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— LARRY MULLINS

Painted Verse

Larry Mullins '80, artist and educator

by Karen Doss Bowman '91

Larry Mullins' journey to becoming a painter was inspired by the elaborate illustrations on vinyl record album covers of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Growing up in Charlottesville, Va., Mullins said record stores were like art galleries to him, and he relished the time he could spend thumbing through the album covers. He said he was drawn particularly to the black-lite art posters.

“The late 1960s and early 1970s were very fertile years for visual art playing supporting roles to vinyl albums,” said Mullins, a 1980 Bridgewater graduate who now lives in Beverly Hills, Calif. “The artwork on the jacket outside and inside often reflected a spirit contained in the music. Groups of us would sit for hours and listen to and look at albums over and over, trying to squeeze out the meaning and metaphor and understand how they applied to the world around us. For me, that experience became important in sorting out what I wanted to say as an artist and how to do it.”

Featuring key words as “verses” in a mix of fonts that resemble styles ranging from Old English and calligraphy to

graffiti, Mullins' paintings are "hybrids that combine language and abstraction," he said.

The language—which can express his frustrations about society and culture, pay tribute to famous people or simply play with words—typically drives the resulting visual. Working much like an editor, Mullins said that he "over-paints" as he moves through the process, deleting or moving to different areas of the canvas words that don't fit or effectively express the ideas he wants to convey.

"My paintings are essentially made through a long process of attempting to visually ground language and letterform into an environment of simple shape and decorative fragment," said Mullins, who prefers painting in oil and alkyd resin on primed paper. "I'm basically looking for poetic relationships between the two, and the visual movement and architecture they create. The vibe of a painting is important to me—its implied message. The spit and vinegar quality."

For Mullins, the most challenging part of the creative process is finishing a work.

"Paintings are like novels—they can hold enormous amounts of information and can go on forever," said Mullins, who has been inspired by the art of Marvel Comics, as well as that of William de Kooning, Tom Waits, Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Lou Reed and Craig Finn. "I try and find a place of resolution between too much and just enough. This takes time and patience."

Mullins, who earned an MFA from the University of Maryland in 1996, earned a resident fellowship at The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Mass., in 1997. The next year, he earned a Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant and spent the year living and working in Denmark. In 1999, he moved to New York City, where he held a Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation Space Program Grant. He and his family moved to Santa Fe, N.M., in 2004, when he was hired to teach painting as an adjunct faculty member at The College of Santa Fe and Santa Fe Community College. They



"AWOL"

relocated to California in 2008, and Mullins currently is an adjunct faculty member at The Art Institute of California in Los Angeles.

Mullins' work has been exhibited throughout the U.S. and abroad at venues such as the Bellwether Gallery, Ace Gallery, Julie Saul Gallery, Danziger Projects, Clifford Chance, Adam Baumgold Fine Art in New York City; the Stalke Gallery in Copenhagen; and The Wash-

ington Project for the Arts and The Hemicycle Gallery at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. His work is included in private collections in Los Angeles, New York City, Washington, D.C., Santa Fe, N.M., London and Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Mullins credits his education at Bridgewater with providing "a very broad overview of what was possible with the tools and concepts at hand." Inspired by the longtime, beloved art professor and department chair Paul Kline, Mullins developed an interest in art history. He recalls going on several field trips led by Kline, including trips to Washington, D.C., and Italy.

"The late Paul Kline was both instructor and mentor to me," said Mullins, who has two teenaged daughters, Merida and Maya, with his wife, Josephine Axt-Mullins. "He was kind enough to overlook my rebellious nature and pass on a great deal of knowledge. In later years, he gave me a couple exhibitions at the College."

Now that Mullins is an art educator, he strives to teach his students that "art is discipline applied to an idea." He encourages them to practice patience in developing their personal aesthetic and to listen to the curiosities and ideas that keep popping into their minds over and over again.

"My advice to students is to listen to those thoughts because it's what separates them from the person sitting next to them," Mullins said. "It's crafting their individuality. With artists, you can't deny the you in you because that's all you have to work from. If you get in touch with that, it can put wind in your sails. It's about nursing your imagination and accepting your own notions." —