

Artist Statement for Gary Westford

I am a representational and narrative painter/conceptual artist whose work focuses on views of an American "landscape" (both literal and imagined) that address concerns about the environment, social equity, human rights, and life in contemporary culture. I often use surreal juxtapositions of incongruous visual images, and frequently combine paintings with vintage found objects (architectural columns, screen doors, weigh scales) to create site-specific environments. In my work I also often incorporate the use of words, advertising slogans, commonly understood cultural phrases ("loose lips sink ships," "that's all folks"), and/or references to favorite poems and "old master" paintings. My desire is to generate ideas about culture related to or outside and beyond the visual image overtly presented within the painting or sculpture.

Loose Lips Sink Ships (Seven Deadly Sins)

In this painting, the ominous monochromatic face and mouth of an evil oracle appears and looms in the background. The phrase "loose lips sink ships" is written at the bottom edge of the canvas. This phrase originated and was used on American/Allied posters during World War Two to mean "beware of unguarded talk" that could result in destroying the allied war effort against dark forces of evil that would destroy western democracy. In front of this image, a veil or curtain of seven "floating" red spheres/orbs provides a critical distance and separation between the viewer and the painting beneath it. These red (symbolic of passion, anger, blood) spheres were orchestrated to represent and symbolize the Seven Deadly Sins (pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, sloth). Our contemporary failure to recognize the truth in the face of lies and deceptions places *all of us* in grave peril...

That's All Folks

In this painting, a polar bear is seen within the same sort of circular format (that would soon disappear and fade to black) used as a closing "sign off" at the end of Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig "Looney Tunes" cartoons. I watched these cartoons as a child in the 1950s. "That's All Folks" would appear at the end of the cartoon as the central character would fade to black within a circle. What will be the fate of our world's polar bears? Will they fade to black forever? Will it *really* be "That's All Folks"?

RAIL

The inspiration/source for this piece comes from lyrics to "Liar Liar," a 1965 pop song by The Castaways: "Liar, Liar, pants on fire/Your nose is longer than a telephone wire/Ask me Baby, why I'm sad/ You've been out all night/ Know you've been bad."

This freestanding sculpture includes the use of an early 20th century hand-turned wooden “classical” column of the type used on government buildings across the United States and Europe, symbolic of Democracies since ancient Greece. The column is mounted on a moveable black granite base. On the lintel of the column, brushed aluminum letters spell the word LIAR. How do we discern between lies, fictions and false information, and truths based on accurate scholarship, academic and scientific research, and the collective will to find answers for complex questions? The title for this piece is *RAIL*... LIAR spelled backwards. In the early 20th century, American industry used railroad ties (rails) to build a transportation network across the country that connected our east and west coasts. Early commercial travel posters exhorted Americans to “see the country and travel by rail!” One can also use the term RAIL to criticize or “rail against” personal or cultural failings and injustices that impact individuals, institutions, governments, and countries.