



# Artist

**stold** the  
spelling,  
but the **wit's**  
**all** his own

By Robert L. Pincus  
ART CRITIC

**B**eware of first impressions — at least as they apply to Wick Alexander's solo exhibition, "Here It Comes," at the Mesa College Art Gallery.

The repeated image in these works looks dumb. But that doesn't mean it is dumb. The words sound banal. But that doesn't mean they are banal.

In fact, the show is a droll, witty take on the workings of the mind itself and a good-natured satire on the contemporary tendency to think of ourselves as victims of bad things. Fault couldn't possibly be rooted in our actions, the logic of victimhood has it.

Each one of these little images features a face, shaped a little like Jughead's or Archie's, with X's for eyes and the upper half of a circle for a mouth. The top of his head is open, like the lid of a can, to reveal a swirling vortex that suggests nothing much happening in here. And each one carries four words, emblazoned the same way each time across the picture surface, that have the accumulated effect of a dorky mantra.

Three works, done as ceramic panels, carry these lines: "Art Stold My Life," "Critics Stold My Meaning" and "Bad Art Stold My Patience."

The majority of the works in the show, rendered in ink on paper, take the demented logic and run with it: "Time Stold My Logic," "Vanity Stold My Common Sense," "Curators Stold My Fame," "Divorce Stold My Family," "T.V. Stold My Imagination," "Art Theory Stold My Enthusiasm" and "Zen Stold My Everything."

By now, you just might be thinking Alexander needs a remedial course in spelling. That is, unless you've concluded the work just wouldn't be the same without the "sic" spelling of "stole."

It wouldn't, of course. Something about that wrongly placed "d" makes the wrongly constructed logic of his slogans seem even funnier.

The spelling has a source, and it's the same one as the image: graffiti that the artist came across and that lodged itself in his psyche several years ago.

For more than a decade, this locally based artist has been making and exhibiting visually complex, narrative paintings that appear to have sources in everything from Giotto to retablos. Fortunately, one



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of them is on view, so the uninitiated can get a broader picture of Alexander's art.

"Star Trek 2000," like many an Alexander painting, mixes a deft eye for geometry and pattern with the announced subject. The pattern in this picture is the carpet in a big conventional hall, where Trekkies are holding a convention.

But the event, as in so many Alexander paintings, looks curious by ordinary standards. There are as many "Star Trek" characters on hand as there are Trekkies. The dividing line between life and art in this picture is razor-thin, as it sometimes is in Alexander's storytelling images.

The link between the "stold" series and Alexander's other paintings is the wit that pervades both. The mildly amusing "The Addiction Box," a

compact construction made of wood, is also the expression of the same sensibility. On the outside are painted scenes depicting different sorts of addicts: one hooked on drink, another on drugs and still another on glue. Inside is the punch line, the symbol of a different sort of addiction.

It would be presumptuous to tell you what's under the lid of Alexander's box, pre-empting the artist's intention that this be a surprise package. In this instance at least, the artist won't feel as if I stole his meaning.

As for my interpretation of the rest of the show, I own up to the crime of which I stand accused. Critics have been assigning meaning to art for as long as there has been criticism. We just can't help ourselves.

## ART REVIEW

"Here It Comes," paintings, drawings, ceramics and a construction by Wick Alexander.

Through Sept. 29 at Mesa College Art Gallery (Room D-104), 7250 Mesa College Drive, Kearny Mesa. Free; (619) 627-2829.

Graffiti was the inspiration for Wick Alexander's delightfully dorky series of images, which include "Art Stold My Life."