Born 1967 in Canton, Ohio, John Bell’s childhood years were wrapped up in an obsession that would become his lifelong pursuit, art. Labeled "prodigy" at age 5 was in private lessons rendering traditional figurative and still life charcoals and oils that bested older, more accomplished artists. "I believe artists are born, not taught" says contemporary, abstract artist John Bell.

After graduating with a degree in visual communication from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh in 1987, he worked for a short time as an illustrator for Gem Studio's in New York City. Returning to Ohio he landed a job as an art director for a prominent Cleveland ad agency. During that time he was honored with several prestigious industry awards; realizing that the ad world "was unsatisfying, cut-throat" and limiting to my other artistic pursuits” Bell explains. He moved west in 1989 where he sought adventure, freedom and the mind set to realize his other artistic interests in the mountains of Colorado, the north coast of California, and the deserts of Utah. In 1992 he settled in Salt Lake City, moonlighting as a highly sought after, accomplished graphic designer and photographer.

For over 20 years Bell has continued to develop his current artistic style. It wasn't until 2003; however that he decided that his work was ready for public exhibition where he participated in a group show. Within two weeks his paintings had all sold. Since then he has amassed an impressive body of work that employs multiple disciplines and creative expressions. His work combines the gestural elements of abstract expressionism with the linear qualities of geometric abstraction, the physicality and presence of large scale modern sculpture, kinetics, pop art and the ideas about space addressed in modern architecture. "My themes and imagery are always evolving, reflecting the times both past and present.” says Bell. Painting, print making, photography, sculpture and writing have all found their way into his work. "Over time I discovered that while these disciplines seemed to be parallel pursuits, they informed and influenced one another in many ways. Eventually it reached a point where the lines blurred and they started to become one.” explains Bell. "I like to think of this an interconvertible nature of artistic expression, which is as vast and full of possibility as we are individual.”

Working in this way has paid off for Bell. His work has been placed in many prominent private collections throughout the east and west coasts. Hailed as an "Artist on the rise by Salt Lake City Magazine; His work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including The Artist Fair in Miami during Art Basel and his West Coast debut in the Los Angeles area this past spring, a solo exhibition and mural commission at Time Warner Center in New York City. His work has been featured in a cover story for Utah Style & Design. He has received acknowledgements and reviews in Artists of Utah 15 bytes online, Salt Lake City Weekly, Artcotic.com, Catalyst, In Utah this week, Fox 13 News, Arkade magazine, NY Art World, Artnet and Blackbook magazine. Bell is an award winning graphic designer and photographer. He received a degree in visual communication from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. He currently resides in Salt Lake City, Utah. For complete portfolio and additional information, visit  www.artisjohnbell.com

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Artist John Bell
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It was an exceptional Grand opening of the Utah Alliance Art on Jan 4th in Salt Lake Downtown. A day earlier Fox 13 recorded the exhibit and promoted the new galleries in the Main Street, which have been on our website since September 2007.

At the beginning I was so impressed from the crowd that even could not see the art. The people there looked to me so different from the usual public that attend the receptions in Main Street every first Friday of the month. Different from the others and similar as a society. At the beginning I thought they came for the Grand Opening of the music studio, but later I learned they are all friends of the graphic artist John Bell, who opened a solo exhibit in the Utah Alliance Art gallery. He is forty, while a skull is printed on his T-shirt as a part of his art work and obviously his personality.

A young lady from this crowd told me she does not like Internet and her clothes were layered in really original way. The hair – red. And even one baby and two young boys at age abt 6-8 attended the reception. Both boys told me they loved drawing and spent much time for art. This night they came with their parents for the John Bell’s art reception.

It is time to introduce him. He is one half Transylvanian and one half Italian. His grandparents migrated to the USA and later his parents met in Ohio. But John has been living for abt 15 years in Salt Lake where his wife, Mary, comes from.

Recently John has begun to travel to Europe. He even told me that liked Europe better that USA. I think this is just the impressive effect of the places that we visit beyond our everydayness.

L. Nikolova: John, I decided to know you personally at the reception because Vanina Harkova, my student, mentioned quality when I asked her what she liked in your exhibit. This is not the art that can touch my heart and I was also so impressed by the crowd, so it was even hard for me to focus on your art works. I thought I was in New York. And I heard some interesting things first from your wife, Mary, and later from you.

Let me continue our conversation. How do you feel in Utah comparing to Ohio and the other places that you had lived? You can connect your answer with the problem of enculturation. In cultural anthropology we use this term that conceptualizes the integration of the individual into the society including education and different types of social grouping. We believe enculturation is a life-long process and we all depend on it, respectively on art as one of the most formative cultural components of our human creative and communicative personality.

J. Bell: Well, as far as adapting to a culture, I’ve remained a bit of a fringe dweller here in Utah. In other places I’ve lived (Cleveland, New York, Pittsburgh, Breckenridge Co., Mendocino, CA ) I found that I almost immediately fell into the rhythm of them, the towns & with the people. Here it’s been much slower. I had no problem adapting to the outdoor lifestyle which is a big part of the culture, but for most part I still feel very much like an outsider here. In some ways, I feel we (myself & the people I have become close with) have created our own culture. There is an solid artists community here that is growing stronger every year. Over the years I have felt more a part of that, & that I am helping to strengthen & grow it.

L. Nikolova: And now about your art. My brother is a graphic artist. In other words graphics are a kind of my every-
dayness. What I know about this art is that it is an extremely hard work. And of course, highly technical. You told me that you were just born an artist. But why graphic design? How do you feel the world through your art?

J. Bell: The disciplines of graphic design are invaluable tools for me as a painter. Creating identity & image though the use of shape, color, composition, negative space, etc... Photography is very much the same for me. They both inform my paintings on many levels, always bringing a fresh perspective to the work. They are all about communication. How do I feel the world through my art? Simply put, like a mirror. I'm just trying to translate what I see & feel into my art in a way that resonates with others.

L. Nikolova: Let me talk a little bit about Europe. You showed me Paris on your pictures. What about the life and people in Europe? What makes them different from Americans? Did you find life-long friends there?

J. Bell: A few friends, we'll see about the life-long part. What appealed to me most about people in Europe was how easy & open they are with you (a complete stranger). I found myself in long, in-depth conversations with so many of the people I encountered. This may have a bit to do with your own state of mind while traveling, but that easy attitude seems to be the rule there, not the exception.

L. Nikolova: You told me that would love to come to Bulgaria. And now you know where it is. I am sure you will love our artists in Karlovo. Do you think the people in Bulgaria will understand your message through your art? Or probably we need to help them – what would you like to tell the people through your art?

J. Bell: I don't think anyone will have a problem understanding my art at all. I try to convey a wide range of human emotions in as modern a way as possible. I see them as emotional touchstones & mirrors of the times we live in. I can share my inspirations & influences with people to help them understand me a bit better as an artist. But as far as meaning or a message goes, I believe that comes with time. A work of art has to live in the world for a while before the meaning becomes clear. Many people (hopefully) will see it, talk about it, & maybe even write about it. Some where in that time line meaning gets attached. If I could hope for one thing that people might get from my paintings, it would be to remind them of the possibilities of the human spirit & the power of creative thinking.

L. Nikolova: I am sure your numerous fans would love to know more about your everydayness? What inspires you more for your art - your everydayness or everything that happens beyond it? You even have a company for T-shirts prints. It is not very usual one artist the cover such a huge scale of imaginary – from T-shirt prints to large scale art works? Approaching the psychology of art, do you think the huge art work makes you free from the accumulated cultural energy of your imaginary? Or probably you have a specific motivation for your large scale graphic design?

J. Bell: Everything inspires me. I am hardwired to the creative process. Things I see, hear, & read can all start a fire. I take photographs almost every day. If I’m not in the studio working, I’m doing graphic design or filling notebooks with thoughts & ideas. It almost never stops, even in sleep I sometimes dream the solutions to a design problem or have images of paintings come to me. I can’t even walk into a room, any room, without accessing it’s spatial qualities, or the light, how it hits me & then re-working the entire space in my mind.

Art is the arena in which I learn. The questioning nature of it helps me to see & understand life in more philosophical & spiritual terms. It is a space in which I fail & succeed, re-evaluate & grow to understand myself, the world, & the people in it. Most importantly, it keeps me in a constant state of becoming.

L. Nikolova: What is artcotic.com? I saw your name as a newly added artist? Do your art works belong to a certain style of art?

J. Bell: ARTCOTIC.com is new venture I started with business partners Rob Worthington & Alex Lodemeier. It is an online artists community & retail shop that specializes in high end limited edition artists apparel. It is a collaborative site as well where we invite artist to submit work to us each month in different themes. Chosen artists get paid, they also get an artist profile page on our site, recognition & promotion online & in
national advertising. We have a lot of big name artists involved like Frank Kozak, Liz Magrath, Superkitch & Koralie. Breaking bands like Pinback & White Rabbits, Director David Slade, as well as very talented but lesser known artists that we are helping to build a reputation.

As far as my artwork goes, I feel I have several very distinct styles. They all run deep (meaning I have been developing them for many years). On the surface they may appear quite different, but I find that they not only inform one another, but as time passes their paths seem to cross more & more. I have always draw from many different movements in art. From abstract expressionism, color field painting, geometric abstraction, pop art, etc… as well as from the philosophies behind modern architecture & sculpture. I’ve never been interested in choosing just one style & working within set ideas, that would be to limiting. What I have been working towards all these years is creating a movement & style that is my own.

L. Nikolova: Ethnically we are from close regions. You may not believe but I am sure that your Romanian and Italian blood contributes a lot you to be so liked. How do you feel – the people like you because of your art or they like your art because of your personality?

J. Bell: Well, the art certainly draws people in, but in the end I feel it helps if they like you as a person. No one is going to invite you or your work into their lives or into homes if you’re an asshole.

L. Nikolova: It seems hard to live from art in the USA. Tell me something about the people who buy your art. I am sure many or most just want to see your art work everyday at home. But probably there are some who invest in your art. And here is the tricky moment – if the prices of your art work go up, you will have more clients who would invest in your art. I saw at this exhibit the price $350.00 for your small prints and $1800.00 for the bigger ones. When you began, what was the price of your art works? What would do with the money if you sell some graphics for instance for a million?

J. Bell: Investing in art is always a tricky proposition. Personally, I feel you should buy art because you connect with it. You’re going to be living with it for a long time so you want something that your emotionally invested in, that you can live with & enjoy for years to come. The price of my work has gone up considerably in the past several years. The paintings that were going for $1500 to $2500 four years ago, now go for between $3000 & up to $10,000, with the large scale works recently selling for as much as $25,000.

The show you came to, “The Sound & The Fury” was a deliberate attempt to broaden my audience. I’ve been lucky enough to have a fare amount of people locally who have followed my work, but have ask if I would be doing anything more affordable. So that show (which was all limited edition prints) was a response to that request. As far as what I’d do if my work sold in the million dollar range… well, I don’t think it’s healthy to think about that to much. If it did, I can tell you that I’d buy a lot of art from artists I admire.

L. Nikolova: John, I understand the art is your life. However, there is something beyond the art? Do you have some
secret whose door you can open, perhaps to free space for other secrets?

J. Bell: No, nothing I would consider a secret. I want a full & happy life. I want the people in my life to have that also. But art has always been the center of my life & want nothing more than to have my place in that world. To have relationships & dialog with all the people involved in it.

L. Nikolova: As my grateful acknowledgments for this interview. I thank you also for the invitation to visit your studio and really hope that soon we will continue our conversation there.

When I finished the interview, I visited the website of John Bell. It looks I was not wrong with my feeling that John Bell that Friday brought the New York spirit in Salt Lake Downtown because I read:

“John Bell’s work has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including a solo exhibition & mural commission at Time Warner Center in New York City in 2005 and 2006. His work has also been featured in a cover story for Utah Style & Design. He has received acknowledgements & reviews in Artists of Utah 15 Bytes ezine publication, Salt Lake City Weekly, Catalyst, In Utah this week, Fox News, NY Art world, Artnet & Blackbook magazines. Bell is an award winning graphic designer & photographer. He received a degree in visual communication from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. He currently resides in Salt Lake City, Utah (http://www.onemodernart.com)” [The new web address is http://www.artistjohnbell.com/home.html].
John Bell.
The painting "Einstein's Dreams #1" is in part based on a book of the same name by Alan Lightman. In it he bases several of his short stories on Einstein's notion that time is circular & is constantly repeating itself, sometimes exactly the same, other times slightly or completely different based on our individual decisions... & that all these moments in time may still exist in parallel space. Based on a abstract understanding of this, I simply asked the question "what might that look like as a painting, if you could see clusters of random moments all at once?" In this first painting of the series, I have repeated images from past works as an even more tangible illustration of this theory. Over the past 13 years, I have read his book several times and have always been interested in these ideas, but it wasn't until the past 3 to 4 years, after studying the ideas & philosophies about space addressed in modern architecture & incorporating them into my work, that a solution was realized. So this piece, like most of my work, is a continuum of years of studies, questions and paintings. I am always searching for a new pictorial language to add to my work. Once I finish with a set period of ideas and feelings, I have to find a new visual language to carry on, a new way to express an evolving sense of exploration & understanding by incorporating different forms and ideas into my vocabulary. This is the key to growth in my work.
Identity, Memory and Loss (1)
"IDENTITY, MEMORY AND LOSS"
SERIES - ARTIST STATEMENT

The identity, memory & loss series are abstracted visual commentaries on who we are as individuals and as a society, what makes up our identities, and what gets lost in the process.

They started when I came across a series of photographs of displaced Jewish children from world war two. The children had been taken by the Nazis at the onset of the war, placed in concentration camps and used as slave labor throughout Europe. Some had had their names changed, or had been taken so young that they didn't remember their family names. After the war ended, the kids were taken to the Kloster Indersdorf Center and photographed holding chalkboards with their names, or what they thought their names were written on it. The photos were then placed in newspapers and publications all over Europe in hopes of finding their identities and reunification with their families.

I was so moved by the photos that they got me thinking about our search for identity today, and what images run in the papers and magazines in modern times, attempting to sell us identity through the use of imagery. Memory is such a malleable and selectively revisable notion, so many of us have such a vague awareness or understanding of the nature of who we are, why we choose what we choose, and what effects and manipulates those decisions. The influence of those images can be so powerful that the reasons we choose certain things may have less to do with who we are, and have more to do with acceptance and fitting in... But fitting in to what & why? They stand as question marks on what gets lost in that process. The juxtaposition of the images can be read as a statement on values and priorities. The architectural lines running over and through them are metaphors for division of self and between one another and self imprisonment. The scrawl of words are my personal thoughts on all this, but are mostly buried in the imagery as to not be so much read by the viewer, but to create a look and mood of the confusion these opposing notions create.

These works were created in an attempt for me to work out my own thoughts on these ideas. I am not attempting to tell anyone who they should be or what to think. As I've said, they stand as question marks; I leave it to the individual viewer to answer these questions for themselves.

~John Bell
Identity, Memory and Loss (2)
Identity, Memory and Loss (3)
FROM THE CALENDAR OF THE ARTIST JOHN BELL

March 2007: John had a very significant solo exhibition titled; "Building Icons" where her previewed over 9 of his most ambitious and large scale works at Patrick Moore Gallery originally on 500 west and 200 so, but has since moved to Sugarhouse. He received a great deal of press for this exhibition, including articles and mentions in Artists of Utah 15 bytes online publication, In Utah This Week & The Salt Lake Tribune.

The piece that received the most press was his "Standing on Foreign Ground", (KOB) see attached. This work consists of 4 free-standing towers and a large background wall piece. This work illustrated a musical portrait of the great jazz musician Miles Davis and his 1957 band and album "Kind of Blue". The towers represent Miles and the other 3 musicians and the background piece serves as a stage set or back-drop. As you view this work especially in person you get a sense of theatre, sculpture and a narrative that is evident with John's emotional brush strokes, rich blues, and geometric patterns throughout each of the pieces. This significant piece was placed with music executive and promoter, Bill Silva in West Hollywood, CA. in late spring of 07 and is the most expensive piece of art John has sold to date for $25,000.

January of 2008 - John debuted solo exhibition of "The Sound and the Fury" & "Election" series of digital prints at The Utah Arts Alliance and is where we met you. This exhibition was the first time John had shown his digital prints. We were approached by Fox13 News Utah and interviewed John and featured work on camera during their live morning show.

June of 2008 - John enjoyed his west coast debut of his art in the Los Angeles Area. He exhibited both painting and a series of prints; and unveiled a series of painting, titled "Identity, Memory & Loss". And for the first time incorporated silk-screened figurative images depicting, beauty, identity, & human loss, some of the images where photographs misplaced Jewish children who had been displaced after the war. (See explanation) attached. Very powerful and provocative.

July 2008 - John is approached by the editors of Salt Lake Magazine to feature him in an editorial as "An artist on the Rise" with 4 other artists. For the Sept/Oct. 08 issue of the magazine.

September 2008 - John is accepted into inaugural debut The Artist Fair in Miami Beach, December 4th-7th, 2008. The Artist Fair is the first and only all booth fair for individual artists at the Shelborne Hotel in Miami's art deco district. The fair runs in conjunction with the prestigious Art Basel, the most important art show in the U.S. and a sister event to the 39 year old Switzerland show. Art Basel attracts an international bevy of renowned art galleries, museums, curators, critics, dealers, high-profile collectors, artists and art lovers. This all artist fair is a vital addition to the Basel related fairs. It will provide unprecedented access to the exhibiting artists as never before.

October 2008 - John is featured in a group exhibition for "5 Utah Artists on the Rise" as featured in the Salt Lake Magazine editorial at Phillips Gallery; where he debuted one of his "Einstein's Dreams" paintings.

November 2008 - John has completed 4 new pieces of work to exhibit in Miami at The Artist Fair on December 4th -8th. He will be exhibiting a total of pieces of work and digital prints from his "Election" Series. (See attached)

John is already slated with an exhibition of his digital prints for February 2009 at Phillips Gallery in Salt Lake City. During the last 5 years John has exhibited in 24 group and solo exhibitions; which is outstanding for an artist exhibiting for this length of time. John has sold 28 pieces of his art in 2008.

~ Mary Fresques