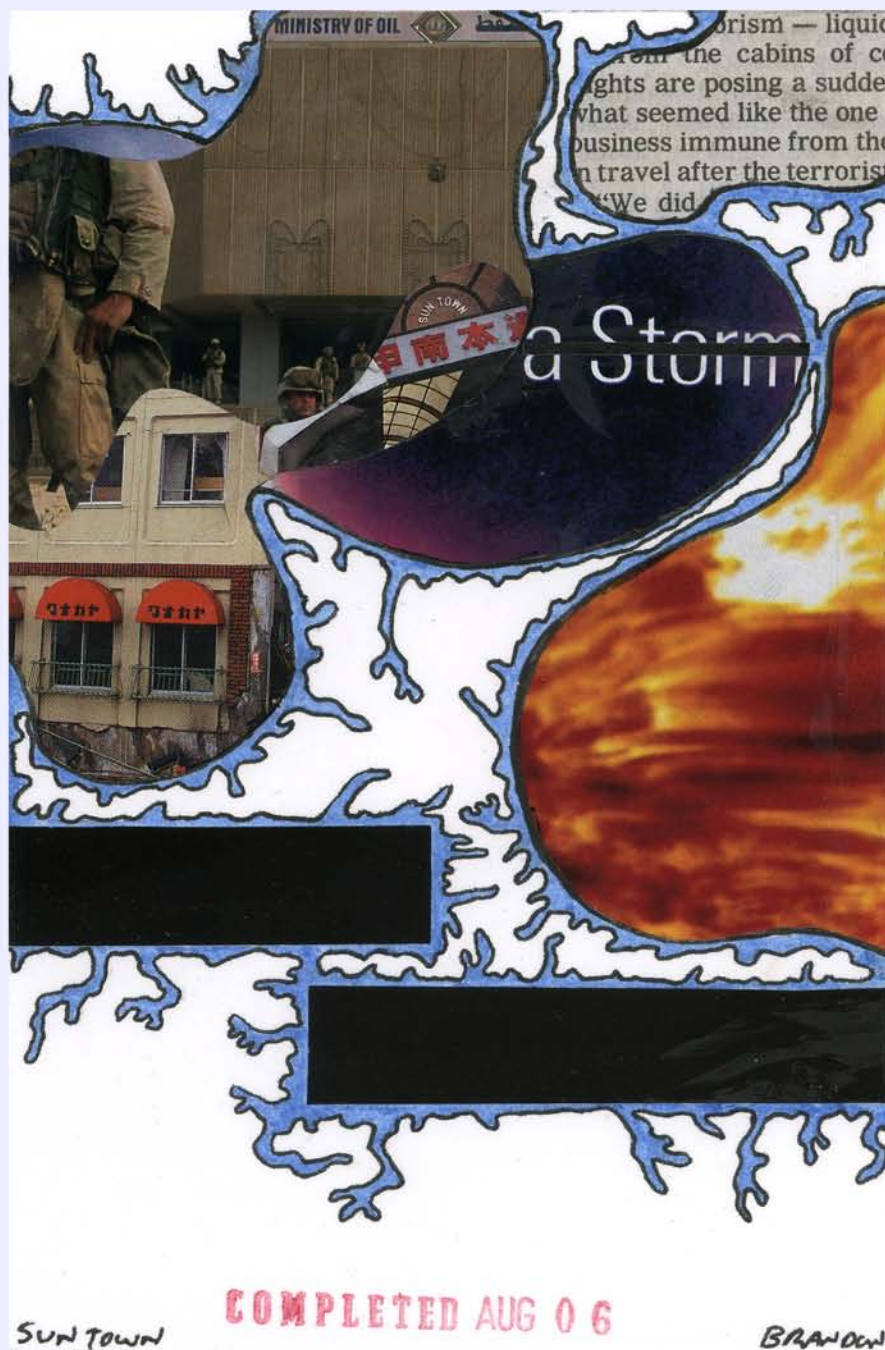




Smaller  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper

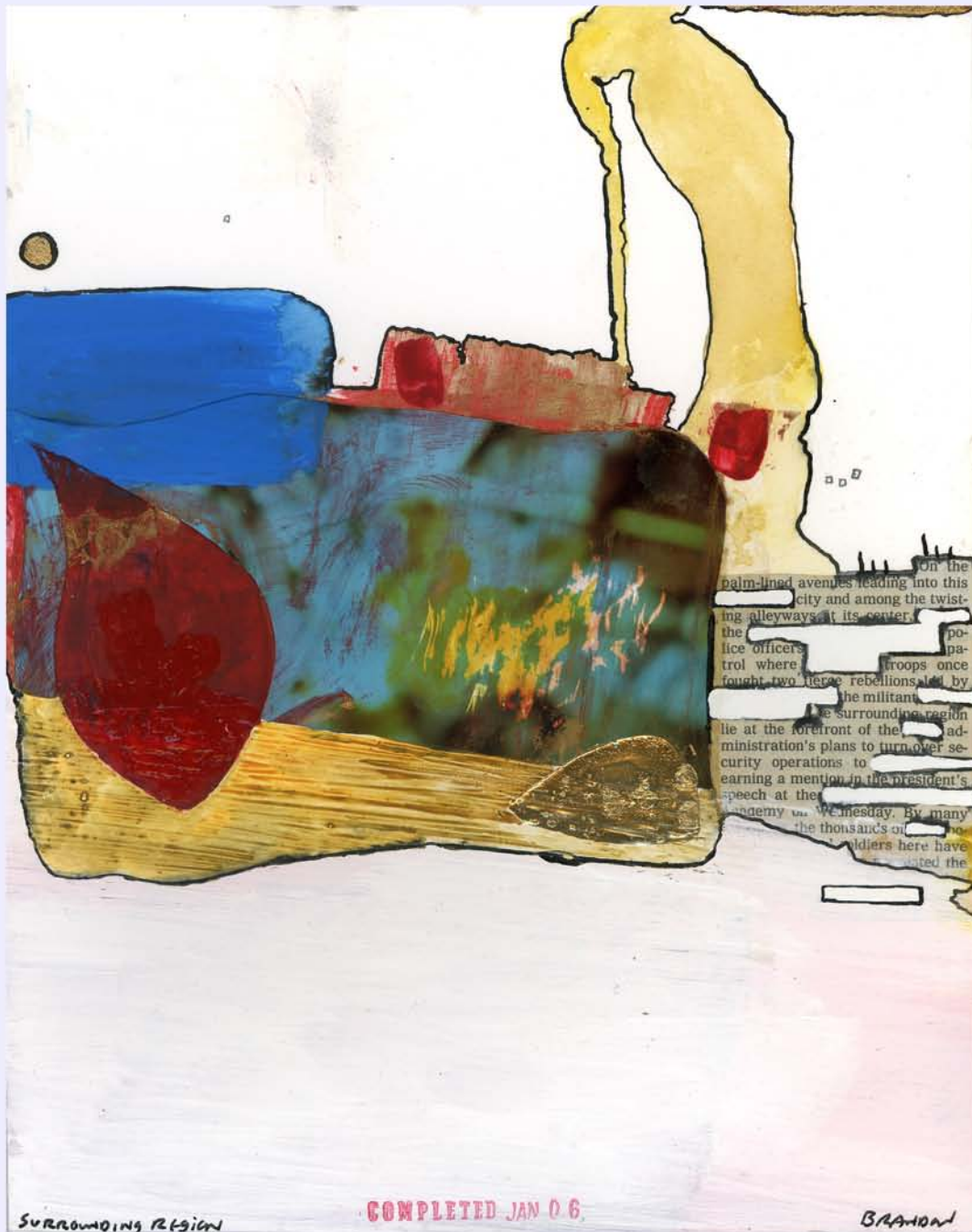


Spring  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper



Sun Town  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper





Surrounding Region

8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard

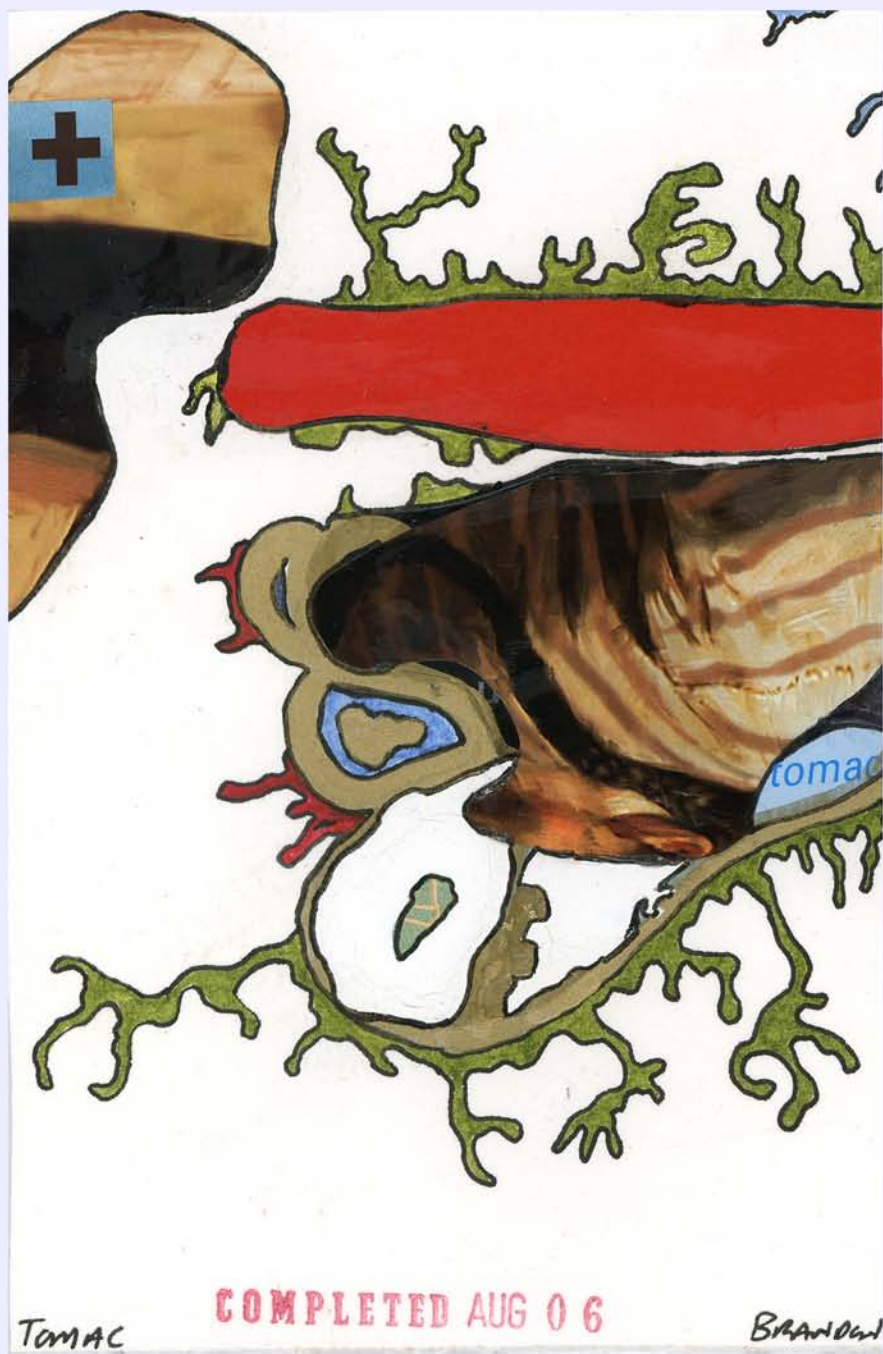


The End  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard





These  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper

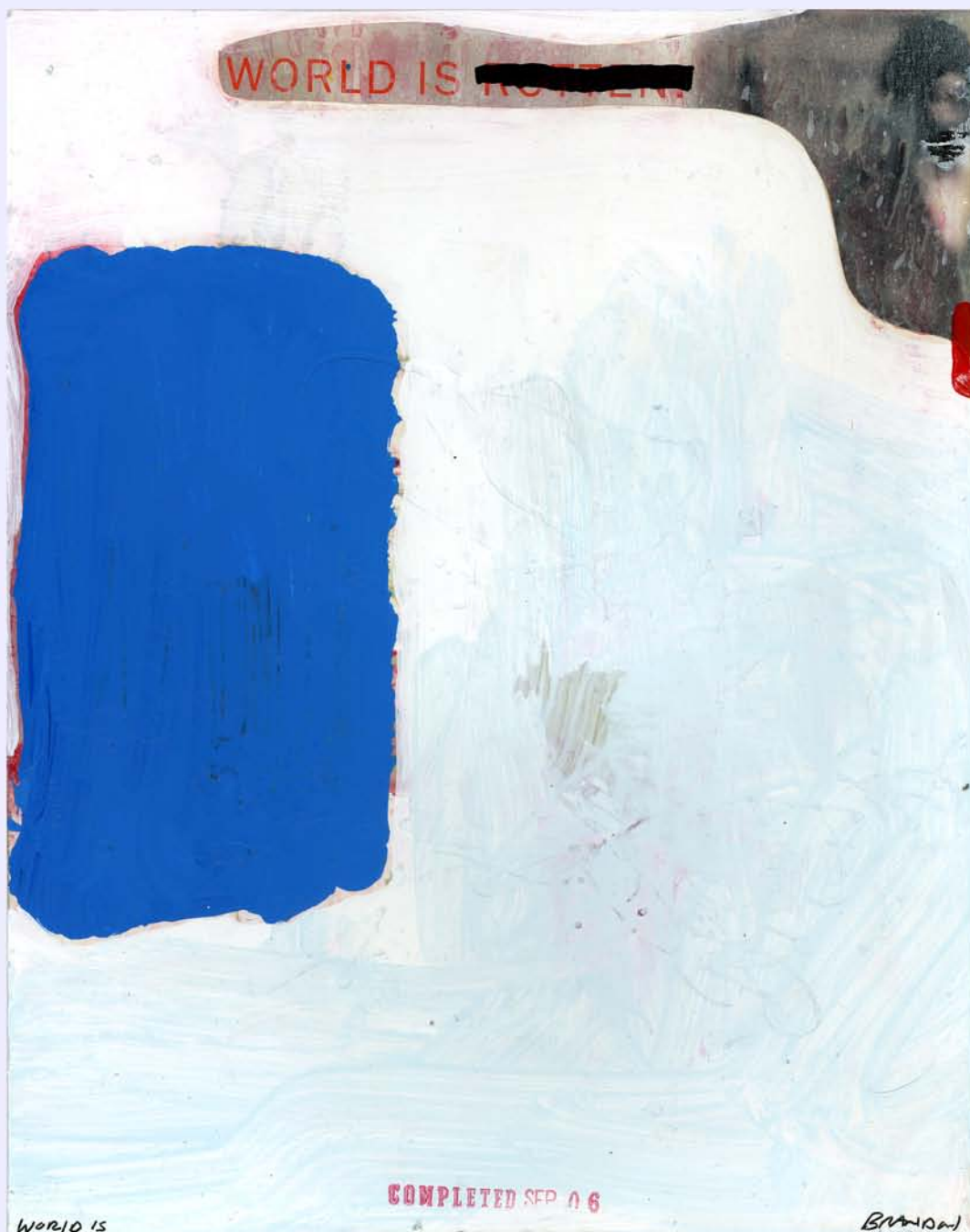


TOMAC  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper



War  
4"x6" Mixed Media & Collage on Paper





World Is  
8"x10" Mixed Media & Collage on Paperboard

## Artist Statement

This current work represents a departure from my past work in significant ways. Previously my work was larger in scale and had a recurrent motif of expressionistically modeled figures in barren yet abstract environments. In this new work I have retired the figurative element and have chosen an intimate scale. These recent explorations with line, form, and abstraction also have an added element of text.

The text functions on numerous levels in this work. I have explored the way in which text unconsciously motivates one to find literal interpretations of abstract elements. Some references to war and conflict have come from innocuous sources such as advertising and articles concerning competing consumer technology. Other textual elements are taken from older newspapers and publications creating new meaning. Regardless of the original source, the relationship between the text and abstract elements tends to present itself as a statement concerning current conflicts. It is intriguing that void of specific signifiers separating the words from their current social context creates unique challenges.

This body of work is still in an experimental phase of its development. My intention in this series is to continue the exploration of the relationship between abstract formal elements and text and how these two distinct elements interrelate and inform one another.

Brandon Bauer  
August 2006

**Barrow & Juarez** presents ***Contemporary Works on Paper***, September 1st - 31st, an exhibition featuring a wide variety of innovative approaches to paper media by contemporary artists **Vince Como**, **Brandon Bauer**, **Rafael Salas** and **Thomas Maguire**.

Being one of our most *affordable* exhibitions of the year, ***Contemporary Works on Paper*** includes a number of works under \$100 by some of the Midwest 's most promising emerging artists! This is your buying opportunity.

Please join us for a free wine reception from 6pm-9pm this Friday, September 15th to meet the artists, meet other arts-interested people in the area and buy art for your own collection.

#### **About our featured artists:**

**Vince Como** is a contemporary artist working in Chicago and is featured in the highly-acclaimed *Perfect Exhibition* in Chicago as well as the *Chicago Cultural Center*. Said by many to be one of Chicago 's most-promising new artists, his future is exceptionally bright. Como will be featured in *Western Exhibitions* in 2007.

**Brandon Bauer** is a professor of time-based media at the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design (MIAD). Bauer's newest multi-media works on paper address the contemporary international political climate and a world at war. Bauer's much sought-after work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, including New York & Paris . Priced between \$90 - \$280, this is a must-purchase opportunity as demand for this artist's work grows.

**Thomas Maguire** is a fine artist and industrial designer whose current projects include design of the much-acclaimed steel jungle at Discovery World as well as recently having an illustrated book published by Simply Read Books. As a fine artist, industrial designer and illustrator, this young artist is set for greatness. This is Maguire's first formal public exhibition.

The *Barrow & Juarez Project Space* features new contemporary oil paintings by **Rafael Salas**. Salas recently relocated to Wisconsin from a successful career and exhibition series in New York . Salas' unique compositional approach and technical sophistication underscores a deep introspective view on contemporary life.



**Gallery Information:**

Barrow & Juarez is located at the corner of Water & Buffalo Streets in Milwaukee 's Historic Third Ward in the Marshall Building , 207 East Buffalo Street in the lower level.

Gallery Hours are Tuesday – Saturday 12 – 6pm. Private after-hours appointments are available by email at [barrow@barrowandjuarez.com](mailto:barrow@barrowandjuarez.com) .

Parking in the Third Ward is free after 6pm.

***Also This Month...***

Starting September 28th, Barrow & Juarez will feature the first of its video & film screening series featuring innovative projects by national and international artists.

***NEXT MONTH> Stephen Lapthisophon's Far Off Places***

**We hope to see you there!**

Brooks Barrow

**Barrow & Juarez**

207 East Buffalo Street, Lower Level  
Historic Third Ward  
Milwaukee, WI 53202