



ASHEVILLE MADE

July 31, 2022

The Muse Who Demands Down Time

by Tom Kerr



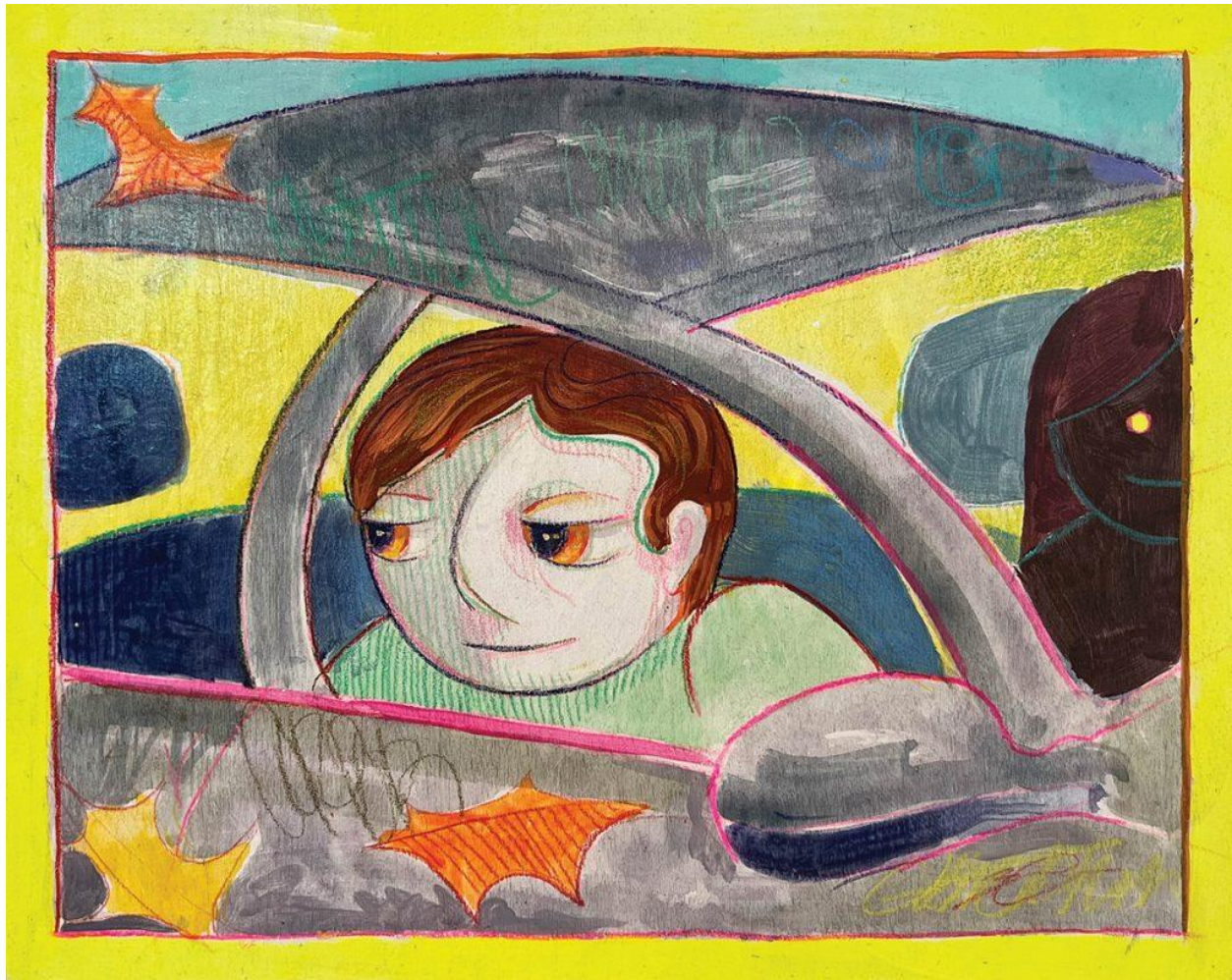
Zander Stefani in the zone of one of his downtown murals.
Photo by Colby Rabon

TRACEY MORGAN GALLERY

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In school, says Zander Stefani, he learned what makes up the basis of any good painting: “line and contrast and variations in texture, color, and value.”

But then, he says, “I arrived at my own way of painting.”



Ghost Rider

Through trial and error, he relates, “a style emerged where I started to create recognizably ‘me’ sort of work.” The multimedia artist and muralist began pursuing a degree in architecture at the Savannah College of Art and Design — but promptly dropped it. “My first day of classes included an architectural class and an illustration class,” he recalls. “The architecture assignment gave me loads of anxiety, whereas the illustration assignment was fun. I switched to illustration.”

Craving even more freedom, he later switched to painting.



A Meeting

Stefani went on to earn a BFA. Had he pursued architecture, one might imagine him designing in the mood of Antoni Gaudí, whose fantastical modernism was defined by color, fluidity, and a wonderland dose of 19th-century psychedelia. Stefani’s own playfully mod murals do, however, contribute effervescently to architectural structures along Asheville’s South Slope Mural Trail — where they remind some of the 1970s pop art of Peter Max and the bold graphics of Heinz Edelman, the artist behind the Beatles’ “Yellow Submarine.”

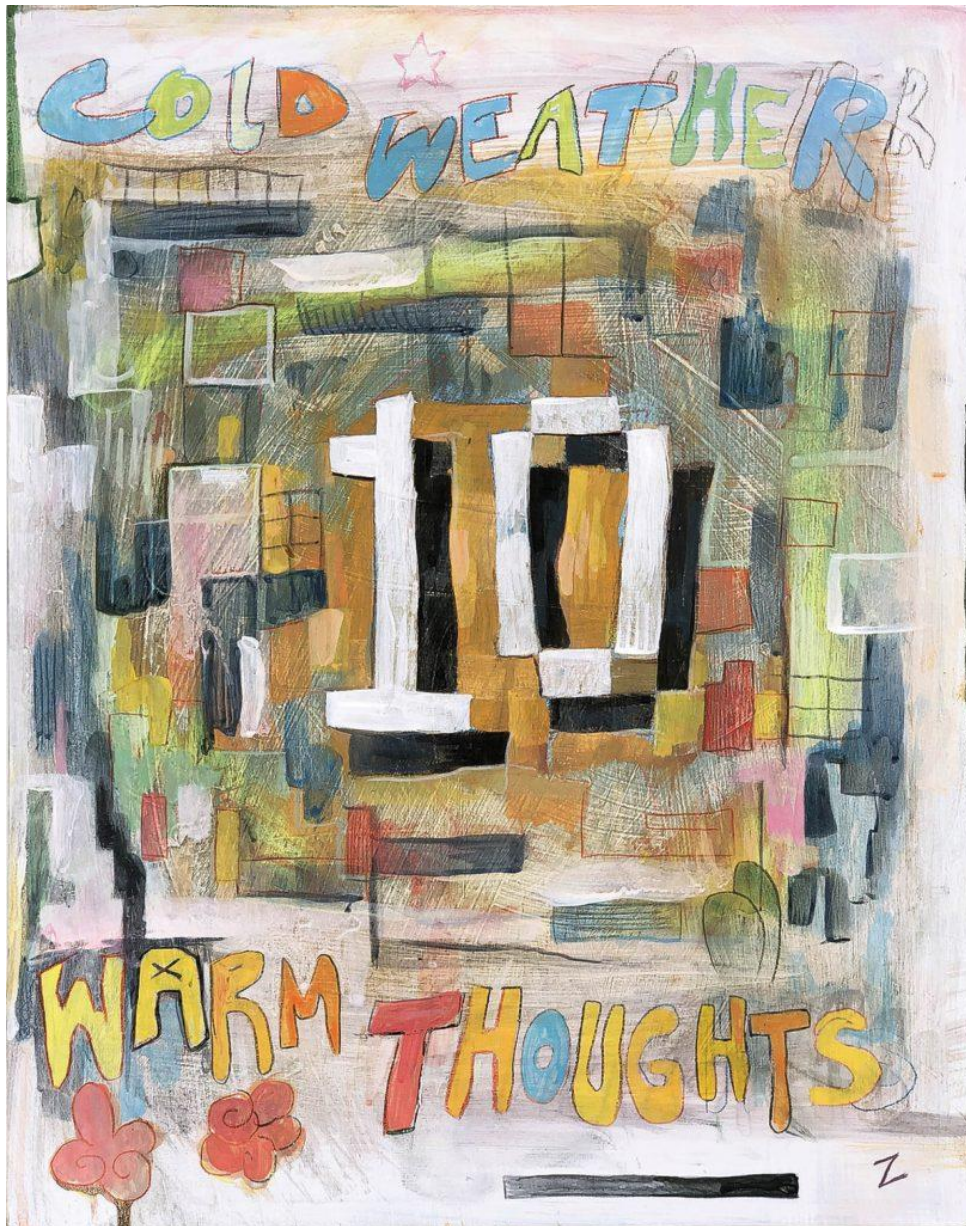


The Shadow Above

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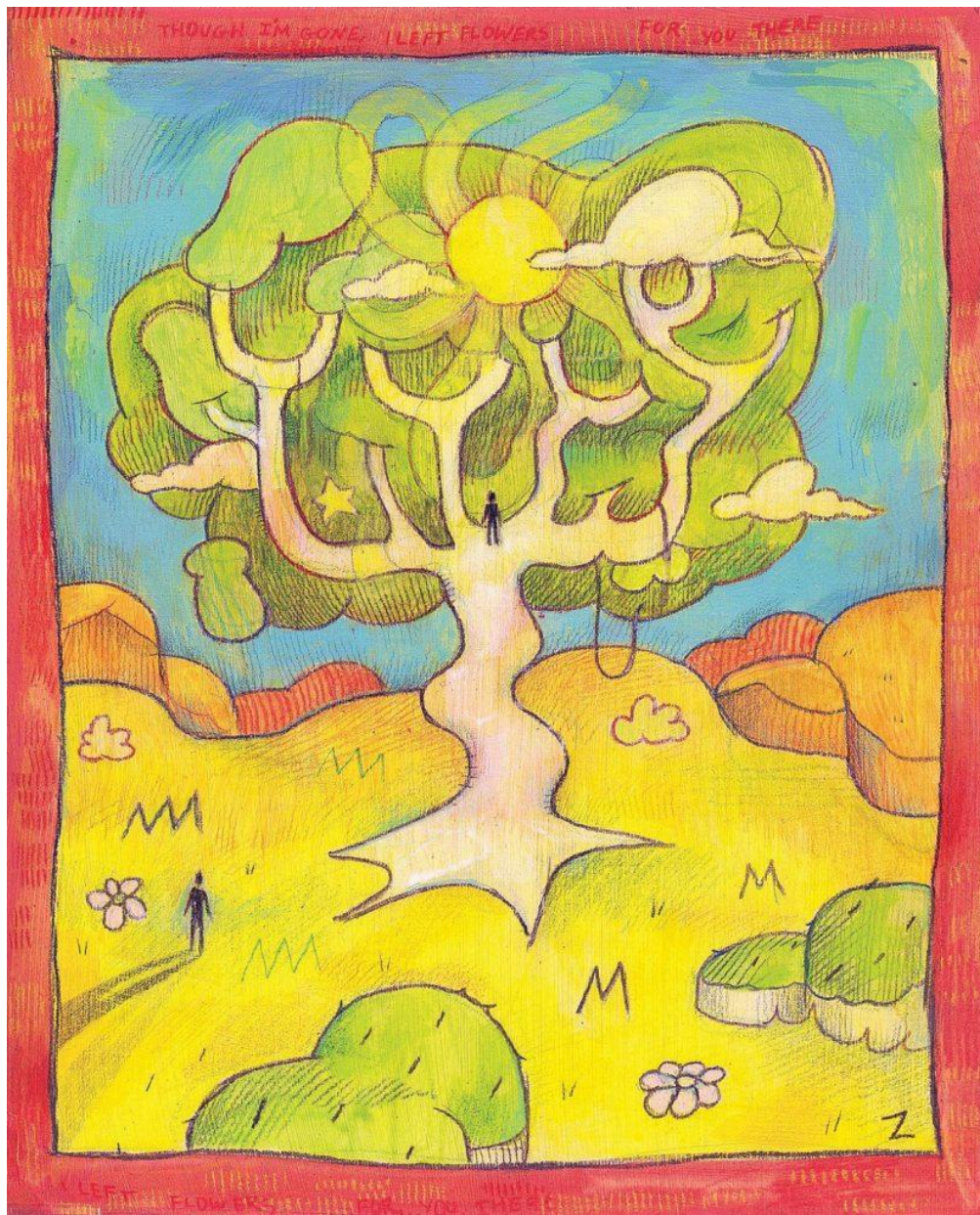
With murals, he's using spray paint and basically transferring illustrations or sketches to a much larger scale. In his studio, he can use colored pencil, charcoal, acrylic, and clear gesso for texture — and typically paints his layered, expressive abstracts and loosely executed portraiture on wooden panels. This allows him to sand down sections of paintings-in-progress to “build up more character and history in the painting.” The imagery is kinetic and impulsive, full of a free-spirited humor. Stefani’s goal is to suspend self-judgment and try to, as he puts it, “get as pure of an expression from my body as I can, letting my hand move the pencil or move paint around, letting it flow.”



Cold Weather, Warm Thoughts

So absorbed, he gets deep in the zone — a place where “each mark I’m making, each decision, comes from everything I’ve ever visually seen. When that happens, in the end the painting feels like such a pure and honest reflection of where I am at that moment in life — just letting the art come through me, even if I don’t remember how I got there.”

More often than not, Stefani — a joyfully self-confessed procrastinator — gets there in a roundabout way that involves not painting at all.



Though you're gone, I left flowers for you there

“I stay busy, but I’m always avoiding some kind of work I have to do for a client or gallery. I love painting, but it takes energy and work. So, my life is a constant battle between wanting to sit and do nothing and having to paint to be productive.”



Detail from a Stefani mural

Zander Stefani, ZanZan Gallery, 70 Charlotte St., Asheville. For more information, see zanderstefani.com or on Instagram: @zstefani and @zanzangallery. Stefani is also represented by Tracey Morgan Gallery (188 Coxe Ave., South Slope in downtown Asheville, traceymorgangallery.com).