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Petros Christostomou, *Megalomaniac*, 2008.
Edition of 5 + 3 AP, C-Print, 39 ½ x 31 ½ in. (100 x 80 cm), Courtesy of the artist and Nicholas Robinson Gallery.

ARTISTS TO WATCH

PETROS CHRISOSTOMOU
EVOL
ANNE-KARIN FURUNES
KRISTINE MORAN
CAROL PRUSA
HADIEH SHAFIE
JENNIFER STEINKAMP
RON VAN DER ENDE

How Did I Get Here?

BY BRUCE HELANDER

One of my favorite, inventive recording artists is the singer in the big white suit named David Byrne, who founded the Talking Heads while he was still an art student at RISD. And one of my favorite Talking Heads songs with some of my favorite lyrics is “Once in a Lifetime” (1984), which asks repeatedly “...And you may ask yourself—Well...How Did I Get Here?” After a chorus or two, the crooner asks more questions. “Where does that highway go? Am I right? Am I wrong? MY GOD! WHAT HAVE I DONE?” Byrne left art school after his freshman year, perhaps influenced by another set of his lyrics (“Why stay in college? Why go to night school?”) and made a beeline for Lower Manhattan, armed with a plan to tie together art, music and performance at CBGB’s and the Mudd Club. The formula worked, and scores of the other bands were influenced by his success. According to *Rolling Stone*, he helped change the face of contemporary music forever, and made “art rock” a household word. But, how did he get there? Well, apparently, he followed in the determined footsteps of other famous dropouts, from Microsoft’s Bill Gates (the richest man in America) to Adolph Ochs, early publisher of *The New York Times* to flying high with Richard Branson, a self-made billionaire who, perhaps taking a cue from Madonna (full of *Blond Ambition*), branded his businesses like a Virgin. The distinguished group of iconic quitters is so impressive that it’s hard to believe that it’s not a Dean’s List. Crave a drive-thru? Think diploma-less Henry Ford first, and then Ray Kroc. Need a quick haircut and blow-dry, think of Vidal Sassoon before attending a reception at one of Kemmons Wilson’s Holiday Inns. Photographers Ansel Adams and Weegee, painters Jean-Michel Basquiat and Claude Monet, actors Charlie Chaplin, Humphrey Bogart, Quentin Tarantino, Whoopi Goldberg and Sophia Loren, to name a few, dropped out of academia impatiently and prematurely to pursue their daydreams. Harry Houdini made magic without a degree and Thomas Edison turned on the lights for all of us without completing his high school science project.

So, it’s a bit of a twisted irony that so many prominent, creative people whose careers became hugely prosperous skipped out on a college education in mid-stream to go for the gusto, having the confidence that their passion could not wait for another semester

to pass and preferring to saddle up in advance for happy trails to seek their fortunes. The majority of flourishing artists did indeed graduate from college, but also they carried with them a burning torch for achievement that set the world on fire. A future article by our contributing editor, David W. Galenson, *Anticipating Artistic Success: Lessons from History*, carefully examines the clues to commercial and critical acclaim, including now prominent artists who indeed finished their art education with an academic degree or two, particularly from the Yale University School of Art. Taking a quick look at numerous artists whose careers became historic and financially lucrative, a few simple common denominators seem to float to the surface. For a start, unusual talent demonstrated at an early age is a required part of the mix, quite often accented with parental persuasion and encouragement. There are plenty of exceptional artists out there who could not muster up the support they needed to pursue an intuitive gift, and got lost along the road. A distinctive visual voice and a determination to explore all approaches and master an appropriate talent also are no surprise as basic ingredients for success. But taking for granted a measure of natural ability, it appears that drive and ingenuity are key elements in becoming an art star. According to Byrne’s hit song, “...And You May Ask Yourself, How Do I Work This?,” sitting around waiting to be discovered, either as an artist or an actor, just isn’t going to happen unless you “work it,” sincerely wanting recognition to happen sooner than later, and are willing to go beyond skill sets to an exciting real life plan. There is the story of Andy Warhol (a graduate of Carnegie Institute of Technology, class of 1949, who majored in pictorial design!), who left Pittsburgh with a one-way ticket to the big city and fifty dollars in his pocket to support his determined quest for fame and fortune. Becoming a sought after illustrator wasn’t enough for Andy, after he realized that morphing into a painter was the best circumstance to realize his burning ambition. Just over twenty years after his untimely death, Warhol outsells Picasso and just about everyone else with a legacy that definitely did not happen by accident. Accordingly, it makes good sense to realize that talent is not the only ingredient crucial to an investment in art that appreciates in value far beyond anyone’s expectations. As I have mentioned before in this



Petros Chrisostomou, *Wasted Youth (25 Ashbourne Ave)*, 2008, Edition of 5 + 3 AP, C-Print mounted on DIASEC, 39 1/2 x 31 1/2 in. (100 x 80 cm), Courtesy of the artist and Nicholas Robinson Gallery.

column, emerging artists to keep an eye on show a great aptitude for invention and uniqueness in their work. In the early stages of these careers, an independent spirit and a style that catches your eye with magical twists and pure originality is more important than anything else, but a strong desire to prosper needs to surface as soon as a beach head has been established and secured.

Artists mentioned in this section demonstrate many of the necessary qualities that have been summarized here, including Petros Chrisostomou, who successfully has refined an original concept into something inventive and memorable. His recent display of photographs at The Armory Show on Pier 94 in Manhattan offered the viewer a supernatural and theatrical twist on the depiction of common everyday objects, which are positioned surreally out of scale in a simple context that makes it difficult to separate reality from staged illusion. Which came first, the kitchen or the egg, begs the question in the wonderful C-print illustrated here, which leaves us scratching our heads for clues that a young Sherlock Holmes might find an impossible challenge without Watson's second opinion. The handmade architectural setting turns out to be a scale model of the artist's own kitchenette, complete with convincing but poorly constructed and laminated cabinet doors that don't close. Like the celebrated photographer, Laurie Simmons, who builds funky little dollhouse sets that provide a backdrop for her plastic subjects, Petros has developed a powerful photographic sleight of hand with his prints that are clever and convincing all at once. The artist challenges the viewer's natural familiarity with a normal do-

mestic environment by offering two misleading viewpoints of what might be real and what might not. There is a strong aesthetic weight added to the photographs' inventiveness by the artist through the use of these convincing pictorial juxtapositions that portray the impossible circumstances of proportion. With everything ready for opening night, Chrisostomou adjusts special lighting and off-Broadway conventional stage sets that spin around our perception and reversal of the recognizable spaces that we take for granted. Often the artist takes a disorienting, humorous approach to the placement of his unbalanced compositions, which adds yet another welcome dimension. Another mysterious image on view was that of the white interior of a mansion's great hall, complete with small fireplaces that hosted a swirling, vertical contrapposto golden wig fragment as a sculptural centerpiece, which seemed to take over the room's undivided attention like a living, pole-dancing smoke signal. In these works, deliberate fiction is stranger than fact. -BH

CORRECTION: VOLUME, 1 ISSUE 1, ARTISTS TO WATCH

In Volume 1, Issue 1 of *The Art Economist*, Geoffrey Farmer was featured in the Artists to Watch section. Our publication listed among his exhibitions a show at LAXART, which in actuality was canceled. The exhibition, Farmer's first solo show in Los Angeles, was showcased instead at REDCAT, and was curated by REDCAT assistant curator, Aram Moshayedi. *The Art Economist* regrets the error.



Carol Prusa, *Portal (Einstein-Rosen)*, 2011, Silver, graphite, titanium white pigment with acrylic binder on acrylic hemisphere and fiber optics, 50 x 50 x 10 in. (127 x 127 x 25.4 cm), Courtesy of the artist and Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

CAROL PRUSA

ARTIST TO WATCH

Carol Prusa creates a new vision of the powers of the universe in each artwork she makes. Inspired by cosmology and all of the natural sciences, Prusa creatively explores these practices, arriving at pictorially stunning re-interpretations of their theories. The artist says she "yearns to create a radical vision, taking into account the chaotic interactions of the formation of the universe, while critiquing claims of truth and fully embracing mystery." The materials and methods Prusa uses in creating her works are singular. She starts with specially fabricated, acrylic hemispheres, ranging from small bowl-sized to domes up to five feet in diameter, which are sandblasted and gessoed. She then employs the traditional technique of silverpoint drawing, enhanced with ground graphite and titanium white pigment. Her multi-layered, labor-intensive process can add up to hundreds of hours of work for the larger domes. In the newest pieces, fiber optics are added to the internal structure, creating pinpoint lights on the exterior. The detailed lines and grids networking across each

piece reference cellular systems, weather patterns or maps, and are combined with proliferating botanical and biological shapes, such as petals, stems, nerves, tongues and internal organs. The domes are like intricate, fantastical cartographies, vibrating with palpable energy. This energy is a result of the simultaneous depiction of opposing forces: internal vs. external, implosion vs. explosion and chaos vs. order, creating an exuberant visual experience. Carol Prusa's work shows us that the universe is profoundly limitless, and quite possibly only definable through the mind of an artist.

Carol Prusa, born 1956 in Chicago, lives and works in South Florida, and is represented by Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami. Solo shows include Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville and Arkansas Arts Center, and upcoming at the Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah and Kohler Arts Center, Wisconsin. Permanent collections include the Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale and Miami Art Museum. -KWT