

# Rob Tarbell

Selected Press,  
Publications,  
& Catalogs





Rob Tarbell  
 Full Screen I smoke and sugar on canvas, 36 x 42 inches

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Rob Tarbell

Smoke I smoke and sugar on canvas, 36 x 42 inches

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Rob Tarbell  
 Carrotbush I smoke and sugar on canvas, 36 x 42 inches

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## Rob Tarbell

Sarasota, FL  
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### Education

- 1992 MFA, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN
- 1990 BFA, Auburn University, Auburn, AL

### Residencies

- 2018 V.C.S.A. Residency, Praxeolab/Forest, VA  
 Rogers Foundation, Lake Forest, IL
- 2013 All Ages, Krause Gallery, New York, NY
- 2012 Joe and the Things in Things like Trees, White Box, New York, NY / Les Nœuds de Montréal, Charlottesville, VA
- 2011 Wynne Hunter, Krause Gallery, New York, NY
- 2010 Fellow of the White, Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, VA
- 2008, Reynolds Gallery, Richmond, VA

### Recent Exhibitions

- 2016 SCOFF NY, Krause Gallery, New York, NY
- 2015 Anatomically, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH
- 2014 Bone & White, Doris Ullmann Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2014 Bone & White, WMSA, Virginia Beach, VA
- 2010 Five Works, Haverford Art Museum, Haverford, PA

### Awards

- 2007 Professional Artist Fellowship, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

### Publications

- 2013 "Smoke Screens," *Installation Photo & Magazine*, #6, *The International Drawing Annual 9*, Marlboro Press

### Exhibitions

- Parsons K. and William A. Reed, Jr.  
*Wagon's Station II at NFA*

Represented by  
 Duverson Gallery, London, UK  
 Krause Gallery, New York, NY

My work is driven by the transformation and juxtaposition of traditional and non-traditional materials and the exploration of unorthodox techniques. The work balances accident with control and gains permanence in the ephemeral. The absence of an original and the use of alabaster processes are inherent to my smoke, painting, and collage-in-series.

All Ages reexamines the cut-and-paste Rorschach culture of punk-rock flyers. The unpredictable black lines of the Rorschach have been replaced by smoke captured to create an image on a surface. Though fictional, the imagery is documentary in character and parallels the balancing of accident with control, and chaos with its orchestration. The process encourages and discourages the flow of smoke, translating the photographs and collages into cover versions of the originals.



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# ROB TARBELL: SMOKE SCREEN

DISCOVER / ISSUE 08



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What began as a way to purge himself of artifacts of capitalism like credit cards and memberships, transformed into an unexpected journey taming smoke. **Rob Tarbell** describes his process of manipulating smoke, and making the unpredictability of fire become a lucid gesture that captures his wildest visions.

**Installation Magazine:** Your new body of work *Smoke* employs a complex, unusual and sophisticated method of taming and painting with smoke. How did you develop this technique to achieve this unusual effect?

**Rob Tarbell:** The smoke technique began around 2005 with a few ideas coming together to form a what if moment. The first idea was a self-help technique of burning sentimental things to remove their emotional connection or physical burden. After visiting the Sistine Chapel (after its cleaning and restoration), I saw the significance of the accumulation of smoke over time. After many failed attempts to create a portrait using liquor and cigarette smoke, the what if moment kicked in. What if I got rid of all my credit cards, membership cards, and gift cards by burning them and captured the smoke to create an image? Seeing the resulting smoke led me down the path that I am on now.

**How do you tame such a fragile medium?**

This work is created by controlling the accumulation of smoke on the paper surface. It is a purely additive process and results in a mark that my hand or a brush cannot make. It is also a different approach and product than directly burning the paper surface to create an image. The idea of working indirectly and controlling the conditions to create an image interests me. The process of figuring out how to make this technique work is also interesting. There wasn't much to go on other than trial and error, which as expensive as it is, has been rewarding. It is frustrating to create work this way, I never know what I am going to get, if anything, but that in turn leads to surprises. It's comical to think back about its beginnings. I started with a crude set up in a metal garage of my then girlfriend/ now wife, Anna. I was holding the paper above the flame, while holding my breath, then running out once I thought I had something. The setup developed around the idea that heat rises and the smoke has a flow to it and controlling the flow is key. I was clipping the paper to giant cable ties I found in the garage. Figuring out how not to get burned and how to stay in there longer was tricky. Now, I work in a room we built equipped with ventilation and a carbon air filter unit. I wear a flame resistant suit and use a fresh air system with a mask and air hose and have a pulley system rigged up. There are also three fire extinguishers handy, none of which I have had to use. I went through many, many trials of burning different things. The credit cards and membership cards worked well, but I found burning 35mm slides of my old work to be more satisfying. I wasn't getting rid of the slides as much as transforming them and infusing the new work with the old. Later, I acquired a slide library from an art history survey course. The newer work is informed by and infused with art history.

**How much time do you have from the moment the material burns until you can guide the smoke into the desired form?**

There is smoke immediately after lighting but I have to wait a little to get the good smoke. From beginning to end, the burn lasts about five minutes of good smoke time and depending on the size of the piece, I have to do more than one burn. I think the 40" x 30" piece I did for *Installation* took about 45 minutes of smoke time. Planning and prep time is whole other story.



JEN STARK - ISSUE 13



FEATURED POSTS



Are the scenes derived from your imagination or do you reference archive posters or photography from circus performances?

I researched the history of the American circus and then created my versions based on aspects of those. I found some incredible behind-the-scenes type portraits of circus performers doing their tricks outside tents during rehearsal. They seem to be taken for fun or documentation rather than for promotion. The photos are oddly intimate, playing to the photographer rather than to the camera or an audience. As informal as the photos were, they still had to convincingly perform their trick. I created my pieces with the approach that these weren't actual performances, but ones done for friends. So the people in the Smoke are my wife and friends dressed up in funny outfits and costumes goofing around, doing yoga poses or cheerleading stunts while jumping on a trampoline. Unfortunately, I don't have a live elephant handy, so I look at elephant photos and also replicas or toys. The zebras are actually horses, which are readily available where we live. The tents are drawn from photos I took of a craft fair that sets up in a park near our house. I like the fact that I am playing to the illusion that is at the heart of most circus acts—by creating convincing images that are by no means a true reflection of the acts actually captured to create the ultimate image. As made up as it all is, it is convincing. At one opening in Baltimore, I was approached by a woman who has spent her life performing in and managing circuses. She came specifically to ask me about my circus background, and asked my wife how long she had been riding and training horses. I am not sure she was entirely thrilled with my explanation that the performers were friends in pirate costumes jumping on a trampoline on my deck, but she did tell me the name of a few of the tricks I had managed to depict in my pieces.

I imagine that in honing your technique you must have put out plenty of fires!

There were a few harrowing failures and a few minor burns, but thankfully not very many. I am aware of what is going on but I am grateful for the gloves, fire resistant suit, and concrete floors. I have been lucky to lose only a few really good pieces I was working on. The potential for a flaming sheet of paper to come crashing down from above is a little alarming, but it keeps me focused. I strongly believe that failing is part of the process. In fact, it is the process of contemplating and producing new work that excites me the most – and failing is very much a part of that process. Constant tinkering – constantly trying something to have it not work out and then having to rethink my approach – is what drives me in my art production and ultimately my day to day life.

The circus celebrates a “smoke and mirrors” experience where audience witness animals performing tricks that are not part of their nature. What about the circus inspired you to make it the theme of your work? Do you feel that your process of manipulating smoke relates to theme of the circus because it is not in the nature of smoke to create figurative shapes?

After working with the smoke and creating gestural and abstract forms like rings and ribbons, I kept upping the challenge of what I could create. Squiggles are one thing, a representational image is quite another. In the early representational images, I saw the importance of the silhouette in describing the thing but also in describing the thing in space. Then it became a control game, how do I get the smoke to go here but not there? I saw a parallel in what I was trying to do similar to training an animal. The trainer must recognize and respect the innate nature of an animal when trying to modify its behavior to achieve a desired outcome. The same is true in working with smoke. The inherent properties of smoke must be respected, then permitted to – and yet discouraged from – acting naturally. I started with diving horses. I related to the idea of a something powerful being out of control but in a controlled environment, like the Atlantic City diving horses— minus the cruelty and sadness. Then came the dancing bears. Minus the cruelty and sadness, the guy tethered to something dangerous yet existing cooperatively was me. As I achieved better control with tonal values and as the technique progressed, so did the need for a more refined tricks. Not being a huge fan of all things circus, I was apprehensive about using it as imagery. I focused on the act of presenting a convincing trick more than presenting a dramatic scene from a circus. Everyone sees the resulting image and reacts to the content or history, without thinking about what the “trick” involves. There is also a significant parallel between the smoke technique and performing magic. It convincingly presents an impossibility.

How would you describe the stories that inform your artwork?

I am a chronic collector—my studio reflects that. My wife might say hoarder. I prefer a magpie, of sorts. I gather constantly and hold on to what resonates in some way. When a connection is made, that piece gets made or that direction is pursued. My nest is full of connections waiting to happen.

Your work was recently included in the exhibition Circus Pony at the Liminal Art Space in Roanoke. What's next? What are you currently working on?

I am turning down shows for the foreseeable future and not planning for any new shows for awhile. I am looking forward to just making lots of work without any deadlines. I have so many ideas I need to try, that I need the time to make mistakes and disasters and have time to develop possibilities.

PLAY-I ROBOTS: MEET  
BO AND YANA

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FEATURED CONTENT  
FROM CALIFORNIA AND  
IN BLANK WE TRUST  
ISSUES



*David Hildington, Take Me to the Moon...*  
David Hildington has always been fascinated by the intersection of the natural and industrial world. The museum where the exhibition from the urban space and the great beyond. The unbridled creativity of the eyes an evidence of this juxtaposition, as the river crosses below from the industrial world while following artists of nature that has managed to survive. [1]

## Up In Smoke: Circus Scenes Painted With Smoke

WEDNESDAY 03.06.2013 , POSTED BY JESSICA CZECK



Much like a ring master or circus performer attempts to train a wild animal, artist Rob Tarbell applied similar principles to taming smoke into the form of old fashioned circus scenes. To achieve the images, Tarbell mounts paper to the ceiling (in a metal garage with fire extinguishers nearby), then burns credit cards and old 35mm film below it, directing the smoke into the desired shapes. He uses his wife and friends as models for the human portions of the pieces and pictures of horses and elephants for the animals. The ghostly images under the name *Smoke Rings* will be on display from March 11- April 12, 2013 in a circus themed group exhibition at Roanoke, Virginia's Marginal Arts Festival.

### SEE ALSO NATURE VS MAN: CROSS SECTION DIAGRAMS OF THE FUTURE

In an interview with [MyModernMet](#), Tarbell explained:

"I was working off the premise of controlling the smoke, which turned into trying to get it to do what I want it to do while still doing what it naturally does. That sounded a lot like training an animal so I went towards that type imagery – bears dancing, zebras or elephants doing tricks. As my control got better, I tried more elaborate images and was pushing the technique to show more realistic values, which felt like the balancing acts or more elaborate tricks with an animal trainer and an animal performing – a direct parallel to how I was making them and how the smoke would act. The more I explained how I did this, the more people keyed in on the performative imagery of me creating them in my studio – so the trainer or ring leader took more prominence. I ran with performance and tricks metaphor, adding some corn and a little cheese."

To see more works by the talented and patient Rob Tarbell, check out his [website](#).



## Portraits Of Circus Scenes Painted By Smoke

By Sarah Lee, 07 Mar 2013

COMMENT

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Artist [Rob Tarbell](#) has created his art pieces by guiding the smoke to desired patterns and shapes.

Titled **'Smoke Rings'**, Tarbell first mounts paper to the ceiling and then burns credit card and old 35mm film below it, turning the smoke traces into beautiful images.

The artist also used his wife and friends as models, and pictures of animals to follow the patterns.

**"I was working off** the premise of controlling the smoke, which turned into trying to get it to do what I want it to do while still doing what it naturally does. That sounded a lot like training an animal so I went towards that type imagery—bears dancing, zebras or elephants doing tricks," shared Tarbell.

**"As my control** got better, I tried more elaborate images and was pushing the technique to show more realistic values, which felt like the balancing acts or more elaborate tricks with an animal trainer and an animal performing—a direct parallel to how I was making them and how the smoke would act."



**GLOBAL DREAMER**

**ROB TARBELL**

**ARTIST/PROFESSOR OF ART, USA**  
[www.robtarbell.com](http://www.robtarbell.com)


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Like tapping into visions from a child's imagination, Rob Tarbell creates whimsical circus-inspired images using smoke captured on paper.

**age** Old enough to know better.  
**born** Findlay, Ohio, USA. **thing that made the world sit up and take notice of you** Creating artwork by capturing smoke on paper has brought me worldwide attention. I never imagined being in a newspaper in Siberia! **describe yourself in ten words** Tall, creative, persistent, hard worker, patient, great daddy and husband. **gets you out of bed in the morning** Dottie, our 19-month-old daughter, is up at 6:00 am almost every morning, well rested and hungry. **idea of complete happiness** Having a healthy mind, a healthy body and a healthy life/work balance. **makes you different** A mix of creative curiosity, persistence, tenacity and the ability to embrace and learn from failing. And I am tall. **scares you** My wife would say black labrador dogs in the dark. I say hideous bloodthirsty beasts lurking in the darkness. **environmental beliefs** Recycle, reuse, repurpose. **biggest inspiration** I put more stock in hard work than inspiration. My brother just completed cancer treatments. He is working hard to defeat this cancer and is succeeding. He is inspiring me to work harder. **world you imagine** Can't we all just get along? **words of wisdom** Say please and thank you. Work hard. Give and give back.



## ARTICLES

# A View from the Easel

by [Philip A Hartigan](#) on October 24, 2012 

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## Rob Tarbell, Crozet, Virginia (site)



My studio is a walkout basement of my house. It was originally a dungeon of sorts complete with functioning ferret habitrail, but I have since renovated it so that it is a nice workspace with lots of wall space and movable walls attached to workbenches. After having countless studios open to the elements, this one is climate controlled and has easy access to loading in or out. It also has a door that does pretty well keeping the real world at bay or it can function as a glorious gateway to a sandwich. Nice.

The photo shows finished work and work in progress after a stint at VCCA Auvillar, a residency in France. Being abroad for a residency proved how few materials I needed to create. All possible fancy art materials were reduced to 2 ounce Higgins bottles, tiny cups, and an extravagant bag of scrap t-shirt rags. So when I got home, that is what I stuck with, although the scale grew to being larger than a suitcase.



ИНТЕРВЮ РОБ ТАРБЕЛ

## ДИМ ДА ГО ИМА! ИЛИ КВАДРАТУРАТА НА КРЪГА ОТ РОБ ТАРБЕЛ

Избирайки оригинална техника за обработка на фотокартините си, Роб Тарбел инвестира цялото си майсторство в дима. Да надникнем зад гъстата димна завеса и да видим как се осъществяват тези тайнствени превъплъщения – на огъня в дима и на дима в златото.

ОТ МАРИЯ ШИРЯЕВА

L'EUROPEO	
	<p><b>творчество – един празен лист. Какво чувствате, когато се изправяте пред двойната непредсказуемост на бялото платно и белия пушек, с който рисувате по него?</b></p> <p>О, мислех, че ще говорим за бита, а вие ме връщате към бието. Честно казано, никога не започвам от съвсем празен лист, а и не знам какво ще се получи накрая. Аз съм само съвтор, художествено око, затова по-скоро се възбудвам, но не се страхувам да преобразявам обикновеното пространство на платното в арт обект. Димът, а и пушекът като един от новите производни ми помагат в прекръщаването на тази граница. Те я разширяват, унищожават. И това е нещо като материализация на метафора за мен. Освен това и картините ми по своята същност или, ако щете, жанр са колажи. Едната, ловко балансираща на гърба на летящия кон, не е никаква ширкоба артистка, а жена ми, упражняваща йога.</p> <p><b>Йога ли?</b></p> <p>Йога – нали знаете? Много популярен спорт и философия едновременно, интересуваща се от различни трансформации на енергийните потоци. И ето ви една трансформация, надминаваща очакванията на всички зрители по света. Снимам жена си, а после създавам проекция на фигурата ѝ върху платното. А след това цяла редица на дима – малко разфокусирани контури, размаяни сенки. Тази техника създава помирява фотографските изображения с фантазматичен видения, всекидневно от извънредно-празничното. И бече не е възможно да разграничим фантазията от истината.</p> <p><b>Както и в цирка, който рисувате?</b></p> <p>Струва ми се, че циркът сега е последният погослон на чистото изкуство. Нещо като прирак в съвременния свят. Моят фотограф е също така едно странно изкуство, а е и размито, ефемерно... глупо заради дима, който „консервирам“ и по този начин спирам времето, карам го да застане в различни образи. Освен това ширкобите истории донякъде са метафорично отразение на технологическия процес. Укротяването на остана ми прилича на това как дрсират животните. Зверуокротителът трябва да разпознае характера на дивия си партньор и да се съобрази с природните му рефлекс и склонности. Въз основа на това вече се взима решение как да се модифицира победенето му. При мен нещата се побираят. Първо трябваше да</p>
<p>Геометрията на дима би могла да стане достоен предмет за изучаване от молекулярната физика, но науката едва ли щеше да се справи с предизвикателствата на непрекъснато променящи се периметри и траектории. Друго си е изкуството. Когато разглеждаш фотокартините на Роб Тарбел, на пръв поглед ти се струва, че те са нарисувани с въздух. Но това е вярно само донякъде, защото въздухът не е средство, а резултат, остатък от мигновите метаморфози. А белите неизбродени петна на картините се закръвяват в многобройни ширкоби „лук и сега“ благодарение на молява позната от физиката на ежедневието явление – горенето.</p> <p><b>Да започнем от самото начало...</b></p> <p>От това къде съм учил, в какви школи съм участвал, колко картини съм създавал досега и какви са ми плановете за блиското бъдеще ли?</p> <p><b>А не. Всъщност ми било интересно да чуя и това, но щях да ви питам за нещо друго. За началото на всяко</b></p>	<p>136</p>

L'EUROPEO	
	
<p>разбера естествените, присъщите на дима като на една физическа и химическа субстанция свойства, след това да ги убяжа и чак тогава бече да ги експлоатирам. Хм, експлоатирам ли казах? Не, не може да има никакви насилие, иначе вместо картини ще има жертвена клада. Аз съм само един мирен димоукротител – прекрасно се разбираме с дивия си партньор, оставам го да покаже на какво е способен и само го насочвам.</p> <p><b>И с какво храните въздушно си животни?</b></p> <p><b>От какво се получава идеалният за картините ви дим?</b></p> <p>Ха, това е най-интересното. Научих се да правя от нищо нещо. Прекрасна антикризисна рецепта. Изгарям най-различни предмети от бита като например снимки и кредитни карти, улавям дима и го насочвам към фотоколажа, който преувелително е поставен на табана.</p> <p><b>Това не е ли опасно?</b></p> <p>Има определени рискове, нали ви казах, че съм димоукротител. Доскоро работех в един гараж, но много бързо се убедих, че осяват е много непредсказуема стихия. Затова в моята къща си оборудвах напълно изолирано помещение за „запичване“ и „опушчване“. Имам си специално конструирано устройство за концентрацията на дима, заподобяващо въвеждамата лампа на Аладин, работя в</p>	<p>пълна бояна екипировка, подсиуряваща достъпа на кислород.</p> <p><b>А как изобщо стигнахте до тези експерименти?</b></p> <p>За пръв път „арестувах“ дима през 2007 г. – а сякаш беше вчера. Това ми хрумна съвсем спонтанно, не се получи кой знае какво, но тъй самият процес взе, че ми хареса. Оттогава си усъвършенствах и техниката, и инструментите, но принципът си остана един и същ. Създавам нещо размито и имажинерно, в същото време творческият процес иска прецизност и акуратност: едно небитователно движение и свещендействието трябва да започне от нула.</p> <p><b>Дотук установихме, че рисуването със сив дим и черен пушек е едно... чисто изкуство. Сега пък стигаме и до свещендействието?</b></p> <p>Казах „свещендействието“, защото се сетих за ширкобите ритуали на окаяване... Виждате, още един образ и паралел едновременно. (Смее се.) И няма значение дали си властелинът на дима или просто аматьор – преди всичко си творец. Винаги си мисля за това. А и се чувствам малко мажорстик, защото с изгарянето на материалното правя чудеса, не по-малко материали при това. И по този начин спирам мига. А кой не би мечтал за това?!</p>
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# THE SOUTHEAST REVIEW

## SEROnline, Summer 2012

July 16, 2012



The Struggles

**Rob Tarbell**

The Struggles are the remains of a stuffed animal after being infused with porcelain slip, formed and fired. They signify the acts of cremation and preservation, and transformation; in subject, concept and material. Each Struggle recalls the emotional past of a toy while suggesting a new potential for narrative or play.

Rob has shown in eleven solo exhibitions and more than fifty group exhibitions throughout the United States, Korea, China, England, and Canada. He earned an MFA in painting and drawing at the University of Tennessee and has taught art and design at Limestone College, James Madison University, Virginia Commonwealth University. He is currently Assistant Professor of Art at Piedmont Virginia Community College. Rob has been awarded multiple fellowships and honors, including a 2009 fellowship at the Virginia Center for Creative Arts and a 2007 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Professional Artist Fellowship.

**Rob Tarbell and Douglas Boyce fuse visual art and musical composition**

**Abstract grace**  
by : Sarah Sargent

A collaboration between visual artist Rob Tarbell and composer Douglas Boyce, "Bird-like Things in Things Like Trees" was conceived two summers ago during an artist residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in Auvillar, France. While there, both men became captivated by a distinctive birdsong. Their unsuccessful quest to identify the bird became a kind of metaphor for their situation as strangers in a foreign land trying to figure out what people were saying and how to navigate an unfamiliar landscape.

Tarbell had initially intended to continue the lyrical smoke paintings he's known for, but became ill and couldn't do them. The most he could manage were small colored ink drawings. He would begin working after Skyping with his pregnant wife back in Charlottesville, likening his artistic transformation to a kind of Couvade Syndrome (sympathetic pregnancy). His work came with a newfound freedom, and though he didn't know they would have a girl, he used plenty of pink ink. The drawings showcase Tarbell's assurance with form, gesture, and composition. His colors are vibrant and inventive in their pairings, and it's clear he's reveling in color after years of working with smoke.

Tarbell is clearly interested in space. In his large pieces, he layers ink-tinged polyester several inches above Mylar (imparting a hard candy luster) to create pieces that seem to hover in space. Light is an integral part of the work, and he uses it to play with foreground and background: It passes through the translucent ink, staining the polyester surface to hit the Mylar below, which reflects it back onto the surface in patterns that echo the ink image on top. To underscore this expansion outward from two-dimensionality, Tarbell jettisons the rectilinear picture plane for more unconventional amorphous shapes.

Both opaque and translucent, with surfaces that recall the Mylar, his glass horns reference gramophone horns (a café in Auvillar put a gramophone outside each day to play, providing a soundtrack to the VCCA fellows' experience), which, as Tarbell says, "give sound a visual presence," tying in nicely with his collaboration with Boyce. "Obscura Horn: I Woke Up in a Camera Obscura" refers to the serendipitous camera obscura created by a hole in the wall of Tarbell's room. "I awoke from a nap to find a real time movie of cars driving by, people walking, the bridge, trees, sky, and clouds clearly projected on the ceiling and on two walls above and around me," he said. "Obscura Horn' parallels that phenomenon. One horn brings the outside scene (the cloud) in and sends it through the wall, out through the other horn and onto the ceiling.



**"Horn 1, 2012" is one of the camera obscura pieces included in the exhibit at Les Yeux du Monde. (Courtesy of Les Yeux du Monde)**

**Rob Tarbell and Douglas Boyce, "Bird-like Things in Things Like Trees"**

*Les Yeux du Monde*  
**Opening reception July 13**

Douglas Boyce's composition—in reality an interlocking network of compositions—is intentionally enigmatic and fragmented. "Speculative ornithology" is how he describes "Bird-like Things in Things Like Trees." In a larger sense, the piece is about conjecture and reality: How do we make sense of a world in which we only have access to its fragments.

"Bird-like Things in Things Like Trees" (presented in conjunction with the 2012 Wintergreen "Innovation" Summer Music Festival) is an ambitious piece, displaying the inventive nature of artists who take something ordinary like a bird song, pursue it in various ways, and arrive at interesting, existential responses. A live performance of Boyce's piece, featuring Harmo-nious Blacksmith, will occur on Friday, July 13 during the opening reception.

I was particularly taken with Tarbell's most recent work "Volée et Brûlée" (a reference to a spate of car thefts and burnings occurring in France in 2010), small abstract paintings that reintroduce smoke. These are both graceful and substantive. Some are cut in two with exposed edges painted an arresting fluorescent orange. Tarbell uses the same paint on the backs and sides of the frames to produce a glowing aura.

Derived from the songs and flights of the Auvillarian birds,

# Вечные ценности Эксклюзивное интервью

## Клубящиеся полотна Роба Тарбелла

«Работа цирковых артистов с дрессированными животными очень напоминает работу с дымом», — считает американский художник Роб Тарбелл (Rob Tarbell). Ведь, чтобы получить желаемое, мастеру нужно обуздать его поведение, и так же, как укротитель, хорошо понимать и уважать природную сущность «огненного зверя». Именно поэтому для создания своих удивительных полотен Роб использует не кисти и краски, а горючие материалы. Так, при помощи копоти, содержащейся в обычном дыме, была создана замечательная серия «Кольца дыма» (Smoke Rings), которую художник посвятил искусству цирка. О себе и своем огнюпоисном творчестве мистер Тарбелл любезно согласился рассказать забайкальцам.

— Мастер Тарбелл, расскажите немного о детстве и о том, как Вы пришли в мир живописи?  
— Мои самые теплые воспоминания об этом времени связаны с рисованием иллюстраций для рассказов, которые я считал настольными книжками. Кроме того, всегда старался получить живую копию, где только мог. Особенно в Кленлендском музее искусства. В детстве мне часто везло гулять для зарисовки пейзажей. Там же я был свидетелем стрелити, и пока другие дети рисовали скульптуры Родена, пытаясь изобразить подвздошной мидии, тогда в впервые стал проявлять независимость, утверждая личный интерес к миру животных.  
Постепенно стал рисовать рисованием все больше времени, затем поступил в колледж на отделение живописи и графического дизайна. Никогда не было и мысли о том, чтобы бросить рисовать!

— Вы из художественной семьи?  
— Моя мама — исключительно творческой натурой, особенно в области вышивания и работы с тканями. Вся моя жизнь она придумывала и создавала удивительные вязальные кружева, квилты (искусство лоскутной аппликации). Однако изобретениям разнообразной ткани, созданным маленькими стежками, — прим. авт.) и все, что только можно создать из ткани. Можно сказать, столица у истоков моего будущего искусства. Она была большим другом и моим главным вдохновителем, что также очень важно в любой семье. Он велосом поощрял мои занятия живописью. И, в конечном счете, настаивал на подлинности моего таланта, чтобы заняться бизнесом.  
— А кто более всего повлиял на Ваши профессиональные достижения?  
— Я не думаю, что кто-то или кто-то смогло повлиять на меня больше, чем



## Эксклюзивное интервью

оплачивать счета и переживать между продавцами наших работ. Большую поддержку оказал профессор Майкл Смитсон (Michael Simpson), позволил мне не ходить на некоторые уроки. Он смог увидеть в моих работах перспективу и помог мне закончить школу. По окончании этого я замесился только живописью — творчески развивался и пробовав себя в разных сферах, благодаря чему и стал тем, кем сейчас являюсь. Эксперимент стал основой моего творчества.

— А где Вы живете и работаете сейчас?

— В настоящее время я живу в городе Фронт, шт. Вирджиния, США вместе с женой Анной и маленькой дочкой. Навс

Обстоятельства четверок. Но окончательное решение пришло после ссоры с подругой моей женой Анной. Она тогда очень сильно выжидала и много кричала. Нужно сказать, что жили мы тогда в Ричмонде, шт. Вирджиния — таковой столицей Союзных Штатов. Поэтому у меня родилась мысль нарисовать ее портрет с помощью темного линолеума и сигаретного дыма. Однако затем не удалось — сигаретный дым вел себя совсем не так, как я рассчитывал. Тогда в воскресенье я купил карандаш и попробовал поджигать его, что привело к появлению красивого густого черного дыма. Я начал думать о том, как научиться им управлять для создания картин. Много раз пробовал за это и бросил, давая метод проб и ошибок.

— И какие работы стали Вашей первой картиной из дыма?

— Вначале я делал множество символических набросков. Затем начал изображать цирковых животных — танцующих медведей, слонов, зебр и лошадей, исполняющих трюки на арене цирка. Так появилась моя серия «Кольца дыма».

— Вы избрали цирковых представителей в качестве основной области творчества, словно дрессировщик, работающий с дикими животными?

— Именно так. Дрессировщик обязан знать и уважать природную сущность зверя, чтобы управлять его поведением и получить желаемый результат. Например, заставляя медведя танцевать или обучая лошадей ходить на задних ногах. То же самое — с дымом. Мне приходится уважать

— Мастер Тарбелл, а Вы не пытаетесь использовать вместо кредитных карт другие горючие материалы? Чтобы получить, к примеру, темные оттенки?

— Я пробовал поджигать различные дымовые шашки, однако не смог получить то, что хотел. Для производства разных цветов я использую дым вместе



с краской. Однако предостерегаю: для горения материалов дают только черный дым. Действие той или иной краски во многом зависит от действия самого дыма, просто для ее передачи вместо горючего воздуха используется вода, аэриальная краска и т.д.

— Трудно ли контролировать дым, заставляя его рисовать?

— Работать с дымом очень сложно и не менее увлекательно! Приходится постоянно думать, как заставить его работать на себя, сделать так, чтобы он вел себя именно для создания — словно кисть или уголь. И мне по душе сам процесс рисования — вся последовательность операций. А постоянное совершенствование — отличный стимул для создания новых произведений!

— Сколько примерно времени уходит на создание одного дымового полотна?

— Создание одной картины, выходящей в серию «Кольца дыма», происходит в несколько этапов и требует немалых усилий труда. Сначала я делаю индивидуальные фотографии, для подготовки и создания которых требуется масса времени. Затем из этих фоторабот необходимо сделать набросок будущей картины. Потом составляю план и подготавливаю бумагу и горючие материалы. В целом на создание одного — одного полотна уходит от одного до четырех месяцев.

— Вы уже участвовали в персональных выставках и семинарах или в других странах?

— За последние пять лет я провел 12 персональных выставок работ, выполненных с помощью дыма. Все они проходили на территории Союзных Штатов — в Нью-Йорке, Сан-Франциско, Далласе, Атланте и Вирджинии. Кроме того, мои дымовые картины участвовали во многих коллективных выставках в Союзных Штатах, Китае, Корее, а последние — в Польше и Бразилии. В один прекрасный день надеюсь устроить выставку в Чехии!

— Расскажите, пожалуйста, о Ваших творческих планах. Будете ли продолжать работу над циклом «Кольца

дыма» или обратиться к чему-то новому?

— В настоящее время я работаю над проектом, который называется «Проекты на птиц и лошадки на деревьях» (Birds Like Things and Things Like Trees). В нем будут использоваться слои краски, нанесенные на полиуретановую основу из полиуретана и покрытые лакокрасочными панелями. Раскрашенный полотно имеет вытисненную обильную форму и будет установлен на основании — подрамнике. Работы выглядят как стеклянная пластина, в тонкий слой чернил в отраженном свете делают их привычными и заставляют блеснуть. Однако эту выставку вместе с современным композитором Джимом Дугласом Боллом (Dr. Douglas Bolus). Он написал произведения для камерного оркестра, основанные на моих работах — музыка будет ложиться на слушателям слухом, заворачивая с помощью разных звуковых эффектов. Впервые мы уже продемонстрировали свой проект в галерее «Ле Ю де Монна» (Le Yeu de Monna) в Вирджинии, и собираемся показать ее в «Уайт Бокс» (White Box) в Нью-Йорке. Этот новый проект очень много значит для меня.

— На многих Ваших работах из серии «Кольца дыма» изображены лошади. Что для Вас означает это животное?

— Лошади — удивительные создания! Своим великолепным телом они словно бросают вызов художнику, они как будто созданы для искусства. К тому же, лошади ассоциируются у меня с множеством лошадиных форм, которые окружают наш дым. Куда бы ни я шел, повсюду вижу эти прекрасные животные.

— А что члены Вашей семьи думают о Вашем «дымовом творчестве»?

— Они просто поражены! Жена говорит так, что была рядом со мной с самого начала, когда все это было еще безумной идеей, которую я пытался реализовать в ее старом металлическом гараже и до основания дна, когда мои работы выставлялись по всему миру.

— Что бы Вы могли пожелать или посоветовать молодым самобытным художникам из Сибири и Забайкалья?

— Назначение того, как что-либо сделать, не предназначено для того, чтобы этого не делать. Для художника очень важно всегда оставаться учеником. Будьте учениками и используйте как можно больше материалов, с которыми вы работаете, сами. Не идите, пока кто-нибудь покажет вам, как и что нужно делать. Вы можете пожелать научиться дыму — на собственном опыте, которые сделали вас тем, кем вы должны быть. Тому, что делало сейчас, меня не учил в школе, и этого нет в книгах. Я пытался использовать то, что узнал сам, изобретая свои инструменты, разработывая новые процессы, учась приспосабливать под себя новые материалы. И, даже находясь в Сибири, вы можете создать свое собственное искусство, а это — совсем другое дело. Конечно, вы можете его увидеть. Так произошло и со мной... Чуть не забыл! Помните, что за всеми этим стоит адский труд! Вы не сможете стать талантливыми, если не будете много и усердно работать. Такой труд всегда найдется своему народу. Что еще? Едва ли больше скажу! Кстати, наконец, это совет для следующей статьи.

Андрей ФАРИОНОВ



Порок расположен у подножия крота Блю-Ридж (Голубого крота). На первом этапе нашего дома и находится моя художественная мастерская.

— Как в Вашем городе идея использовать дым для создания художественных произведений?

— Она пришла ко мне во время павильона работ, которыми я занимался, чтобы посмотреть, как будет вести себя или иные материалы. Мысль об использовании дыма родилась при некоторых различных обстоятельствах, происходящих примерно в одно и то же время. Обязательство парков. В путешествие по Италии, где обратил внимание на лотосов сада Сикстинской капеллы, реставрированных с тех пор, как мы изучали это здание в школе. Когда я увидел обновленный цвет фресок, то очень удивился тому, каков он был грязным и засохшим. Солнце лет издалека дым от лампад и свечей окрасило его колотило.

Обстоятельство второе. При подготовке в путешествие мне пришлось приехать в городок своей букашки. Замок, в Союзных Штатах, почти в каждом магазине можно приобрести новые дисководы, чиповые и различные кредитные карточки. Поэтому я решил уничтожить старые сдвиги по возвращению, однако не решил как.

Обстоятельство третье. Примерно в это же время я развелся со своей бывшей женой. В саморучном по разводу я прочел о снимании фотографий и другие личные вещи, начинающиеся с взаимопонимания. «Вместе с дымом от их горения», — говорилось в нем, — вы освобождаетесь от эмоциональной привязанности к человеку и определенному периоду своей жизни». Тогда я решил избавиться от своего прошлого и попытаться соединить дым от сжигания картриджей на память.



присущие ему свойства, укрывая его и заставляя действовать против его природы.

— А как Вы сами относитесь к своему? Любите ходить на представления?

— Если честно, не был в цирке с самого детства. Слабо помню это положение, в памяти сохранилось только медведь в клоунах. Я не велюсь полюбил циркового искусства и не одобряю участие в представлениях животных. Метафоры с цирком я использую осторожно, и не хотел бы, чтобы это выглядело как реклама. Мне нравится выступление цирковых и воздушных гимнастов, люблю групповые номера и доверительную работу с животными, а также любящие развлечения пародисты сими человека.





The Weekend Poem: 'A Boat Beneath A Sunny Sky' By Lewis Carroll



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Who Needs A Canvas When You Have A Head?

## An Oxygen Mask And A Burning Credit Card: Rob Tarbell's Amazing 'Smoke Art' Technique



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Stood in a face mask and fire-proof overalls, Rob Tarbell burns a series of everyday items – credit cards, sometimes, or photographs – and watches the smoke snake upwards.

Anyone watching him might be tempted to call the fire service, unless they were to glance up and see what he's really doing – creating his latest batch of 'smoke art'.

By skillfully manipulating the flow as it rises, Tarbell 'draws' images onto hanging pieces of paper.

The results are these vivid portrayals of circus animals, a series he calls Smoke Rings.

Animals are an ideal subject for this unusual technique as the wispy 'brush strokes' of the smoke are perfect for creating a sense of energy and movement.

At the same time, Tarbell claims Smoke Rings is all about control.

"The performing animal images in the Smoke Rings parallel the drawing process," Tarbell explains on his website.

"The trainer must recognise and respect the innate nature of an animal when trying to modify its behaviour to achieve a desired outcome: eg training a bear to dance or training a horse to walk upright.

"The same is true in working with smoke. The inherent properties of smoke must be respected, then permitted to - and yet discouraged from - acting naturally."

Tarbell lives in Virginia, America and has exhibited and sold work both nationally and internationally. He also donated part of the proceeds from showing Smoke Rings to animal welfare charities.

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## That's one way to burn a living: The artist who creates amazing pictures using SMOKE



By NICK ENOCH

Last updated at 10:10 PM on 26th January 2012

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At first glance, these works look like standard charcoal-smudged paintings.

That's close, but no cigar - because they have, in fact, been created by smoke.

The amazing pictures were created by Rob Tarbell, who achieved the effect by burning everyday objects, such as photos and credit cards, and then capturing the smoke on paper attached to the ceiling.



When Rob decided to try to control smoke - an idea he first toyed with in 2007 - he realised he needed to channel it, while still letting it do what it did naturally.

To him, this sounded like animal training - and for that reason, he created images such as dancing horses and zebras.

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And in the series, called Smoke Rings, the performing animals - taken out of their natural habitat and trained to jump through hoops or balance on platforms - appear almost ghost-like, their wildness tamed.

'The performing animal images in the Smokes parallel the drawing process,' Tarbell said on his website.



'The trainer must recognise and respect the innate nature of an animal when trying to modify its behaviour to achieve a desired outcome: e.g. training a bear to dance or training a horse to walk upright.

The same is true in working with smoke.

'The inherent properties of smoke must be respected, then permitted to - and yet discouraged from - acting naturally.'



Given the danger of creating his work, Rob wears his protective clothing, with a hood that filters all harmful and toxic fumes. The complete set of instructions is available here. Also, Tarbell has a video on how to capture the smoke in a clear and stable way.



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## Rob Tarbell's Spectacular Smoke Circus

Posted by Shefali Netke on March 15, 2012 at 12:30pm  
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ADVISORY



Rob Tarbell's unique ability to control smoke to create these striking images is amazing. He had to find a way to control the smoke while also letting it flow on its own. This balancing act of controlling the smoke while letting it act parallels a circus ring show. Tarbell describes his work, "The trainer must recognize and respect the innate nature of an animal when trying to modify its behavior to achieve a desired outcome, e.g. training a bear to dance or training a horse to walk upright. The same is true in working with smoke. The inherent properties of smoke must be respected, then permitted to – and yet discouraged from – acting naturally." The results are stunning illustrations of this delicate balance. Tarbell has found a wonderful way of reinterpreting this natural form to create something extraordinary.



## Ghostly Circus Smoke Art

Posted by Alice on January 18, 2012 at 11:00am

[View Blog](#)



Artist Rob Tarbell mounts paper to the ceiling and then burns everyday objects like credit cards and photos to create his mesmerizing smoke art. The paper captures his desired images, in this case, circus horses, elephants and zebras, in a series he calls *Smoke Rings*. The performing animals appear almost ghost-like, their wildness tamed. Taken out of their natural habitat and trained to jump through hoops or balance on platforms, they're similar to the smoke that has been controlled by the artist to create these stunning images.

"The performing animal images in the *Smokes* parallel the drawing process," Tarbell says on his website. "The trainer must recognize and respect the innate nature of an animal when trying to modify its behavior to achieve a desired outcome: e.g. training a bear to dance or training a horse to walk upright. The same is true in working with smoke. The inherent properties of smoke must be respected, then permitted to - and yet discouraged from - acting naturally."

**Update:** We got in touch with the artist and was able to ask him a few questions about his creative process. Read that short Q&A, below.

**Q:** How long have you been creating smoke art?

**A:** I began tinkering with it in late 2007, but it took a few months where I was really getting somewhere with it, but not without a lot of trial and error.

**Q:** What's the greatest challenge when working with smoke?

**A:** Fire? I took the safety concerns pretty seriously. I started these in a metal garage, but still kept two fire extinguishers close by. I also invested in fire retardant clothing, a carbon filter unit, a fresh air system with full facial mask. Later on we had a special room built on to our house to keep it all isolated.

Beyond the safety concerns, I try to only capture the smoke on the surface of the paper, not burn the paper. You can see certain places where there are accidental burns, but I don't want to burn, just capture.

I also hope to make an interesting image within the process constraints I set up originally - working with smoke as an additive process only. No erasing. I still stick to that. Now I don't try to get the whole piece done in one shot, I did that and it was pretty harrowing at first. One false move and the whole piece is trashed. Now I am able to go back into a piece without it showing at all. But it is pretty exciting to get something great in one shot. I just don't bank on it.

**Q:** What did you destroy/burn for the *Smoke Rings* set?

**A:** I started the early ones by burning credit cards, bonus or membership cards. For the *Smoke Rings* work, I burned a lot of 35mm slides of my past work & some credit cards. Most recently I was burning 35mm slides from a collection of art history classes. My work is informed by art history, my past work and money. Or debt. However you want to look at it.

**Q:** Why did you create the *Smoke Rings* set?

**A:** I was working off the premise of controlling the smoke, which turned into trying to get it to do what I want it to do while still doing what it naturally does. That sounded a lot like training an animal so I went towards that type imagery - bears dancing, zebras or elephants doing tricks. As my control got better, I tried more elaborate images and was pushing the technique to show more realistic values, which felt like the balancing acts or more elaborate tricks with an animal trainer and an animal performing - a direct parallel to how I was making them and how the smoke would act. The more I explained how I did this, the more people buyed in on the performative imagery of me creating them in my studio - so the trainer or ring leader took more prominence. I ran with performance and tricks metaphor, adding some corn and a little cheese.

The imagery is all faked. It's a combination of images I took - the zebras are horses from around my home, but elephants are combined from a variety of sources. The figures are all friends doing yoga or cheerleading poses, or acting silly. Most images came out pretty convincingly. At the opening in Baltimore, a woman introduced herself as being a long time manager of a traveling circus and wanted to know all about these images - who they were, which circus. She gave her approval of the action, but seemed a little disappointed that they were my wife in yoga pants collaged over a retired racehorse. Which hinted at the trick aspect of the smoke, only more towards the being tricked. That shows up in later work using smoke.

Thanks for the interview, Rob! Wonderful work.

**Rob Tarbell's website**

Photos via Rob Tarbell, [Kissco Gallery](#), [Deanna's Gallery](#), and [Dolly Chaddock Gallery](#)

# Checking in with Rob Tarbell

## Painter, smoke artist

### What are you working on right now?

I figured out how to capture smoke on paper. I found that, over time, other artists used smoke and burning, but the particular way that I do it, I haven't found anyone who's done it. I developed it from an idea of, "What if I do this?" And then I figured out how to make it work. It centers on capturing the smoke on paper—not burning the paper, not burning the image, but herding and corralling the smoke. I get it to do what I want it to do, while doing what smoke does. I've created all kind of tools and formats to work with the smoke. I have a room built on to my house to do this.

### Tell us about your day job.

I teach at PVCC, where I'm coordinator of the Graphic Design program. I also teach studio classes.

### What's your first artistic memory from childhood?

I always made art and never really stopped. I had lessons at the Cleveland Art Museum around third grade and I remember the instructor—there was a team, actually—they had us in a museum and we were drawing sculptures, like bronze sculptures, and I kind of refused and I was drawing underwater scenes of fish. They would say, "We're drawing Rodin's 'The Age of Bronze,'" and I'm like, "No, I'm drawing a muskellunge eating a rat, because they can do that and it's so cool." I remember being a little annoyed they didn't see how cool drawing underwater fish scenes were.

### How do you prepare for your work?

With what I've been doing with the smoke, it's not very spontaneous. I figure out what I'm doing, and try to get there. It's so strange because it starts with ideas, and my best ideas come when I'm driving. I'll have a pad of paper and I'll write down an idea and go from there, see what I can get done and then go and see visual references. A lot of stuff I do, like horses, I need to look at horses, I need to study horses. I work from photographs, do that kind of thing, then I just plot out from there, what time allows when.



Artist Rob Tarbell harnesses the power of smoke with tools of his own design to create images that boast a surprisingly rich palette. Tarbell's work is currently showing at Mary Baldwin College and Hunterdon Art Museum in New Jersey.

### What's your daily routine?

I'm lucky with the kind of teaching I do, where the class time is pretty movable, and preparation time is more liquid. I can prepare in the same way, where I have the planning time, and then execution time is class time. I can move pieces around to benefit my studio time, or I can put off studio time to benefit my teaching time. You just have to focus on the balance of the two. And be flexible.

### Of which of your works are you most proud?

There's a sales pride and then an aesthetic pride. I sold a piece at an auction in D.C., the Washington Project for the Arts auction, a couple years ago, which was my first time

there. It went for the highest bid, which was exciting because there were some international artists there and some national ones. I was kind of a rookie, and mine sold for the most. I got a lot of exposure out of that.

### Locally, who would you like to collaborate with?

I'm collaborating with a composer I met in France at the residency, which was through Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He's a chamber music composer who's in D.C. His name is Douglas Boyce. We're going to do a show based on companion pieces, drawings and paintings based on what we went through and experienced in the environment in France, specifically birds and bird activity. He's going to compose cham-

ber music that explores the same idea in a different way and then the pieces will be presented in the gallery.

### What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

You fail a lot as an artist. You get rejected a lot, which could be seen as failure. What I've learned and can do is not worry about it. I just do it. It's the idea of finding your "yes." Failure is productive in the long road. I'm not destroyed by failures. Obviously it stings, but you have to figure it out and keep moving forward. ☺

**Who would you like us to check in with next?** Drop a line to mailbag@c-ville.com or to 308 E. Main St., 22902, or go online now to c-ville.com and post a comment.

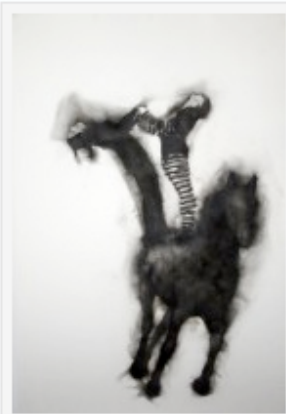


**M A N I F E S T**  
CREATIVE RESEARCH GALLERY and DRAWING CENTER  
INTERNATIONAL DRAWING ANNUAL 5



## Ethereal material: Grant and Tarbell catch the drift

by Laura Parsons



**Rob Tarbell, "Alinga Sister Balance Hold 2."**

If you're counting the days to Halloween, eager for the chance to immerse yourself in creepiness, here's a suggestion: head to Les Yeux du Monde and spend a few minutes staring at John Grant's digitally mirrored photographs, "The Medium," "Water Born," and "Facing East."

Eerie enough to induce nightmares, these three images are part of Grant's latest body of work, which is premiering in Les Yeux du Monde's four-artist exhibition, "Medium and Mystery: Gasman, Grant, Iliescu, and Tarbell." Gallery owner Lyn Warren curated the show to highlight artists who use unconventional materials—e.g., staples, aluminum, and smoke—to create their visions. Although Sanda Iliescu's cut-paper compositions and Lydia Gasman's textured

paintings add color, it's Grant's photographs and Rob Tarbell's smoke works that provide fuel for the show's fire.

Grant's black-and-white abstracts offer a departure from his previous, flower-centered color work. After noticing the way ink dispersed when dropped into a vase of water, he began shooting extreme close-ups of this process, capturing the pigment as it shifted through translucent shapes and unfurled in graceful arcs and lines on its way to the bottom. The resulting images look less like photographs and more like etchings or monotypes.

The photos take a turn for the weird, though, when Grant experiments with digitally reversing the images and pairing the near-twins. Disturbing faces suddenly emerge, along with other ghostly imagery. Uncanny as these digital compositions may be, Grant's more direct shots, especially "Swimmer," are artistically stronger and less gimmicky.

Grant also presents a brief stop-motion video, *The Language of Water*, edited from over 800 stills. Although the soundtrack smacks of a **De Beer's diamond commercial** ("You'd marry her all over again"), the visuals allow the viewer to experience the ink's thrall as Grant is creating his images.

The edged-with-chaos wispieness of Rob Tarbell's smoke work complements Grant's fluidity. The seven pieces displayed reflect Tarbell's refinement of his technique even while maintaining its spontaneous energy. To create the stunning "Alinga Sister Balance Hold 2," in which two women arch backwards, clasping hands, as they stand on the back of a horse that appears about to gallop out of the page, Tarbell burned slides of previous work, resulting in surprising texture and a metallic sheen. Tarbell's masterful way of melding positive and negative space is also jaw dropping.

Haunting and beautiful, Grant and Tarbell's work momentarily controls the uncontrollable (and then lets it go).

*"Medium and Mystery: Gasman, Grant, Iliescu, and Tarbell" is on view through October 10 at Les Yeux du Monde, 841 Wolf Trap Road. 973-5566.*

# Smoke and Mirrors

ART



Rob Tarbell's works such as "Alinga Horse 3" use burning plastic to create images on canvas. "Making art is as much about directing intent as it is about scientific tinkering," he says.

Idiosyncratic visions connect at Reynolds Gallery.

by Mike Dulin

The depth of innovation can be attributed to the vitality of a creating artist. In two exhibitions at Reynolds Gallery, viewers are rewarded with challenging work from an established artist as well as emerging unknown talent. With "Ride: Works by Rob Tarbell" and a group show of Virginia Commonwealth University students, "Almost Famous," Reynolds has created an environment in which strong voices coincide and connect.

In "Ride," Tarbell uses the idiosyncratic process of smoke as his medium. "In my practice," he says, "making art is as much about directing intent as it is about scientific tinkering."

Through the process of burning plastic Tarbell uses a form of smoke to create images on canvas suspended overhead. The smoke operates on chance. The absence of brushstrokes hides the intent of the artist. His choice of horses

as a narrative subject is a connection to — and a comment on — the identity of the smoke itself. Tarbell explains that smoke must be permitted to fulfill its natural path and at the same time be controlled for a greater means, much like the spirits of the horses he depicts. Though these animals can be trained and disciplined, their natural instincts cannot be overcome.

"Almost Famous" is a hand-selected

body of work from the university's top students in the master's degree in fine arts program. Ten artists are selected for their standout work as the exhibit returns for its fifth year. It's a collection of individuals already strong in voice and execution.

Work such as "PocketSea" by Ana Esteve-Llorens, a grid sculpture of dyed polyester and poplar wood, invokes a contained feeling of energy. Its layered construction creates a hue of depth and weight found only in the ocean. As well, the kinetic sculptures of Younseal Eum imprison the mechanical actions of a butterfly and a small airplane within constructed cages. Their elegance and delicate nature can be viewed only through bars. In the stark light of Hon Chen's print on cotton sateen, "Water-Sky," all time element is removed from the image. The ocean is paused for a second and held forever on the wall.

Other works, such as Hannah Walsh's two-minute video, "An Awesome," shows an unflinching sun being eclipsed only by the appearance of a silhouetted cheerleader. Her arms are outstretched and she stands straight-legged atop a balanced hand. The pose is held indefinitely, only slightly wavering while the supporting hand struggles.

These elements of containment, absence and momentary respite leave the viewer in limbo, unsure of what's next. Uncertainty becomes a natural byproduct of innovation. To roll with change and constantly envision the next level requires people willing to act on their intuitions. And strong intuitions come from solid, confident voices. **S**

"Rides: Work by Rob Tarbell" and "Almost Famous" will be on display at Reynolds Gallery, 1514 W. Main St., until July 30. For information call 355-6553 or go to [reynoldsgallery.com](http://reynoldsgallery.com).

Andrea Donnelly's "Holding In" is one of the standout pieces included in the "Almost Famous" exhibit.





## Rob Tarbell at Decorazon Gallery

By Dallas Fine Arts Examiner, Jon Breazeale  
December 31, 5:21 PM



Rob Tarbell  
Decorazon Gallery



### [Rob Tarbell at Decorazon Gallery](#)

Currently up at Decorazon Gallery in the Bishop Arts District in Oak Cliff is the work of Rob Tarbell. The show, titled "Meet the Struggles" and "Smoke Rings" contains two very different types of work. The first pieces you see are his Smoke Rings drawings in which Mr. Tarbell uses actual smoke to create the images which are of a circus theme. They feature animals with a performer of some type. The images bring to mind drawings by Degas and some of the Impressionist artists. They have a very delicate feel as if they might simply blow off the paper if one gets too close to them. They are also very photographic in the way Mr. Tarbell's technique of applying the smoke to the paper achieves the finished image. "Flying Alinga Double Jump" is a wonderful example of the Smoke Drawings. In this drawing you see what might be a trapeze artist doing her act while she rides on the back of a horse. She is caught in the middle of her jump and appears to float above the horse as it runs around the ring. With the title of the show "Smoke Ring" and the images that appear to come from a circus, the use of the word ring seems to have a double meaning. The artist uses smoke, which brings the idea of smoke rings, to create images of circus performers, possible a three ring circus, for his images.

The other works that are part of the show are from his series "Meet the Struggle" in which the artist takes stuffed animals and coats them with porcelain, plastic, and resin to achieve the final product. He displays two types of sculptures; free standing and wall mounted pieces. The wall mounted pieces are a mix of two different animals and are referred to as trophies in the title of the piece. "Bull Rabbit" is an example of this mixed breed of wall trophy. It challenges the viewer to decide which animal should be the focus. Instead of "a wolf in sheep's clothing" this time, it is a bull in rabbit's clothing. The other free standing pieces are straight forward in that they do not blend different animals. "Boss Dog" is one of the free standing pieces and it brings to mind some of the works from China and Japan over the last few years. Both works are full of playfulness and humor. It also plays with the idea of elevating the everyday object and bringing it into the world of fine art, much like the Chinese and Japanese artists have done, but also the works of Jeff Koons come to mind when he did he series on kitsch objects and inflatable animals that he cast in various metals.

The show is interesting and is worth the trip to the Bishop Arts area. Mr. Tarbell's playful pieces and play-on-words titles are a joy to see. The drawings have a much more traditional feel, even though they are created from a far from traditional method, and are wonderful on their own. The sculptures are full of humor and keep you wanting to see more.



Dallas Fine Arts Examiner

Jon Breazeale  
Decorazon  
Galley

To see more, visit us at [examiner.com](http://examiner.com)

## Rob Tarbell's "Struggles" is on exhibit at Quirk Gallery through December 26

By Richmond Art Gallery Examiner, Rebecca  
Barnabi



LittlestBear is part of "Struggles" at Quirk Gallery.  
Photo courtesy of Rob Tarbell.

Stuffed animals are burning up to be in Rob

Tarbell's art.

Opening last Friday at [Quirk Gallery](#), Tarbell's exhibit "Struggles" contains 18 pieces of art that once were stuffed animals.

Tarbell takes a stuffed animal, most of which have been bears and rabbits, and pours porcelain slip over them which burns the stuffed animal inside. The porcelain image remains.

"It's the idea that it transforms into something but still retains what it was," said [Tarbell](#), who used to live in Richmond but now resides in Crozet, west of Charlottesville.

Some of the pieces in "Struggles" were created a year ago for a show in Charlottesville, but six or seven pieces are new.

"They go through a lot," said Tarbell about the exhibit's title. "From being a stuffed animal I get from Goodwill to [putting them in art]. They look cute, but really they're not."

Tarbell said the stuffed bears and rabbits in the exhibit sometimes are presented so that they impersonate one another. There is also a gorilla and a pig.

He created similar art previously in his

**SEE it**

"Elephant &amp; Swami Noah"



# Struggle not

Multimedia artist Rob Tarbell wields smoke and fire

Now that I've encountered Rob Tarbell, methinks that we humans don't burn enough things. It's one of our major discoveries, fire... but we use it mostly to light cigarettes, maybe candles occasionally, maybe a bonfire once a year. Perhaps a more regular ritual is in order. Self-help books, be they lame or life-changing, often recommend burning reminders of ex-lovers in order to destroy any lingering connections. That's something which Rob took into consideration when formulating his plan for the Smoke work—that, the Sistine Chapel (the smoke puffs signifying the election of the pope, yes, but also damage to the ceiling caused by candle smoke, woodstove smoke and automotive exhaust) and, of course, the omnipresent guy-at-bar-with-cigarette. That should be the title of a major American work of art; maybe someone will paint it now that the phenomenon is about to become extinct.

Rob paints with the smoke itself. What's interesting to him is that historically, the marks that smoke leaves on things are undesirable, and that as a medium, it's just barely tameable; there's not a lot of room for correction. In trying to inflict his will upon it, the main factor to consider is where it wants to go, what it wants to do. It's a process of mastering gesture while learning to relinquish control—much like tight-rope walking, or training a wild animal... see his line of thinking for the performing bears and elephants and horses in Smoke Rings? "In my latest work, I've upped the trick to include

people... there's more risk, and more control. It's a subject that's very appropriate to the medium," Rob said.

When not working with smoke, another difficult and fickle substance—porcelain—is his weapon of choice. Enter the Struggles: a series of ceramic animals created by filling soft, plushy bears and rabbits with slip and firing them, burning away any remnant of their previous lives. The new wonders, hard, cold, and bearing some new mysterious countenance, parallel the Smokes in their strange patterns of becoming-while-taking-away. They are "menacing and repellent, not cuddly," perhaps more in line with the truth of animal nature.

He's insanely busy with openings over the next two months (Decorazon in Dallas, Aqua Art in Miami, Dolby Chadwick in San Francisco, Murray State University), but we're lucky, because not only is he coming to Quirk, but his work is already housed in the Reynolds Gallery—go ask them to show you, it's in the archives!—plus we can daytrip to Charlottesville and see him at Les Yeux Du Monde. For more info about Rob, find him on the Web: [robtarbell.com](http://robtarbell.com).

—BIRD COX

WEB [www.robtarbell.com](http://www.robtarbell.com)

"Anna Alinga Backbend on Zebra"

QUIRK

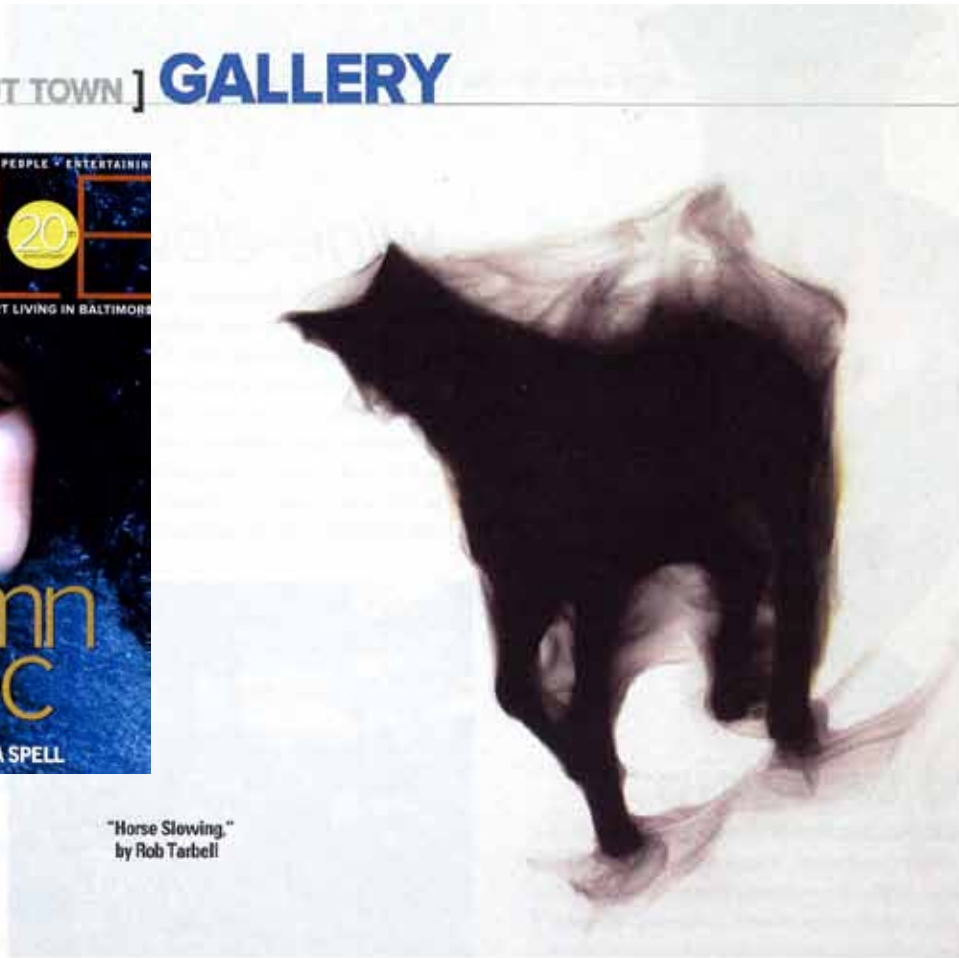
311 Broad St.  
644-5450

"Red Tip" Ceramic

# studio visit

volume eight





"Horse Slowing,"  
by Rob Tarbell

NOW SHOWING

## smoke signals

In Rob Tarbell's new series "SMOKE RINGS," ethereal figures in gray—a running horse, dancing bears, a circle of elephants in a ring—seem to whisper across the page. The shapes fade, deep black at the heart paling into swirls of slate, the edges trailing out over the white paper.

This may not sound revolutionary, but it is—because Tarbell's medium is smoke. He first sketches out his concept, usually animal or abstract human shapes. Then he burns material—everything from credit cards to old oil paintings—and directs the smoke onto dense printmaking paper. "The whole thing was trying to get the smoke to do what I want it to do, to control it but let it be itself, let it make its mark," says Tarbell, an artist based in Crozet, Va., who earned degrees in art at Auburn University and the University of Tennessee.

Tarbell stumbled onto this technique nearly four years ago after reading a divorce self-help book that suggested burning items from his marriage as a kind of catharsis. As he watched the smoke rise, Tarbell thought of the Sistine Chapel and the idea of smoke leaving a mark. "I bought my first pack of cigarettes ever and tried to get the smoke to catch on the paper," he says. "No, I did not smoke them. And, no, it did not work at all"

But Tarbell didn't give up. He began to burn other objects,

and soon he found that the consistency and color of smoke could be controlled. While burning a Starbucks gift card created a warm brown color, burning slides of his work yielded a darker black. Over time, he developed techniques to harness smoke, such as blocking off areas of the paper and directing it through little chimneys.

Using performing animals as subjects seemed a natural parallel to the taming and corralling of smoke, says Tarbell. He started with diving horses and branched out to dancing bears and other animals—all beautiful things being made to do something ridiculous. While a portion of his proceeds from "Smoke Rings" will go toward animal rescue organizations such as the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, Tarbell says his creations are not about animal rights. "I don't want them to be about the circus or about what's happening in the picture," he says. "It's more about making the smoke do what I want it to do, and the animals are the vehicle for that."

Tarbell's horses and bears and elephants float across the page almost like a strange dream, as substantial—or insubstantial—as smoke. —Lauren Seibert

"Smoke Rings" is on display Sept. 18 through Oct. 31 at Gallery Imperato, 921 E. Fort Ave., 443-257-4166, galleryimperato.com.



## DUAL PERSPECTIVES

### FROM BURNT MEMORIES TO ARCHETYPAL NICHES AT ROSEWOOD GALLERY

By Jud Yalkut

Two Virginia-based artists are presenting their work in two unusual media at the Rosewood Gallery in Kettering through February 6. Rob Tarbell of Virginia Commonwealth will present smoke drawings and Novie Trump, director at Lee Arts Center in Arlington, will offer ceramic sculptures and miniature environments.

Novie Trump received her B.A. in classical archeology from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, a discipline reflected in her choice of imagery influenced by ancient relics and marker stones.

"I am particularly drawn to massive stone markers," she writes. "Mycenaean beehive burial mounds, Mesopotamian steles, Egyptian columns and Celtic monoliths. These time-worn stone monuments inform the shape and heft of my sculptures, while their weathered patinas inspire my layered surfaces."

Within a furrowed and textured horizontal niche, a ceramic modeled "Bird Skull" rests on a black slab, while a blackened and ashen upright bird form inhabits one niche between two others with inner white columns on an irregularly symmetrical surface inscribed with circles and vector lines in "Palace of the Night Bird." Another bird-oriented piece is Trump's "Cradle for Raven" with its oval bed enclosing a sleeping or perhaps dead black bird form.

While Trump's ceramic sculptures mimic monumental forms, she often uses "archetypal symbols taken from ancient myths and tales... the bird as harbinger and messenger, bones as touchstones of quiet power, the forest as a threshold to the unknown." Within a stone-like vault, on a tall white ceramic shelf stands a gray leafless "Secret Tree," like an erect growth of driftwood.

Related to the bird theme is the recurrence of egg forms throughout Trump's work. Within an arched reliquary frame, frosted with white glazing drippings, is a small white egg whose center seems to be giving birth to an emerging swirl of life in "First Glimpse." Another white egg sits on end off center on a black slab within a raggedly framed back niche in "Waiting."

A small snail-like shell sits on a black disc within a window in a light gray Flintstone form in "Treasure," and another black disc is a partially obscured moon shadow within a circular niche above three rows of six arched

niches in "Annulus."

Trump has a small installation of "Nine Arches" in gray clay, each holding a single molded white and gray mottled egg-like reliquaries for offerings to an unknown god.

"Three bowls" resemble artifacts from an archeological



left: Novie Trump, "First Glimpse," ceramic, stains, oxide, slips

above: Rob Tarbell, "Hardware: Outstanding Swimmer," smoke on paper

dig, with their rough textured edges and stone-like forms, each holding ersatz stones made of clay, one white, two black, and three with one brownish gray, like long abandoned nests. These may be symbols for what she terms "universal human experiences like love, fear, death, courage and transformation."

Rob Tarbell, who studied art education and received his M.F.A. in drawing and painting from the University of Tennessee, calls his part of the exhibition "Absence and Presence." He has created images of performing animals with smoke on paper in the past as well as using credit and grocery cards, photos and slides of his artwork. But in this new work, he still burns materials but uses other imagery based on human forms, trophies and wartime photo, in two series "Specialist and Hardware" and "Good Riddance."

Tarbell writes: "Smokes consist of images that are created by capturing smoke on paper as evidence of a transformation and preservation of the ephemeral... The act of burning simultaneously creates a new object and conflicts with the need to hold onto something that is inherently temporary and finite."

Tarbell's "Hardware" series of award statuary includes the traces of "Three Stars" as black within the black of a trophy shelf, a triumphant gray figure against a black triangle in "All Star," a blurred action figure about to dive in

"Outstanding Swimmer," and a wreath bearing figure in smoky browns and blacks in "Runner Up." Other "Hardware" images are the smoky traces of award trophies like "Two Champions," "League Champion," and "First and Third Places."

The "Specialist" series also includes slides of his own work which were burned. "Look Out" is a dark silhouetted male figure, "Bunk" has a faceless suited figure seated, "At Sea" has a stranded figure with arms akimbo, and "Patrol" is like a silent barbed and erect warrior streaked with filaments of smoked texture.

Tarbell is a former Dayton resident and has decided as a form of aesthetic nostalgia to invite Dayton community members "to provide small hand-held, common, burdensome items or reminders of something negative or traumatic that still carry emotional weight." Within a matrix stencil of a sitting rabbit, these 32 "collaborations" involved 16 people including Rosewood Gallery director Amy Anderson. Strangely, there lingered a vague smell of smoke in the gallery air.

Among the objects to be destroyed by fire and immortalized in traces of smoke on paper were credit cards, Delphi remnants, images of meat, a wooden toy, business and medicine cards, a wedding gown, gift wrapped papers, lies as well as Tarbell's unfinished portrait of his father and a photo of his dog. All this provides, in the artist's words, "a cathartic disconnect from the event while establishing new associations in the form of a benign rabbit."

Rosewood Gallery is located in the Rosewood Arts Centre at 2655 Olson Drive in Kettering. Gallery hours are 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday, and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call (937) 296-0294 or visit [www.ketteringoh.org](http://www.ketteringoh.org).

Reach DCP visual arts critic Jud Yalkut at [contactus@daytoncitypaper.com](mailto:contactus@daytoncitypaper.com)

# Visions from fire and earth

Rosewood Gallery hosting an exhibit of art created from two classical elements

By Pamela Dillon  
Contributing Writer

**F**rom preserving the ideas of relics of past civilizations to old memories that need to be purged, there is a duality of themes in the current double exhibit at Rosewood.

Do we preserve the past or discard it? The answer is a type of rebirth or transformative process for the artists.

For Novie Trump of Falls Church, Virginia, it is one of preserving the past through reinterpretation. Her ceramic sculptures are influenced by the past civilizations she studied as an archeologist.

Rob Tarbell's smoke drawings reflect a theme of either preservation or purging, depending upon the work.

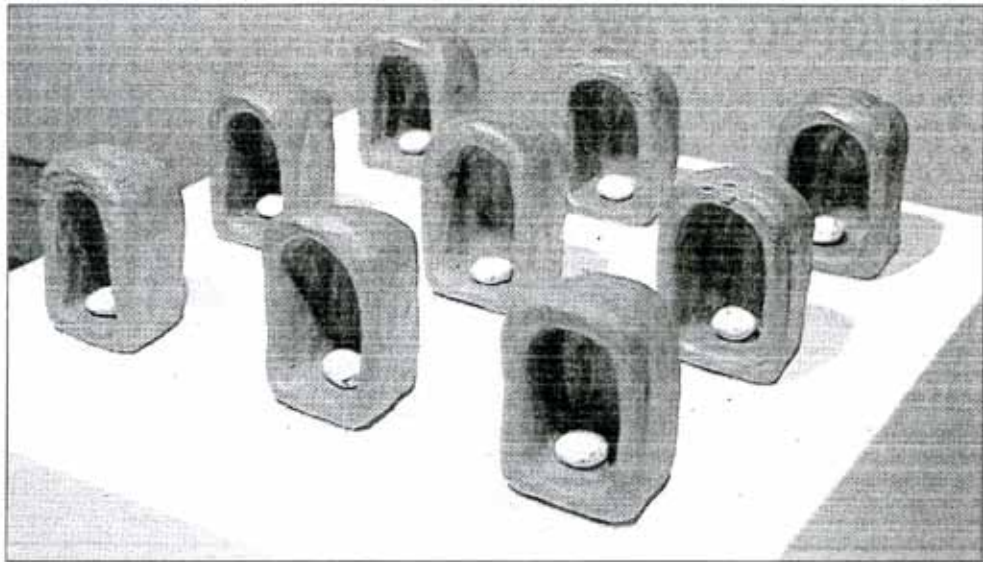
"Good Riddance" is self-explanatory. It's a loosely-formed collage of 21 rabbit images and one image of a dog.

This collaborative work started months ago, when Tarbell, an instructor of art for the Art Foundations Program at Virginia Commonwealth University, contacted 19 Dayton-area people to send him small, common or burdensome items that reminded the giver of traumatic or negative memories.

His idea was to burn these items separately, and use the resulting smoke to create a neutral or positive image to take its place.

Amy Anderson, Rosewood Gallery coordinator, was one of those participants.

"It was exciting for me to shift from an external to internal element in a Rosewood Gallery exhibit," said Anderson. "It was liberating to get those objects out of my studio and have Rob transform them into a new form, one that no longer holds the negative memories."



ABOVE: "Nine Arches" by Novie Trump. RIGHT: "Two Champions" by Rob Tarbell. Contributed photos

## How to go

**What:** Novie Trump/Rob Tarbell double exhibit

**Where:** Rosewood Gallery, 2655 Olson Drive, Kettering

**When:** Runs Monday, Jan. 12, through Feb. 6

**Hours:** 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday; 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday

**Opening:** 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 11

**More information:** (937) 296-0294 or [www.ketteringoh.org](http://www.ketteringoh.org)

The Rosewood exhibit balances two series of works: a Specialist series that documents the human form in various aspects of war duty or work; and a Hardware series that relives moments in sports history through trophies.

"Smokes consist of images that are created by capturing smoke on paper as evidence of a transformation and preservation of the ephemeral," said Tarbell.

Trump is showing 14 ceramic works that preserve the forms of massive stone markers, Mycenaean beehive burial mounds, Mesopotamian steles, Egyptian columns and Celtic monoliths.

In conjunction with her monumental forms, she often uses archetypal symbols taken from

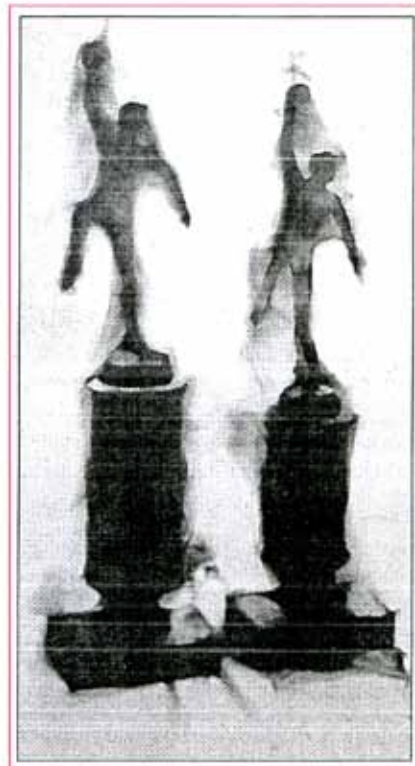
ancient stories.

"These symbols are used to express such universal human experiences as love, fear, death, courage and transformation," said Trump, the director at Lee Arts Center in Arlington, Virginia.

In "Secret Tree," created from ceramic, stains, oxides and slips, the focal point is a young tree stem living inside the frame of old bark. Old becomes young again.

For "Nine Arches," simple gray oval cavities become a nesting place for white stones that resemble eggs. Multiple forms add to the visual impact of this work.

The surface treatment is mesmerizing in "First Glimpse," that shows a chick's beak poking out of an eggshell.





# 500 CERAMIC SCULPTURES

Contemporary Practice, Singular Works



**Rob Tarbell**  
*Red-Tip Rabbit* | 2007  
11 X 9 X 6 INCHES (27.9 X 22.9 X 15.2 CM)  
Porcelain: electric fired, cone 10; resin  
PHOTO BY ARIEVOI



500 CERAMIC SCULPTURES

67



A Lark Ceramics Book

# studio visit

volume six

**Rob Tarbell**  
[www.robartbell.com](http://www.robartbell.com)

Ornet, VA  
[rob@robartbell.com](mailto:rob@robartbell.com)  
603.875.3318  
1306 Lakeshore Road, #100, Ornet, VA  
Gallery: Hennessey, Baltimore, MD  
Support: Artistic, Atlanta, GA  
See You in: Studio: Ornet, Charlottesville, VA

Snippets are created by capturing smoke on paper as evidence of a transformation and preservation of the ephemeral. During the process, various materials are burned to remove their growing presence in daily life, an ironic nod to a self-help technique of burning sentimental things to relieve their emotional burden.



**Zebra**  
ink on paper, 20 x 22 inches



**Horse**  
ink on paper, 24 x 32 inches

# studio visit

volume four

**Rob Tarbell**  
[www.robtarbell.com](http://www.robtarbell.com)

Crane, VA  
[rob@robtarbell.com](mailto:rob@robtarbell.com)

6422294 4871030000  
1708 Spring House of Branson, Woodstock, VA  
144 New St. Suite 600, Charlottesville, VA  
Robbie Kaplan, Baltimore, MD

The Sluggers are the remnants of stuffed animals after being whined with potatoes or a hard feed. As a Sluggie, the animal's ecology is freed. In a sense, the animal's body must be left alone in order to absorb its new state. Sluggies contain all animals, but rather in rabbits and bears.



**Red - Top Rabbit**  
polyester and wool, 11 x 9 x 5 inches



**Sluggie**  
polyester and wool, 9 x 12 x 12 inches

From the award-winning blog  
[www.SkullADay.com](http://www.SkullADay.com)

# SKULLS



Virginia artist Rob Tarbell made the smoke art for me using one of my skulls.

176

**NOAH  
SCALIN**

Winner of the 2008 Webby People's Voice Award in the Personal Website Category

# DC

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## THE GOURMET ISSUE '08!

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### SCENE IN DC



Kim Ward and Andres Tremola

#### WASHINGTON PROJECT FOR THE ARTS GALA

**THE PARTY:** DC's contemporati hold out on their biggest purchases of up-and-comers' work each year until they can amble through this hot gala auction. **THE SIDESHOW:** All in attendance at the Katzen Arts Center agreed it was worth the wait—and so, too, did the artists. Rob Tarbell's "Aerial Rider" went for \$8,500 and David Henderson, an NYC artist, sold his pieces for higher than retail value. The money raised was shared between the artists and the not-for-profit. **THE VENUE:** The Katzen was decked in fuschia, that Indian pink that's become so trendy. Auction chairwoman Kimberly Casey wore the color divinely as well. WPA director Kim Ward beamed while her friend and board member Bill Paley was honored with the Alice Denney Award. —KAREN SOMMER SHALETT

### + PLUS

SAARINEN DECONSTRUCTED  
DC'S NEW FASHION BLOCK-BUSTER  
OUR OWN FRENCH KICKS STEP IT UP!  
WE WANT MOORE:  
JULIANNE GIVES IT UP!  
C'VILLE GOES MOD  
OLYMPIC ARTIST STRIKES GOLD  
AND ALL THE BEST PARTIES...



5457 800C 000





# 2008庆奥运国际美术大展

## 2008경 올림픽국제미술대전

2008 Celebrate the Olympic Games International Fine Arts Big Exhibition

Robert L. Tabell



- 2006 to Present Virginia Commonwealth University, Instructor of Art, School of the Arts, Art Foundations Program
- 2006 to Present Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Statewide Workshops, Artist-instructor
- 2004 to Present Piedmont Virginia Community College, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art
- 2005 to 2006 James Madison University, Instructor of Art
- 2003 to 2004 PhotoWorks Creative Group, Charlottesville, Virginia, Graphic Designer
- 2000 to 2002 Limestone College, Assistant Professor of Art
- 8 - 02, 03, 07 University of Virginia Art Museum, Art Educator, Summer Art@ USA Art Museum



Zebra & Tiger 21" x 21" Stroke on paper

**ART**

## Struggles and smokes

### **“No Mirrors”**

Les Yeux du Monde

Through April 26

Rarely do you go to an art show and not know how the image in front of you was made. Paintings, ceramics, drawing—these things we can understand. But “smoke on paper”? It takes a good search of Les Yeux du Monde to find a list of the media involved in Rob Tarbell’s latest show. Tarbell’s last exhibition, “The Struggles Play Nice,” was one of two installations hosted by Second Street Gallery in February. Kept in the smaller Dové Gallery, his eyeless, porcelain-infused animals (of the formerly “stuffed” variety) climbed the walls, sat atop pedestals or congregated at the foot of them, and generally appeared to be making mischief. But the overwhelming feature was Young Kim’s collection of salt tile portraits in Second Street’s main room, where low lighting on the serene faces ushered you quietly in or let you hauntedly out.

This time at Les Yeux du Monde, though Tarbell’s work is nowhere near the door, the space he takes up is vast, and each piece is more isolated and commanding—ghostly horses mid-gallop, or sitting with their legs sprawled awkwardly around them, surrounded by white space. The papers are huge, almost the entire height of the walls on which they are hung—big enough that the veils and small contortions of the smoke are easily vis-

ible. The sheets bear only the subtlest signs of human touch, the tiniest dings here and there. They are clean, but unmechanical.

Tarbell also gets points for hanging some of his “smokes” without frames. It is nice to have nothing between the paper and the eyes of spectators. And to appreciate them, you can’t just go to Tarbell’s website, or visit any of the other sites giving him press on the Web. Three hundred-odd pixels on a smooth computer monitor won’t cut it; you need 5’ of paper hung 5” from your face.

There has been a distinction made between spatial art (paintings, drawings and the like) and temporal art (music, film), and while I can agree with such distinctions on my less opinionated gallery visits, my trip to Tarbell’s exhibit is not one of them. You can see the time elapsing in these smoke drawings—particularly knowing, at last, how they are made. There is a clipping from the Richmond Times-Dispatch left on a John Casteen IV-crafted bookshelf that details Tarbell’s process: Paper is hung from the ceiling all Michaelangelo-esque (a belabored word for a belabored process) and he moves a strong flame some distance below. He got the idea while reading, in a post-divorce fugue state, that burning things helps. Tarbell’s invention is to harness that flame and make his process of creation manifest. Smoke rises of its own accord, ghosting the paper as it passes through. Though tamed into coherent images, the airy figures still appear wild on the page, or as circus animals that, though bridled, hold their own power, even beside their trainers.—Sara Yenke



# Peep Show

by Paulette Roberts-Pullen



To promote its annual art auction, 1708 Gallery is exhibiting the 50-plus works contributed by regional artists. Rob Tarbell's vibrant and graphic "Loomis Elephant Ring" (above) represents a circus act of elephants connected tail-to-trunk. Tarbell mysteriously executes his black elephant figures against an intense red background with, as the gallery label explains, "smoke on painted paper." Indeed, the fluid nature of his wafting medium poses a curious contrast to the implied mass of his subject matter, sparking the possibility of a magical narrative. Other significant contributions are by Gregg Carbo, David Freed, Andras Bality, Richard Roth and Sally Bowring. The auction is April 19 at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$75. 319 W. Broad St. 643-1708.



ArtPark Blog  
<http://artpark.typepad.com/artblog/>

April 15, 2008

Rob Tarbell - The Smokes @ Les Yeux de Monde

Rob Tarbell's works are created with a process involving smoke. He burns sentimental things such as photographs using the smoke to create the images. He claims the burning of these types of objects removes their emotional burden. His artist statement says that he likes to use smoke because it makes both good and bad marks. An example he gives of the negative effects of smoke is the damage it did to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel; but when smoke is controlled and given a new purpose it can be good. This series portrays performing animals: horses, dogs, elephants, zebras, and bears. Tarbell likens the use of smoke to the choice of using performing animals in that "something that once had a practical or natural use is removed from that environment at the expense of its original purpose. Transforming its original purpose, transforming it and replacing it in the form of entertainment art." In the way that an animal is taken out of its natural habitat and trained to jump through hoops or balance on platforms, smoke is removed from its destructive purpose in nature and controlled by the artist to create a new image.

At first I thought the works were charcoal on paper, when I read the medium was actually smoke I found the works slightly more intriguing. One picture in particular of a horse caught my eye. The pattern the smoke had left on the paper makes the horse look ghost-like. The wispy smoke lines trail off the horse's body and its white eyes all add to the perception that the dark horse is charging out of the white expanse directly towards you. This piece, being one of the few that was framed, was enhanced by the glass in front of it because the light of the gallery shining on the glass gave the white paper a glow adding to the eeriness of the "ghost horse." I don't think this was necessarily the artist's intention, but, for me, the effect gave the piece life and movement. Overall, I found the exhibition very interesting though it may be more beneficial to the viewer to understand the artist's methods and goals before seeing the works... Tarbell's works require a deep contemplation to understand the artist's agenda.

Whitney Strickler

## artfeature

BY LAURA PARSONS  
ART@READTHEHOOK.COMCrispy critters  
Tarbell smiles  
through Struggles

PAUL CITY PHOTO

**WHEN** artist Rob Tarbell moved to Charlottesville a few years ago, he left behind a painful marriage and a job as a full-time college art instructor in South Carolina. He struggled to break into the Charlottesville art scene, even resorting to opening a temporary gallery to showcase his stellar 2004 painting exhibition, "Bird by Bird."

How time—and talent and gumption—change everything. Last year Tarbell not only won a prestigious Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowship, he also exhibited work in 18 regional, national, and international shows. And now he's cracked that Charlottesville keeper of the cutting-edge art flame, Second Street Gallery, with his exhibition of ceramic sculpture, "The Struggles Play Nice."

Throughout his darkest days, Tarbell maintained a wry sense of humor, which is the fuel powering this current body of work. Ivory porcelain animals that began as plush toys sit on pedestals, roam across the floor, and seem suspended in mid-fall on the soft brown walls of the Dove Gallery. With the exception of four once-fluffy heads mounted like hunting trophies on off-white plaques (funny but undeniably creepy), Tarbell carefully composes each beastie's limbs and features in ways that bring them to cartoonish life, provoking smiles and irresistibly tugging on viewers' heartstrings.

But nothing is what it seems. Hardly living flesh, Tarbell's creations are no longer even furry fakes. What was once soft and cuddly has been burned away to yield prickly, breakable objects masquerading as emotive animals. The artist, tongue firmly planted in cheek, plays with deception and disguise, casting (literally) the rabbit—a traditional trickster in many cultures—as his main character. Pieces that initially appear to be cute little pigs, elephants, or gorillas, upon closer inspection reveal tell-tale long ears hanging down their backs from behind tied-on masks. Two lumbering bears with small bunnies hopelessly strapped to their snouts are particularly hilarious.

Tarbell is effective at pushing viewers' childhood buttons. Here and there he uses paint the color of silly putty or duckling yellow to highlight features like the insides of rabbit ears. Plus his pieces'



matted fur, resulting from the porcelain dip, inevitably recalls favorite stuffed friends we all accidentally left outside in the rain (don't tell me you didn't cry).

"The Struggles Play Nice" is fun and funny, but its underlying strength is Tarbell's ability to tap into our sense of fragile vulnerability as we all try to fake it 'til we make it. ■

Rob Tarbell's exhibition, "The Struggles Play Nice," is on view through March 1 at Second Street Gallery, 115 Second St. SE (in the Charlottesville City Center for the Arts), 977-7284.

## Ones to Watch

*Emerging local artists to collect before it's too late*

By Carrie Nieman Culpepper

Contemporary art is hot. In November, Sotheby's had its biggest auction in history, selling \$315.9 million worth of contemporary work, including a giant stainless-steel heart by Jeff Koons that went for \$23.5 million — the highest price ever for a piece by a living artist. While we don't advocate collecting purely for speculative purposes, like the hedge-funders, it's hard to ignore the hype. Virginia Commonwealth University arts associate dean Joe Seipel was recently in New York City checking out shows by recent grads; one he estimated sold about \$350,000 worth of work, and the other was at The Met. "You almost have to collect them a year after they're out of grad school or it's too late," he says. Luckily, we have a highly ranked art school in our midst and a healthy art community as a result. And who knows, that artist you bought here could be at The Met one day. Here are 12 rising stars, including Sun Tek Chung (pictured), to keep an eye on:



### Rob Tarbell

has been busy: His work appeared in 19 shows this year alone, including ones in China, Korea, Illinois, Michigan and Nashville. He also teaches at VCU and serves on the board at the artist-run 1708 Gallery. Tarbell

got an MFA in drawing and painting but has found his stride in two less-conventional areas of art. His smoke paintings, which showed at Art6 recently, depict eerie circus scenes literally drawn with smoke onto the paper. And in December his hybrid stuffed-animal sculptures looked deceptively soft and cuddly from afar but disturbing in a "Through the Looking Glass" kind of way up close. Tarbell won a VMFA fellowship in 2007 and shows no signs of slowing down. \$250 to \$2,500; [www.rebtarbell.com](http://www.rebtarbell.com)

14 FEBRUARY 2008

# studio visit

volume one

**Rob Tarbell**  
[www.robstarbell.com](http://www.robstarbell.com)

CHINA, USA  
rob@robstarbell.com

©2008 BY ARTIST/WRITER  
FROM Spring, Board of Directors, November, We  
has been in Rhode Island, Connecticut, etc.

The "functors" were created by capturing the  
bricks of various 3-D card, table and photo  
set paper. The performing animal images are con-  
sidered with its burning process. Releasing the  
once back a natural use is removed from that  
environment at the expense of its audience, trans-  
forming it into entertainment or art.



**Elephant Ring**  
mixed on pattern paper, 6.5 x 9.4 inches

194



**Animal Rider**  
mixed on paper, 6.5 x 9.4 inches

195



## BRADLEY UNIVERSITY'S 31ST INTERNATIONAL PRINT AND DRAWING EXHIBITION

# Paper creations

Four area galleries to display 122 works from 109 artists

BY THEO JEAN KENYON  
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

It's become one of the premiere competitions of works on paper to take place in the country.

Bradley University's 31st International Print and Drawing Exhibition, which annually attracts artists from across the United States, opens Friday at four local galleries.

This year's show features 122 works by 109 artists, according to Suzanne Nestory, Bradley's director of galleries. The show received some 600 submissions this year, Nestory said. Works will be on display at Bradley's Hartmann Center and Heuser Art Center galleries, the Peoria Art Guild and the Contemporary Art Center.

This year's Bradley International embodies the vision of Judith K. Brodsky, who served as juror. A distinguished artist and professor emerita from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University in New Jersey, she also started the Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper in 1986, envisioning the center as an international hub.

Selecting the prints and drawings was both "exhilarating and provocative," Brodsky said in a written statement. As she looked through the submissions from around the world, she found a split between more traditional prints and prints that explore new directions.

She awarded "best in show" to "Force of Habit, No. 1" by Juliet Jaeger of Milwaukee.

Please see PAPER, Page C3



ABOVE: "Force of Habit, No. 1" by Juliet Jaeger of Milwaukee won best in show for Bradley University's 31st International Print and Drawing Exhibition. The piece is a large-scale charcoal and embossment on paper.



LEFT: Rob Tarbell of Charlottesville, Va., used smoke on paper to create his "Smokes: Dancing Bear."

## PAPER

Continued from Page C1

Habit, No. 1" by Juliet Jaeger of Milwaukee for her narrative drawing in charcoal on embossed paper. But Brodsky said she also awarded many honorable mentions because she found so many of the drawing submissions "wonderful."

Paul Krainak, chairman of Bradley's art department, called the Bradley International "a benchmark for works on paper for more than 50 years. Consequently, it has represented influential trends in printmaking and drawing for generations of artists in the U.S. and now increasingly on a global setting," Krainak wrote in his director's statement.

"The show has never precluded any artist that is independent of a market or community. Nor has it promoted a particular school of thought or practice," Krainak wrote. "Rather, it seeks to present art that defines its own terms of craft, criticality and vision."

Is it a man, woman or shadow that Juliet Jaeger's figure is pushing against in "Force of Habit, No. 1"? Jaeger, whose large-scale charcoal drawing was judged "best in show" in the Bradley International Print and Drawing Exhibition, said the figure is meant to be a person, but the sex is ambiguous. The figure pushing symbolizes someone who is physically and mentally capable against an immovable object.

## Bradley International Print and Drawing Exhibition

Bradley University's 31st International Print and Drawing Exhibition goes on display Friday through April 13 at two Bradley galleries, the Peoria Art Guild and the Contemporary Art Center of Peoria. Opening reception times are being staggered for the benefit of viewers who want to visit each gallery.

► **Hartmann Center Art Gallery, Bradley University:** 4 to 6 p.m. Friday.

► **Heuser Art Center Gallery, Bradley University:** 5 to 7 p.m. Friday.

► **Peoria Art Guild, 203 Hawthorn:** 7 to 9 p.m. Friday.

► **Contemporary Art Center of Peoria, 305 SW Weber St.:** 8 to 10 p.m. Friday.

► **More information:** Call Bradley University, 617-2969; Peoria Art Guild, 631-2787; Contemporary Art Center, 674-6822.

A May 2006 graduate of the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design with a bachelor of fine arts degree, Jaeger said she has been drawing "for as long as I can remember, and my parents always encouraged me." She does large-scale printmaking on the 71-inch by 40-inch press bed at the Milwaukee Institute, but, she said, "most of my work starts with charcoal."

Jaeger has a studio space in the Bay View area south of downtown Milwaukee, and she

conducts workshops in the area and has done some demonstrations at the Milwaukee Museum of Art.

This is the first time Jaeger has submitted work to the Bradley International, and three of her pieces were accepted ("Force of Habit" Nos. 1, 7 and 8). She said a work by a friend — Darrel Jensen, a Milwaukee Institute staff member whose entry consists of two large pieces displaying pixelated images captured from film noir — also is in the show. Both plan to attend the opening here.

The prairie grasses stand out in striking silhouette against a falling sunset sky, dusky blue and mauve, with pinkish clouds.

"Under the Sky" by Ann Coulter of Elmwood is a dramatic pastel presented from the point of view of a viewer on the ground looking up.

Coulter, who has been drawing for 25 years in pastel and charcoal and teaches drawing classes at Bradley University, said the piece is something of a departure from her typical work.

"I usually work with a landscape that is sometimes more traditional," she said. "But recently I've focused on getting away from that and finding new ways to talk about the landscape."

Her large-scale, 40-inch by 45-inch pastel exhibits that new focus as well as her delicate touch.

The Peoria Art Guild has exhibited Coulter's work, most recently in a show last year.

Rob Tarbell of Charlottesville, Va., entered the Bradley International show for the first time this year.

He created his "Smokes: Dancing Bear" with real smoke. "I used credit cards and old slides. I thought I could burn them to get a good smoke," he said.

To create such an image, he hangs paper horizontally or diagonally, suspended above the ground.

"As the smoke rises, the paper is catching the smoke," Tarbell said, and the images on the paper are formed by freestand movement, with some areas of blocking out.

He said he got the idea when he was out with friends drinking and smoking and wanted to do a sketch for a friend.

"Then there are those self-help books that suggest you burn things to get rid of odd emotional baggage, and I also thought about the Statius Chapel, which had smoke damage to it," he said. "So I thought how to get rid of old things I don't want and make the smoke rise to the ceiling."

So far Tarbell has turned out about 50 of his smoke drawings, and they "get quite a reaction," said his largest is 6 feet by 4 feet.

With an undergraduate degree from Auburn College in Alabama and two master's degrees from the University of Tennessee, Tarbell now teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University's school of art.

His studio, he said, is "a metal garage — fireproof."

Another first-time entrant is Talia Bromstadt of Athens, Ga., whose reduction woodcut "Nineteen" was accepted into the show.

Bromstadt, a student at the University of Georgia, said she just started printmaking last semester. Even so, her finished print is remarkably detailed.

"You start with a block of wood and transfer an image to that. I used a photo of my mother when she was 19, and I'm 19 now," she said. "After the image is transferred, you carve out parts of the block and get down color. Each time you put down color, you do a 'run,' and then each time you carve out more wood and put down more color."

"I used a lot of stencils, and I did eight runs on the press, usually there are only three or four runs — so it was an ambitious project and a lot of frustration, but it turned out all right."

Is her mother proud of the result? "She hates that photograph," Bromstadt said, "with her hair curlers and glasses. But, yeah, I guess she likes it because it's her kid."

Theo Jean Kenyon can be reached at 686-3190 or tkenny@journalstar.com.

第4回

# 龍山國際美術祭

2007 용산국제미술대전

龍山國際美術祭

Yongsan  
International  
Art Exhibition





Rob Tarbell mastered smoke as a medium for his 23 smoke-on-paper works on display at Art4. But he says "it's a constant struggle" getting the smoke to cooperate.



Tarbell's "Horse and Rider." Many of his works are of animals.

## Smoke signals

From fire and haze, new kinds of artwork emerge

BY ROY PROCTOR  
Special Correspondent

**R**ichmond newcomer Rob Tarbell is turning the elusive alchemy of art — smoke — to artistic ends.

He's an explorer. As far as he knows, no artist has blended the smoke trail to this extent before.

"Everything here represents a different experiment to control and master smoke as a medium," the 41-year-old Tarbell said as he sat amid the 23 smoke-on-paper works in his first Richmond solo show at Art4.

"It's a constant struggle between getting the smoke to go where I want it to go and where it wants to go.

"Occasionally, in the early days, when I would hold the burner too close to the paper, the work would literally go up in smoke."

The works on view range from the 11-by-15-inch "Red Boat Dancing" to the commanding 4-by-6-foot "Red Boat Dancing." Two are on vellum, the rest on watercolor paper, some of which has been painted red, blue or yellow.

One has been covered with transparent nylon fabric, which obscures the image like fog.

Except for two that abstractly suggest flight formations of birds, they represent elephants, leoes, horses and other performing animals, often with their trunks.

"Animals are not made to perform, just as smoke is not made to create art," Tarbell said.

Are these drawings despite the fact that smoking except smoke touches the paper?

"I think of them as drawings in the sense of making marks on paper," Tarbell said, but noted he could understand "how somebody might consider them prints. I could make multiples of the same image."

Imagine Tarbell, who stands 6-foot-5 in his stocking feet in a hand of acrobatic equivalent of Charlton Heston's Michelangelo lying on his back to create the Sistine Chapel ceiling, which was obscured by smoke over the centuries and has only recently been restored.

Tarbell's studio is the metal two-car garage at his West End home, where he's lived since moving from Charlottesville last month.

"I spread the paper on a board either horizontally or diagonally above me from the rafters and hold the burner under it," Tarbell explained.

"To get the representational images, I draw an image on another piece of paper, cut it out and use it as smoking, a kind of stencil. The cut-out portion is where the smoke goes, but sometimes it goes under the marking. The flame is very small, and the distance from the paper goes from an inch to a foot, depending on the kind of mark I want."

Tarbell leaped early that burning paper didn't give him nearly the intimacy or dark color of smoke he needed.

He now cuts plastic — everything from old credit cards to 35 mm slides — into small pieces and sets them afire.

SEE SMOKE, BACK PAGE

### Smoke

— FROM PAGE H1

The seeds for Tarbell's venture into the artistic unknown were planted several years ago when he was getting a divorce.

"One way to get through it, according to a book I read, was to burn sentimental things like photographs and letters that would remind me of the marriage," Tarbell said. "The object was to watch them burn and, like the marriage, go away."

"I did that. I would watch them burn, but I would watch the smoke at the same time. That was not only cathartic. I was fascinated as I watched these concrete objects transformed into smoke."

"More recently, I was out with my girlfriend and a friend of hers, and I watched her drink smoke and drink a lot through the evening. I became fascinated with how much she smoked and drank. I thought that, if I ever did a portrait of her, I would do it with bourbon and smoke."

"I bought a pack of cigarettes and lit them and tried to capture the smoke on paper, but it didn't work. I needed more substantial smoke. That's when I abandoned

the portrait and started making those in Charlottesville.

"I was leaving on a trip to Italy, and I was cleaning out my wallet. I decided to set some plastic cards on fire, and that's how it all began."

But hardly how it's likely to end.

"Rob's an up-and-comer," said Art4 gallery coordinator David Brundley, who proposed the show to his exhibition committee. "His work is unique. Abstract, but representational. It has a wonderful expressionistic quality about it."

Tarbell, who was born and raised in Ohio, holds a bachelor's degree in painting and graphic design from Auburn University as well as a master's in painting and drawing and a master's in education from the University of Tennessee.

He teaches art at Virginia Commonwealth University and Piedmont Virginia Community College in Charlottesville.

Tarbell is not above to post sending smoke signals to the rest of the art world.

"I'm very excited about the potential that smoke offers," he said. "I'll continue to do my other painting and porcelain work, but I'll stick with this, too."



## SMOKE EM IF YOU GOT EM



### Rob Tarbell at Art 6 Gallery

Who doesn't want to be freed from the tyranny of credit cards, licenses, club member cards, etc.—all the flotsam and jetsam that clutters up one's life? Somehow just cutting them in half doesn't seem liberating enough for artist and VCU art professor Rob Tarbell. So he turns to the primal, liberating power of fire.

If you think the process of transforming inspiration into art is ephemeral, you will want to see Tarbell's new exhibit, "Replacements: Smokes on Paper," for yourself. He burns things, such as the aforementioned accoutrements of modern living, and by manipulating the smoke, captures images on paper creating living memories in an instant. Sound complicated? In a way, you might say he's taking Jackson Pollock's action painting to its illogical extreme, as fire and smoke and not paint at the end of a brush, guides the work. Controlling the uncontrollable, perhaps. But Tarbell isn't straight jacketed by such esoteric concerns; he has a sense of humor. Some images take on familiar shapes—circus elephants, rabbit heads (a particular fascination of Tarbell's), horses, dancing bears—while others are more abstract, though they are equally evocative. Tarbell manages to make these images both whimsical and slightly creepy at the same time, a little menacing but retaining a sense of fun. Whatever they are, they are not like anything else.

—GREG HERSHEY

**"Smokes: Red Elephant," above.**

2007 韓·中 修交 15周年 紀念  
國際美術大展  
INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION



Robert L. Tarbell

The Snakes Drawings - smoke on paper

The "snakes" drawings consist of images created with smoke on paper. Using smoke came from a recognition of its inherent marking quality in accordance with a desire "to rid" myself of burdensome objects, memories, associations and their resulting hindrances. Credit cards, grocery cards, gift cards and passes were the first materials to be burned as a way to get rid of burdensome stuff.

The performing animal images created in the "snakes" drawings are consistent with its burning process. Something that once had a practical or natural use is removed from that environment at the expense of its original purpose, transforming it and replacing it in the form of entertainment or art.



Red Elephant 2 artwork paper - 15" x 11" smoke on painted paper



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