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canvases that evoke splendor,
romance, awe and the grand qualities
of the cosmos.

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Artistry

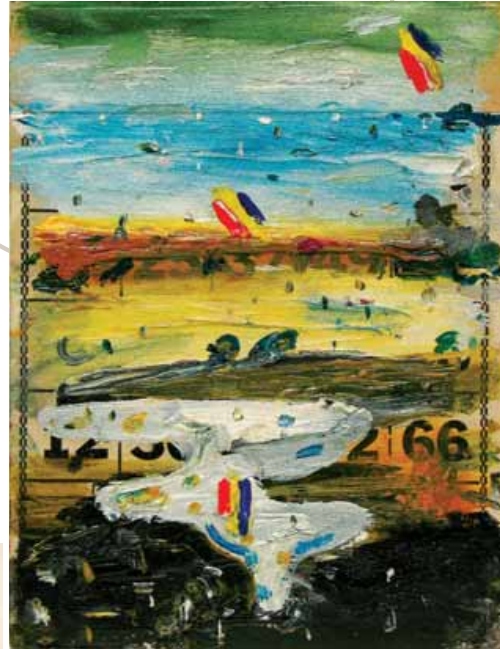
Pigments of Imagination

John Walker paints masterful, bold canvases that evoke splendor, romance, awe and the grand qualities of the cosmos. BY LOUIS POSTEL

Back in the 1950s, John Walker's classmates at the Birmingham College of Art in England must have wondered why so many plants filled the young artist's work area. Was he studying art or botany? Walker was in his teens when the school recruited him. "I was several years younger than everyone else," he recalls. "They thought drawing live models would corrupt my mind. So I drew a lot of plants before I drew humans."

The thousands of hours of drawing paid off. At seventy-one, Walker has developed superb artistic muscle: powerful, subtle reflexes between eye and brain. In compositions that are as rock-solid as a newly poured foundation, Walker's work is wild with burnt oranges in black horizons and Velasquez pinks feathering past the moon above a turquoise sea.

Walker is a very young older man, a man who has gleefully eluded decline. Fortune seems to follow him in a low-key way. The National Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C.,



has just purchased a large triptych. And the hammer at Sotheby's London recently came down on the equivalent of about \$13,400 for *Tense II*, a large acrylic he painted in 1985. His work can be seen in museums worldwide from Boston to Chicago to London to New York. Walker's canvases speak with lyric power and emotion, capturing the fleeting yet grand qualities of the cosmos and the human race. Here's a man with big ideas and large

Clockwise from above: *Bird Strike* (2010), oil on canvas, 96 3/8" x 156"; *Seal Point Series #V XVII* (2007), oil on bingo card, 7 1/4" x 5 1/2"; *Winter* (2006), oil on canvas, 84" x 66"



52 *New England Home* March/April 2011

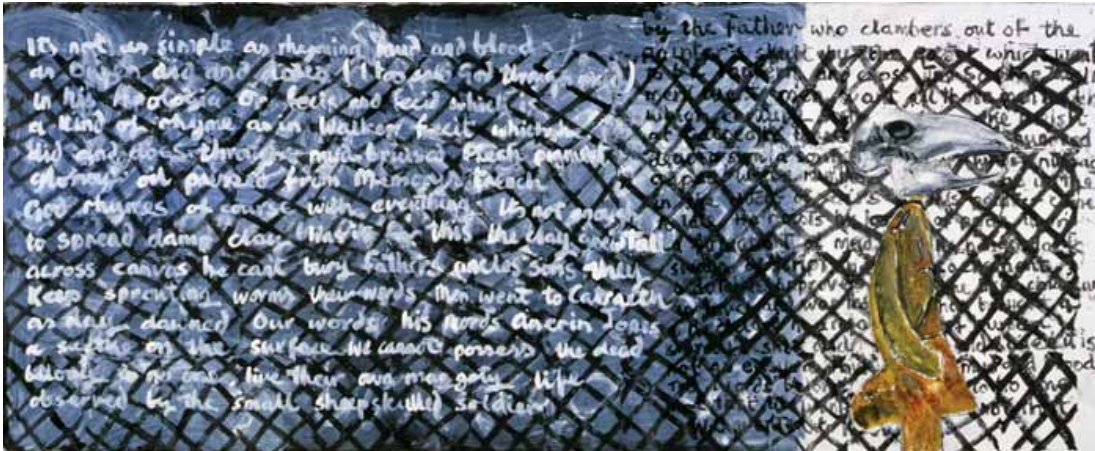
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feelings who is able to express himself in a warm, perfectly controlled line. This rawness versus refinement is everywhere in the canvases Walker is working on in his Boston studio.

In the bright, third-floor space, tall African and Oceanic statues—inspiration for his work—cluster like old friends in front of banks of expansive windows. “For Walker, there’s a seamless connection between the African and Oceanic cultures and his own work,” observes poet and critic William Corbett.

Art is basic and seamless for Walker, and so is teaching. As head of Boston University’s graduate painting and sculpture program, he has helped push BU into the forefront of traditional, painting-focused art schools along with Princeton, Yale and Columbia. “You have to

work hard here at BU, but if you’re interested in traditional painting this is a great place to be,” says Walker. “We’ve won over twenty Guggenheim Fellowships as well as six of the annual prizes from the Royal Academy in London.”

Walker recalls his own formative days: the enormous leap that took him from Birmingham to the abstract expressionist melting pot of New York. His technique was developed to a high polish. What came next was the courage

to connect emotionally to the richness of life. “What got me really turned on to the possibilities of art was first seeing

Rembrandt’s *Jewish Bride*,” he says. “Her hand touching his. It’s a very ephemeral moment and yet it’s forever and ever that touch.”

Not long after, he saw a show of work by Russian artist Kazimir Malevich. “I had no idea a black square could express so much emotion. It was amazing to me!”

Somewhere between Rembrandt and Malevich, Walker has staked out something entirely his own. •

Clockwise from top: Remembrance I, For Rosanna Warren (2000), ink and oil on canvas, 78" x 203"; Coastal Cross (2010), oil on canvas, 36" x 24"; Ostraca I (1977), acrylic and canvas collage on canvas, 122" x 96"; Lesson I (1983), oil on canvas, 96" x 78"

Editor’s Note John Walker is represented by Knoedler & Company, New York City, (212) 794-0550, www.knoedlergallery.com

