



left, Francesca in Space, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 20"
above, Winter Coat, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 30"

A Life Enjoyed is a Life Well Lived

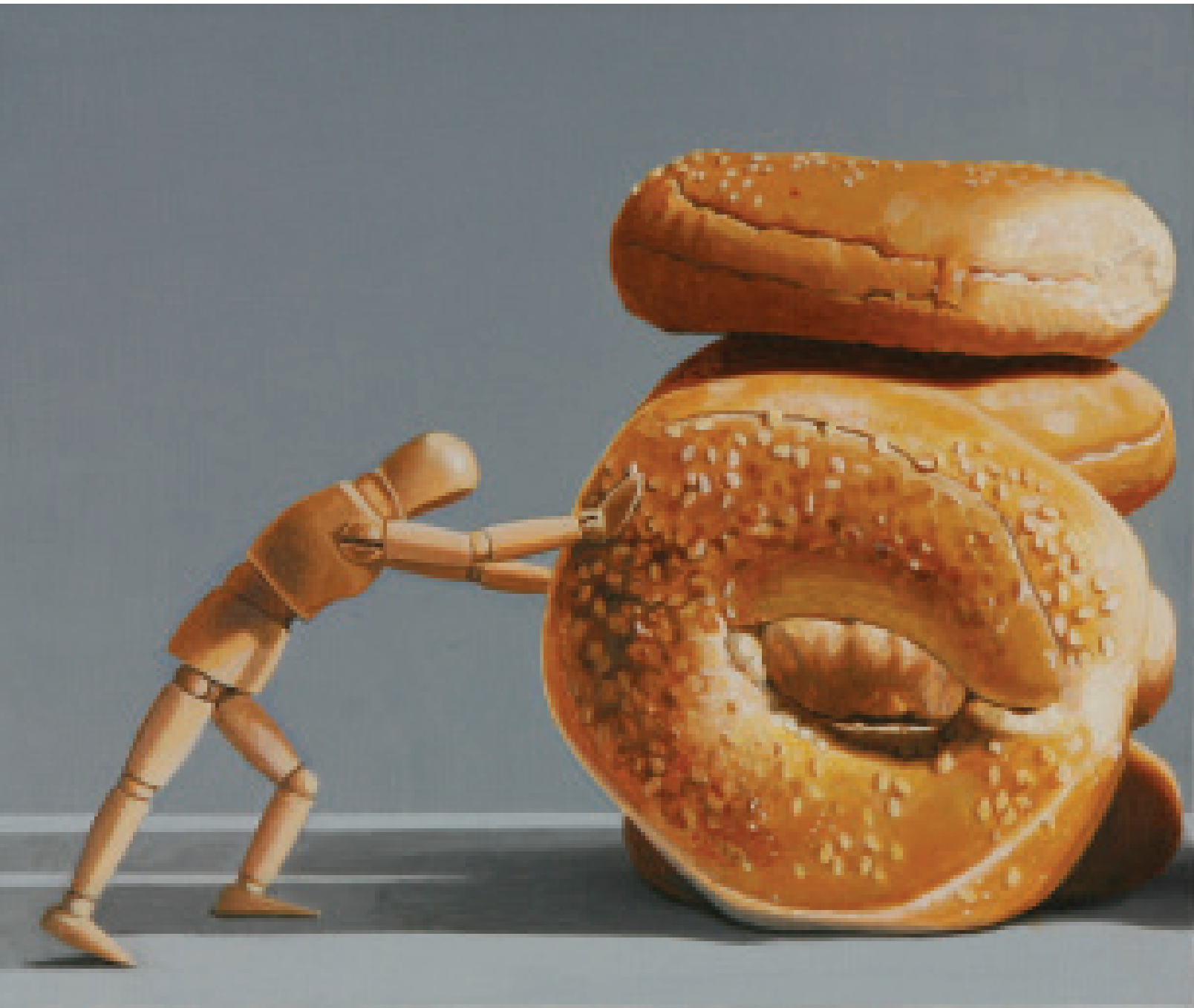
written by Brett Anningson

When it comes to his artwork, Jerry Davidson is quite the philosopher. He admits, "At the risk of treading on dangerous territory, I can't help but think sometimes that we artists take ourselves a little too seriously. Typically, there seems to be a collective and abiding compulsion to inject profound meaning into everything we do. I suppose this is why I, occasionally, edge over to the lighter side and look for some element of whimsy or mystery when I contemplate a possible

subject – in hopes that the viewer will pause for more than a brief glance and give the finished work a thoughtful appraisal. Besides, it makes executing the piece much more fun."

Describing himself as a "self-taught" artist, Jerry says, "In the early stages there was a lot of agonizing trial and error. Today, I wish I could say that I have morphed into a feverishly disciplined artist who starts at first light and works through the day subsisting on a scrap of bread and glass of water, but that is not the case. Much as I derive enormous pleasure from my painting activities, I am drawn to other interests which tend to inhibit my output as a painter."

These delights include most kinds of music. "For years, I have struggled to play not just one, but three instruments: banjo, guitar and ukulele. Lately, I have even taken up the drums in the



DAVIDSON

Bagelmen, acrylic on board, 8" x 16"



above, *Outlier*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 24"
 right, *Humpty Dumpty*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 20"

forlorn hope that pounding a stretched skin with a couple of sticks will liberate some inner talent. Finally, because I'm a card carrying member of the "older set", friends insist on lecturing about the hazards of idleness and the need to get out there and "take up jockery" as one so quaintly put it. Translated, that means wasted time on the golf course or tennis court which could be more productively spent in the studio."

But it's all part of the charm. When you look at Jerry's work, you see a sometimes serious, often whimsical, exploration of reality. Perhaps this comes from a lifetime of travelling as a pilot and seeing the world in different ways. That story begins during World War II.

The Art of War

"I have to think that seeing my father, daily, in an Army Major's uniform, and my brother in 'Navy Blue' on his rare shore leave, left an impression that was to catch up with me later," Jerry recalls. "We were living in Regina, my birthplace, and

the war was the main topic of discussion in our house. Apart from that, my life as a young school boy was as normal as one could expect in those difficult times."

After the war, his brother married and took up a career as a commercial artist. His father returned to his profession as a lawyer, while pursuing his passion for art on the weekends. Jerry says, "He'd be working at an oil painting on his easel long before any of us would wake. I remember watching, fascinated, as he created portraits of Plains Indian chiefs, a subject that seemed to be his favourite."

When his father became seriously ill, the family relocated to the west coast to be near Jerry's brother in Victoria. There, thanks to some informal drawing lessons with this brother, Jerry developed a growing interest in drawing and painting. High school ended and job-hunting began. This was the 1950s and the cold war dominated the news. The Royal Canadian Air Force had just begun an aggressive recruiting





A Daisy a Day, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 24"



Arrangement with Chopsticks, acrylic on board, 16" x 20"



Shapes, Brushes and Paint, acrylic on board, 18" x 24"



A Tree in Brooklyn, acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24"

campaign seeking candidates for aircrew training; as it happened, Jerry had spent one summer as an air cadet and the idea of being an air force pilot seemed exciting.

After training, Jerry became part of a squadron of F-86 Sabre fighters based out of Baden-Baden, Germany. For the next three years, he flew missions all over Europe. Then it was back to Canada as a flying instructor for six years, then another three-year tour with a fighter squadron.

"My final tour in the service was as a staff officer in the personnel branch at Air Defense Command Headquarters in Montreal," Jerry explains. "One day, about six months into my new job, an opportunity poked its head around the door to my office in the form of a fellow pilot who said, 'Jerry, have you heard? Almost all the commercial airlines in Canada and the US are offering flying jobs to air force pilots. With our background and training, we are almost a sure thing!' Well, his enthusiasm was catching. With visions of overseas flying again, and my wife's enthusiastic agreement, I applied for

release from the service – to move west and join Canadian Pacific Airlines, later known as Canadian Airlines International."

A Return to Art

Thus began a new chapter, with benefits, in Vancouver. Before long, Jerry and his wife were visiting various galleries in the city and admiring the works of Vancouver artists. The art market was something of a mystery, but after making inquiries and attending a few openings they began a modest collection, including Toni Onley, Richard Thomas Davis, Sam Black and Raymond Chow.

"Dipping a toe into the art world was also a strong motivation to renew my own personal interest in drawing and painting," Jerry muses, "and it wasn't long before I began some tentative attempts at both, to see where it might lead. A chance meeting with Raymond Chow gave me the extra incentive I needed. I joined his weekly life drawing group and later exhibited some of my early work in his Gastown gallery. He also introduced

me to some people associated with a professional ballet company, which is now Ballet BC. I began photographing and drawing the dancers and, for the next few years, produced promotional photographic work used by the company."

Photography had always been an interest. Combined with his experience in aviation, Jerry found a new world of opportunity opening up. He met a group of fellow pilots who performed at airshows throughout North America in the Pitts Special biplane and were collectively known as the Ray Ban Golds. After a couple of seasons flying with the 'Golds' as their team photographer, Jerry was invited to join Canada's premier aerobatic team the Snowbirds, as a photographer. He admits, "For the next five seasons, I flew with the team on 'photo missions' which was one of the most exciting times of my life."

In 1990, he was offered an early retirement package from Canadian Airlines. After weighing the pros and cons, Jerry and his wife decided to break with the past and begin a new adventure.

"We sold our house, moved to Salt Spring Island and jointly designed and built a house with a studio overlooking the Gulf Islands. Gaining new friends, adapting to new surroundings and launching a new career as an artist proved to be rewarding and inspiring, and we quickly adapted to island life in a flourishing arts community. I began to paint in earnest and exhibit my work in a local gallery. After all, I reasoned, what with my father, my brother, and an uncle who was an artist as well as a cinematographer for the National Film Board, it must be in my DNA."

Sadly, in 2002, Jerry's wife became seriously ill and, after a long struggle, passed away. Jerry was alone in a large house with not much left in the way of inspiration. Fortunately, both of his children and their spouses had moved to Vancouver Island. That close proximity to family helped him, slowly, regain his footing in life.

"Quite some time later, I met a lovely woman from Salt Spring who commented that she had recently enjoyed seeing one of my paintings at



left, Alberta Gothic, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 20"
above, Just a Little Sugar Please, acrylic on canvas, 20" x 24"

a friend's house. This fortuitous meeting turned out to be the beginning of a wonderful friendship and, later, the foundation of our marriage. I am convinced every artist should have someone close by to act as a creative influence and unflinching critic; I can say that Susan has fulfilled both those roles with insight and tactful criticism."

Fun in the Studio

Jerry will tackle just about any subject matter in a painting, as long as he can treat it in an unconventional way. "People have often said that my works are not what they seem at first look," he says. "I take that as a compliment." His inspiration is often out of the blue, stumbling across an image or scene which he just "sees" as a painting. He is fascinated with human anatomy and spends a fair amount of time life drawing from a model. For drawing, he works mostly with graphite pencil

or Conté pencil. He enjoys exchanging ideas with other artists, and likes teaching small groups and helping beginners get started.

"My style is certainly realistic," Jerry notes, "but I draw the line somewhere short of what is called photorealism. Because of the relative ease with which you can blend oil colours, I wish I felt more comfortable using them but, frankly, I find the smell and the bother of cleaning brushes just too burdensome. I've tried egg tempera with limited success, but have ultimately adopted a similar tempera technique which I now use with acrylic paint. Once I have settled on my subject and established the format and size of the finished work, I lay out the rough composition with pencil on tracing paper, guided by the many photos I have taken as reference. This stage is critical, since it is essential to feel comfortable with the placement of the main components that make up the final composition.





previous spread, Crow, acrylic on board, 16" x 20"
 above, Your Move, Oreo, acrylic on board, 16" x 20"



above, Cornwall Chimney Pots, acrylic on canvas, 20" x 24"
 below, Missing Mitten, acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24"



If something in the layout isn't right, I feel it in my bones and make adjustments until I've solved the problem. I begin the painting stage by laying in successive layers of thin colour in broad patterns on my painting surface, with the aid of my trusty hair dryer to speed the process. After that, it is a matter of slowly and painstakingly creating the appearance of blended colour and tone using progressively smaller sable brushes with a cross-hatching motion until I achieve the desired effect. I have joked that one day I might end up with a tiny brush that has only a single hair for the finishing touches."

His wife refers to his studio as "the man cave" – which, Jerry says, "is very appropriate, given that I can happily disappear behind my drawing table for lengthy periods only to reappear upstairs again at tea-time. I'm inclined to create a lot of clutter and it is a constant struggle to keep things in some sort of sensible order. The studio walls are covered with works by realist painters that I

admire, such as Alex Colville, Christopher Pratt, Richard Thomas Davis and Kent Bellows. I also have an insatiable thirst for books on early and modern painters, and how-to books including what I regard as a timeless classic entitled Figure Drawing for All It's Worth by Andrew Loomis, first published in 1948. He also wrote what I consider to be the best book ever on composition and perspective, which I refer to often."

Jerry says the hardest part is finding a subject that he knows will be interesting and fun to develop. "Once I am comfortable with that, the technical part is pretty straightforward. I can't stress how important it is to enjoy yourself while you are working."

Jerry Davidson is represented exclusively by:

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www.artgallery8.com
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