

# A Conversation with VF ARTISTS

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by John Schutz

"Coffee or Diet 7-Up?" asks F. Ronald Fowler as I sit myself on the couch in his living room. These are generally the two choices of beverage in his cozy house in the center of town. Looking around the room, the walls are adorned with examples of his work, reminders of the many styles and media "F" has worked with through the years: abstract; collage; photography; construction; romantic oils; and his many inspirations - Greek mythology, land and seascapes, and the male form. On an easel sits a huge canvas depicting moonrise over Provincetown harbor. When I compliment it, he replies, "Oh, it's not done. In fact far from it...there's a lot more to this than there seems..."

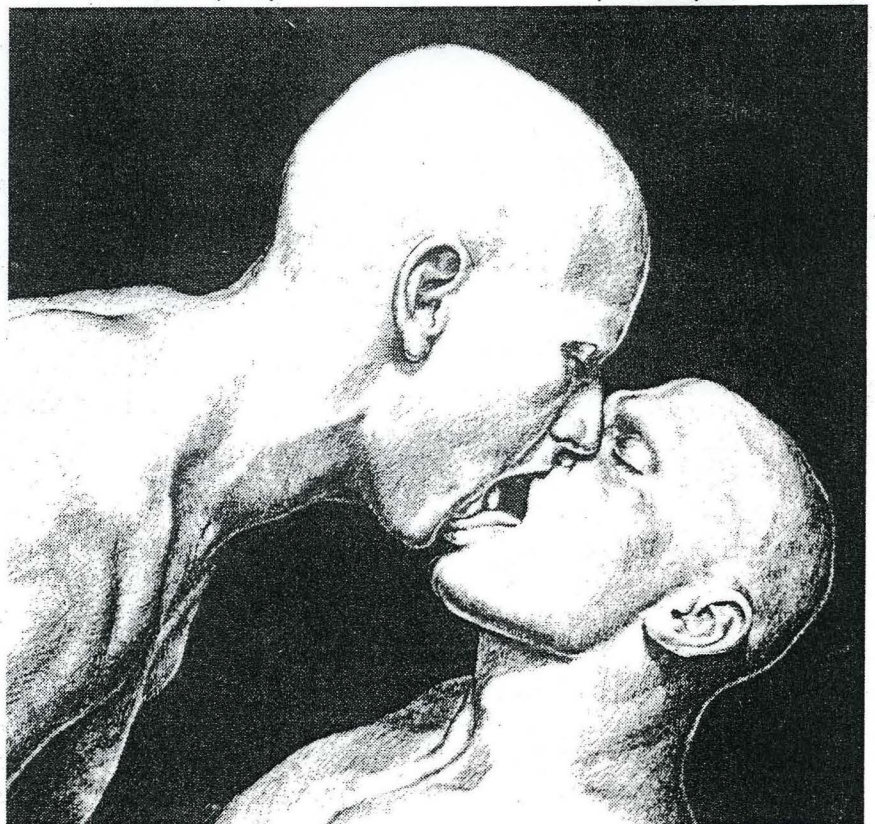
The same could be said of the man himself. Known by many for his male erotica - with good reason, if you've ever seen his Provincetown Carnival Posters from the mid-eighties, or his work in Mandate or Honcho - he is also becoming known for his interpretive work in other media, especially his romantic oils. In fact he was chosen to represent the Cape Cod School in a show at the Smithsonian in Washington.

Some of his colleagues chided him for his turn from his erotic and cutting edge art to his more sedate landscapes. "Doing what sells, huh?" they'd tease; "No, doing what's fun," was the response.

"I had originally decided not to do anymore male figure work, then the opportunity for the book came along, and I couldn't pass it up," he relates. "The book" he refers to is The New Joy Of Gay Sex, by Charles Silverstein and Felice Picano (Harper Collins,

1992) for which F. Ron did over fifty illustrations. The illustrations are the focus of the show Fowler is having at the Cortland Jessup Gallery.

The drawings are the original illustrations done for the book, and are all done in pencil. "You can do anything with a #2B pencil," he once confided to an artist friend. "No," she replied, "You can do anything with a #2B pencil." She was right. Fowler's work breathes and has a life of its own. The panels present male-





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male sexuality in its many forms and in a loving, positive manner.

A few of the pieces have already been sold to private collectors, many of whom hang them in their living rooms and other public areas of their homes. "They consider them to be quality drawings - fine art, not pornography. That's why people are buying them," the artist reveals.

We discussed why a female nude is considered art while a male nude is considered pornography. Without the time to write a book on the subject, "F" did say that he felt that it was because most male nudes are considered homoerotic in a country that is basically homophobic, and that female nudes are okay to those people because the female form has been "objectified" by male artists for so long. "It's starting to happen to men now, too. Look at Marky Mark. The stigma on nudity in art should be lifted - it is the 90's after all - we should be glorifying the human form, not objectifying it," he says. He goes on to mention showing his portfolio to an Art Director in New York City. The art director was female, and she said it was so refreshing to see some male nudes after all the thousands of female nudes she usually had to look at.

Fowler first photographs his

models in his studio, then draws from the photograph, usually adding a creative background. The models were mostly from Provincetown (this writer was one), and were of various races, builds and ages. They weren't all pretty white boys, and F. Ron has been greatly complimented for his use of older men. "Just as relaxed-cut jeans are designed for the baby boomers as they get older, so too eroticism will also grow older as the population -- and this artist -- ages," he says with a smile. He continues ruefully: "I've been looking for an older man so long, I became one!" In fact, the response has been so favorable that he is working on a collection of erotic works featuring men over 40.

When I ask what part of the book deal he enjoyed the most and he replies, "The freedom to art direct myself. The part I disliked the most was having to do it all in 9 months!" He doesn't have a favorite piece in the show, as he feels that would be like singling out a favorite child. When asked if he minds selling away those children, he states, "The pleasure of the creation is what I get out of them, that's why I don't mind selling them...now it's time for someone else to get pleasure out of them."

Some people feel there is a huge gap between an artist and an illustrator. Fowler disagrees. "The only difference as an illustrator is that you are *given* a challenge (an assignment), in fine art you give yourself the challenge. The rest is the same." He continues: "You still decide how to say what you need to say in the best possible, most efficient, most beautiful way."

I'm sure when you see his illustrations you'll see the beauty that Fowler finds inherent in the human form. And if you have the opportunity to view his other work, I'm sure you'll agree that there's much more to the man than there seems to be. Oh, and one last thing...boys, he's single.

F. Ronald Fowler will be showing at Cortland Jessup Gallery, 234 Commercial Street, September 4 through 16.