



Father and Son Explore Existentialism in Aligned Painting Series

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by Julia Halsey

Symbols, hidden texts and ancient imagery were essential in the creation of artist Franklin Engel's "Searcher" series. His son, Christopher Engel, also an artist, found similar inspiration for his "Messengers" series—but not quite in the same way.

[Romany Kramoris Gallery](#) in Sag Harbor, NY, combines the two series from the familial artists in the single exhibition "Searchers + Messengers," on view August 3 to 15, 2019. In the exhibition, abstract and figurative imagery reflect the fascination father and son each have with concerns of the existential kind.

At 83 years old, [Franklin Engel](#) said in a phone interview that he has always been fascinated with the never ending-journey of the mind and spirit. Engel believes symbols and images from the past are necessary for searching and to understand the future. Often taking inspiration from ancient imagery, Engel makes use of ancient Japanese and Chinese maps as a source for the art in "Searchers."

A wide range of mediums make up the series. Paintings are built upon wood, ceramic and stone and then continue the natural connection by weaving materials such as sand and wood into the work.



"The Searchers" by Franklin Engel. Mixed Media on wood panel, 36 x 33 inches.
Courtesy Romany Kramoris Gallery.

An abundance of geometric shapes, including triangles and circles, can be found in the work as well as converging lines, reminiscent of imagery from prehistoric cave paintings, Franklin Engel said. Religious and historical imagery like pyramids, crosses and planets also appear. So does iconography that's purely personal to the artist.



"Galileo's Dream" by Franklin Engel. Mixed Media on wood panel, 34 x 32 inches.

Courtesy of Romany Kramoris Gallery.

When looking at the work, viewers should be prepared to be comfortable with their own interpretations after examining the layers of iconography, the artist said.

“People have to bring their own looking, their own search,” he explained. “The more you look into the work, the more you will see. You have to spend the time looking for the symbols and images. Once we find those, we find ourselves, and then, eventually, we hopefully find the reasons for our existence.”



“Ancient Sands” by Franklin Engel. Mixed Media on wood panel, 36 x 33 inches.
Courtesy Romany Kramoris Gallery.

Franklin’s son, [Christopher Engel](#), had the idea to bring together his father’s work together with his own, he said in a phone interview, after considering how well the themes in his father’s “Searchers” series related to the ones found in his own “Messengers” series.

“It struck me how similar and yet different the works were,” Christopher Engel said. He invited his father to exhibit with him at Romany Kramoris Gallery and curator Romany Kramoris agreed.

Now 57 years old, Christopher Engel’s art career began after discovering the psychology of Carl Jung, who coined the idea that humans have an “unconscious mind” derived from ancestral memory and experience, he said. Engel’s “Messengers” series is centered around Jungian concepts.

The “messengers” in Christopher Engel’s art are depicted as religious-related figures: Angels, prophets, monks, nuns, rabbis, shaman, spirits and ancestors, all of which have traditionally assisted layman in the path to enlightenment. He uses bold colors and gestural brushstrokes to further emphasize the importance and spirituality of these figures who are surrounded by numbers, symbols, text and collaged images.



“The Ladder” by Christopher Engel. Mixed media on paper, 52 x 66 inches.
Courtesy Romany Kramoris Gallery.

Christopher’s fascination with connecting the past to the present is not limited to his figurative

paintings. His abstracts feature bold, multicolored lines and shapes that move together to form patterns akin to ancient markings created by our ancestors. These works were prompted by the light and wind seen in the water and sky during the summers spent at his studio in Nova Scotia. "It was the absolute silence that inspired me to paint the patterns that I saw in the sky and in the water," he said.



"Echoes" by Christopher Engels. Mixed Media on Paper, 51.5 x 77.5 inches. Courtesy Romany Kramoris Gallery.

Christopher's artistic processes is similar to his father's in regards to time. Though his initial process is quick, Christopher finds it necessary to intermittently step away and return to the work over a course of a few weeks. However, the end result is not always what he envisioned from the beginning.

"As you create it, it creates itself." He said. "It has a path of its own and I'll follow that path until I come to completion."



"Bodhisattva" by Christopher Engel. Mixed Media on Paper, 23 x 30 inches. Courtesy Romany Kramoris Gallery.

When he is not making art, Christopher is a visual arts teacher and Expressive Arts therapist working with students across the East End. He is currently the Director of Community Programs at the Ross School in East Hampton, NY. He has been represented by Romany Kramoris Gallery for ten years.

Franklin has always been passionate about the theater, and worked extensively in mixed media, creative Sculpture, film and slides for many mixed media productions. He also created visual elements for the "New Playwright Series" at New Media Repertory Co., a non-profit theater company based in New York City, which he co-founded with his wife, Miranda McDermott, in 1976. He trained professionally at the Art Students League and currently resides in Manhattan.

As far as the pair's joint exhibition at Romany Kramoris, the collective unconscious may, in fact, be where the searcher meets the messenger, Christopher Engel said.

"A searcher is someone who is looking for the messenger and trying to understand something, and a messenger someone who is trying to explain something to someone," Engel explained. "The two

series are similar in that they are questing for meaning and trying to figure out what life is all about.”



“Language” by Christopher Engel. Mixed Media on Paper, 50 x 50 inches.
Courtesy Romany Kramoris Gallery.

BASIC FACTS: “Searchers + Messengers,” on view August 3 to 15, 2019 at Romany Kramoris Gallery, 41 Main Street, Sag Harbor, NY 11963. www.kramorisgallery.com.

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