

# Another Man's Treasure

Retro? Modern? Dumpster-diving Mezell's cool collages are a bit of both | *By Chris Kelly* |

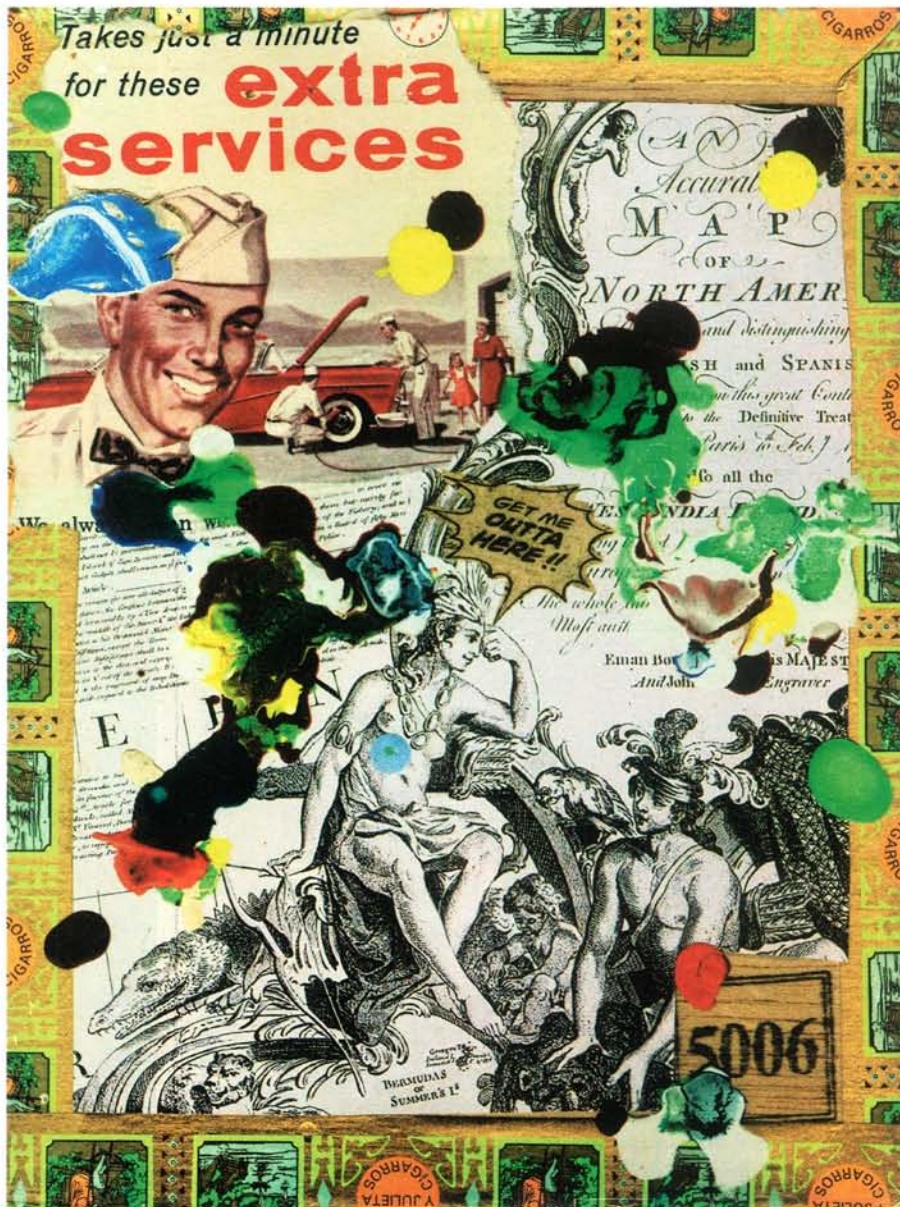
At a glance, the broad shoulders and imposing physique of artist Michael Macedo Mezell, 42, telegraph ex-football-player. But his body language is adrenaline-free, fluid and mellow. Mezell is a gentle man who's spent his life tackling ideas, not quarterbacks. "This is Baby Girl," Mezell says as his sturdy hand tenderly strokes a black-and-white kitten that has taken up residence in his home/studio in the First Ward near Downtown.

Along with Baby Girl, his compound is also home to a massive freestanding garage-like space where he creates gleaming, semi-retro wall-hanging collages and assemblages—some of which will be shown at Colton & Farb Gallery (2445 North Boulevard, 713.869.5151) Jan. 29-Feb. 27—and a small wood bungalow that was once his grandparents'. The house, like his work, is an rather sentimental affair combining a hodgepodge of things that make him happy—a bulbous Mickey Mouse lamp, for one, and an old jukebox from the now defunct Tex-Mex restaurant Josephine's Café, which his grandparents opened on the north side after WWII.

"When I was a kid, I'd pretend to be sick so I wouldn't have to go to school," grins Mezell. "Then I'd suddenly make a full recovery knowing that my mother would send me to the café for the rest of the day to help my grandparents. I loved it there, and I still prepare some of my grandmother's salsa and beans."

But art, not cuisine, was Mezell's passion, and, from childhood through college at Lamar University, he studied and created art, such as watercolors. During post-grad coursework at MFA's Glassell School, he delved into assemblage. It was a choice born of necessity.

"I didn't have enough money to buy art supplies," he says, "so I'd drive around Houston going through garbage cans and dumpsters and finding all sorts of materials for my work—paint, old photographs, greeting cards, stamps, fabric, maps." And he's still inspired by the same sort of treasures. Taking about six months per piece, the artist makes collages digitally, mixing in manipulated computer scans of found objects such as



**MAP QUEST** Mezell digitally collages computer scans of found objects such as maps and cigar box tops, prints the assemblages on aluminum panels, and then adds colorful splashes of paint. He shows new work this month at Colton & Farb Gallery.

coins, cigar box tops and kitschy '60s magazine photos. Then he prints the assembled images on six-foot aluminum panels to which splashes of paint are later added. The result is meant to be joyous, merging modern with wistful, as memorabilia from bygone eras float together on shiny, contemporized surfaces. "I create only positive pieces. I describe them as nostalgic."

Mezell's collectors include Colton & Farb Gallery backer Lester Marks and P.R. firm owner Maggi Jones. "Michael's work is deeply emotional," observes Jones. "Each piece sequentially evokes laughter, smiles, sighs and a remembrance of the past with fondness, while the actual piece ... is absolutely contemporary."

Given all of his success, you might wonder if Mezell still dives into the trash for art. The answer is yes. "One of my greatest dumpster finds is a family Bible from 1842 with handwritten notes about the family tree and important family events," he says, adding that he used the discovery in an assemblage. "Can you imagine someone tossing that?"

Luckily, some such discarded keepsakes find a new purpose in Mezell's thoughtful work. As he puts it, "There are so many stories to tell." ■

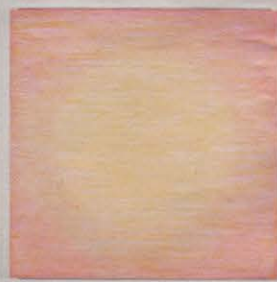


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## ARTNOTES

**An American Spring:** It's a splendid American season at the **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston**, which launches five must-see exhibitions spanning the 19th through 20th centuries while highlighting the works of four major painters. We'll bring you the details next month in our annual March art issue. Meanwhile, head to the MFAH for Valentine's Day openings of two exhibits on **John Singer Sargent** — "Sargent and the Sea" and "Houston's Sargents" (through May 23 and May 9, respectively) — paired with American grand master watercolorist **Maurice Prendergast** in "Prendergast in Italy" (through May 9). **Emily Neff** organizes the traveling shows while curating the Sargent exhibition culled from tony hometown collections. **Texas Triumphant:** While our Texas artists have been shamefully overlooked for the 2010 Whitney Biennial, they emit bright energy in our galleries. **McKay Otto**, painter of light and vapor, materializes at **Wade Wilson Art** (February 19 – March 27) ... Former Core Fellow **Francesca Fuchs** introduces another new series at **Texas Gallery** (February 18 – March 27), this one involving "paintings of paintings," including a few capturing husband **Bill Davenport's** work ... **Michael Macedo Mezell** gets a long-overdue solo, displaying his unique Pop imagery upon aluminum surfaces at newly branded **Colton & Farb Gallery** (through February 27) ... Make tracks to Victoria for **Susan Plum's** "Arbol de la Vida/Tree of Life" at **Nave Museum**, featuring prints created at **Dan Allison's** Texas Collaborative Print Studio, the artist's signature glass weavings of the universe and more (February 5 – March 15) ... At **Meredith Long & Company**, Houston painter and Glassell teacher **Brian Portman** unveils canvases that evoke nature (through February) ... And here's one international: Danish artist **Mie Olise** returns to **Barbara Davis Gallery** (February 19 – March 20), concocting an installation with a musical component, inspired by voyages and mythic places. **Forecasting FotoFest:** **FotoFest**, perhaps the most important biennial of photography and photo-based work in the world (fotofest.org), launches next month. And it all happens in Houston. Meanwhile, a slew of galleries are mounting early shows, including **Laura Rathe Fine Art**, presenting the iconic photographer of the Afghan Girl, **Steve McCurry** (February 20 – March 25). *For more Art Notes, visit [papercitymag.com](http://papercitymag.com).* Catherine D. Anson



McKay Otto's *Ever Catch a Glimpse Ever*, circa 2010, at Wade Wilson Art

