art ltd.

SHEPARD FAIREY

ROBBIE CONAL

SANDOW BIRK

CALIFORNIA BIENNIAL

TIM CAMPBELL COLLECTION

1980s ABSTRACTION

CHARLES ARNOLDI

U.S. $5.99/CAN $6.99 Nov/Dec 2008
www.artltdmag.com
11>
0 74470 07993 4

Home of the Brave

Los Angeles collector Tim Campbell prizes—and lives with—art that dares to speak out.

By Paul Young

Whether it's the Way of the Samurai, the Bible, or the Torah, the wisest men always say that the best way to rid one's self of fear is to face death directly; to stare it in the face and make friends of mortality. If that's true, then Tim Campbell might be a very wise man. Each day, as the 44 year-old architect arises from bed, he looks directly at Francis Ryan's *Dead Soldier,* which depicts an almost life-sized image of an Iraqi battlefield, with a lone corpse splayed across a desert floor. His arms are severed and charred, his skin burned beyond recognition. "I didn't buy [the painting] to shock people," says Campbell. "I bought it because it's a way of re-engaging with the horror that we've all grown to live with and ignore. Because I don't want to forget things like that. I want to face what we're doing as humans, as people, and as a country, everyday. So more than anything else, it helps me remember why I'm angry about the things that I'm angry about."

Ryan's *Dead Soldier* is not the only reminder of injustice in Campbell's 3-story, 2,400 sq. ft. home in Silverlake. To date, the self-taught architect, who only began collecting in the late 1990s, has acquired over 50 paintings, photographs and sculptures by the likes of Robbie Conal, Sandow Birk, Sue Coe, Clinton Fein, Jeff Gillette, Richard Ross, Travis Somerville, Bill Jacobson and more. Each speaks to racism, global terrorism, gender issues, religious hypocrisy and the abominable blunders of the Bush

Above Left:
Tim Campbell at home

Below:
Interior view with
"Market Street Pumpkin," 2007
Christopher Chinn, oil on canvas, 60" x 36"

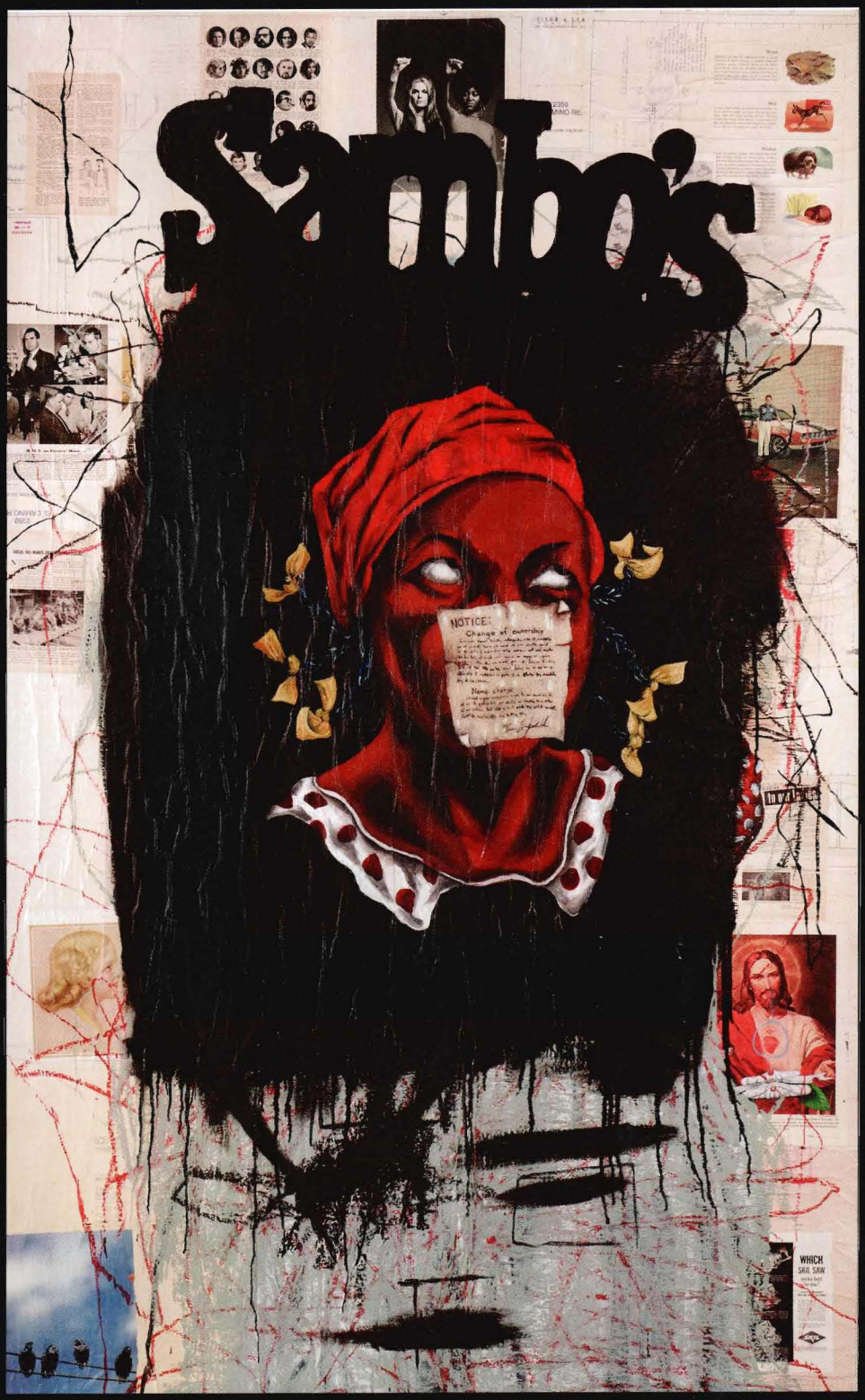
administration. "I don't find it difficult to live with difficult art," says Campbell. "I would find it difficult to live with beautiful, pointless art."

The house itself, which Campbell began designing in 2003, was inspired by Brutalism, the British-born architectural movement of the 1950s that celebrated building materials over ornament. That means it bears the spare, minimalist approach of classic modernism, with high ceilings and expansive white-walled rooms. But it also includes raw elements, such as an unfinished steel stairwell that connects its three levels and polished concrete flooring.

One might assume that the overall effect would be unsettling when combined with Campbell's collection. Yet both he and his partner, Steve Machado, have tempered the home's edginess with colorful Indian statuary, African masks, vibrant rugs and 10th century Asian furniture, which gives it a relaxed feel. What's more, Campbell deliberately designed large, spacious gallery walls to showcase his collection in a way that's more contemplative than bombastic, more serene than aggressive. In fact Catharine Clark, a gallery owner in San Francisco who specializes in political material, was so impressed with the results that she hired Campbell to design her new gallery space. "I have a lot of clients who are architects," says Clark. "But Tim's house was the first living space that I walked into and said, 'This is how I want my gallery space to be.' It's so perfect, so quiet and really allows the art to come forward."

A few hours spent in Campbell's home bears out that assessment. Its easy flow and ample light provides just the right atmosphere for both intimate and aggressive artworks. Not far from Ryan's soldier is Bill Jacobson's haunting photograph *4142*, which takes a second or even third glance to reveal a collapsing world trade center in a dreamy, hazy fog. Nearby is Clinton Fein's *Like Apple Fucking Pie*, which uses images and depositions from the Abu Ghraib scandal to create an American flag, and to lay bare the American practice of torture. Campbell bought the work before it was included in the "Visual Politics: Art of Engagement" show at the American University in Washington DC in 2006. Campbell laughs as he recalls being at the opening with Fein. "We were standing there," he says, "when we overheard the fellow who endowed the show say that it was the only piece in the show that he detested."

But it is Attila Richard Lukacs' *Love* painting that dominates the living room. Rendered in bold red hues, the work depicts a group of



"Sunday After Church"
2003
Travis Somerville
Oil, oil stick and collage on blueprints, mounted on canvas
100" x 67"
Photo: courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco

neo-Nazis engaged in a bout of sloganeering with banners and clenched fists. For Campbell the irony is not only in the inherent hypocrisy of neo-Nazism, but the fact that Lukacs' paintings can be read as either heterosexual or homosexual rituals depending on the context. "He's done the same with American military manuals," says Campbell with a smile, "which are just amazing."

Clearly Campbell enjoys a dash of humor with his politics. The text pieces on the living room wall by Ruben Lorch-Miller for example, use urgent phrases such as "If attacked remain calm" without revealing that they're common phrases found at camp sites. Then there's Sandow Birk's mock recruitment poster for the "War of the Californias;" a double-sided lynching rope by the New York team Leonardogillesfleur hanging in the bedroom; and Robbie Conal's *Blood for Oil,* which depicts Bush and Cheney throwing gang signs. "We weren't certain that we could live with Bush and Cheney," explains Campbell of the latter. "Or at least I didn't think that Steve could. But he loved it, because as a chiropractor he immediately recognized the physiology of deception and lies and said that Robbie nailed it perfectly."

Humor aside, the rest of the collection, which fills the downstairs office and spare bedroom, tends to deal with compassion and tolerance in a somewhat softer voice. They include Julie Pudlowski's stirring photographs of AIDS patients in Africa, Jurgen Schadeberg's intimate portraits of the Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela, and Christopher Chinn's riveting portraits of local vagrants, which are rendered in oil and in extreme close up. "My office is downtown," says Campbell, "And after buying Christopher's work I really started to look at the homeless people down there, whereas before I tended to look past them, like most people."

"I love these artists because they're able to speak the truth whereas the rest of us have to edit what we say," Campbell observes. "So for me art's freedom is everything. Because we still give artists the license to say what needs to be said. And we can look away if we want to, but a great work of art has the ability to influence us far beyond its beauty."

Born in Texas, the always charming, surprisingly gracious Campbell, admits that his interest in such works stems from growing up in a world that was woefully devoid of tolerance. He was the fourth child, and only son, of a Southern Baptist minister, who spent the first fifteen years of his life on the move. "We moved from Texas to Kentucky to Ohio and even Mexico," he says. "Sometimes as often as once a year."

"I LOVE THESE ARTISTS BECAUSE THEY'RE ABLE TO SPEAK THE TRUTH WHEREAS THE REST OF US HAVE TO EDIT WHAT WE SAY," CAMPBELL OBSERVES. "SO FOR ME ART'S FREEDOM IS EVERYTHING."

He moved to Los Angeles in 1986 to work in the design office for the Hilton Hotel Corporation. A short time later he struck out on his own with his own company, CADD Production Resource, which outsourced renderings to architects and clients alike. He has since designed over 60 homes under his own name, and remodeled nearly 150 others, including historical preservation projects as diverse as Richard Neutra's Singleton house for

Ronnie and Vidal Sassoon, and an addition to a Louis Barragan fountain in Beverly Hills.

That has given him the means to build an art collection that reflects both his desire to support those who dare to speak out against oppression and abuse, and to embrace the very imagery that would have been taboo in his parent's home. "I wouldn't say that I have any pet issues," says Campbell. "But the political content is either topical or in a contemporary sense, it goes back to my family and my personal history."

He enjoys the sacrilegious bent of Keith "Sand" Popplewell's paintings, *Stations of the Cross* and *Crucifixion*, for example, which hang in the spare bedroom and stairwell respectively; and he relates to the work of Travis Somerville, the son of a minister who routinely attacks American racism in his large-scale paintings and collages. In fact he placed Somerville's *Sunday After Church* not far from where he reads the morning paper because, he says, it reminds him of how much the popular media tends to enforce racist stereotyping. "There was a period when I was afraid to show that kind of work in my own home except to close friends," he concedes. "And it's a little nerve-wracking to actually expose yourself in this way because I don't know if my clients would agree with my points of view on issues of politics. But personally I generally like people who don't always agree with me."

He's not entirely alone in that sense. As veteran art consultant Barbara Guggenheim argues, there are quite a few collectors in Los Angeles and elsewhere who are drawn to message-oriented art. But as she says, they tend to be more concerned with specific "schools" of art, whether modernist or contemporary. "There's a school of American social realism that is very political and very well connected here in L.A.," she cites as an example. "Particularly amongst filmmakers who believe in being especially responsible storytellers."

Yet as Peter Selz, the author of "The Art of Engagement," argues, politically divisive artworks are still a tough sell. In fact, with corporate sponsorship of museums on the rise, fewer institutions are willing to host difficult shows. For example, only two venues stepped up to show Fernando Botero's recent paintings based on the Abu Ghraib prison scandal: the American University in Washington DC and the University of California at Berkeley. "Art shouting political accusations is unlikely to be featured in museums sponsored by corporations," says Selz, Professor Emeritus of Art History, University of California, Berkeley. "It requires courage and willingness to take risks to make political art in our culture." Nevertheless, as Selz suggests, there has been a gradual increase in such artworks since the 1990s, and a sharp increase in the last three years alone. "There's an enormous interest in this now," he says, "and much of it is coming from California."

That makes Campbell happy, as much of his collection comes from the West Coast. "It's not surprising that so much important political work comes out of this state," he says. "After all, this is a place where people tend to question the status quo, and our way of seeing the world is different from anywhere else. That's a big part of why I moved here."

OPPOSITE:
INTERIOR VIEW WITH ATTILA RICHARD LUKACS' "LOVE"

BELOW:
"DEAD SOLDIER," 2005
Frank Ryan
OIL ON CANVAS OVER PANEL, 48" X 72"
PHOTO: COURTESY OF WALTER MACIEL GALLERY, LOS ANGELES