

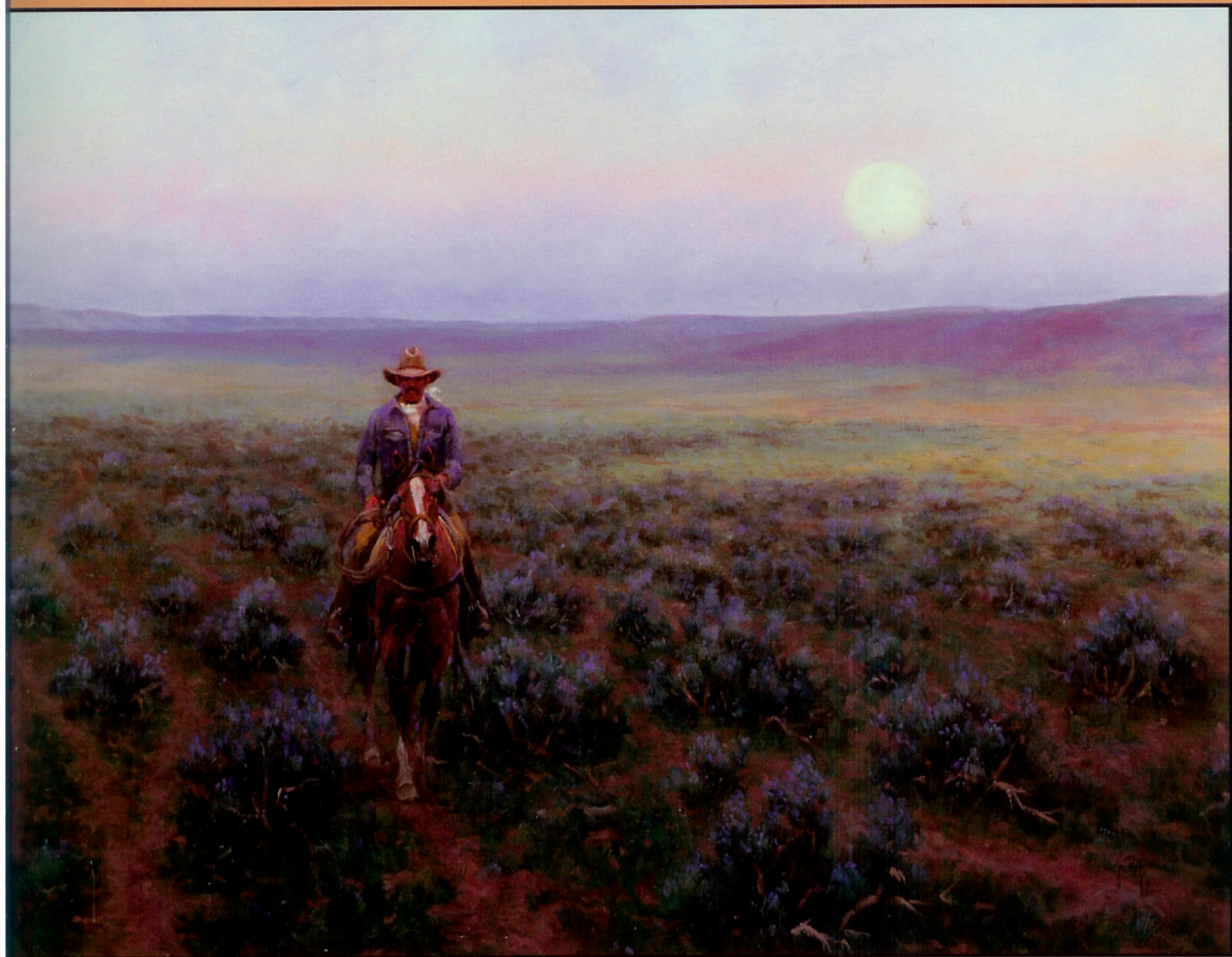
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# FINE ART

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# COLLECTOR



COVER ARTIST AND FEATURE STORY

# JIM REY

and  
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# The works of

# BYNAR

# HUMANITY IN ITS NAKEDNESS

by Patricia Saleh

In real life, Charlotte Bynar, who prefers to go by the name Charlie, is a very private person, not one who jumps at a chance for an interview, but saunters up to it, looks it over, then because she sees it's really worth the effort, tries to summon up the words to describe what she communicates so frankly in art.

It is perhaps because she is so private that we can appreciate how much she gives to her painting in offering her most cherished possession, her intimate self, in the hope that through it fragments of the truths of mankind will be revealed to us all.

The motive behind her work, she said, is the search for "a less hazy image of myself and the rest of humanity, or to see humanity in its nakedness." To this end, she often incorporates the moments and people who

have meant the most to her into autobiographical nudes, stripping the images of all but the most crucial accessories to convey her emerging message.

Nevertheless, she said, "I don't believe it's possible to see humanity in its nakedness—only rarely and only by those with the most clairvoyant minds, so when I paint a self portrait it's the easiest and best way to get a picture of myself. I can't look away from it and tell an untruth. It forces me to face me, and if I do that on a regular basis then I can be more intimate with myself.

"I would call my work kind of like placing realistic images on a surrealist background." In the painting she titled *The Rise and Fall* (1991, watercolor, 3 1/2' x 2 1/2') she said, "I painted what was happening to me in a relationship at that time. I was at the stage where

I was going to stay or go, 'rise or fall,' head out or head in, and the main strain we had was our sexual life. It was complicated. There is the one figure, me, trying to cover myself up as though to say 'Don't touch me,' and he [the man in the work] is very open. The other part of me wanted to hold onto him. There is something in a relationship that is hard to let go of; people stay in these things even though they're not good because they're comfortable."

The nudity in her painting has nothing to do with sexiness, however, and she makes that clear. "Sex sells everything. It could sell a cat or a chair, but I think this painting doesn't come off as sexual at all, even though they're naked people. It's more like a documentary to me. I think we try to sell sex too much. It really gets on my nerves—even the beautiful fe-

example she explained, "Most everything that's done with watercolors doesn't have strong pigments, so I was trying to experiment to see how deep a color I could get. That's the thing with independent thought; you can try something different. ... I like to try to get real colors out of watercolors. There's nothing wrong with soft colors, but it seems more alive when you have blacks contrasting with whites and everything in between. Soft colors are too wishy washy. There's a lack of conviction to them."

Although watercolor is recognized among artists as one of the most difficult mediums, Bynar is not sure they get the respect they're due. "Watercolors are almost never found in museums," she said. "You can find them in galleries, but not in museums. [To museums] watercolors are kind of a third-world thing. Oils are on top, but watercolors are only for people who paint on Tuesdays. I don't think it has to be that way. ... There's so much difference between sculpting with rock and clay and the same with oil and watercolors. If you chip a rock it's gone; too bad. If you're sculpting with clay you can remold it and start again. A bronze is nice but it's not rock to me. Rock means a person was incredibly intense in doing what he was doing. He can't just say, 'Oh I had a bad day. I'll go back and fix it tomorrow.' Watercolor is like rock as opposed to clay. I've heard it called the unforgiving medium because you can't go back.

"I'm also really fussy about things like a square with a rectangle and a line through it. There's no real technique or patience involved. ... I think a great abstract is very hard to come by. They have them, but they're intentional. Dali's *Last Supper* is just astounding, and the one with the Jesus floating in front of the cross and the woman looking up at him—he showed that he could paint, so when he went into abstract it became valuable to me. It's important to look at the artist's whole body of work. Some of these people who do abstract, I can't help wondering if they can really paint. Or, are they restricted to abstract because they can't do anything else? ... I think the paste-and-cut 'word art' is the same as when an artist commissions someone else to do his work, then the artist signs it; there's an integrity that's lost. Even though Michelangelo may have done that too, I wouldn't do it myself."

Bynar's intense esteem for originality rebels at duplication, even for the sake of preservation, to the point she has created a medium she believes will never be duplicated: watercolor mixed with her own blood. "When I went to Washington, D.C. I was so furious because you could buy duplicates of Renoirs or whatever. They have all these great technicians who copy one of these works and sell it for \$160,000. I can't stand that. I was very upset when they were paint-

ing over Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. To paint over an artist's work ... it's no longer their painting! I know they're valuable and have to be preserved but it disturbs me that another put his work over Michelangelo's. I use my own blood for paintings just because it makes it more personal. ... My blood is my own and will never be duplicated."

That does not mean, however, that she will never allow multiples of her work. "Originals can go for a lot, and Chris Robinson [the owner of Robinson Galleries] does prints of some of my paintings, which are not as expensive so people can enjoy my work for a whole lot less. But I'm not into mass production. I'm into quality rather than quantity. ... That's the most important thing. I'm a very basic kind of girl. I'm not too much of a material girl. My mom was always dragging

real life.' This guy was 16 when his dad decided to push him out of the house. His mother had died two years before and he was infatuated with her, so from that point on he was looking for his mother in any woman. Of course he was never going to find her so he was always going to be unhappy, and every woman he would meet would never meet his needs which would make her unhappy.

"The woman in the painting is not anyone in particular but represents a potential lover who will never satisfy him. There are two hands, and they are handcuffed together, and one hand has a skull in it because he was chained to death. There's a vase on the table that has no flowers. It's empty. The image in the background is that of his mother. He had only two photos of her and this was taken from one of them.

"Art is a tool for understanding wisdom. I myself think it has a place in humanity. If God is omniscient, and I guess he is, then that gives me a hope that we can one day know some of the secrets of the universe because I believe God is within us as well as everywhere else. Being human our senses are so limited I guess we could never be omniscient so even if we know only the tiniest fragments [of the truth] then it's worth the effort you put into it.


"The ancient Egyptians had the idea that if you could even barely touch the cloak of God you had done something of significance. God is like a beacon in the night that always calls you. It's always there and it kind of lets you know. It can be kind of distracting.

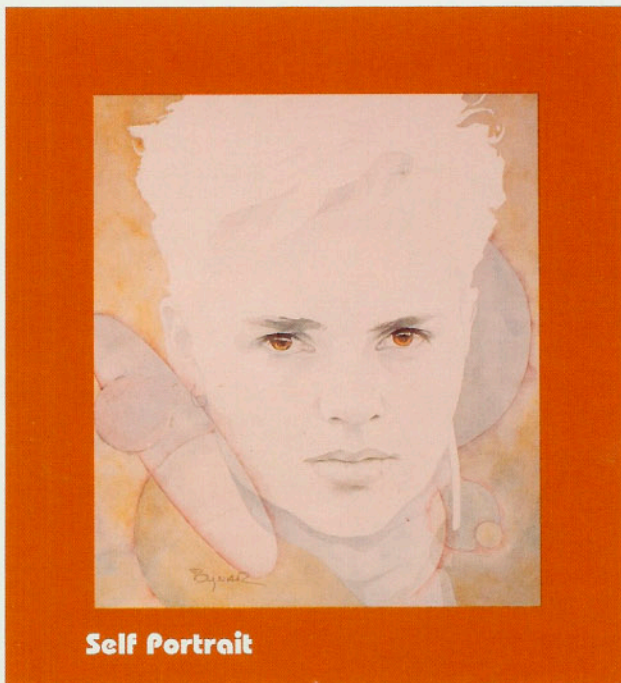
"I don't necessarily like to use the word God because it's attached to so many things. I don't see God as a man. That's why I don't like attaching the word God to it. It [God] is the essence behind everything. Sometimes when we use the word we can't

even get to the point we're leading to; we have to battle all around ourselves. It is definitely not a man with a beard up in the sky.

"People have an idea that science and religion can't coexist but I think they are very much in harmony. Einstein wrote about how religion and science can exist together, so I don't think they have to fight each other. I don't see why you can't believe in evolution and God too. Maybe the Big Bang was meant to happen. It's better to leave an open mind about these things. They're all speculation.

"The more we know about humanity the more we know about God. When I paint someone else it's more aimed at humanity than when I'm painting myself directly. For me it's very important to paint humanity.

"I have never tried to paint God directly. I don't try to portray images of God, but if you believe God is within everything then I can't help but paint that too." 



**Self Portrait**

me in out of the mud. ... She would drag me in, hose me down and clean me up and the first chance I got I was back in the mud again."

With quality and technique basic to her artistic values Bynar is far from basic in her themes, as shown by her description of *Fork on an Empty Plate of Crumbs* (1989-90, watercolor, 4' x 2 1/2'): "I had a stray cat whose name was Grey and he came into my house to die from pneumonia. He wouldn't eat and until that night he had never let me near him. Just before he died he finally let me pet him; he purred and then he died in my arms, and I was sad that our friendship ended so abruptly. I had a plate with crumbs on it and made the parallel to it that I had been left with little bits of crumbs of Grey. The plate represented something to me which just seemed to antagonize you but never fill you up.

"It reminded me of the oedipus complex, and I knew a man who really had it, so I thought 'Oh, I've got to paint this because it's

**Editor's Notes: Bynar's works range in price from \$750 to \$75,000.**

male body. It's too bad artists can't sculpt more nudes that aren't sexual. They [sex and nudes] don't have to go together. That's one of the million ideas I want to paint.

"Fine art can be the kind of tool that can provoke the artist to think about things he thinks he knows something about, and maybe doesn't know anything about at all. Art can unsettle you in a good way. With a little bit of unsettling of ideas you can grow. ... It's a very intimate tool that helps you learn more about who you are.

"Art shouldn't be complacent. If it's complacent you don't learn anything and it's no fun. If you get too complacent then you stop thinking or growing.

"I don't believe in furniture art; that's just technical. If you stop at technique it's like going to college and never doing anything

with your education, never using it to further yourself.

"If I just painted flower after flower I don't know if I would learn anything. It's too static and boring. I also try to aim at painting different kinds of people and all the things we love to hide. If we're always trying to hide something about ourselves we have to face it sooner or later, so I try to bring it out so we have to look at it. That makes my work heavy at times, but we're more truthful to ourselves if we look at it rather than hide it."

Although she isn't afraid of painting the truth, she seems to see herself as an analyst more than a negative critic. In fact, the negative side of art almost stopped her from being an artist entirely. "My dad is a painter," she said, "but even though he is a very talented artist and paints many beautiful things, when

I was young he also painted some which showed life in its rough ugliness. For some reason, those were the ones that stuck in my head and because I had respect for him I thought that one couldn't be an artist without portraying the distasteful, even if it meant struggling like my dad.

"My own creativity didn't relate to the gross aspects of life. I needed to separate my work from his. I believe in being constructive rather than throwing something like that in people's faces. I didn't believe they would learn anything by that approach, so I decided never to paint. One day, however, I realized I could paint anything I wanted to and that's when I started ... about five or six years ago."

With watercolor as her medium of choice, Bynar has chosen to try to further its potential. Using the work *Sweet Chelsea* as an