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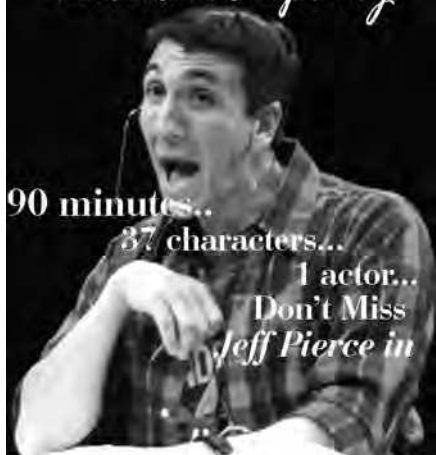
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Artist Andy Helps



A Genuine Bic-asso

Artist Andy Helps cuts a ballpoint path through adversity.

How many aspiring artists have sat doodling in the margins of notebooks, idling away the time while planning their masterpieces? And how many of them have, in the process, produced pen and ink designs of such soul-wrenching authenticity and surreal complexity that they command the attention of anyone who happens upon them? At least one has. And at 41 years old, Andy Helps is ready to bring his stunning collection of strictly Bic pen creations out of the margins, and into the public eye.

"I say I've been doing art for 15 years, but I've been doing it ever since I was a little tiny kid. I'm drawn to draw," says Helps, laughing. The artist's jovial personality and boyish grin belie a life fraught with recent hardship. Within the past five years, Helps has split from his wife, lost a house, an apartment and a truck containing all his belongings, spent four months in jail and six months living on the streets of San Francisco. Right now, he calls the Eugene Catholic Mission home, at least until he finds a way to make some money and begin collecting the pieces of his life again.

"I lost a lot of artwork because of how hectic my life has been," Helps said. Back when he was living out in the woods near Cottage Grove, Helps used to collect "artist's conk" fungi to use as canvas. On the streets, he would draw on paper plates or whatever was available. But he's never stopped drawing, and the pieces that have survived all the turmoil are worthy of their own exhibit. So with the support of Shawn Mediacast at Eugene's Museum of Unfine Art and Record Store, an exhibit is exactly what Helps is going to get.

"This may be the most important show I've hosted," said Mediacast, whose offbeat gallery has displayed the work of more than 500 artists, and who refers to Helps as his hero. "Andy is an astounding artist and person." Until now, Helps has only been able to distribute his art to a couple of underground 'zines, and that was back in the late 1980s. Widespread recognition of Helps' remarkable talent is long overdue, and this show

could be just the beginning.

The tortured figures and Dali-esque altercations of Helps' drawings are an open invitation to armchair Freudian analysis. But don't tell that to him. "It always seems like everybody has a theme to their art," he said. "So I kind of make it to where, there's nothing, there is no theme. I guess that is my theme: having none and just concentrating on the visuals." Fortunately, those visuals speak volumes.

Helps mixes bold lines with rich stippling technique, creating enormous depth and transforming the Bic pen from an item of disposable practicality into an instrument of unlimited artistic potential. "How can you really be totally original anymore, because there's been so much art thrown out there?" Helps asked modestly, and in the next breath answered his own question. "I just try to come up with something no one's ever seen before. I do what I like to see, what looks good to me, and hopefully other people like it too." **EW**

The art of Andy Helps will be featured at the Museum of Unfine Art and Record Store Dec. 1-14, with an opening party scheduled for Friday, Dec. 2 at 6:19 pm.



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— SHAWN MEDIACAST,
FEINSTEIN'S MUSEUM OF UNFINE ART

