

On the Cover

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on March 11, 2013.

For Elizabeth Huey, the past is not dead. "History is with us," she recently said, and she is confident that history will continue to inform her paintings. The two historical figures in the painting on the cover of this issue are familiar to psychologists but are not usually depicted at play. *Freud and Jung* is Elizabeth Huey's artistic interpretation of an actual photograph taken during Freud and Jung's 1909 lecture tour in the United States.

Born in Virginia and currently living and working in New York City, Huey started painting as a child. At age 13 she took oil painting lessons from a Hungarian woman after school. The lessons were charged with stories of French painting and World War II—a personal story of clobbering a Nazi general over the head with a log from the fire might easily follow a description of Cezanne's apples. As an undergraduate, Huey majored in psychology while continuing to study art. After a summer at the Marchutz School of Painting in Aix-en-Provence, France, she moved to Manhattan to attend the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture, where she spent two years working from nude models and painting still lifes. She subsequently earned her MFA in painting from Yale University in 2002. Huey was awarded a Terra Foundation for American Art fellowship and residency in Giverny, France (2001) and a travel fellowship to Italy from Johns Hopkins University (2006). She has also been honored with an upcoming residency at Fountainhead Studios in Miami (2013).

In many of her paintings, Huey has explored a somewhat unusual subject: mental institutions and asylums. It is not all that she paints, but she is keenly interested in the history of mental health treatment as well as modern recovery centers and therapeutic environments. She has long been interested in emotions and the varying ways in which humans interact, and the mind and our relationship to it has been a paramount pursuit in her life as well as in her art. "I have always been more fascinated by questions than answers," she says.

One of her paintings, *The Superintendent*, a psychologically complex depiction of early 19th-century psychiatrist Thomas Story Kirkbride, hangs in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Nominated by that museum's curator of modern and contemporary art for a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, Huey was one of a very few selected in 2008. Among other pursuits in the Smithsonian's vast archives, she combed through Victorian pharmaceutical cards (seductive imagery that accompanied medicine bottles), handled early diagnostic equipment, and explored a labyrinth of mental health images used in advertisements. Huey also spent time in Philadelphia investigating the correspondence between Thomas Kirkbride and Dorothea Dix and discovering Kirkbride's magic lantern show. Fascinated by Kirkbride's concept of providing an environmental/architectural solution to

mental illness, she continues to consider what kinds of imagery could foster well-being, such as images of nature, community, and water. She asks, "Might a patient on bed confinement benefit from a painting of a walk in the woods or figures playing in the water or squares of color?"

Huey's paintings often begin with an image from an old postcard or photograph. Her larger works are usually composed from multiple photographs or sources, even combining up to 50 varying images. "I refer to the photographs, but I am not interested in an exact replica of the source. I consider painting to be a conversation between myself and some unseen force." Painting for her is a tactile endeavor as she applies multiple layers of acrylic and other media and finishes with oil paint, using brushes, knives, trowels, and even her hands.

Imagine her surprise when she found a photograph (http://historacle.org/freud_jung.html) of Freud and Jung that captured them during a down time. Starting with that black and white image, she added color, texture, and a sense of the air in the room to capture atmosphere, mood, and emotion. She refers to it as "resuscitating the experience—making the ethereal visible." In this case, the experience fits Kirkbride's priorities: two renowned mental health experts pausing in a busy, undoubtedly stressful schedule for some recreation. Freud, smoking a pipe, leans casually against an adjoining pool table while Jung adjusts his pool cue. One wonders what they might be saying to each other. Even though paint can only hint at movement, Huey has created a painting with warmth, light, and flow, in contrast to the otherwise harsh, static photograph.

David Ward, a historian at the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC, has described Huey's paintings of asylums:

Infusing new life into history painting, Huey's subject is the asylum and her pictorial [sic] terrain is the fields of force which radiated from its totalizing intentions. Huey works in the tradition of anti-Enlightenment or anti-rational cultural critique pioneered by Michel Foucault, Thomas Szasz (or, more popularly, Ken Kesey): her paintings are intensely personal history paintings charting the rise of an ideological system that exercised power by cloaking it in the benign language of the therapeutic. (Ward, 2010, p. 2)

During the 1980s, Huey witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of therapy gone wrong, how misused power can damage the vulnerable. But she is also keenly aware of therapy's significance and firmly believes therapists have the capacity to "alter one's behavior and save one's life."

REFERENCE

Ward, D. C. (2010). *Seeking asylum: Elizabeth Huey as history painter* (Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art catalogue essay). Retrieved from <http://www.elizabethhuey.com/artistInfo/biblio/14.pdf>

Sandra M. Fowler
Art Co-Editor