



The Champions Collection

Year One

Rob Schamberger

Painting Every One of Professional Wrestling's World Champions

Foreword by the Five-Time World Champion Adam Pearce

the
Champions
Collection

the first year
by Rob Schamberger
foreward by Adam Pearce

2

foreward

by Adam Pearce

Not many people know this, but I've always considered myself an artist of sorts.

Ever since I was a young kid, I invariably find myself passing the time by doodling, drawing, and, on occasion, even painting. In the space between my paper and pencil, and in those moments when inspiration would strike, my imagination would run amok and these bigger-than-life personas - football players and comic book characters and, of course, professional wrestlers - would come to life.

I wasn't aware of this until much later, but for all those years my mother would quietly steal away my drawings, saving them for all prosperity, and perhaps giving her a way to relive all of those memories of me as a child. That's exactly what happened to me when she showed me those old sketches of Iron Man and Walter Payton and Fred Flintstone and Hulk Hogan. I found myself instantly transported back to a time where things were simpler and characters were real and the art was pure.

I get a lot of really similar feelings when I look at the incredible art that Rob Schamberger has shared with us all. Rob's passion for art and for professional wrestling struck me immediately as someone that has equally grown to love and appreciate both, and truth be told I am extremely jealous of his talents. To undertake the daunting task of painting all of wrestling's world champions, and to do so with the incredible accuracy and care that each piece conveys is truly remarkable. I'm proud to have been a subject of his work, and even prouder to have busted his work over the head of an opponent. It is my sincere hope that you will enjoy the images throughout this book in much the same way that I and hundreds of others in my industry have, with admiration and respect.

And in between the admiration for his indomitable skill and the obvious wholeheartedness in his respect for our sport, I hope that each of his works will manage to do the same things to you that they do to me.

For the works of my friend Rob Schamberger somehow take me back to a time when things were simpler, the characters were real, and the art was pure.

Humbly yours,

"Scrap Iron" Adam Pearce



Adam Pearce: Art appreciator

Photo by Brian Kelley

CM Punk

4
ECW Champion
ROH Champion
WWE Champion

CM Punk is my favorite currently active wrestler. Not only is he great in the ring, with on-the-mark psychology and conditioning, but he comes across as genuine on the mic. The majority of moments where I've been legitimately excited about wrestling have revolved around him.

I did his portrait first, and really began this whole collection, because of him. I was working in a dead-end job that I was positively miserable at, knowing that I had this skill in me that wasn't being utilized. Punk was apparently having similar feelings at the time with his contract about to expire, and he let loose with one of the most historic promos in wrestling history when he 'addressed his grievances' with his spot in the WWE, naming names and saying the things that guys shouldn't say. It rocketed him to the top and brought more attention to the sport than it had seen in ten years. He made his own way and it reinforced to me that I could, too.

So I said, "I'm going to paint every World Champion in the history of pro wrestling," and created a Kickstarter project to help me do so. I raised \$20,000 in one month to help with materials and studio space, and within a few months was able to transition to this being my full-time gig. I've toured my work from coast-to-coast and have met amazing people because of it.

Punk continues to steal every show he's on, making the most of the time he's given. He connects with his fans on a very personal level, even when he's the bad guy, creating a large and voracious following online that hangs on his every word.

Let the creative and talented people do what they're strong at, and amazing things will happen. Stifle them, and they'll leave and do it elsewhere.



Acrylic and oil on 24" x 24" wood

Harley Race

NWA Champion
WWA Champion

6

In Kansas City, Harley Race is possibly the most respected and revered wrestler in the city's history. He was a co-owner of the Central States territory with Bob Geigel and Pat O'Connor and an eight-time world heavyweight champion, battling a who's who of wrestling luminaries. Today, he owns and runs the country's pre-eminent wrestling school, training wrestlers who have gone on to main event for WWE, TNA, Ring of Honor and in Japan.

It seems just about everyone I talk to has a personal story about Harley Race. He tried to recruit my father-in-law to be a wrestler. One of my neighbors was friends with Harley's son and Harley would throw them into the lake. A lady I used to work with would start fanning herself and shout, "Oh, Harley! Oooh, he was so handsome!" Another coworker got thrown out of Memorial Hall when he got worked up during a match and tried to help out Harley.

About the piece: A lot of people still tell me that this is their favorite of mine. It's one that simply came together right. Since doing it, I've become friends with many of the people involved in Harley's school and his promotion, World League Wrestling, leading to me doing another larger portrait that's now hung in his school! This particular one I had signed by Harley and gifted it to one of the people who helped me out with my Kickstarter project.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Frank Gotch

NWA Champion

8

Frank Gotch was the second ever wrestling world heavyweight champion, back when the stuff was a sport and not for show, a reign that is one of the ten longest in history. He was one of, if not the, biggest sports stars of the early 1900's and elevated wrestling to heights never before dreamed of.

Because he competed in legitimate competitions, he had far fewer matches in his 14 year career than today's professional wrestlers, only 160 official bouts. 154 of those he won. Think about that and compare it to the 'legitimate' MMA fighters of today. Georges St Pierre? 22 and 2 in 9 years.

Gotch was a tough sum'bitch.

About the piece: I opted to paint this in a very modern style, showing that his power and accomplishments still resonate today. Soon after completing it, I was invited up to his home town of Humboldt, IA to participate in their July 4th festivities and the erection of a gorgeous bronze statue in his honor. I exhibited this and several other pieces from the collection there, and was warmly welcomed by the community. I sold a TON of prints of this, and ended up selling the original by the end of my stay there. I've become good friends with many of the people from Humboldt, and it's still one of my favorite experiences since I started this series.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 48" wood

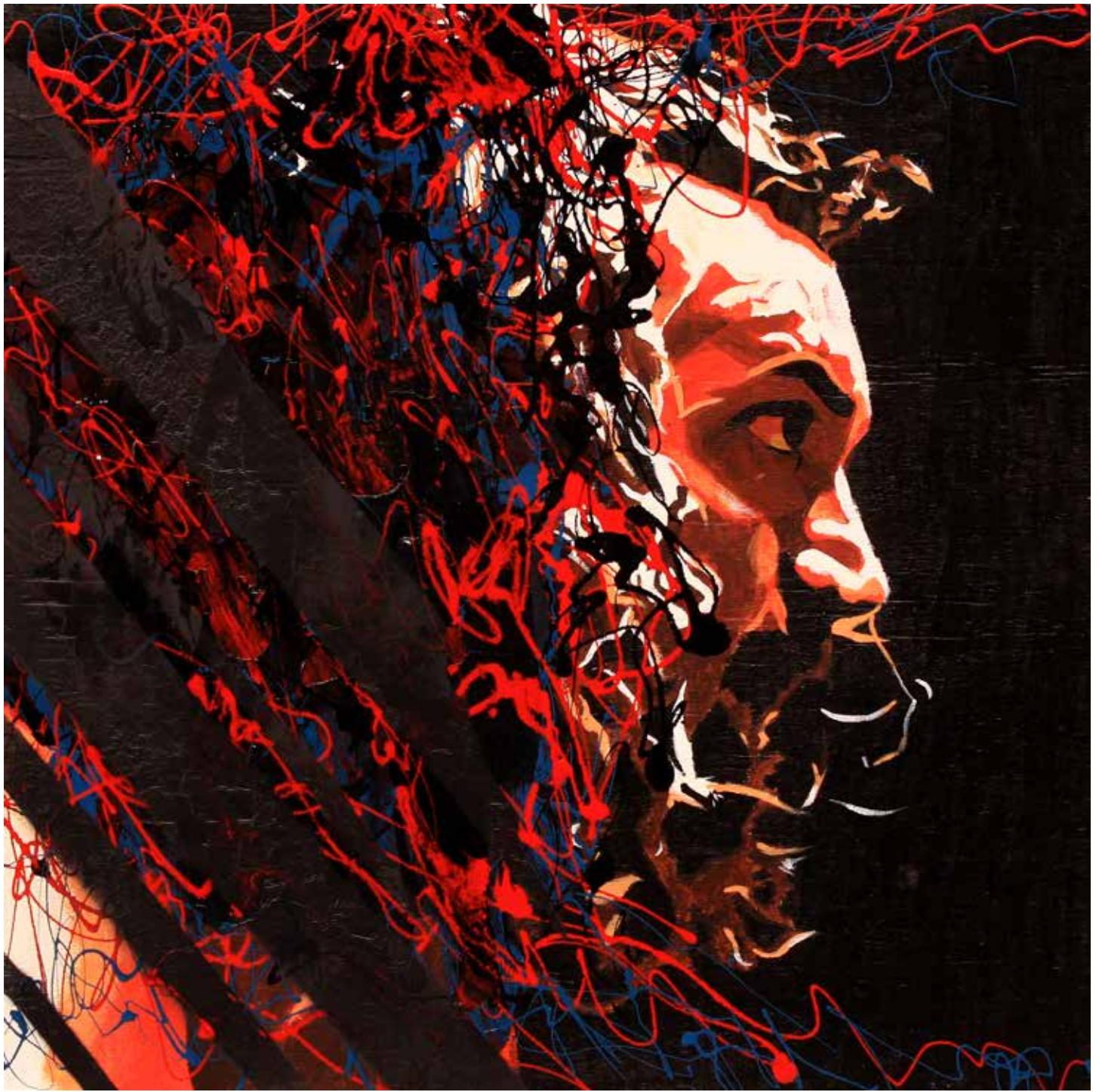
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'King Kong' Bruiser Brody WWA Champion

Frank Goodish, aka Bruiser Brody, aka King Kong Brody, was one of the most memorable and greatest wrestlers of his generation. He made his name in every promotion he performed in, from the Funks to Japan to Central States to WWWF to AWA and everywhere else he was booked. He could change up his style to work well with each territory, and was a vehement protector of kayfabe. He was a draw wherever he was booked, to the chagrin of some bookers, to whom he was a notoriously shrewd and outspoken businessman. At home, he was a loving husband and father. He was tragically killed by a promoter after an argument, robbing the world of the bright future this man still had ahead of him. He will always live on in the shelter of our hearts and memories as one of the best ever.

About the piece: I'm comfortable saying that Brody is my all-time favorite wrestler, so I wanted this to be a special piece. I first painted the face with acrylics, then brought in the wild energy with red, blue and black oil-based enamel paints, letting them mix together the way they wanted to. I then tempered that energy with black spray paint stenciled over the top. It's a testament to him, and to my passion for the piece, that this was the first one I sold from the collection, to a promoter in Texas.

I have prints of this and two other portraits I've done of him that are available on my site, and \$10 from each goes to his son Geoff, by request of his widow. I feel really glad each time I sell one, because I know I'm giving back to him in a special way.



Acrylic, oil and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Brock Lesnar

WWE Champion

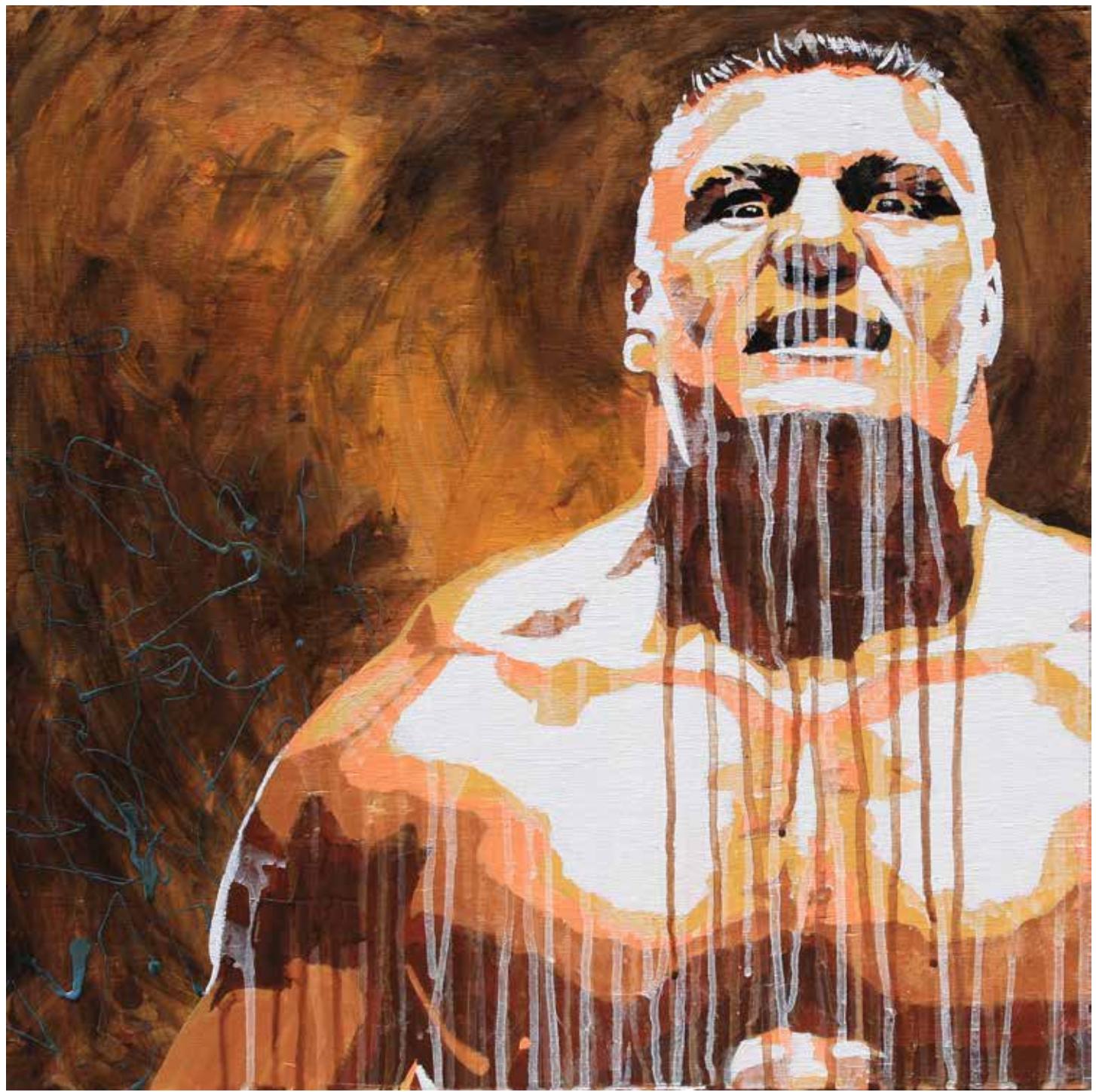
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Brock Lesnar is, at his heart, a competitor. As an amateur wrestler in college he went undefeated (and can you imagine the poor kids that were across the circle from this beast?) and then came into WWE and was quickly pushed to the top, where he became the youngest champion in the company's history. He had notable feuds with the Undertaker, Kurt Angle and Rey Mysterio and also met his wife, the legendary Sable.

The demands of the WWE's travel schedule and the lack of true competition led him to quit the company. After that, he tried out for the Minnesota Vikings, but when they didn't put him on the main roster, he opted out. He then rose to prominence when he entered the mixed martial arts world (with a ridiculous new tattoo on his chest that rather looks like a dong dagger) and quickly entered the UFC as a top contender. He had a mixed record at best in MMA, but one thing was clear: This guy was a draw. The UFC saw record buys for any pay-per-view he competed on.

After having surgeries to correct diverticulitis, he was no longer able to compete at a high level as an MMA fighter. Seriously, his opponents just went for his gut. It was a giant target with a dong dagger pointing at it. Now he's back in the WWE, with one of the most amazing crowd reactions any returning wrestler has ever received.

About the piece: I was heavily influenced by street art murals for my approach on this, as I love how sometimes the paint will drip down on them. So I did that with this, watering down the paint and letting it just do its own thing. It's hard for a lot of artists to give up their control over the work, feeling the need to meticulously control every aspect of it. Man, I'm not that guy. My best moments happen when I give up my control, and I think this piece is a testament



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

The Ultimate Warrior WWE Champion

Straight-up honesty: I'm not the world's biggest Ultimate Warrior fan. He's not the kind of wrestler that I tend to gravitate towards. However, there's no denying that he was and still is a huge draw with a monstrous fan base. He brought a lot of people into wrestling during his hey-day, and a lot of those fans still fondly remember him and his outlandish persona. He had a wild look with the face-paint and neon colors, and backed it up with a jacked-up presence in the ring and insane promos. If someone was an Ultimate Warrior fan, ask them to do their impression of him. They all do it.

About the piece: I did the figure all in greys, and while I was at that stage I was really nervous with how it was coming together. Then I did the face-paint with oil-based enamels, putting them on really thick and left the piece standing up over night. This allowed the paint to drip down as it wanted to, created what I think is still one of my strongest compositions.



Acrylic and oil on 24" x 24" wood

Nigel McGuinness

16
ROH Champion

If you were to make a list of the best wrestlers in the last ten years and Nigel McGuinness didn't make it on your short list, then your list is wrong. Nigel was a big part of the success of Ring of Honor, where he became a notable champion. He came to my attention when he moved to TNA and wrestled as Desmond Wolfe. I remember reading that this Desmond Wolfe guy was challenging Kurt Angle for the title, and I was like, what's up with a new guy going straight into the main event? "Oh! Desmond Wolfe is Nigel McGuinness! Word!" He had some good feuds there and was a part of Ric Flair's Fortune stable. Unfortunately a medical situation forced him to retire from the ring in what should have been his prime. He still has an active role in the wrestling business, including working as a commentator for Ring of Honor.

Nigel was instrumental in my early success, especially with my Kickstarter project. He had just completed one to fund his documentary on his retirement tour, and included prints of this painting as one of the gifts for his project. I finally had the pleasure of meeting him at the 2013 Cauliflower Alley Club Reunion as our table were next to each other. We chatted over the three day event and I'm glad to call him a friend. He also shared some tasty cookies with me.



Acrylic, spray and oil on 24" x 24" wood

Kurt Angle

|8

TNA Champion
WCW Champion
WWE Champion

He won an Olympic gold medal with a broken neck. He is Kurt Angle, the wrestling machine. His run in WWE led to some of the greatest matches in the history of the company, with the likes of The Rock, Stone Cold Steve Austin, the Undertaker, Edge, Eddie Guerrero, Brock Lesnar, and especially John Cena. I put John Cena being so over squarely on Kurt Angle and Edge's shoulders.

When it was time for Angle to leave the WWE, he rocked the wrestling world by showing up at TNA, where he has put on fantastic matches with Samoa Joe, AJ Styles, and Nigel "Desmond Wolfe" McGuinness. Whatever problems there may be with TNA, when Kurt comes out you pay attention.

He's the real deal. Damn real.

About the piece: Sometimes a piece comes right together. I did this one in a night. Having him emerge from the elements of the American flag was one of those ideas I couldn't put down and I had to make it happen immediately. I painted the face with acrylics, then did the black it was emerging from with oil, as well as the red stripes. I then created a stencil for the stars and brought them in with white spray paint.



Acrylic, spray and oil on 24" x 48" wood

Fritz Von Erich

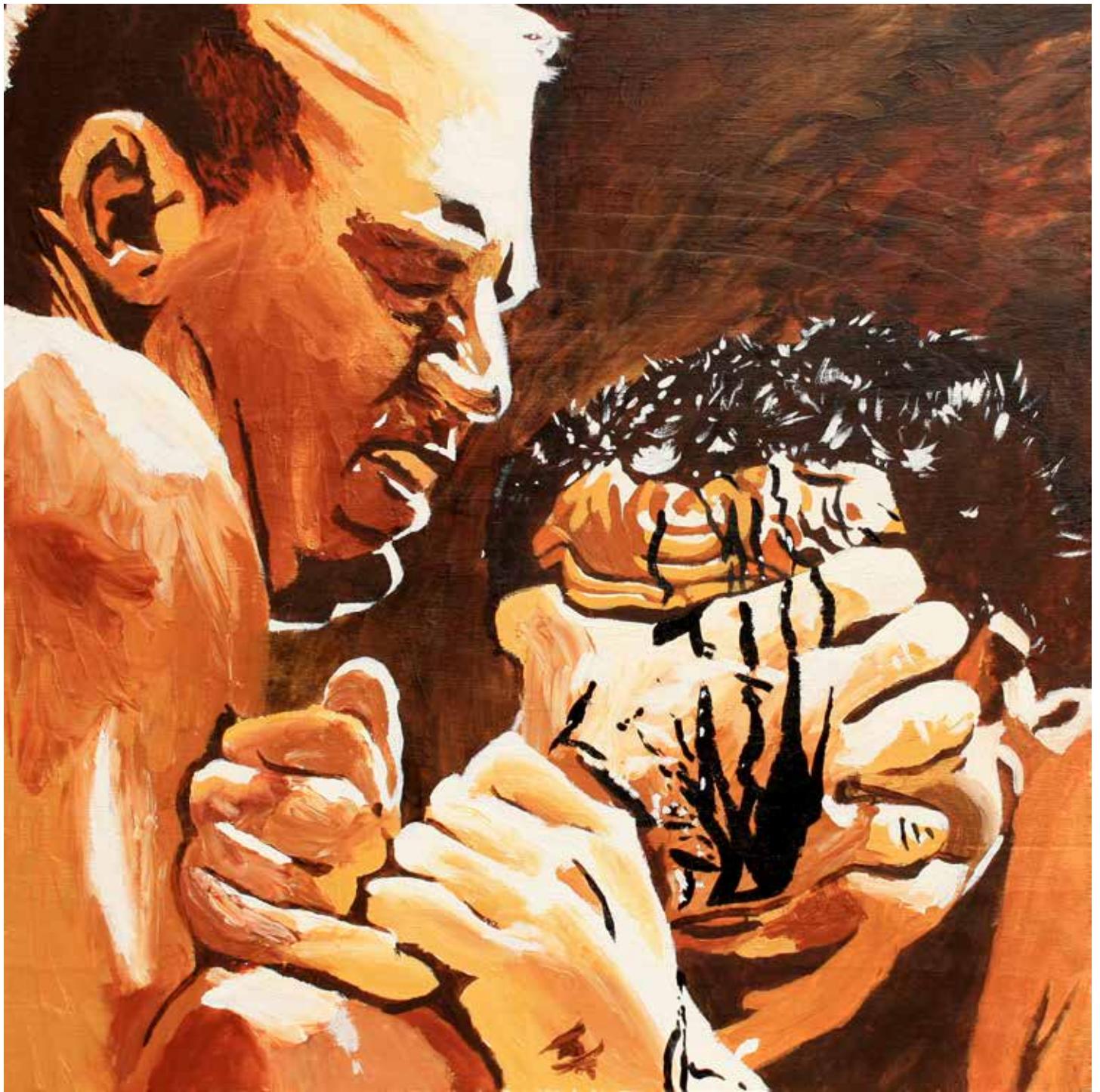
20
AWA Champion

Fritz Von Erich is one of the most influential men in professional wrestling's history. Born Jack Adkisson, his larger-than-life wrestling persona as evil Nazi (like there was another kind of Nazi) Fritz Von Erich became the name he would be forever be known as. He was trained by the legendary Stu Hart, and went on to thrill fans across North America and in Japan. He won the AWA World Title in 1963, and then went on to be a mainstay in the Central States territory of the NWA. In the late 1960's he became the head promoter for the Dallas territory and the adjoining Houston and San Antonio territories.

It's in Texas that he'll always be remembered as a legend. In the early 1980's he formed the storied World Class Championship Wrestling promotion, known for its high production values, large syndication, and most notably: Exceptional wrestling. It's a who's who of greats that came out of WCCW, like The Fabulous Freebirds, Christopher Adams, Abdullah the Butcher, Bruiser Brody, and a young Stunning Steve Austin. WCCW is best known for the Von Erich family, though. Fritz's sons were among the most athletic and charismatic wrestlers in the world, some becoming World Champions themselves.

The Von Erich legacy continues today, with son Kevin Von Erich bringing his own sons Marshall and Ross to Harley Race's school here in Missouri to train, and abroad in Japan. Fritz's granddaughter Lacey Von Erich is also involved in the wrestling world. It's awesome to see a name become so beloved that was originally for an evil Nazi. Only in pro wrestling, my friends.

About the piece: I think this piece may still be the one I spent the longest on. The limited palette made each step more meticulous and conscious than my normal process.



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

The Sheik

NWA Champion

The Sheik is one of those characters that reminds me why I love wrestling so much. There have been many notable ‘Sheik’ characters in wrestling’s history, like the Original Sheik and of course the Iron Sheik (he’ll make you humble!), and now this Sheik who has become an international star. He has been an NWA World Heavyweight Champion and a Pro Wrestling Zero 1 World Heavyweight Champion, and is known for his physical and often bloody matches.

About the piece: This was done nearly all with stenciled spray paint. I created the weathered look by waiting until a layer was nearly dry, then slapping a piece of poster board on it, and then pulling up that layer and revealing portions of the one beneath. Once that was done, I splattered some red paint in the lower left corner, portraying his violent and bloody persona.



Spray and oil on 24" x 24" wood

Jerry 'The King' Lawler

AWA Champion
USWA Champion

I know it's a sin, but I'm jealous of Jerry "The King" Lawler's life. Seriously, listen to this career path: He started out wanting to be an artist and was making decent money as one. He did paintings of the local Memphis wrestlers, and because of that he got to hang out at the shows. A promoter mistook him for a wrestler and booked him at a show, and off he went! Since then he's become a fixture of the Memphis wrestling scene, had one of the most memorable celebrity feuds ever with Andy Kaufman, setting up an utterly unique deal with WWE where he still ran his own promotion while wrestling for them, and now serving as one of the distinct voices of the WWE.

He still wrestles, and still puts on a great match. Seriously, watch the ladder match he had a little while back against the Miz. It was a clinic on how it's done. His big secret for his longevity is that he doesn't drink or do drugs, and his only admitted vice is a taste for the ladies (of which he's married a plenty). What a life!

About the piece: I opted to go for Jerry in his youth, as the King of Memphis. He should totally bring back the goatee!



Acrylic, spray and oil on 24" x 24" wood

26

Owen Hart USWA Champion

Mention the name of Owen Hart to a wrestling fan, and you'll get a mix of smiles and tears. Mention the name of Owen Hart to a wrestler, and you'll most likely get them to say something that starts with, "If only..." Mention the name of Owen Hart to a wrestling fan in Kansas City, and there's a good chance they'll say, "I was there, you know."

The younger brother of the legendary Bret Hart and maybe the most beloved member of the Hart family, Owen was a wrestler that could always be counted on to deliver in the ring and in the fans' hearts. He had many notable feuds and a variety of personas he portrayed in the squared circle, and at one point held the USWA World Championship. Unfortunately, his memory will always be associated with how he passed away. Other wrestlers have died in the ring, like Iron Mike DiBiase or Mitsuhiro Misawa. But Owen's may be the most tragic because it was totally preventable. He was being lowered to the ring during a Pay-Per-View here in Kansas City, when his rig malfunctioned and he plunged to his death, right in front of the audience. I know a lot of people who were there, and they'll likely always be haunted by the sight of it. I can only imagine how it was for everyone in the WWF when it happened, and even more so his family.

I made this painting to celebrate his life, and how he impacted so many of ours.

About the piece: This is still probably the most difficult piece I've done, emotionally. It took me a couple of weeks, staring at it and thinking about how it was coming together. I was truly moved when Bret shared it on the anniversary of Owen's passing, seeing it as a fitting tribute to his brother.



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Hulk Hogan

28

AWA Champion
WCW Champion
WWE Champion

Hulk Hogan is the most well-known wrestler in the history of professional wrestling. Everyone knows who he is, and they associate him with pro wrestling, and vice versa. He was the face of the WWF when that company made its national expansion, headlining the first several Wrestlemanias, including selling out the Pontiac Silverdome with Andre the Giant, creating the largest attendance record in history. He was in Rocky III, the A-Team, his own cartoon, one of the 3 Ninjas movies (okay, one of these is unlike the others), and a host of other major appearances.

He shocked the world when he went from being the biggest babyface in wrestling's history to a straight-up vile, evil, greedy heel, leading WCW to years of ratings dominance. He can now be regularly seen on Impact! every Thursday.

He has his detractors, he's had his flops, he's been at the center of numerous controversies, but at the end of the day he's had tremendous success, leading everyone else around him to success as well. The higher the tide, the more the boats can sail, as the saying goes.

He's Hulk Hogan, the biggest name in wrestling's history.

About the piece: My intention was to get across the red and yellow explosive energy of the man, creating the feeling that he's not just tearing out of the shirt but out of the painting. The figure was done with acrylics, and the red and yellow were done with a oil-based enamel, applied thick and vibrant. I spritzed a little bit of yellow spray paint as well to balance it all out.



Acrylic, spray and oil on 24" x 48" wood

Adam Pearce NWA Champion.

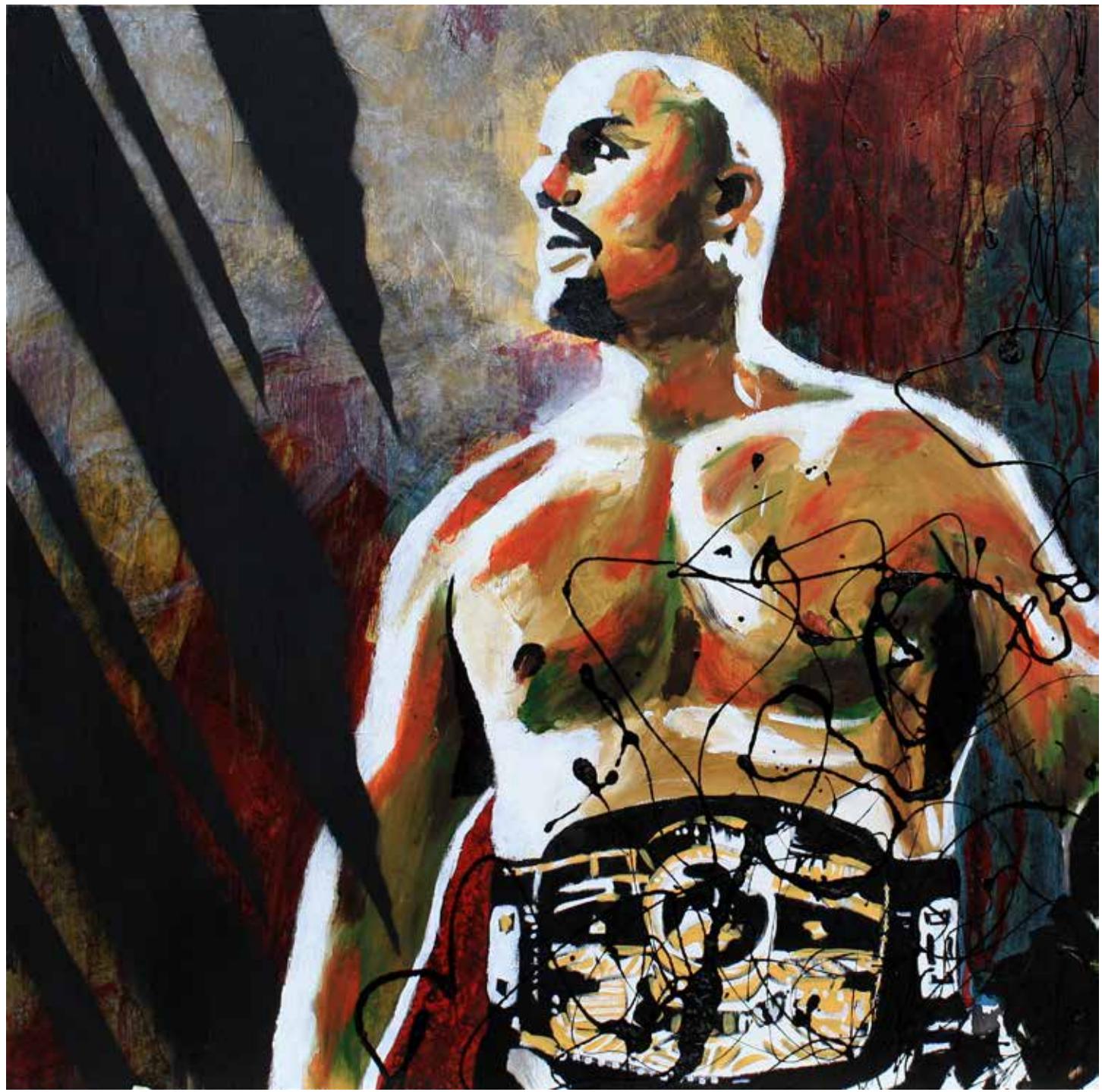
Adam Pearce was the first World Champion to get in touch with me when I started on this project to paint every one of wrestling's World Champions. He's been a huge supporter, and I'm really honored to have him in my corner. For such a monster heel in the ring, he's a solid guy outside of it!

Adam has made his own way in the wrestling world, which is such a rarity in today's market. He has earned respect from every locker room he's been in, and is talked about in reverent tones by every wrestler I've met. We talk several times a week now, and I'm proud to call him a friend.

His hard work is well-respected, and I can only hope that it will lead to a legend of a man who was able to carve out a living in the business without having a national contract. He's toured the world round and round, has become a five-time world champion and hot-shots every promotion he steps in the ring for.

About the piece: When I had first laid down the colors for the background they felt too vibrant, so I varnished it with some watered-down acrylic black and some white. I then worked the figure, and balanced the composition with some stenciled black spray paint and some drizzled black paint. As Adam remarked on it, "He even made me look pretty!"

31



Acrylic, spray and oil on 24" x 24" wood

The 'Macho Man' Randy Savage

USWA Champion
WCW Champion
WWE Champion

When you say 'pro wrestling' to anyone, there's a handful of names and faces that pop into their head. 'The Macho Man' Randy Savage is one of them. He had the whole package: He could wrestle amazingly, he had a one-of-a-kind look and one of the most memorable personas in the history of the sport. Savage's promos are the stuff of legend and just about EVERYONE has done an impersonation of his classic "Oooohhh Yyeeeaaahhh!" at some point in their lives. His match against Ricky Steamboat at WrestleMania 3 is still heralded as the best match in the history of 'Mania, and rightfully so.

Dig it!

About the piece: I did this for my friend Brian Kelley, who runs Missouri Wrestling Revival and was integral in bringing me into the wrestling world. I wanted to show how Randy could create so much energy simply by standing still, and did this by drizzling quite a bit of paint 'exploding' from his figure.



Acrylic and oil on 24" x 24" wood

34 Scott Hall aka Razor Ramon USWA Champion

Scott Hall, aka Razor Ramon is inarguably one of the biggest names in the history of professional wrestling. Dominantly intimidating in appearance, he coupled that with amazing ring psychology and incredible ability in the ring. His biggest angle is of course when he formed the New World Order with Kevin Nash and Hulk Hogan. The NWO is one of, if not the most popular factions in wrestling's storied history. I remember going to high school at the time and those black and white NWO shirts were everywhere I looked.

Lately, the talk about Hall seems to center on his personal life and the troubles he has, and recently the event in his past that led to so many of these problems happening. I prefer to focus on how he could make an entire arena explode by simply saying, "Hey, yo," or "Say hello to the bad guy."

About the piece: Some people thought this was about the darkness encircling him, but it was really just about him making the NWO explode with energy. Read into it what you will, but it's about that, not about controversy. I recently had the pleasure of creating a new piece for him that he's made prints of and is using for charitable ends. Scott's trying to turn things around, and I'm honored to be a very small part of that.



Acrylic and oil on 24" x 24" wood

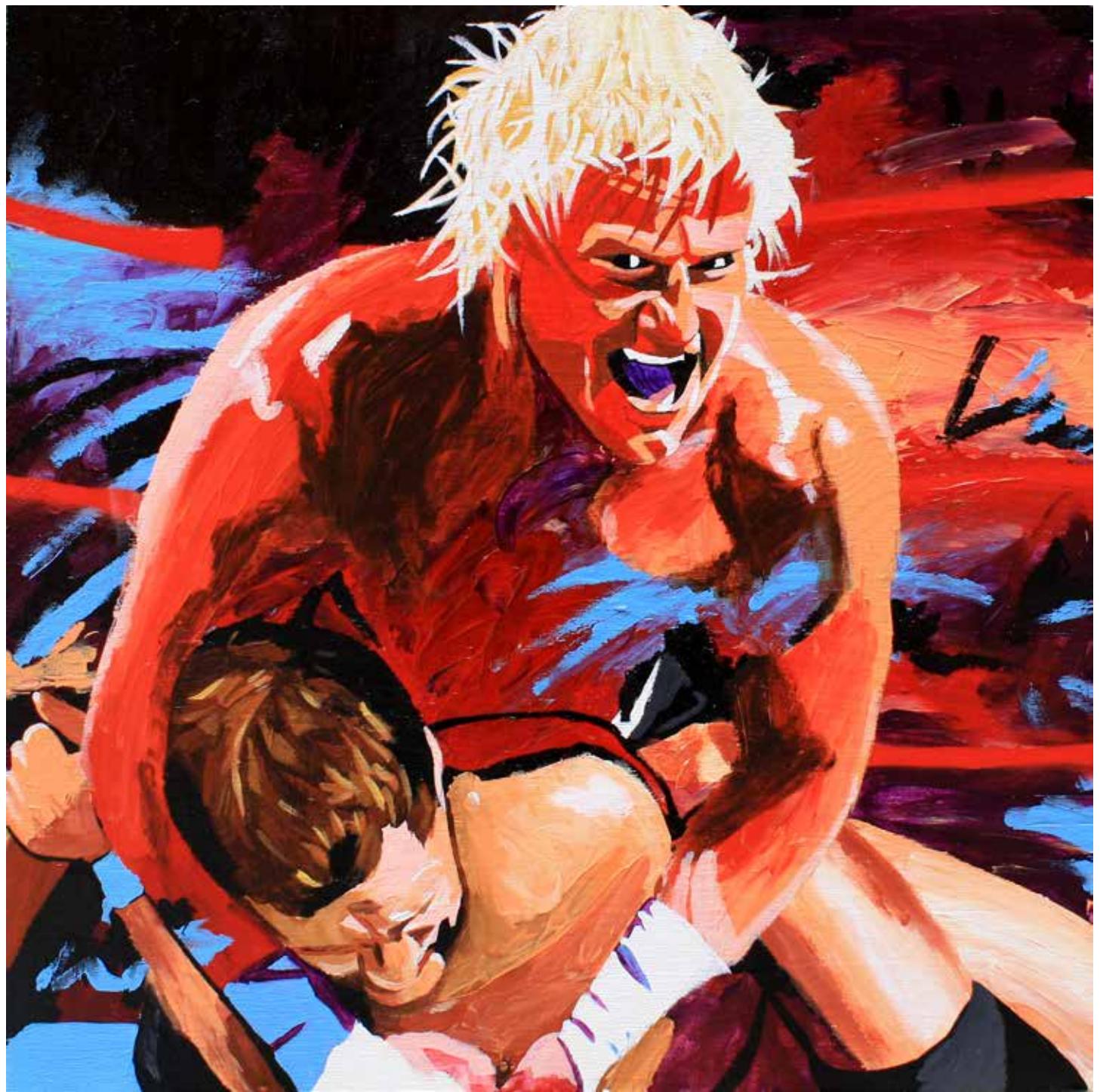
Dolph Ziggler

WWE Champion

While his first title run may have only lasted 11 minutes and 23 seconds, everyone knows that Dolph Ziggler's best days are still ahead of him. Already a highly-skilled athlete, Nick Nemeth aka Ziggler has a drive and determination that is sure to get him to the top and keep him there. He'll go out and put on consistently great matches, then do appearances, and media, and stay active on social media channels...he's got the hustle, and if rap music has taught us anything, it's that the hustlers always come out on top!

But man, that name is RIDICULOUS!

About the piece: I haven't done a lot of action shots for this collection, for a variety of reasons, but I felt that it was necessary for Dolph. His energy really comes out when he's active, showing all of the little things he does while perfectly executing one of his moves. I met him at a World League Wrestling event and had the pleasure of showing him the portrait. My wife Katy got a thrill by telling him that he has 'crazy eyes' in the portrait, and he enjoyed that the piece showed him beating up on Daniel Bryan.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Koko B Ware USWA Champion

The two-time USWA World Champion Koko B Ware is one of those guys that makes me smile every time I see him. When I was two or three my mom bought me a paper mache macaw parrot that hung from the ceiling. I called it Perry the Parrot, and I've still got it hanging in my place now! So, here's this flamboyant guy that would come out to the ring in his gold jacket while Morris Day's "The Bird" played, and he had a REAL macaw on his arm! As a kid that was all I needed, man. Koko would wave his arms like a bird and Frankie the macaw would flap his wings with him, and the crowd just ate it up every time. As gimmicks go, it's kind of amazing it ever worked, but boy howdy it really did and it's one of the most memorable from that era of so many gimmicks that just flat didn't work.

Koko's career in the WWF pretty much consisted of him being a jobber to the stars, but folks who saw him in the USWA or other territories knew that he could go in the ring and bring a variety of emotions out of the crowd. He worked successfully as both a face and a heel, and got over with audiences large and small!

About the piece: I first painted in Koko's face on the right side, creating as strong as a portrait as I felt I could. I then created three stencils for his parrot Frankie for the left, making the two separate yet linked together.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

40 Baron Von Raschke WWA Champion

Baron von Raschke, the three-time WWA World Champion is one of the most unique-looking wrestlers I've ever seen. Fans were instantly drawn to him and his antics in the ring simply because his look was so different. They kept watching because he was obviously a great wrestler. In his amateur days, he was a two-time NCAA All American, made it onto the Olympic team, was the Worldwide Interservice Wrestling Champion for the Army, and held many other prestigious titles.

He's a favorite of mine, but I've probably only ever seen one or two of his matches. My personal attachment to him goes back to when I was a little kid, five or six years old maybe. My older step-brothers would put his finisher, the dreaded claw, on me all the time and yell, "The Claw! The Claw!" while we were playing around in the back yard. My step-brothers are both gone now, but those little childhood memories keep them alive and young in my mind!

"And dat is all da people need to know!"

About the piece: I'd initially intended to do more with this piece with some other media, but when I was done with the acrylic portion I was at an impasse. I thought it was really fine the way it was, after having it sit on my easel for a couple of days staring at me. The simplicity almost makes him more monstrous. Also, meeting the Baron I see why the Claw was his finisher: His hands are ginormous!

41



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Bobby Roode

TNA Champion

42

The former TNA World Champion Bobby Roode is one of those guys that people on the inside nod their heads and agree, "Yeah, he should be the champ." He works hard and shows loyalty to his roster and promotion, and brings legitimacy to the title he holds. When he was one half of Beer Money with James Storm, they were seen as the best current tag team in all of wrestling. Their 'Best of Five' matches against the Motor City Machine Guns, Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin, were the most exciting thing happening in wrestling in 2010.

Bobby Roode is a guy I connect with, because he shows that hard work and talent can only be held back for so long, and that you'll eventually have your day in the spotlight.

About the piece: I'll openly admit that this one didn't quite come together the way I wanted it to. My intention to do the hair with a mix of acrylic and spray paint didn't pan out, but it's the mistakes I make that better inform me for the next thing I do. Also, if I don't try out something new on occasion, then I don't grow. Really, I could nit-pick everything I've ever done and point out what I could have done better. That's just the way of things.



Acrylic, oil, marker and spray on 24" x 24" wood

44

Kevin Steen

ROH Champion

The former Ring of Honor World Champion Kevin Steen is one of those wrestlers who bucks tradition and stereotype. He's not built like a Mr Universe, but he can go in the ring and connects with the fans on the microphone in a way that so many others can not. People love him or hate him, but they care passionately either way and that's what makes someone a 'top guy' in a wrestling promotion.

On a personal level, I've got a connection with the guy that means a lot to me. He won the title on the same day that my Kickstarter project to paint every World Champion funded! That's awfully cool to me. I tweeted him congratulating him on his win, and letting him know that he was now on my list. He responded back, letting me know that if that list was for a fight, then that was cool, but if it was for a portrait that was even cooler!



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Colt Cabana NWA Champion

The former NWA World Champion Colt Cabana is making a big name for himself and he's doing it through hard work. Colt has the hustle, man. He's going from promotion to promotion, putting over local guys just like the best of NWA World Champs did. He hosts the best wrestling podcast in The Art of Wrestling, interviewing his peers and showing them as the people they really are. He's active on social media. He has an online store with gimmicks that are actually cool. He does stand-up comedy shows. He puts in 100% effort, and those efforts are loved by his very loyal fans.

He's a champion.

About the piece: Colt's persona is wrapped around his humor, so I wanted to make his goofy grin the centerpiece of the portrait. In my travels with my work I've been at several shows with him, and it's always fun catching up with him. At an afterparty I hosted at my studio I had mis-timed the delivery of the pizza, delaying it by way too long a period of time. Colt was there and got frustrated with me, leading to both he and I becoming the butt of many jokes by other wrestlers. Pizzapocalypse may become my greatest legacy in the business.



Acrylic, oil and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Sheamus

48

WWE Champion

The currently-reigning WWE World Champion Sheamus is a lot of fun to draw and paint. He has a very distinctive look, being so pale coupled with the bright red hair and beard, which makes for really fun visual possibilities. One day I had this piece pop into my head and I knew that I had to do it right away! The first Irish-born WWE World Champion, Sheamus has made a name for himself for a great work ethic and solid, physical matches. He recently had a match on Raw against Albert/Tensai that put both of them over and made me look at Sheamus in a new light as a champion: It was an old-school thing that's been lost at WWE, where the champ would travel to different territories taking on the local hero. He'd almost always win, but he'd make the local guy look like a million bucks. Sheamus did that with Tensai, and it proved to raise both of their stocks.

I still like him better as a heel, though!

About the piece: My idea was to have everything from the top of the figure drip down, creating the composition while also playing off of his trademark pale figure. I had made a large poster of this when I had third-row seats at a Smackdown taping, and WWE's security confiscated it from me, saying that it looked 'too bloody on TV'! I hadn't even thought of it, but it looked like his head had been decapitated due to the rust-brown paint dripping down. Ha! The guy gave it back to me after the show, apologizing profusely, but I was cool with it. I gave the poster to a kid in front of me who was a noticeable Sheamus fan, and he started shaking and crying he was so excited.



49

Acrylic on 24" x 48" wood

John Bradshaw Layfield

50
WWE Champion

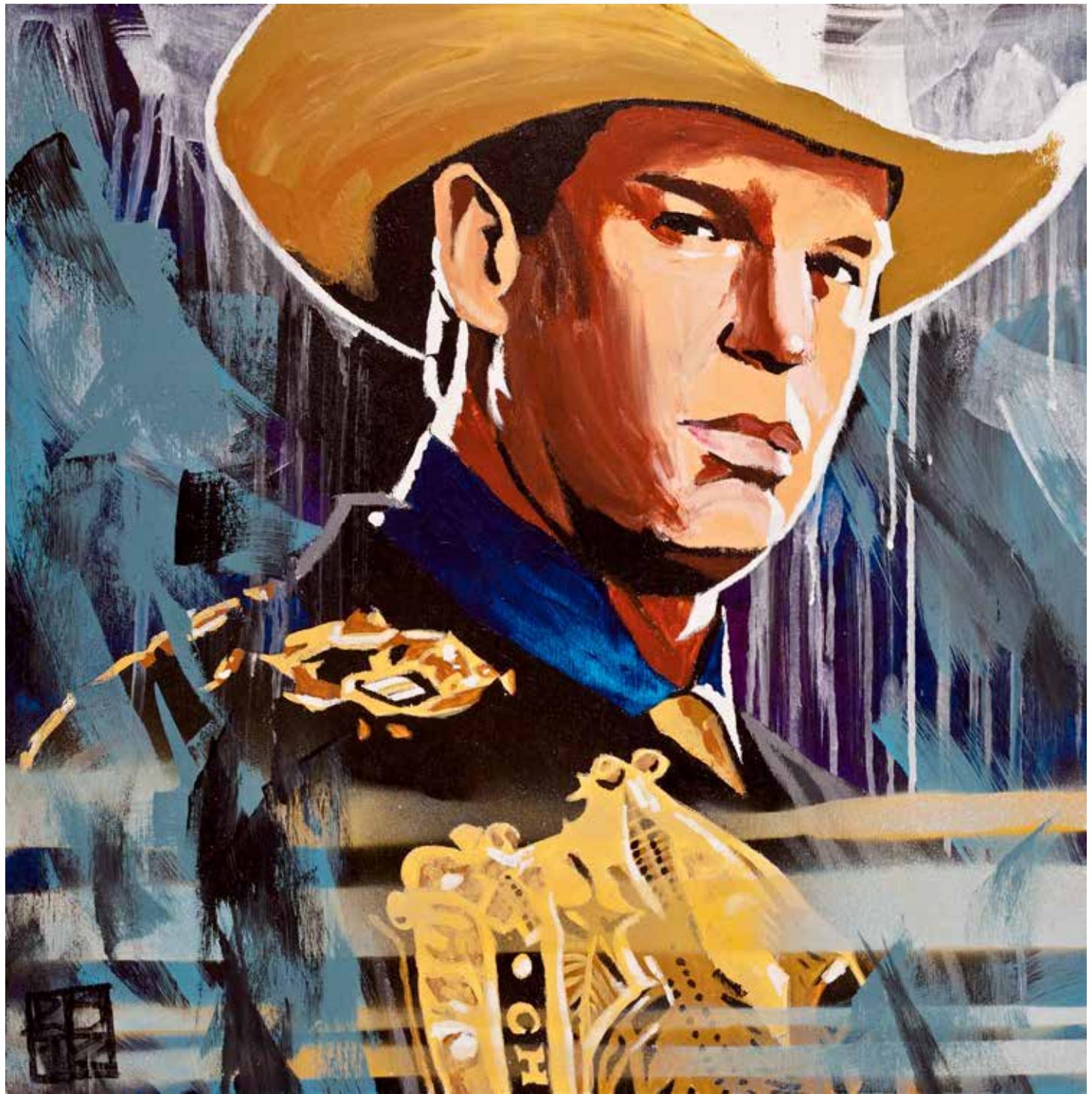
John Bradshaw Layfield was the guy who made me ‘get’ professional wrestling. I had enjoyed his time in the tag team division as one of the Acolytes with Ron ‘Farooq’ Simmons, where he was a physical competitor that always put on a solid match. But it was when he transformed from ‘Bradshaw’ to John Bradshaw Layfield, or JBL for short, that I really took notice. See, I hated this guy. I really, really wanted to see someone beat the hell out of him, to get the title off of him, because I could not stand him. That went on for months, until one day it clicked in my head: “Whoa, he’s good at being a heel.” Then? I was all about this ass hat in a cowboy hat and how good he was at making me hate him.

Then Eddie Guerrero died and I saw JBL as a man, not as this larger-than-life personality that he portrayed on television. I lost it. Absolutely lost it. I remember watching that episode and I slid right off of the couch and sat there on the floor. Still gets me choked up.

Layfield’s biggest contribution to the wrestling world was his suggestion to Vince McMahon to do the Tribute to the Troops shows, which have gone on to be one of the best things about pro wrestling. WWE’s talent entertain soldiers at bases around the world as a simple thank for all that they do for us. That’s pretty awesome.

About the piece: I had the pleasure of spending the day with Layfield at the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum, where we shared a table in front of the piece and we had prints available in support of the museum. He was a very genuine guy, making time for everyone who wanted to see him and get an autograph, staying long past his original budgeted time.

51



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Andre the Giant

52

WWE Champion

What can I say about Andre the Giant that you don't already know? He was the biggest (physically and figuratively!) wrestling attraction in the world. In the old territory days, there were two sure-fired ways to draw a crowd: Have the NWA World Champion come in, or have Andre the Giant show up. He was as physically imposing a guy as there ever was, and by all accounts an incredibly friendly man in real life. I love reading wrestling biographies, because any guy that worked in Andre's time eventually has a chapter dedicated specifically to the Giant.

Andre became a central figure of not just pop culture, but our society as a whole. Hulk Hogan's career was made by Andre, leading to a world attendance record at Wrestlemania III. Andre stole the show in The Princess Bride, which says a lot with the acting talent in that movie. Shepard Fairey made his entire brand around Andre, first with the 'Andre the Giant Has a Posse' stickers, then with the entire Obey Giant line, leading to reportedly a million stickers placed around the world. Fairey's success led to his image of Barack Obama, one of the things people contribute to the candidate's popularity and eventual presidency. So I guess you can say Andre's influence put the first man of African descent into the White House!

About the piece: I did this largely with a palette knife, as I was trying to show the energy and power in his frame. I also think it's interesting to see how tiny the belt looks on him, when on others it looked so massive.



Acrylic on 24" x 36" canvas panel

Dan Severn NWA Champion

54

Dan ‘The Beast’ Severn is what’s known as a legit tough guy. A two-time NWA World Champion, Severn is likely more well-known in the Mixed Martial Arts world as one of the early stars of the Ultimate Fighting Championship. He’s an Arizona State University wrestling Hall of Famer, a three-time Olympic Team alternate, and has won thirteen National AAU wrestling championships. In mixed martial arts, he has won championships for four different promotions and is a UFC Hall of Famer, where he won the UFC 5 Tournament, the Ultimate Ultimate 1195 Tournament, and the UFC Superfight Championship. He held the NWA World Heavyweight Championship at the same time as winning the UFC Superfight Heavyweight Championship in 1995, making him the first man to hold both a professional wrestling and an MMA title simultaneously.

In July 2012 he was inducted into the George Tragos/Lou Thesz Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame, where I had the pleasure of debuting this painting. For such a legitimate bad-ass, Dan was an incredible gentleman and made time to talk with everyone who came to see him, including myself. He really dug the painting and talked to me several times about how much he liked it. Not only is he a champion in multiple disciplines, but he has great taste in art to boot!



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

56

Jack Brisco

NWA Champion

Jack Brisco has been described as “probably the greatest champion of the 20th century”, a description that a lot of people would nod their heads in agreement at. Brisco was a pure athlete, winning the NCAA Wrestling National Championship in 1965 in his junior year, making him the first Native American to do so. He went on to hold several championships in the NWA until finally defeating Harley Race in 1973. He was a multiple-time tag champion with his brother Gerald (a legend in his own right!) working against many of the best the business has ever seen across the world. Jack retired from wrestling in 1985 to focus on the Brisco Brother Body Shop, which he ran with his brothers Gerald and Bill. He was inducted into the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame in 2005 and the WWE Hall of Fame in 2008.

Jack left us on February 1, 2010, but he will forever be known as one of the greatest world champions in the history of the sport.

About the piece: Gerald personally asked me to do this piece, which was an incredible honor. Gerry was on TV every week when I started watching wrestling, and it was surreal talking to him. Knowing that this was so important to him, I felt that I had to do everything right and special on it, and he let me know that I did. This led me to become friends with the whole Brisco family, which I treasure greatly. This piece is now on display, along with one of Gerry, in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum’s professional wrestling wing, another huge honor for me and for any artist.



Acrylic and oil on 24" x 24" wood

Rey Mysterio is so good he's had entire divisions created around him. He's one of the most innovative wrestlers in the history of the sport and has been thrilling fans since before he turned 18, having to be sneaked into the bars where he was performing. He was trained by his uncle, Rey Misterio Sr and went on to compete in AAA, ECW, WCW and WWF/WWE. By the time he got to WWE, he had become one of the biggest stars in the business and has had amazing matches with a who's who of wrestling greats. His mask is one of the most popular pieces of merchandise in the wrestling world, which you can clearly see when going to one of WWE's events. Kids will be lined up around the building wearing Rey Mysterio masks, hoping to be one of the lucky few who can make it down to the front row to be seen with him on TV.

About the piece: This was done all with stencils, which I'll admit is not my favorite way to work. I don't see myself as a precision guy, but I'm forced to be when working this way. This piece involved five separate stencils, and each is needed to line up with the others. A slight shift can throw off the entire piece, and not planning where each color falls can cause parts to be obscured when that's not desired. Once the stencils are cut (and that takes FOREVER!), I like to use several colors within one stencil. That keeps the final piece from feeling flat and gives it more energy.

Rey Mysterio

WWE Champion



Spray on 24" x 48" wood

Blue Demon Jr. NWA Champion

60

Blue Demon, Jr is the first masked Mexican wrestler to win the NWA World Heavyweight Championship. The win was also the first time the title changed hands in Mexico. He is the alleged adopted son of the original Blue Demon, but of course as with anything in pro wrestling there is controversy around that claim. Irregardless, he has made his way in the business to become an international star, winning titles throughout Mexico, and easily one of the biggest names in Lucha Libre.

On a personal note, this painting was very exciting for me as it was my first to be shown in California, as part of the HeART of Lucha show at The Spot in San Diego. The success of this led to many more out-of-state shows for me, including New York, Chicago, and Las Vegas, with more to come!

About the piece: Normally Lucha Libre is all about frenetic energy and lots of bold color, but I decided to do the opposite here. BDJr is in the shadows, his back turned to the viewer, the colors are all subdued like what you would see in a Latin-American portrait, but the power of him feels like it's about to explode moreso than if you were to actually see him doing so.



Acrylic and oil on 24" x 24" wood

Goldberg

62

WCW Champion
WWE Champion

Bill Goldberg is one of the biggest names in the history of pro wrestling, becoming a star in and out of the ring around the world. He was arguably the only star made by TNT-era WCW, largely due to his mega-push of an undefeated streak that was said to go for 173 wins. The streak led to his catch-phrase of "Who's next?" Goldberg is a divisive guy, as most people who made it to the top of the business can be. People seem to really love him or hate him. I've read interviews with wrestlers who fall into both camps, too. However, during the biggest time in wrestling's history, Goldberg was one of the guys at the top who people paid to see, and a lot of other people benefited from that draw.

About the piece: I was always impressed by Goldberg's over-the-top entrance where he would walk through fountains of sparks, seeing them bouncing off of his impressive physique. The sparks took a lot of time, but I think they made the piece come together. One of the coolest things from this piece is that I've become friends with the person who bought it from me. We talk several times a week, and has become a good friend. He showed this to Diamond Dallas Page, leading to DDP and Goldberg resuming their feud in real life over who has the better portrait done by me!



Acrylic on 24" x 36" canvas panel

Lou Thesz

64

AWA Champion
NWA Champion
WWA Champion

Lou Thesz is quite possibly the greatest professional wrestler who ever lived. Beyond his accomplishments like holding the NWA Championship for 10 years, three months and nine days over three reigns, and holding the World Title for multiple other organizations, he is also credited with creating many of the moves that have defined a pro wrestling match. Maneuvers he's credited with innovating are the belly to back waistlock suplex aka the German suplex, the (aptly named) Lou Thesz press, the STF and the powerbomb. Behind the scenes, the NWA stood behind him being champion due to his notoriety as a hooker (get your mind out of the gutter!), someone who can fend off an opponent that decides to try to legitimately beat him in the ring.

Thesz was a legit tough guy, but also widely known as a gentleman that was easy to put forward as the face of not just the National Wrestling Alliance, but wrestling itself. It's not surprising at all that he's still known as the pedigree of wrestling's royalty or that the professional wrestling wing of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum is named after him. He was just that good, and raised the quality of the sport simply by being associated with it.

About the piece: I knew that for Lou I needed to pull out all the stops, and I feel I did for this piece. What's more, I knew that the piece was going into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Dan Gable Museum, in the wing named after him. No pressure, right? I'm damn proud of this portrait.

65



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Samoa Joe

66

ROH Champion
TNA Champion

Samoa Joe is really good at what he does, and what he does is thrill wrestling fans every time he steps in the ring. Joe is one of the most respected performers in the business, a respect that he has earned over and over by putting on quality matches. He's a former Ring of Honor World Champion, where he had what many feel are the greatest matches in the history of an organization known for great matches against CM Punk. He then went to TNA where he is the company's third Grand Slam Champion, meaning he has held every title in the company. Heck, once he even held the Tag Title by himself! He's held other titles for promotions around the world, and continues to be one of the big reasons I watch TNA Impact.

I also believe that his best days are still ahead of him, as scary as that is!

About the piece: I'd initially intended for this to have a background with cool color, making the warm colors of the foreground pop. As I went, though, that just didn't look right so I painted over the background with white. But then the foreground felt wrong, so I experimented with doing some light spray paint and masking off the area around the face off. It still felt a little flat, so I drizzled the black and white in the lower right corner and it felt RIGHT.

I was putting process shots of this up on my Twitter while I was working on it, and next thing I know Joe himself is sharing it! Once I'd posted the finished piece, he shared it again, followed by CM Punk! That was a crazy day for sure. Joe and I have become friendly since, and he got a painting from me of himself, Punk and Homicide that he gave prints of to both of them for holiday presents!



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Dory Funk

68 Jr.

NWA Champion

Dory Funk, Jr is one of the biggest names in the history of pro wrestling. One year after entering the NWA in 1968, he won the World Championship from Gene Kiniski, holding it for four and a half years, the second longest uninterrupted reign in the history of the title! After losing the belt to Harley Race, he went on to compete around the world, having many notable feuds, while his brother Terry later won the NWA World Championship as well, making them the only brothers to have both held the title.

Funk now runs the Funking Conservatory wrestling school, where students have included Matt and Jeff Hardy, Christian, Lita, Kurt Angle, Mickie James, Edge and Test! Dory Jr and Terry were inducted into WWE's Hall of Fame in 2009.

About the piece: Most artists know that inspiration is bull, and that our work comes from constant practice, study and experimentation. But occasionally, it does happen, and it did with this piece. I was watching a documentary, and this shot quickly ran across my TV of Dory Jr and I instantly jumped up and got to work. Mind you, this was at 8PM. I ran to the hardware store to get the wood, then went into the studio to prime it and get my guidelines down. Next thing I know it's midnight and I'm already painting it!



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

The Sandman ECW Champion

The Sandman is a guy who really embodies the 90's and early 2000's hardcore wrestling movement. A wrestler who is not considered to be a technical genius, his charisma made his whole persona. One of the original ECW's alumni, he would make his way to the ring as Metallica's 'Enter Sandman' played, a kendo stick in one hand and a beer in the other. He'd chug on the beer, then bash it against his head until his forehead bled, getting himself bloody before his match even started. That's hardcore.

About the piece: Sandman always hit me as a guy that's about the violence, so I went for the obvious and used a lot of red paint. I put it on thick at the top and let it drip down. I drizzled it in the lower right corner and let it splatter around. If there's any subject I'm going to use to hit someone over the head with the idea, it's this guy!



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Shane Douglas

72

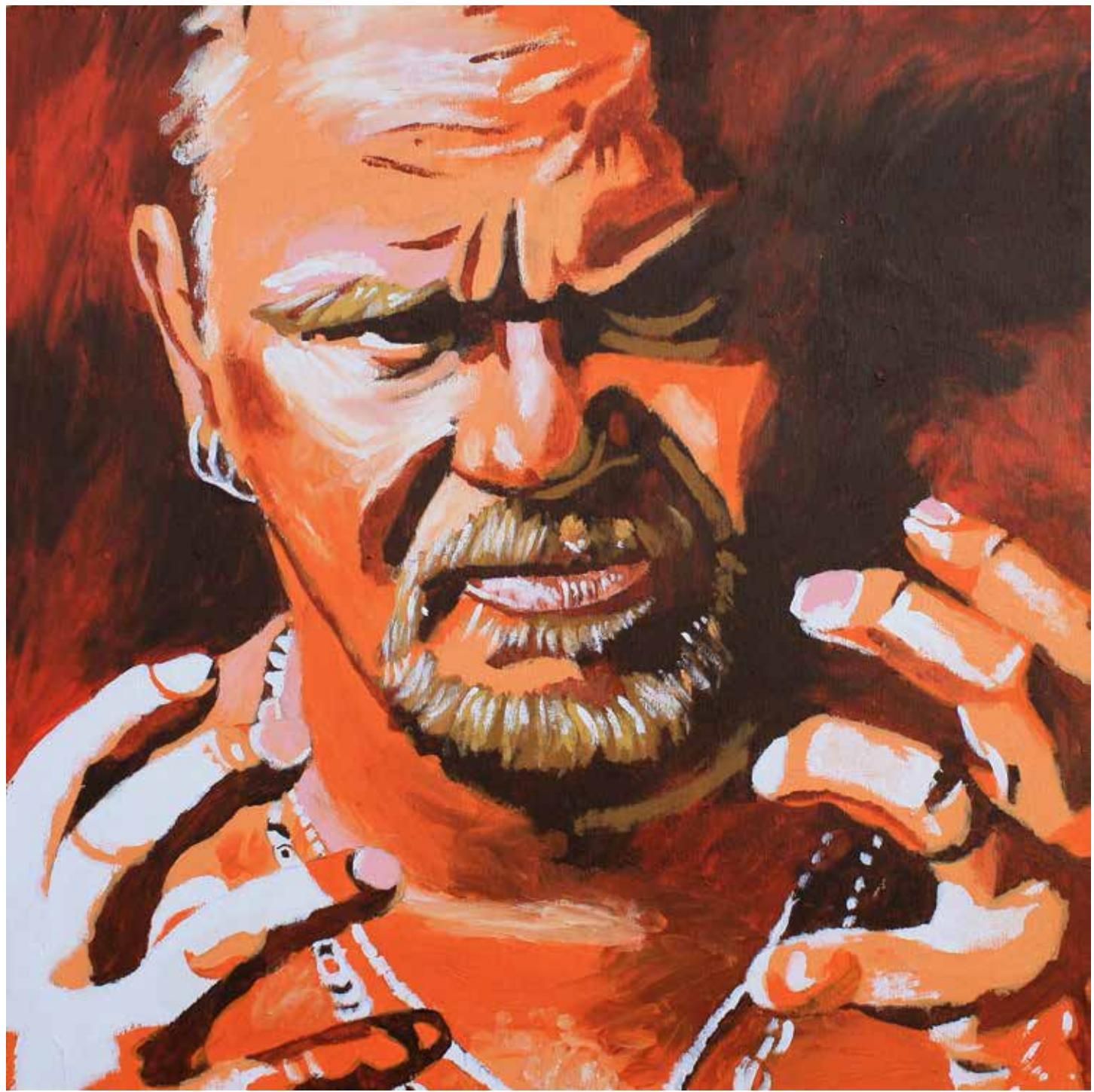
ECW Champion
NWA Champion

Shane Douglas has made his name by being one of the last journeymen in the business, working for nearly every major wrestling promotion. His resume includes stints in the NWA, WCW, WWF, ECW, and TNA. He's most known for his time in ECW, when he cut one of the most famous promos in wrestling's history after winning the NWA World Heavyweight Title. Known only to Douglas, Paul Heyman and Tod Gordon, ECW was leaving the NWA, and in a way to get their promotion exposure, Douglas threw the NWA World Title on the mat and declared that the ECW World Title was the only one that was legitimate. This sent instant waves through the wrestling community, and made the names of both Douglas and ECW.

Douglas has now largely transitioned to being a promoter, notably with Extreme Rising.

About the piece: Douglas' character always struck me as a deep-thinker, very cerebral, so I dropped out the blacks and instead used reds and deep browns, showing the violence on his mind is instructing what his body is about to do.

73



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Antonio Inoki 74 WWE Champion

Antonio Inoki is one of the biggest names in the history of professional wrestling. The Japanese wrestler found fame around the world, while working primarily in his native country for the Japan Wrestling Association, Tokyo Pro Wrestling, and as a founder of New Japan Pro Wrestling. He was also one of the pioneers of mixed martial arts, working against boxers, judoka, karateka, kung fu practitioners, sumo wrestlers and other wrestlers. His most notorious of these MMA matches was against the legendary Muhammad Ali in a controversial match ending with a draw.

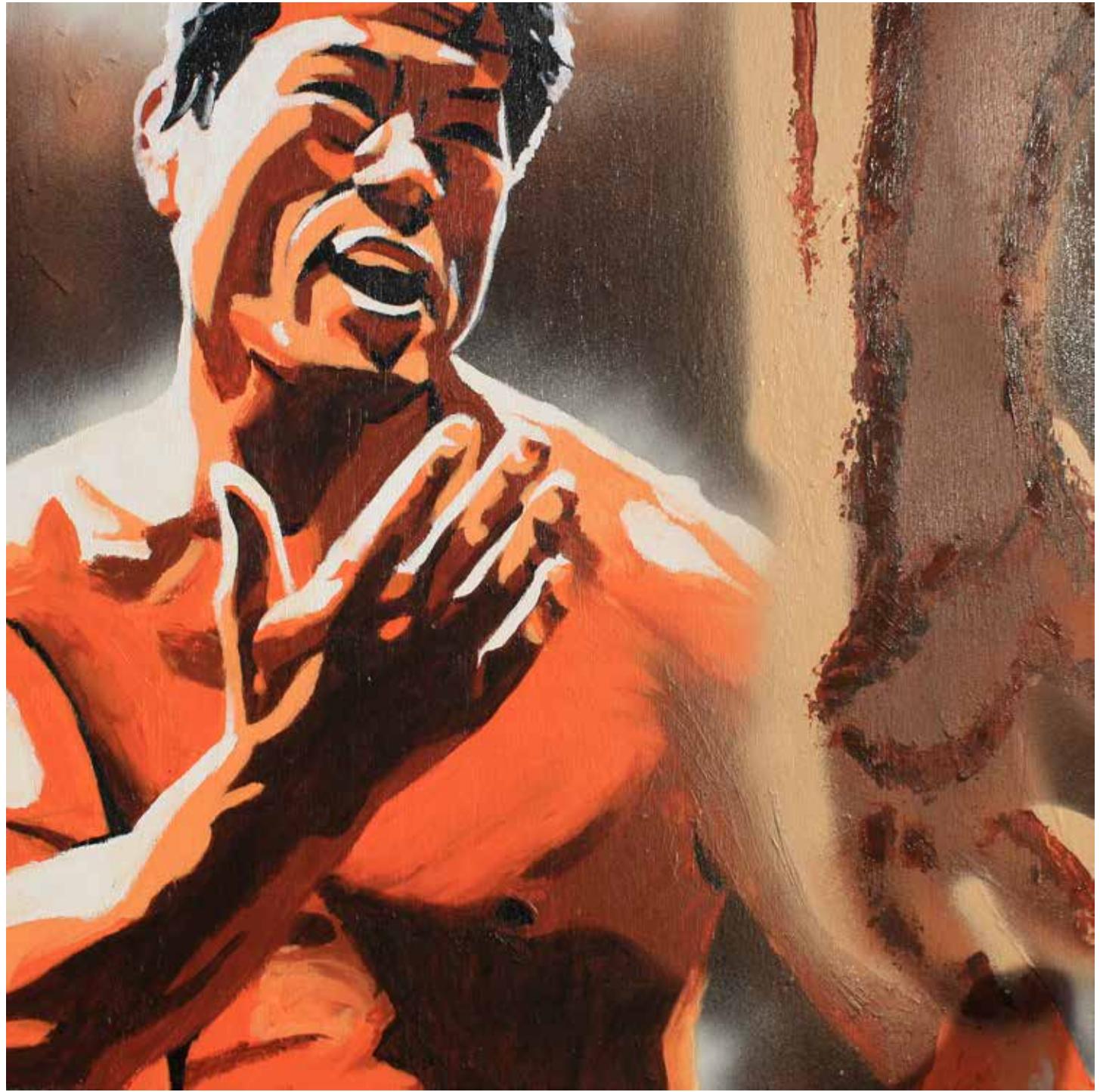
Holding world titles and tag titles for numerous promotions, Inoki continued his knack for controversy when he defeated Bob Backlund for the WWF title on November 30, 1979. The two met for a rematch on December 6, seeing Backlund win after an interference by Tiger Jeet Singh, leading to the rematch being declared a no contest. Inoki refused to accept the title, leaving it vacated. Due to Inoki's refusal, his title reign is not officially recognized by the WWE in its history, although he has received their ultimate honor by being inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame Class of 2010.

One of Inoki's greatest achievements was being heavily involved in the wrestling exhibition put on by Japan and North Korea in Pyongyang, the first of its kind, seeing him compete in the main event against Ric Flair. This trip was especially important to Inoki, as he was able to visit the birthplace of his mentor Rikidozan.

In America, Inoki is also well-known to a generation of moviegoers as himself in *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan*, where he has a match against Tony Curtis! (Side note: Curtis' stunt double was Hector Guerrero, current TNA Impact Spanish announcer and former Gobbledygooker!)

World Champion. Promoter. MMA fighter. Peace ambassador. Movie star. Inoki.

About the piece: I wanted this to feel like it is being seen through a 1970's camera, all aglow with light. Inoki's figure was done with acrylics, and nearly everything else with spray paint.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Vince McMahon

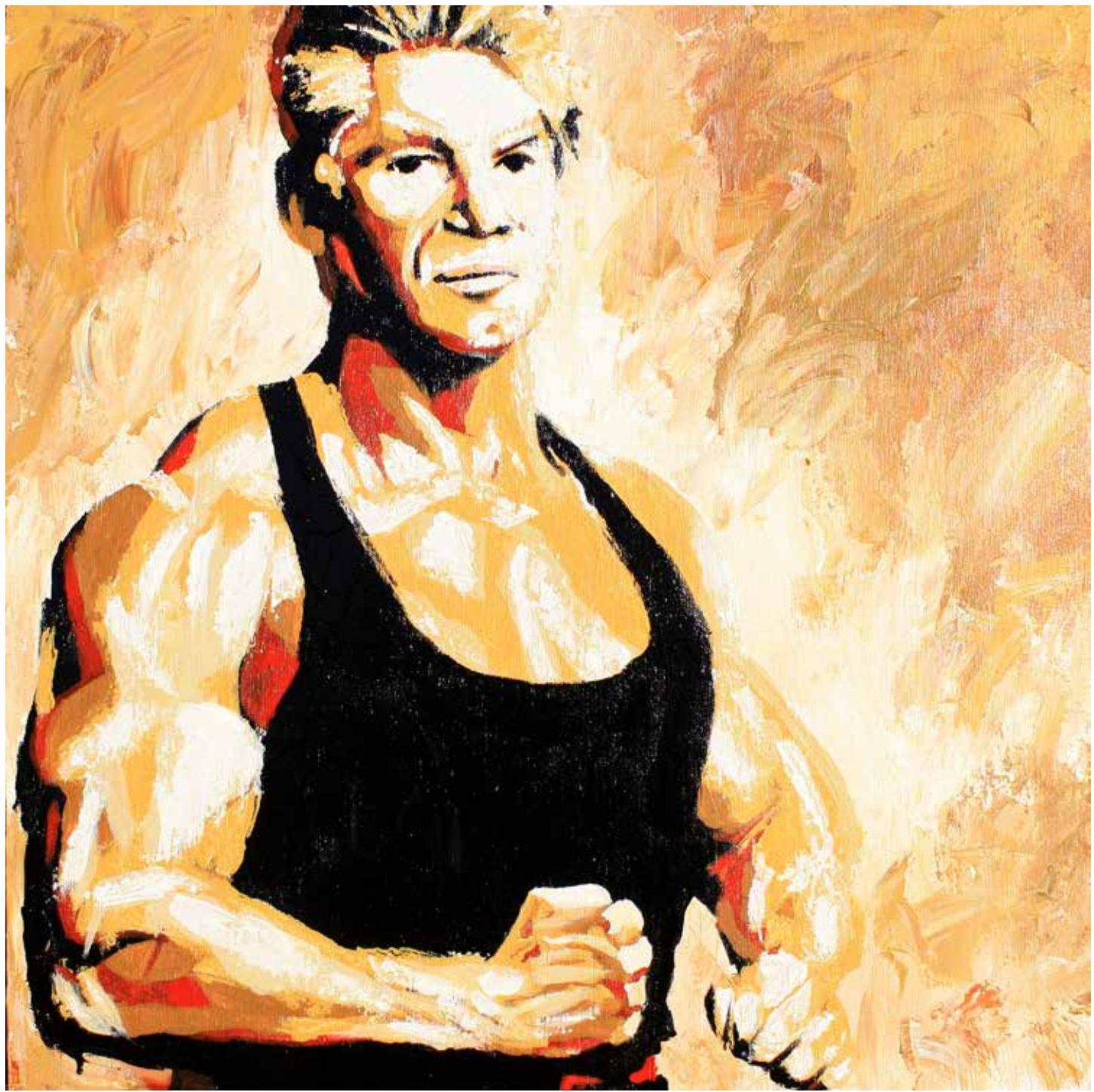
76

ECW Champion
WWE Champion

He's Vince McMahon, a third generation promoter who will likely go down in history as the most successful promoter in the history of professional wrestling. His singular vision took advantage of the changes taking place in television during the early 1980's, taking wrestling from a local product to an international phenomenon. He signed the biggest stars of their time to come compete together on this large platform, leading to the industry standard that is Wrestlemania. He has also been on-screen as a play-by-play commentator, interviewer, and even as a wrestler himself. His behind-the-scenes responsibilities are slowly being pulled back as he passes on responsibilities to his daughter Stephanie and son-in-law Paul "HHH" Levesque, continuing the McMahon wrestling legacy into the fourth generation.

Naturally, by getting to the top he's made enemies and gained detractors, but absolutely no one can deny the unprecedented success that the man has earned, and the indelible mark he will leave on professional wrestling.

About the piece: I largely finger-painted this, especially with the background. I put globs of paint on the surface and then just moved them around and into each other by hand. The limited palette helped me focus on making the composition strictly through shadow and light.



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Some say that David Arquette winning the WCW World Championship was the worst moment in wrestling's history (Totally not. I present the Gobbledy Gooker, Shockmaster and USWA's Dragon Master). David Arquette winning the world title was actually a pretty cool angle handled by a company that was on its way to going out of business. In a different time and place, this would have been one of the biggest angles ever (think Andy Kaufmann). It got mainstream attention and gave WCW some free promos from the likes of Arquette's then-wife Courtney Cox and Kevin Costner. A wrestling company wouldn't be able to pay Costner to do a promo today, and WCW got it for free.

Arquette himself is a lifetime wrestling fan who got to follow up making a fairly fun movie about wrestling called 'Ready to Rumble' with promoting it in the middle of the squared circle. A last-minute booking decision (remember, this was WCW) put Arquette in a tag match where the title was on the line, and in a fluke he won. Strip everything about his trappings away and put yourself in his shoes for a second. A lifetime wrestling fan getting to win the World Title. That had to be awesome for him.

When I started this project to paint every World Champion, everyone asked me if I was going to do Arquette. Well, of course I am, I'm painting EVERY champ, but I thought I'd get his input. I was blown away when a bona fide movie star said that he dug my art and wanted to buy it.

Arquette's not the only one who gets to live a dream because of wrestling.

Based on a photo by Christopher Ameruoso



Acrylic and oil on 36" x 48" canvas

80

Tyler
Black
aka
Seth
Rollins
ROH Champion

Colby Lopez, aka Tyler Black, is a former Ring of Honor World Champion and, now known as Seth Rollins, the first ever NXT Champion. While in Ring of Honor, Black made his presence known quickly as part of the controversial stable, Age of the Fall. Later breaking off on his own, he would defeat Austin Aries for the title in 2010. As Seth Rollins, he moved to WWE's developmental territory, Florida Championship Wrestling, now known as NXT, where he again quickly made his presence known, cementing that reputation when he won the first NXT Championship. He can now be seen every week on Raw, where he again debuted with a bang as part of a mysterious stable of NXT wrestlers who have attacked some of the biggest names in the company as The Shield. The group has made massive waves in the business, getting great feedback from their peers and legends.

About the piece: I was inspired by his dual-colored hair for this composition. I limited the non-body colors to just black and tan. The background behind the blonde hair is black with tan flourishes, and vice versa. I was very surprised when he started using this piece as his Twitter profile picture, making this probably my most-visible painting.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Rick Rude

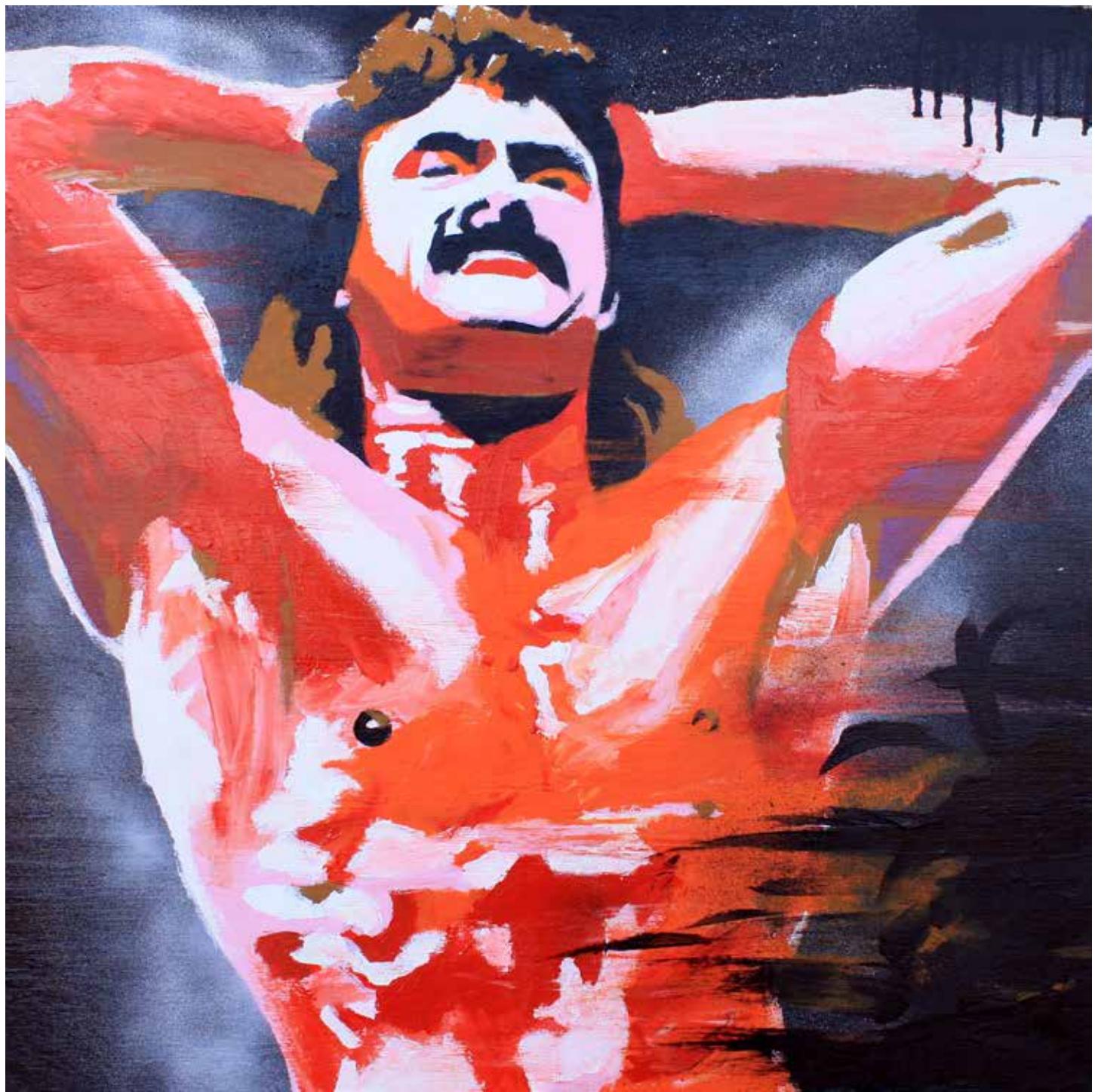
82

WCW Champion
WCWA Champion

'Ravishing' Rick Rude was one of the most popular wrestlers of his time, competing with the biggest names in the sport. Starting in the territories, he became the first ever WCWA World Champion when the WCCW broke from the NWA. In the WWF, he had notable feuds with Jake 'The Snake' Roberts and the Ultimate Warrior, before heading to WCW. There he defeated Ric Flair for the NWA World Title, becoming the first ever WCW International World Heavyweight Champion due to that promotion's exit from the NWA. After suffering a serious back injury, he largely transitioned to being a manager, later becoming one of the original members of D-Generation X. Following the Montreal Screwjob and his disgust with that event, Rude jumped back to WCW and could actually be seen on both Raw and Nitro on the same night, due to Raw being taped. After a stint with the NWO, Rude's injuries finally took him off TV.

While he is no longer with us, his reputation as one of the best talkers and workers in the business keeps him and his legacy alive with all of his fans.

About the piece: I had the choice of doing something based on his infamous tights, where he would have his opponent's face airbrushed on his crotch (really), but opted instead to focus on his physique. I started by laying down some black paint, then added some white spray paint for the glow effect. I then painted in the figure, and then lightly brushing it from side to side with a foam brush.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

The Miz

WWE Champion

Watching the Miz evolve as a wrestler has been a joy over the past nine years of WWE programming. A notorious member of MTV's Real World, the Miz transformed himself into a pro wrestler, debuting with WWE in 2004 as a part of their Tough Enough competition. After some time in developmental, he had some sporadic appearances on Smackdown as a 'host' with occasional matches. It was when he was put on the ECW brand and teamed with John Morrison that his career began to get some traction with the viewers. Their vignettes and in-ring interview segments were a constant highlight, and their working several TV matches a week kept them in the spotlight. After breaking off as a singles wrestler, Miz won the US Championship and later some tag team gold with the Big Show. On July 18, 2010 at the Money in the Bank pay-per-view (a match I was at!) he won the titular prize, later cashing it in against Randy Orton to win his first WWE Championship. As champion, he successfully defended the title against John Cena at Wrestlemania.

Miz has stayed a perpetual upper mid-carder and main-eventer since, and is used by WWE for many of their public relations needs. Hopefully this current face turn doesn't last too long, because personally I love him as a swarthy, cocky heel that is just too easy to hate.

About the piece: I did this in an obvious homage to the style of Shepard 'Obey' Fairey, a street artist most well-known for his Obama 'Hope' print, his 'Andre the Giant has a posse' stickers, and his 'Obey Giant' brand. Miz' trunks are themselves an homage to Fairey, so that was a natural for me to riff on.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Kamala

86

USWA Champion

James 'Kamala' Harris had one of the most notable gimmicks in the history of pro wrestling. Harris debuted in 1978 as 'Sugar Bear' Harris (really!) and toured the UK, before coming to Memphis, where his world would change forever. There, Jerry Lawler and Jerry Jarrett gave him the name of Kamala, (then spelled 'Kimala') the cannibalistic Ugandan giant. The gimmick took off like wildfire, leading him to the WWF in 1984, where he had many notable managers like 'Classy' Freddie Blassie and Slick. He worked there through the early 1990's, while still also competing in Lawler's USWA where he was a four-time world champion. He had a brief stint in WCW as a part of the Dungeon of Doom before largely retiring and making sporadic appearances for the WWE and various independent shows.

About the piece: This was one of those that I just knew exactly what I wanted to do. The figure and background were done with acrylic, largely spread around with my fingers. Then I drizzled a little almond-hued house paint in the corner, and added the facepaint with a stencil and spray paint.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

88

Tank aka Mantaur USWA Champion

Mike Hallick, aka Mantaur, aka Tank is one of those wrestlers who makes the argument that it's better to be infamous than to be famous. Starting his career in Europe, Hallick made his notorious debut in the WWF as Mantaur in 1995. Wearing a gigantic bull's head to the ring, he was billed as half man, half beast (really), even though the mask would come off when he would wrestle. In his matches, he would continue to sell the gimmick by snorting, charging, and yes, mooing. Mooing. At least he was getting booked, right? He had some minor feuds with Razor Ramon and Bam Bam Bigelow before leaving the company. He had a brief run in ECW, then had an even briefer return to WWF as Goldust's unnamed bodyguard during a feud with the Ultimate Warrior. In 1997, he made his way to the USWA as Tank, where he won the World Title from Jerry Lawler, holding it for one week and then dropping it back. Hallick now makes sporadic appearances with independent promotions.

The Mantaur gimmick is the one that stuck, as one of the most ridiculous in wrestling's history. While he may not be remembered for other reasons, he's remembered nonetheless, and that's one of the really fun things about wrestling.

About the piece: I wanted to incorporate both his unmasked and masked looks, while also having fun with the Mantaur persona. Taking inspiration from comic books, I attempted to show him making the fantastical transformation from man to...MANTAUR!



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

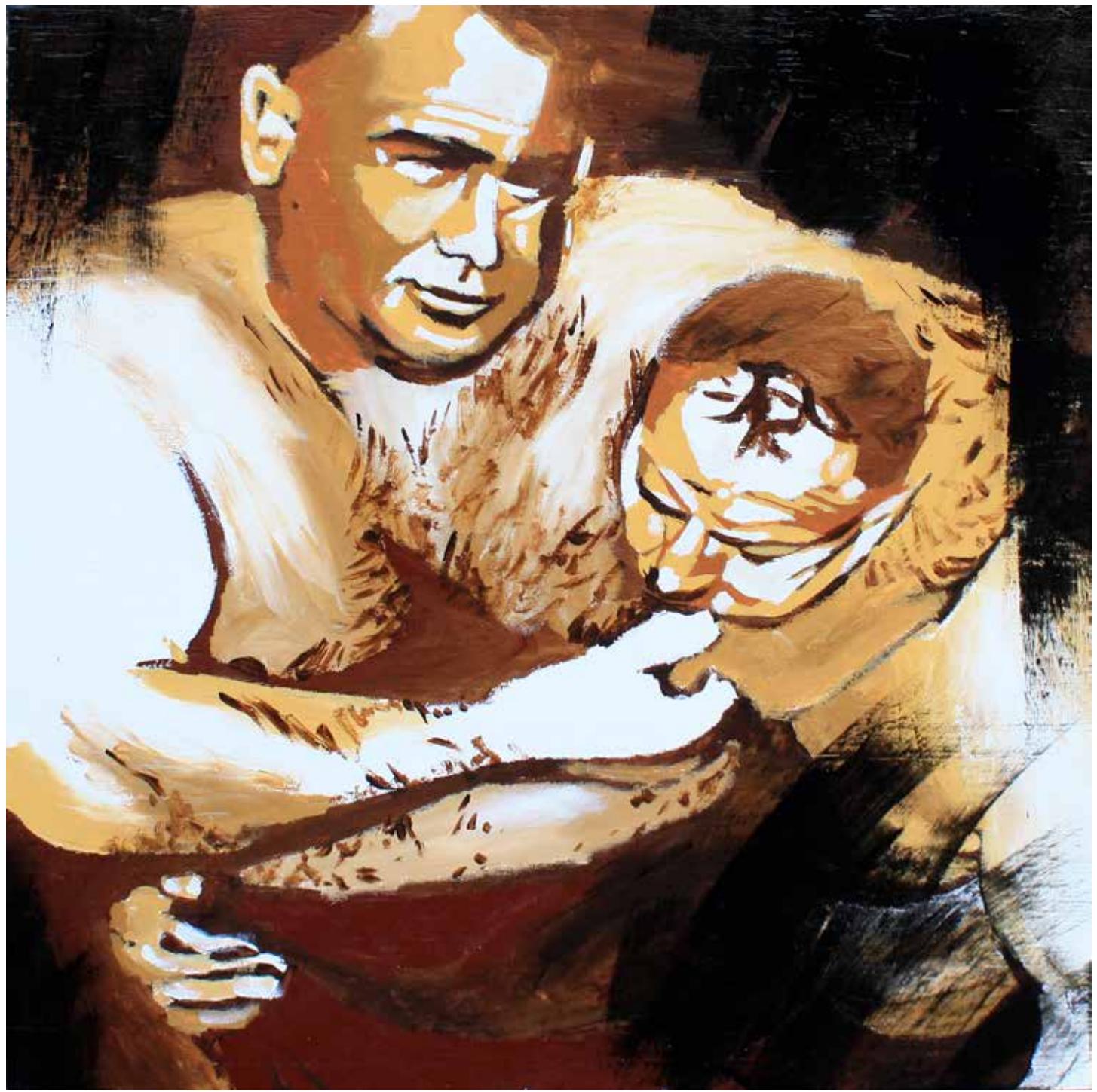
90

Ed 'Strangler' Lewis

NWA Champion

Ed 'Strangler' Lewis was one of, if not THE, best professional wrestlers of all time. Beginning his wrestling career at the age of 14 in 1905, Lewis had a notable career of fights back during the time that they were legitimate and not scripted. The legend is that Strangler was involved in the first worked, or scripted, match against Joe Stecher for the World Title in 1928. This followed the pair having the longest match on record, going for a purported five and a half hours and ending in a draw. Lewis was known as a 'hooker', someone who could inflict serious pain on an opponent through various holds, guaranteeing him a win should his opponent not follow the script. Following his in-ring wrestling career, he became a teacher, manager and traveling companion of the illustrious Lou Thesz, passing along his knowledge to hone the skills of the greatest wrestler of all time.

About the piece: One of my friends pointed out to me that my style is heavily based on high contrast, likely going back to my roots in comic books and illustration and working with ink. I've carried that on to my painted work, and I like to still use a lot of black, but with this I wanted to play with contrast without using black. I then used some black house paint to 'frame' the piece by roughly putting the paint in the corners.



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

The Rock

92

WCW Champion
WWE Champion

The Rock was my first favorite wrestler. I started watching wrestling around 1998, right when he was really taking off in a huge way. His charisma, his way of turning a phrase, his entire x-factor made me tune in twice a week to see what was going to happen.

Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson is a third-generation wrestler. His grandfather on his mother's side is 'High Chief' Peter Maivia and his father is Rocky Johnson. Rock first debuted as Rocky Maivia, combining both of their names. That iteration of the character didn't really catch on, and it was when he turned heel and joined the Nation of Domination that The Rock, the shit-talking wise-cracking bully started to really take shape. But his in-ring skills and the aforementioned x-factor were what really made him one of the major stars of the Attitude Era, and that went into overdrive when he, at his peak, was competing with a game Stone Cold Steve Austin. It was cool to cheer for the bad guy, as long as they were cool, too. It was the James Bond formula: Every guy wants to be him, and every woman wants to be with him. The ladies LOVED Rock and naturally the guys wanted to be wherever the ladies were. Put all of that together and you have a top draw.

I used to work at a bank and several of the ladies there had a book club where they read those Harlequin Romance bodice-rippers. One of the younger women always described the male lead of the book as looking "like the Rock, but with long hair." I'm sure she was thrilled when The Scorpion King dropped. Rock has largely stepped away from wrestling to focus on his extremely successful movie career, where he has really found his niche and is one of the top draws in the business.



Acrylic and spray on 30" x 40" canvas

James Storm

TNA Champion

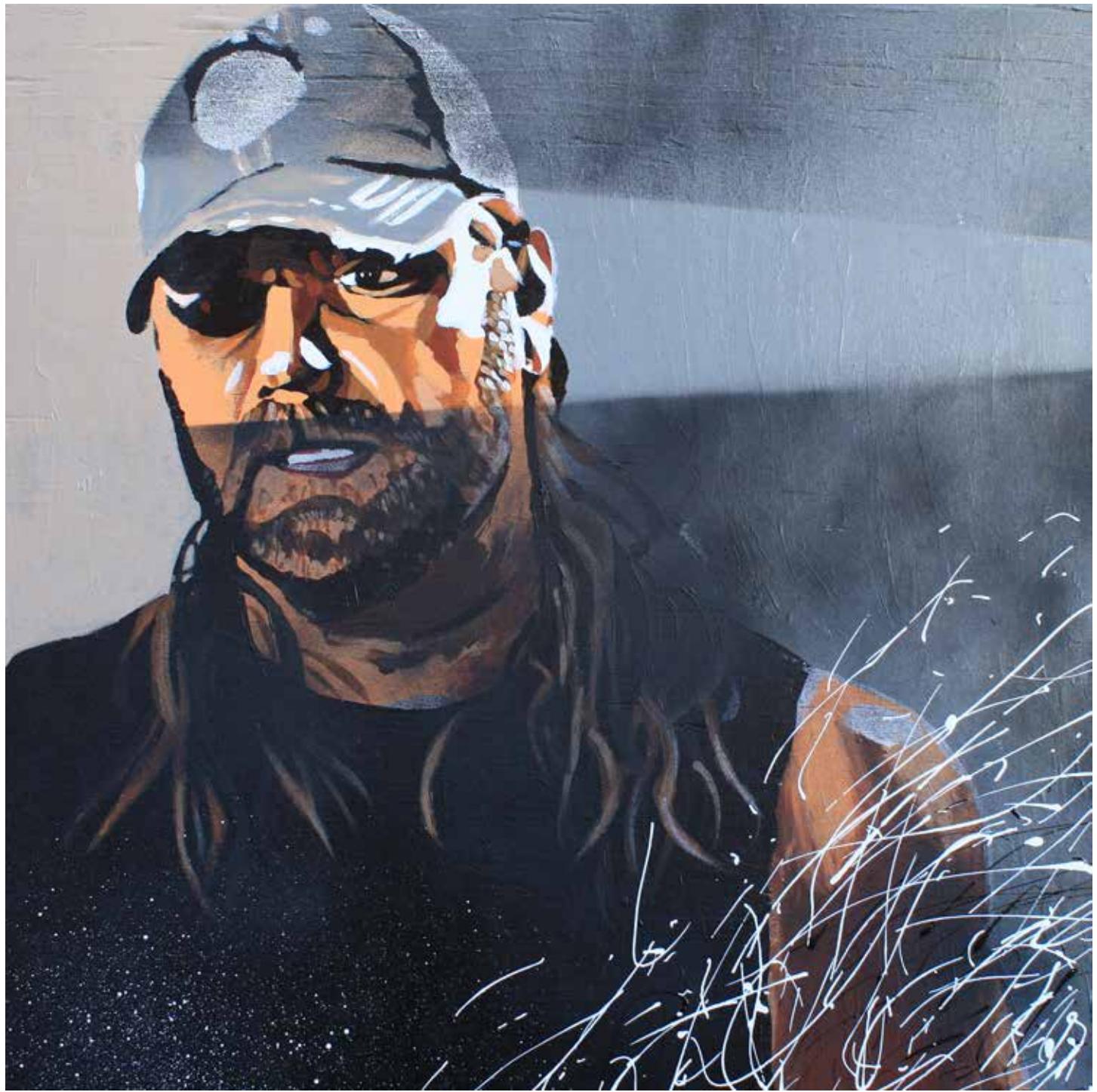
94

“Cowboy” James Storm is one of the few wrestlers who made their name in TNA and has continued to shine with the organization. He has competed there since the company had its first broadcast. Storm initially made his name in the tag division, first with Chris ‘Wildcat’ Harris as the group America’s Most Wanted. The duo were consistently the highlights of each night. After AMW disbanded, Storm briefly worked in the singles division before joining with Bobby Roode to form Beer Money, one of, if not THE best tag teams in the history of TNA. Their best of five series against the Motor City Machine Guns was just about the best feud of 2010 in wrestling, at least in my opinion.

Both members found themselves in the World Title hunt, with Storm winning the title. He lost it just eight days later to Roode after some underhandedness on Roode’s part. The two went on to have a notable feud through 2012.

Storm has one of those personas that just instantly clicks with the crowd. He’s a hard drinkin’, hard fightin’ sum’bitch that can go in the ring with the best of them.

95



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Diamond Dallas Page

WCW Champion

96

Diamond Dallas Page is one of the few men to have become almost more well-known for his exploits after his wrestling career than during it. And he had a huge career in wrestling! DDP debuted as a manager in the AWA, associated with future world champions like Pat Tanaka and Curt Hennig. After a few months there, he was signed with WCW, again mostly working as a manager. There he managed the likes of the Freebirds, Scott Hall, Kevin Nash, Raven and other notables. Page continued his wrestling training and was soon working as a competitor himself. He had a long and memorable feud with Randy Savage during the early days of the NWO, before eventually turning heel. DDP also partnered with many celebrities such as Karl Malone and Jay Leno, raising his profile both with the fans and with the company. DDP went on to have the WCW World Championship three times before the company was bought by Vince McMahon.

DDP's tenure with the WWE is largely remembered for his rather creepy feud with the Undertaker, and his later catch phrases "It's me, it's me, it's...D...D...Pi!" and "That's not a bad thing...that's...a good thing!" Injuries and the tolls of time finally caught up with Dallas and led to his retirement from the ring.

During his last years in the business, Page started getting heavily into yoga, first with his book 'Yoga for Regular Guys' and his mega-popular 'DDP Yoga' DVD series. In the last year, DDP Yoga became an international sensation based around the inspirational story of Arthur Boorman. Boorman was nearly paralyzed and unable to walk unassisted. It was his experience with the DDP Yoga program that led to him losing 140 pounds in ten months and not only being able to walk unassisted, but run! Look up the video on YouTube and see if you can watch it without getting a tear in your eye!

About the Piece: I did this in several stages. First I painted the blue background, then sprayed the white cloud around the hands. I then painted the face and torso, and again sprayed a white cloud around the hands, creating a glowing effect. I followed that up with painting the arms and hands, then another smaller white cloud. I then cut out a stencil for the rays of light emanating from DDP's 'Diamond Cutter' symbol.

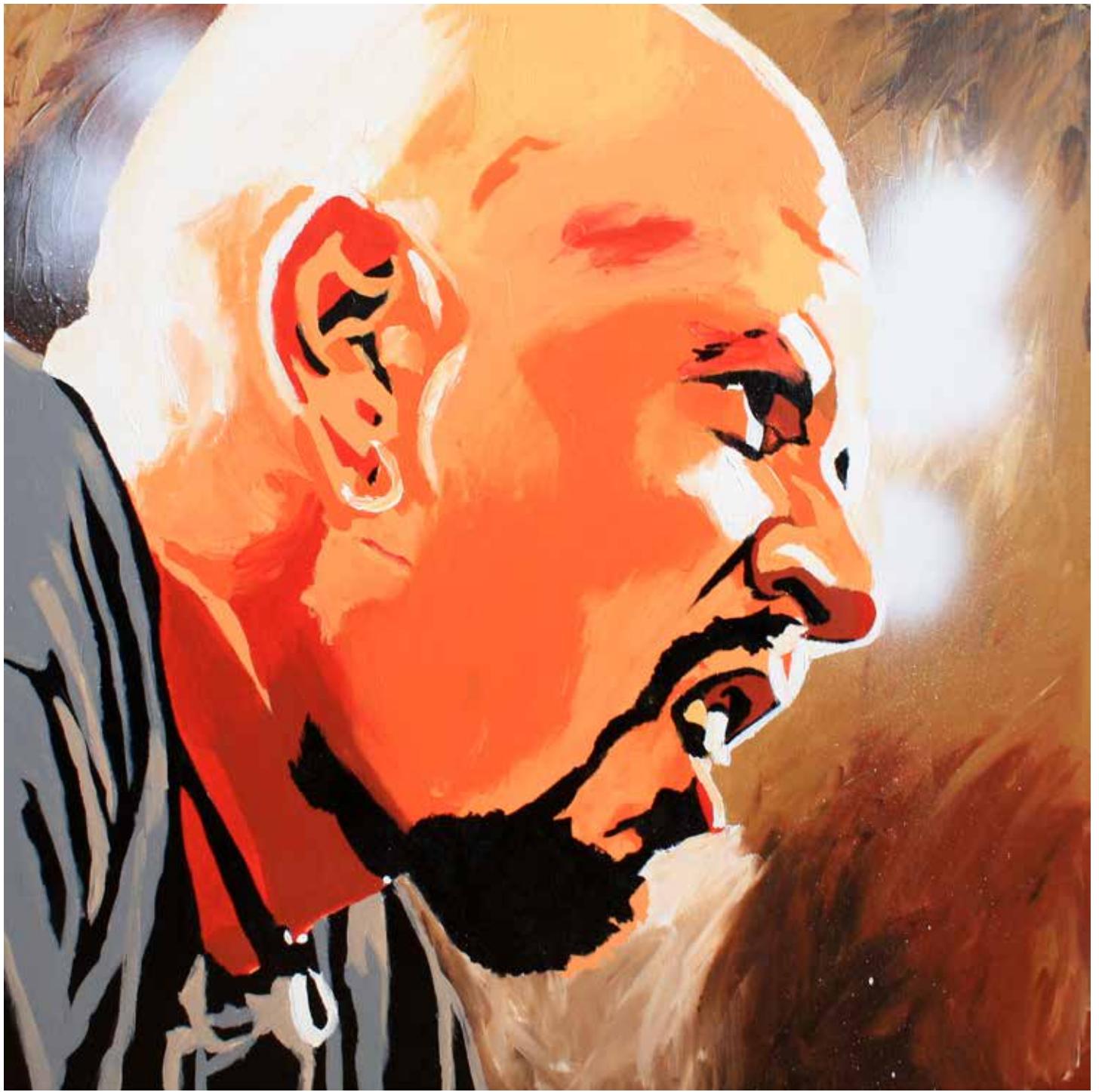


Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Justin Credible ECW Champion

Justin Credible is a wrestler who, through hard work and skill, managed to carve out a spot in the business at a time that it was dominated by giants. After being trained at the legendary Hart Dungeon, Credible aka Peter Polaco was signed by the WWF and debuted as Aldo Montoya, the Portugese Man O' War. He worked there through the mid-90's before leaving for ECW, where he was repackaged as Justin Credible. In the Land of Extreme he had a singles feud with Tommy Dreamer before joining with Lance Storm to form the tag team the Impact Players. They held tag team gold before he got a shot at the ECW World Title, defeating Dreamer for the belt.

When ECW folded, he returned to WWF/WWE, forming a stable with X-Pac and Albert as the X-Factor. He would leave that group to join the Alliance during the WCW/ECW Invasion angle. He then largely competed on Heat, making some Raw appearances before again leaving the company in 2003. He then hustled on the independent circuit, while also appearing for TNA and Ring of Honor. In 2006 he briefly returned to WWE when they relaunched the ECW brand before again returning to the independents.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

100

Randy Orton

WWE Champion

Randy Orton is one of the biggest names in the last ten years of professional wrestling. A third-generation wrestler, Orton is one of the few to become a bigger star than his forbears. After a brief face singles career in WWE, Orton returned from an injury as a member of the amazing heel faction Evolution alongside Triple H, Batista and Ric Flair, leading to him becoming the youngest champion in WWE history at the age of 24. He then went on to a great run in the tag team Rated RKO with Edge, before starting his own faction Legacy, a group of other second- and third-generation wrestlers like Ted Dibiase Jr and Cody Rhodes. Orton spent a better part of the last decade as a perennial main-eventer becoming a nine-time world champion.

On a personal level, Orton inspired me to keep pushing myself. He's exactly three months older than me, and is also from Missouri, albeit the other side of the state. Seeing him continue to achieve and to learn from his mistakes taught me that I'll never be too young and it's never too late to achieve my goals.

About the piece: I painted the background a solid black, then used white spray paint for the halo and glare. I then painted Randy in, thinking that I'd pretty much be done once the figure was rendered. The piece sat on my easel for a day or two because it just didn't feel right yet. Then it hit me, that this guy has put his chaos behind him but still carries it, and that allowed me to bring in the elements along the right side of the piece.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Kane

102

ECW Champion
USWA Champion
WWE Champion

There are few people to have accomplished as much in wrestling as Glenn 'Kane' Jacobs has. Jacobs debuted in 1992 in the St Louis, MO area before working at the USWA as Doomsday, winning their World Title within the first three years of his career. In 1995 he was signed by the then WWF as Dr Isaac Yankem, DDS, Jerry Lawler's personal dentist (that is so hilarious to type out!). He largely worked as a jobber in that role, before being repackaged as the fake Diesel after Kevin Nash and Scott Hall left the company. That gimmick went over like a lead balloon, probably the best thing that could have happened to Jacobs.

Off the air for a few months, he was then given the role of Kane, the Undertaker's lost brother. Managed by the late Paul Bearer, Kane had what many consider to be the best debut in wrestling history following months of creepy vignettes back in St Louis where his career began. During the first ever Hell in a Cell match between 'Taker and Shawn Michaels, the lights go out, then funereal music hits and under only red lights out walks Bearer and the masked Kane. On commentary, Vince McMahon shouts, "That's Paul Bearer! And that...that's gotta be...THAT'S GOTTA BE KANE! THAT'S GOTTA BE KANE!" Kane then tears the door off the cage and proceeds to destroy the Undertaker. My hairs are standing up on my arms just thinking about it.

And the character just worked and instantly caught on with the fans. His imposing look, his music, his pyro, it all seamlessly gelled together. After an extremely notable feud with the Undertaker the two would partner as the Brothers of Destruction, one of the most intimidating tag teams in history. He would go on in his career to win 18 different championships in the WWE, including the WWF Championship, the ECW Championship, and the World Championship, making him the first of only three men to have held all three of the company's world championships. He has also held the Intercontinental Championship, the Hardcore Championship, and 12 tag team championships. He is the company's third Grand Slam Champion, and holds the record for the fastest successful cashing in of the Money in the Bank contract (I was there for that one!). Other records he holds include the most eliminations at the Royal Rumble, the most consecutive appearances at the Rumble, and the fastest elimination of another competitor at 1.9 seconds. He also won the fastest ever Wrestlemania match ever in eight seconds when he won the ECW World Title (I was there for that one, too!).

He's been unmasked, which made him even creepier, and was then remasked and it still worked. He went from non-verbal, to using a voice box, to fully speaking and made each one work. He's now in a comedic role as one half of the Tag Team Champions with Daniel Bryan, and he even makes that not just work, but get way over with the crowd. He has made numerous new wrestlers step up to a new level while still keeping himself strong. He's simply one of the best ever.

About the piece: I kept this one simple. Really, the piece itself kept it simple. I had originally planned to do some fun collage work but once I had the face painted I felt it was unnecessary. I considered adding other painted elements, but those would have also overpowered the intensity of this. I decided to just follow the KISS rule: Keep It Simple, Stupid!

103



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Bret Hart is one of the all-time greats in the history of professional wrestling. I know I say that about a lot of these guys, but it doesn't get much truer with Bret. If he were a music act, he would be at the level of the Rolling Stones or Paul McCartney. The son of Stu Hart and the most famous of the legendary Hart family, Bret started in his father's Stampede Wrestling promotion in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. He then went to the WWF where he established himself in the tag division along with Jim 'The Anvil' Neidhart and manager Jimmy Hart (no relation) as the Hart Foundation. Bret would later break out as a singles wrestler after winning the Intercontinental Championship from 'Mr. Perfect' Curt Hennig, then later as the WWF Champion after defeating Ric Flair. Hart would have many notable feuds with the likes of Jerry Lawler, his brother Owen Hart and his most notorious with Shawn Michaels.

Bret Hart

104

WCW Champion
WWE Champion

Bret and Shawn's feud is, if not the most legendary, then the most notorious in the annals of professional wrestling. They were two tremendous athletes competing at the highest level, as can be seen by their amazing hour-long Iron Man match at Wrestlemania XII. Many argue that this was the greatest Wrestlemania match of all time, an argument that I could be convinced of. Hart would later have an amazing match with 'Stone Cold' Steve Austin at the 1996 Survivor Series that may be the best double-turn ever, where Austin walked in the heel and Bret the face, but those roles were completely reversed by the end. (My personal favorite match for both men.) Bret would leave the WWF for WCW the next year following the infamous Montreal Screwjob, which I will not get into here but it is worth looking up.

Bret's time in WCW was ultimately unremarkable due more to the company than himself, and his in-ring career was cut short following a concussion. But that has not stopped the wrestling community's continuous love and appreciation of the man and his abilities. He has held thirty-two championships across five decades(!), is a Royal Rumble winner, is the only two-time King of the Ring winner, and is in the WWE Hall of Fame, inducted by Steve Austin.

About the piece: I limited the color palette on this to be his flesh tones, then pink, white and black, the colors that Bret is most known for. I painted the background black first, then used a combination of pink and white spray paint with splotches of pink house paint. Then I painted Bret in and brought in a bit more spray and some drizzles of pink and black paint. I'm extremely proud of this piece and consider it to be my best yet.



Acrylic and spray on 30" x 40" canvas

Kevin Nash

106

WCW Champion
WWE Champion

People tend to fall into two camps when it comes to Kevin Nash: They love him or they hate him, but regardless they have a strong opinion about him. Regardless, no one can dispute that he's a man who made his way to the very top of the industry. He began in WCW, going from one ridiculous gimmick to another. He first debuted in 1990 as the orange-mohawked Steel as a part of the tag team the Master Blasters (wow) before being repackaged as the silver-haired, green-robed Oz, based on the Wizard of Oz (double wow). As Oz, he was managed by Merlin the Wizard (for real? For real.) as played by Kevin Sullivan. Believe it or not, this gimmick went for nearly a year before someone got off the drugs and realized how ridiculous it was. In 1992 he was again repackaged as Vinnie Vegas, based off of Steve Martin's character from My Blue Heaven. In this guise, he was managed by both Harley Race and Diamond Dallas Page, before he left the company for the WWF.

In the WWF, he worked under the name of Diesel, first as Shawn Michaels' bodyguard, then going on to be a WWF Champion for nearly a year, the longest reign of the 1990's. There he would feud with Michaels, Bret Hart, Sid, and the Undertaker. He also formed very strong friendships with Michaels, Triple H, Sean Waltman and Scott Hall, a group that became infamously known as the Kliq. Hall and Nash would leave the company together for the large amount of money WCW was paying at the time.

Back in WCW, Nash found himself in the middle of quite possibly the most famous angle in wrestling history: The New World Order. Scott Hall first debuted on WCW, apparently still in his Razor Ramon gimmick, making it appear that the WWF had sent him there. Nash would debut two weeks later, following the same plot, and the two became known as the Outsiders. Later, they would team with Hulk Hogan and officially become known as the NWO, and they put the wrestling world on notice: They were taking over. Set up as a separate, competing brand to the WCW, the NWO took off like wildfire making it cool for fans to like the bad guys. The angle ran its course, but Nash would eventually win five separate WCW World Championships.

Following the WWE's purchase of WCW, Nash would briefly reform the NWO with Hall and Hogan, before having a singles feud with Triple H and later Chris Jericho. Following an injury, he left WWE and made his way to TNA. In TNA he was part of several stables such as the Kings of Wrestling, Paparazzi Productions, and the Main Event Mafia. There he would work with fellow legends and the rising stars of TNA.

In 2011, he would briefly return to the WWE to feud with the mega-popular CM Punk and to resume his rivalry with Triple H. Following an untimely injury, he transitioned to a Legends Contract with WWE, working with their developmental talent in NXT and also making appearances on the Independent scene and in Japan.

Nash has also had a few interesting roles in Hollywood, first as the Super Shredder in the second Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movie (I SO need to draw that) and my favorite of his roles as the Russian in the Punisher. His scene in the Punisher is my favorite of the whole movie, and pretty much the saving grace of that film, which unfortunately also saw him get accidentally stabbed by star Thomas Jane.

About the piece: This one was relatively straight-forward. Stylistically, you'll note that it's similar to the Samoa Joe and James Storm pieces. I painted the figure first, then framed him with a layer of spray paint. I then used white paint to outline the figure again. When I first did that with this one, it looked like he had an orange beanie on, so I put the top layer of spray paint back in. Then I added the expressive Jackson Pollock-inspired drips of paint in the corner to balance the composition out.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Rob Van Dam

ECW Champion
TNA Champion
WWE Champion

Rob Van Dam is one of those guys who on paper just shouldn't work, but fans worldwide will tell you otherwise. A guy in an airbrushed singlet who kind of looks like Jean-Claude van Dam and uses sorta-kinda martial arts in his moves? Shouldn't work, right? But the guy will have entire arenas chanting 'RVD' as soon as he walks through the curtain. Born in Battle Creek, MI (really!) as Robert Szatkowski, RVD made his first wrestling appearance at the age of 16 as one of the kids forced to kiss the Million Dollar Man's foot for \$100 (Google it). After being trained by the original Sheik, he soon debuted in 1992 for WCW as Robbie V. His time there was unremarkable, and was soon back on the Independent circuit and making a name for himself in Japan. It was in 1996 that things started clicking for him when he signed with ECW as RVD, a laid-back stoner with a martial arts-influenced and offbeat style.

In ECW, he had many memorable rivalries with the likes of Sabu, Bam Bam Bigelow, Jerry Lynn, and really all of the notable names of that promotion. He was the longest-reigning ECW World Television Champion, holding the strap for an astounding 700 days. It was there that he became known as 'The Whole F'n Show' by the fans, who would chant that during many of the spectacular moves he would make in the ring.

After ECW's folding, he debuted in the WWE as a part of the ECW/WCW Invasion angle where he had a great feud with Jeff Hardy and quickly became one of, if not the most over member of the Invasion. Once that storyline was completed, he would go on to have singles feuds with William Regal, Eddie Guerrero, Brock Lesnar and Triple H. He would later join with Kane as a dominating tag team before the two would feud. Van Dam would then win the Money in the Bank title shot, using it against John Cena at the ECW One Night Stand event to win the title. When the ECW brand was brought back under WWE, RVD was christened the new ECW World Champion, but also held onto the WWE Championship, becoming the only wrestler to hold both. He would soon lose both before leaving the company in 2007.

After a stint back on the Independent circuit, he would join TNA Impact in 2010 where he would soon win their World Title. He had many feuds there against AJ Styles, Abyss, Christopher Daniels, Zema Ion, Austin Aries, Kenny King, and others. His contract with TNA is rumored to have expired recently, so it's up in the air where we'll see him next.

About the piece: I painted RVD's figure straight-up in acrylics, and then cut out a stencil of the dragon making its way into his singlet. RVD's ring gear is always interestingly airbrushed and I wanted to play on that with the stencil painting.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Ron Simmons WCW Champion

10

Ron Simmons follows in a proud tradition of men who have competed both on the gridiron and in the squared circle. In football, he played for Florida State University where he was recognized as an All-American. He briefly played for the NFL with the Cleveland Browns and the USFL's Tampa Bay Bandits. One of his teammates in Tampa, Larry Pfohl, would also go on to wrestling fame under the name of Lex Luger. Simmons would then transition to wrestling, where in WCW he would join Butch Reed in the tag team Doom. Doom would feud with the likes of the Steiner Brothers, the Rock n' Roll Express and the Four Horsemen, before breaking up and feuding with one another.

As a singles wrestler, he would soon face Luger for the World Championship, a match he would not succeed in. He would also face Kevin Nash and Scott Hall in their respective gimmicks Oz and the Diamond Studd. But it was in 1992 that he would face and defeat Vader for the WCW World Heavyweight Championship that Simmons found himself the company's first African-American to hold the title. The crowd reaction from his victory is one of the greatest in wrestling history, with fans losing control of themselves, jumping up and down, screaming and crying. It gives me chills every time I see it. He held the title for five months.

In 1996 he joined the WWE as Farooq to feud with Ahmed Johnson, later forming the awesomely-named stable The Nation of Domination, a group inspired with the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam. Simmons would later lose control of the group to a young upstart by the name of The Rock. He would soon find himself partnered with John 'Bradshaw' Layfield. The group was incorporated into the Undertaker's storyline as the Acolytes. The two were a perfect pairing of hard-hitting, smash-mouthed bad-asses that blurred the lines of reality with the viciousness of their attacks. This was around the time I started watching wrestling, and they were instantly my favorite team. They really struck me as two guys you really wouldn't want to be in a bar with.

No longer associated with the Undertaker, the duo rechristened themselves as the Acolyte Protection Agency, mercenary bodyguards available to the highest bidder. The team continued their smash-mouth matches, but would also have occasional barfight vignettes at a tavern in the town they were visiting. It was during the APA time that Simmons started incorporating what would become his trademark by saying 'DAMN' when something would disgust him. The team would disband as JBL went on to singles glory and Simmons left the company.

He still makes semi-regular appearances, largely in a comedic role. Some in-ring or backstage segment will get ridiculous with the wrestlers acting a fool, and the camera will pull back or pan over to reveal Simmons standing there with a disgusted look on his face, then loudly proclaiming, "DAMN!" It pops the crowd every single time, including me.

In 2008 he was elected to the College Football Hall of Fame for his time at Florida State, of which he was also entered into the Orange Bowl Hall of Fame. In 2012 he was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame due to his accomplishments as the first African-American WCW World Champion and his prominence in the Attitude Era with WWE.

About the piece: I did this one in a similar style to the JBL portrait, but in a red color scheme rather than the blue one of Layfield's. I wanted the two to compliment one another, while still letting each retain their individuality. I painted the background with acrylic red and black house paint and some watered-down gesso. I then brought in the figure and used a little bit of the red and black to give it some zing. I then took a couple pieces of scrap foam board I had sitting around and used them to mask the lines for the horizontal stripes of spray paint. I then put a little more watered-down gesso on and it was good to go! DAMN!



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Tatanka

USWA Champion

12

The Native American wrestler Tatanka made his name in the WWE, but his legend has spread beyond. Chris Chavis, descended from the Lumbee tribe, got his start in the wrestling business with George Scott's North American Wrestling Association, later known as the South Atlantic Pro Wrestling, where he worked as 'The War Eagle' Chris Chavis. In 1991 he started with the then WWF under the name of Tatanka, where he would go undefeated on TV for two years. During his first stint with the company he feuded with the likes of Lex Luger, Rick Martel, IRS, Diesel and Bam Bam Bigelow. He faced Shawn Michaels at Wrestlemania IX for the Intercontinental Championship. During this time with the WWF he also wrestled for the USWA, where he was a one-time USWA World Heavyweight Champion.

From 1997 to 2005 he made appearances on the independent circuit before returning to the WWE. During this stint he would team with Matt Hardy in a feud with MNM. WWE over three weeks aired footage of Chavis being legitimately adopted into the Oglala Sioux Tribe (Lakota), a rarity for WWE to do and showing that they recognized what a special event this was. He had a brief feud with Sylvain Grenier, before entering into a losing streak that slowly turned him heel, leading to a confrontation with Bobby Lashley. After leaving the company again in 2007, Tatanka has continued to appear on the independent circuit while also appearing on TNA to compete with Jay Lethal and again for WWE in a backstage segment.

About the piece: This one took me out of my comfort zone, because I decided to really focus on the various details with the head dress. As I've stated many times, I don't see myself as a detail guy, but that's the fun challenge of art, you know? Doing pieces that make me try new things and continue to grow as an artist.

||3



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Bruno Sammartino WWE Champion

14

Bruno Sammartino is the greatest WWWF/WWF/WWE wrestling champion of all time. This is an objective statement that is not up for argument. The Italian immigrant came to the US following World War II, where he built up his body to fend off the bullies that so mercilessly preyed upon him. He soon found himself doing strongman stunts, that caught the eyes of Philadelphia's wrestling promoter. Learning the ways of the squared circle in Philly, he soon went to work for the then-WWWF. After making his name in the tag division with Antonio Rocca, in 1963 he found himself in contention for the Heavyweight Championship. He defeated the company's first-ever champion Buddy Rogers in a dominating 48 seconds, informing Rogers in the ring that the planned DQ finish was not going to happen, and that they "can do this the easy way...or the hard way."

Bruno would go on to hold the title for seven years, eight months, and one day. This reign stands still as the longest in the history of men's professional wrestling, and is a feat that is not likely to be broken any time soon. Two years later, he came back to win the title again, holding it for 1237 days. Now obviously wrestling matches are pre-determined and the champion is named by the promoter, so let's get that nonsense out of the way. I get that. Let's talk about what's real here: Bruno was such a monster draw in the US Northeast that it made sound business sense for him to stay the champion that long. That's seven years, eight months, and one day for the first reign, and 1237 days for the second of constant touring, continuing to draw profitable-sized crowds. It's simply unheard of in the entertainment business. If you lived in New York during this time, you knew who Bruno Sammartino was, because out of 170 appearances at Madison Square Garden, 127 of them completely sold out. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

Bruno had likely his most famous feud with Superstar Billy Graham, with the Superstar beating him by cheating to end his second title reign. Their confrontations drew huge crowds everywhere they competed. Sammartino's other most legendary feud was with his protege Larry Zbyszko, after Zbyszko violently turned on him. In 1980 the pair nearly sold out the open-air Shea Stadium in near-freezing conditions, outdrawing the first confrontation between Andre the Giant and Hulk Hogan.

Bruno would continue to sporadically appear for the WWF during the early 1980's until deservedly retiring from the sport. He was a vocal critic of the drug culture around wrestling at that time, and has refused to be associated with the now-WWE due to that and what he felt were inappropriate storylines. Sammartino rocked the wrestling world this year when it was announced that he would be inducted into the 2013 WWE Hall of Fame class and has resumed his relationship with the company that he can be credited with making so successful during the 1960's and 70's. He was inducted by his long-time friend Arnold Schwarzenegger.

About the piece: For such an important figure in the history of wrestling, I knew that I had to do something special. I limited the color palette to make his impressive frame pop, then used a sponge brush with black house paint to bring in his trademark body hair. I then added the graphic circles which are more associated with modern graphic design because I wanted to show that he transcends his time period and remains as important and vital today.



Acrylic and spray on 30" x 40" canvas

Homicide

ROH Champion

||6

It's said that some of the best wrestler personas come from the performer 'turning up the volume' on who they are, and Homicide executes that amazingly. Hailing from Brooklyn and a youth on the streets and in gangs, Nelson Rodriguez Erazo reinvented himself as the incredibly tough wrestler Homicide. After training and competing in New Jersey beginning in 1997, Homicide made his way to Ring of Honor in 2002. In ROH, he had notable feuds with the likes of Steve Corino, AJ Styles, Samoa Joe, CM Punk, Jay Lethal, Colt Cabana, Nigel McGuinness, Adam Pearce, and Bryan Danielson. In late 2006, he defeated Danielson for the Ring of Honor World Championship.

In 2005, he began appearing for TNA Impact as a part of the Latin American Exchange. With the LAX he would win two NWA World Tag Team Championships and one TNA World Tag Team Championship. He also won the TNA X Division Championship one time. In TNA he would compete with the best of the best, including feuds with Beer Money, the New Age Outlaws, and Jeff Hardy. He left the company in 2010 to return to the independent circuit, while still periodically appearing for Ring of Honor and recently again for TNA.

About the piece: I wanted this to look like it was cut out of a graffiti wall, like a bunch of taggers had hit a mural I had done of Homicide. The larger piece at the bottom, the '187' is for Homicide, with the crown on it to signify that he's from Kings County. The 'Notorious' he has on his ring gear, and there's also a cut-off 'LAX' logo.



Acrylic, marker and spray on 24" x 24" wood

Scott Steiner

||8

WCW Champion WWA Champion

Scott Steiner is one of those guys that you can look at and instantly know he's a professional wrestler. His physique, his manner of talking, his movements, everything about him fits the public's image of what a wrestler looks like. Born Scott Rechsteiner, he was a noted collegiate wrestler for the University of Michigan. He was a three-time BIG 10 runner-up and as a senior in 1986 he became an NCAA Division I All American, placing sixth in the US. Soon after graduation he debuted for the Toledo-based World Wrestling Association, where he quickly became their World Heavyweight Champion. In 1988 he briefly worked for Memphis' Continental Wrestling Association before making his way to World Championship Wrestling.

In WCW he debuted as Scott Steiner, teaming up with his real-life brother Rick as the Steiner Brothers. The Steiners had feuds with teams like the Fabulous Freebirds, Doom, and the Midnight Express, holding championship gold on numerous occasions. The duo left WCW in 1992 to debut with the World Wrestling Federation, where they had a notable rivalry with Money, Inc. They were with the WWF for two years before a brief stay in ECW in 1995.

In 1996 the Steiners returned to WCW where they feuded with the Outsiders, Scott Hall and Kevin Nash, during the early period of the NWO. In late 1997, early 1998 Scott began to slowly turn heel, culminating with him turning on Rick and joining the NWO. It was in this period that he radically altered his appearance, cutting off his mullet, dying his hair platinum blonde and growing his signature facial hair, while also notably increasing his body mass. As a singles competitor he feuded with Goldberg, Diamond Dallas Page, Rey Mysterio and most notably with Booker T. In 2000 he defeated Booker for the WCW World Heavyweight Championship. He would lose the title back to Booker T on the final episode of WCW Monday Nitro after it was purchased by WWE.

After the folding of WCW, he competed abroad for a couple of years before returning to WWE in 2002. For most of his time there he worked as a face, competing against Triple H and Test most notably. His stay there lasted until 2004, when he left due to injury. He returned to the independent circuit before debuting with TNA in 2006. There he had feuds with competitors like Sting, Christian, and Samoa Joe before joining the Main Event Mafia. After the disbanding of the MEM, he took a hiatus from the company, returning in 2011 and competing through 2012. It was also during his time with TNA that he amazed the world with his aptitude for mathematics.

About the piece: If I didn't do a representation of Steiner's physique in my painting I would be doing something wrong, you know? This was fun because a good deal of it I did with my fingers, mixing the paints into one another. Sometimes a brush looks too clean and polished, so I just dive right in spreading the paint around by literal hand. I feel if I don't go home without more paint on my clothes and all over my hands, that I did something wrong. Sometimes I'll get it in my hair, on my glasses, on the side of my face...that's when I've had a really good day.



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

I20 John Morrison ECW Champion

John Morrison may be one of the most gifted athletes of his era. His combination of high-flying acrobatics and showmanship quickly made him a crowd favorite. Born John Hennigan, he made his national wrestling debut as a part of the third Tough Enough competition, of which he was a winner. After training in Ohio Valley Wrestling, he was called up to Raw as the assistant to Eric Bischoff under the name of Johnny Blaze. The next week he was called Johnny Spade, and then three weeks later to Johnny Nitro. After a few months in that role, he returned to OVW where the tag team MNM was formed with Joey Mercury and their valet Melina. The team honed their skills in developmental for about a year before debuting on Smackdown in April 2005.

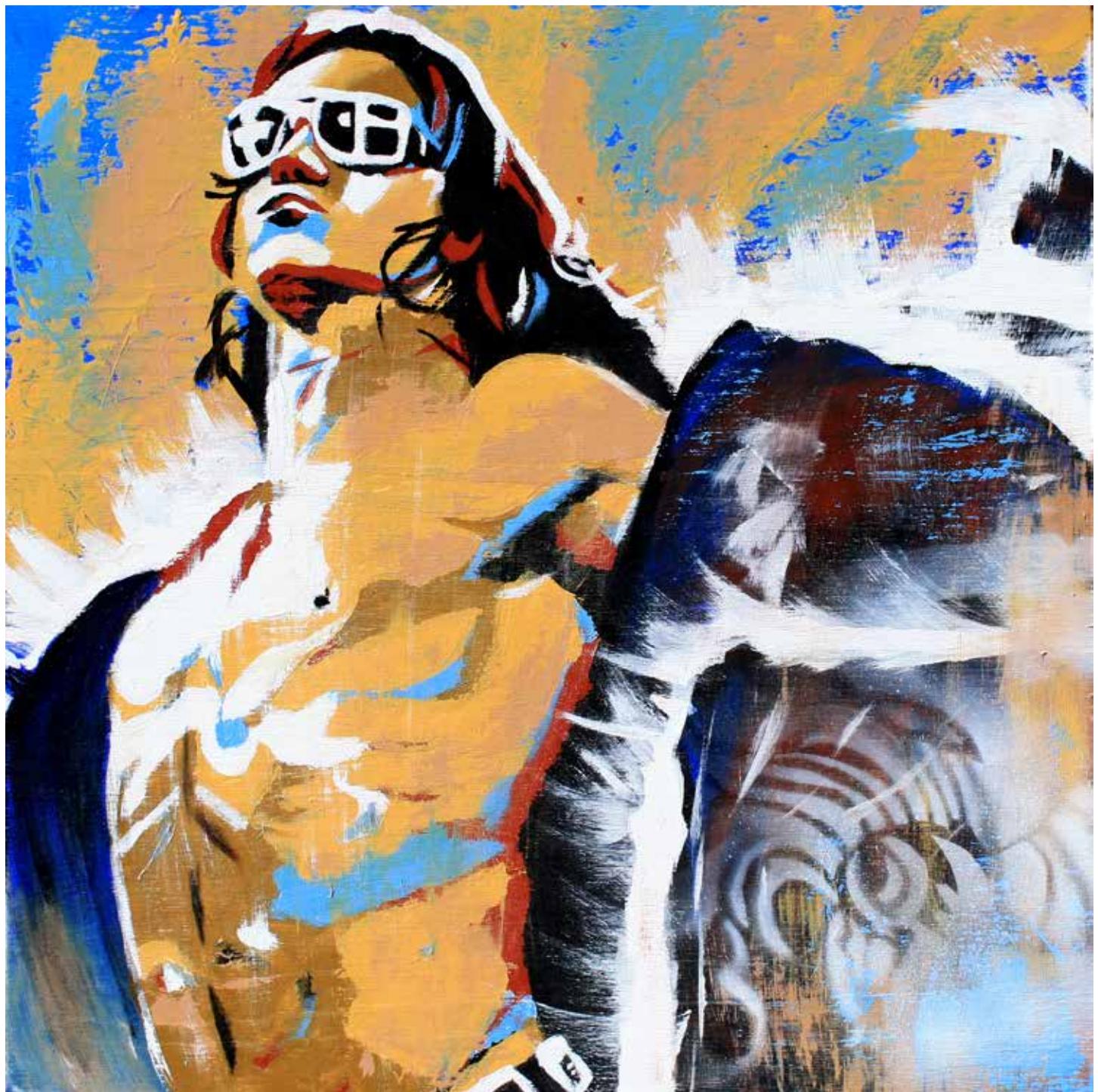
In their first match there they won the Tag Team Championship from Rey Mysterio and Eddie Guerrero. They would go on to hold the titles a total of three times. They were mainstays of the tag division for the next three years, including a physically intense feud with Matt and Jeff Hardy. They would split up as Melina became active in the Women's Championship hunt and Morrison became a part of the Intercontinental Championship scene, a title he would hold three times.

In 2007 he was drafted to ECW, where he would defeat CM Punk for the ECW World Championship. After winning the title, he again changed his name to John Morrison due to his resemblance to the Doors frontman Jim Morrison. He and Punk would go on to have a feud with several great matches. After losing the title to Punk, Morrison was teamed up with his rival the Miz, a pairing that worked right off the bat. They were portrayed as haughty douche bags that talked trash on everyone around them, especially with their web show The Dirt Sheet. The duo had tremendous chemistry and became the workhorses of the tag division, feuding with Hawkins and Ryder, Cryme Tyme, Punk and Kingston, and the Colóns. The program with the Colóns was probably my favorite as all four worked great together and there were several hilarious promos, including Morrison referring to them as the 'Colons', pronounced like the anatomy instead of like the stuff that makes you smell good.

Breaking off again as a singles wrestler in 2009, he competed against Shelton Benjamin, Chris Jericho, Jeff Hardy, Rey Mysterio, Sheamus, R-Truth and his former partner Miz. he left the company in late 2011 and has since competed overseas and on the American independent circuit. He still has a large and energetic following based on his years of entertaining crowds the world over.

About the piece: This one surprised me, because I went in with one plan and it completely turned into something else, then transformed again. I was initially going to do it pretty straight-forward and representational, but after doing that with the Scott Steiner piece I opted to go a little more energetic. I was at first going to do it all with a palette knife, which I largely did, but then also used a foam brush to move the paint around and streak it. I then added the stenciled area in the lower right corner using a portion of the stencil I had cut for the Rob Van Dam piece. I guess that's the way plans go: They're good as long as they work, and when they don't it's time to improvise!

|2|



Acrylic and spray on 24" x 24" wood

I22 The Iron Sheik WWE Champion

A lot of guys claim to be the most notorious man in wrestling history, but the Iron Sheik may have the best claim to that title. Born Hossein Khosrow Ali Vaziri in Tehran, Iran, he built a strong reputation in amateur wrestling, first competing to be on the Iranian Olympic Greco Roman team for the 1968 Summer Olympics. After relocating to the United States, he would become the 1971 Amateur Athletic Union Greco-Roman wrestling champion, and then was the assistant coach to the USA team for the 1972 Olympic Games. With his notable amateur background, he was invited to train to be a professional wrestler by Verne Gagne in 1972.

In Gagne's American Wrestling Association, he slowly developed what would become his signature look, at first wrestling under the name The Great Hossein Arab (really), playing off of the Iranian revolution to get hatred from the crowd. He was also a trainer for the AWA, teaching the likes of Ricky Steamboat, Greg Gagne and Jim Brunzell. He would soon become The Iron Sheik, spouting anti-American taunts during the Iran hostage crisis, making him one of the most-hated heels in the business.

This caught the eye of the WWF, where he would end Bob Backlund's near six-year championship reign in 1983. He lost the title four weeks later to Hulk Hogan, but then went on to a notable feud with Sgt. Slaughter. He partnered with Nikolai Volkoff and brought on manager 'Classy' Freddie Blassie to become the Foreign Legion, winning tag gold and garnering the hatred of fans everywhere they went. After Volkoff would sing the Soviet national anthem, Sheik would get on the mic and say his classic line, "Iran number one, Russia number one, USA..." and he would spit, "Hok-ptoie!"

In 1991 he briefly worked as Colonel Mustafa, aligning with Sgt. Slaughter and Iraqi General Adnan as the Iraqi Sympathizers during the first Gulf War. This garnered tremendous heat at the time, leading me to start using my Slaughter GI Joe figure as a Cobra guy instead of one of the Joes. That's serious, yo. Sheik has made appearances since, including his infamous shoot interview where the terms 'make him humble' and 'old country way' became part of the wrestling lexicon.

About the piece: I limited this to the colors of the Iranian flag, playing off of his character's (and his real-life) roots. Where I normally would have used a cool or darker color for the shadows, I instead used an electric green, giving the piece an almost-supernatural feeling.

|23



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

124

Lex Luger WCW Champion

Lex Luger is one of the most well-known wrestlers of the mid-1980's to 90's. Born Lawrence Phohl, he had a promising time in college football for the University of Miami and was later drafted by the Green Bay Packers in 1982, although he never played in a game for them. He went on to play for the Tampa Bay Bandits in the USFL, where one of his teammates would be his future rival Ron Simmons. In 1985 he began his professional wrestling career, taking on the name of Lex Luger and working in the NWA Florida territory, becoming a draw thanks to his bodybuilder physique and having feuds with the likes of Barry Windham, Kevin Sullivan and Bruiser Brody.

Moving to Jim Crockett's World Championship Wrestling, Luger joined the legendary Four Horsemen stable with Ric Flair, Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard, before turning heel and feuding with the three and his replacement in the group, Barry Windham. He would see success as a singles wrestler, winning the US Championship and later the WCW World Heavyweight Championship in 1991 when Flair left the company.

In 1992 he left WCW, first for the World Bodybuilding Federation, and then the WWF. There he first had a heel narcissist gimmick before becoming the babyface 'All-American', riding in a patriotically-painted bus called the Lex Express across the country. His time in WWF is largely remembered for the massive push the company put behind him, but without the crowd really getting behind him as well. For whatever reason, it was a strange period.

Luger controversially jumped back to WCW without letting WWF know, appearing on the show the night after appearing for WWF. He feuded with Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage, before becoming involved in the New World Order storyline, first feuding with them and later joining them. After WCW closed in 2001, he appeared with Total Nonstop Action Wrestling, and made sporadic overseas appearances. Following his in-ring career, Luger had numerous legal run-ins before crediting his religious faith for turning his life around. He suffered a stroke in 2007 that temporarily paralyzed him, but he is now able to walk again. He has become an outspoken proponent of drug testing in professional wrestling, seeing what the years of steroids and painkillers did to him.

About the piece: I opted to go with the 'All-American/Lex Express' era of the character, as it let me play with a limited palette based on the colors of the American flag. Similarly to the Rick Rude piece, I swiped the paint on his torso around with a foam brush, making it interact with the background.

|25



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Tommy Dreamer

126

ECW Champion

When you say ‘hardcore wrestling’, one of the first names you think of is Tommy Dreamer. Born Thomas Laughlin, he cut his teeth in the early 1990’s with various East-coast promotions as Tommy Dreamer before debuting with Extreme Championship Wrestling in 1992. Dreamer’s first major feud with ECW was with the Sandman, the highlight of which was the first Singapore Cane Match, inspired by the caning of American Michael Fay in Singapore as a means of punishment. Dreamer took his lashes, then got on the mic and asked for more, making him very sympathetic with the crowd. He would then go on to his biggest and most memorable feud with Raven, playing off the storyline that they were childhood friends who had always resented one-another. Dreamer would stay with the company through its closing, becoming their World Champion one time after beating Tazz.

In 2001 he joined the WWE, participating in the WCW/ECW Invasion angle. He would go on to a series of singles matches and became a 14-time Hardcore Champion (really) before losing to Rob Van Dam in a match that unified that title with the Intercontinental Championship. He transitioned for a while into backstage office jobs with the company before helping relaunch the ECW brand under WWE. He would become ECW Champion there in 2009 after beating Christian, becoming the only wrestler to hold the title in both of the company’s incarnations.

He briefly worked for TNA as a part of the unofficial ECW invasion of the company known as EV 2.0, before moving to the independent circuit and lending his star power to promotions like Metro Pro Wrestling, EVOLVE, Dragon Gate USA, Chikara, and more while also making periodic appearances for WWE and TNA. He has a lifelong passion for pro wrestling, and his continued involvement is a testament to that.

About the piece: This is another one that shows sometimes it’s best to go with the easy solutions. Tommy’s colors have long been red, white and black, which a strong palette to work with. I stripped them down to basics to show his energy and convey the violence he can bring.

|27



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

Johnny Valiant

WWA Champion

Whether he's teaming with Jimmy Valiant, managing the Dream Team, or working as a bodyguard for Junior Soprano, Johnny Valiant is always entertaining. Born John Sullivan in Pittsburgh, PA, being brought into wrestling by Bruno Sammartino. Learning the ropes in the territory era in the 1960's, he began competing for the WWWF as a mid-carder. He soon partnered up with his storyline brother Jimmy Valentine in the World Wrestling Association as the Valiant Brothers, where they defeated Sammartino and Dick the Bruiser for the WWA tag team titles.

In the early 1980's he retired from full-time competition and began a new career as a manager. His biggest success with this was leading the 'Dream Team' Greg Valentine and Brutus Beefcake to the WWWF Tag Team title in 1985. Dino Bravo was soon added to the stable, and they turned on Beefcake, leading to Brutus cutting Valiant's hair. He also managed Wayne Bloom and Mike Enos in their victory for the AWA tag team title in 1989.

Since retiring from the business, Valiant has reinvented himself as an actor and comedian, appearing on multiple episodes of The Sopranos and Law & Order, in addition to a well-received solo show.

About the piece: This was surprisingly my first collage piece for the Champions Collection. I say 'surprisingly' because I like working that way. I painted the figure with blue acrylics, then pasted some paper over it and spray-painted the paper with bright colors. I then tore the paper away in the places where it wasn't pasted down, revealing the painting below and framing it with the different colors and texture.

|29



Acrylic, collage and spray on 24" x 24" wood

130

Ivan Koloff WWE Champion

There's an old rule in wrestling that being from another country makes you a villain, but Ivan Koloff took that to another level. Born James Parras in Montreal, he would debut as Red McNulty and was billed from Dublin, Ireland. He worked in the Toronto area for three years before continuing his wrestling education in Japan. In 1967 he found the gimmick that worked, when he debuted with the International Wrestling Association in Montreal as 'The Russian Bear' Ivan Koloff. He was an intimidatingly-sized bearded man billed from the Ukraine, and instantly drew the ire of the fans by espousing Communist ideals and their superiority to the Capitalist way of life.

In 1970 he debuted for the then-WWWF and was managed by the legendary Captain Lou Albano, and was quickly put into a feud with the champion Bruno Sammartino. Koloff would defeat Sammartino in 1971 for the title, ending Bruno's nearly eight year reign. He would go on to lose the title less than a month later to Pedro Morales. During his time there he would have notable feuds with Sammartino, Morales, Superstar Billy Graham and Bob Backlund. When it became clear he would not win the title again, he left the company in 1972.

Koloff would then see great success in the NWA's Georgia, Florida and Mid-Atlantic territories in the tag division, winning over twenty tag titles. His first tag title win was with Ray Stevens, and later with Don Kernoodle, and most notably with his storyline nephew Nikita Koloff as The Russians. The Russians, also with Krusher Kruschev, were a top heel stable in the mid-1980's. During this time, his greatest feuds included Dusty Rhodes, the Road Warriors, the Rock n' Roll Express, and Magnum TA. He also has the distinction of appearing on both the first card for ECW and the first television main event for Smoky Mountain Wrestling.

Since retiring, he has focused his life on charity work and his ministry. I had the pleasure of being in attendance for his acceptance of the Iron Mike Mazurki Award at the 2013 Cauliflower Alley Club Reunion. He gave a very genuine, passionate speech about his life in and out of wrestling, and how defeating his personal demons was so much more difficult than the opponents he faced in the ring.

About the piece: Sometimes I go for the obvious thing, and for Koloff the obvious thing was to do his portrait in the style of a Communist propaganda poster. In my opinion, that style's kind of done-to-death in this post-Shepard Fairey art world we're in, but it felt so appropriate for his over-the-top character.

|3|



Acrylic on 24" x 24" wood

AFTERWORD

I painted the first portrait in the Champions Collection in March 2012, which was of CM Punk. I then launched my first Kickstarter project the next month on April 12th. Here I am a year later with my life completely changed. I no longer have a day job, and am fully paying my bills based on the sales of my paintings. I have toured the country coast-to-coast with the collection. I've been covered on TV, radio, websites, and by the WWE. My work is now owned by people around the world, including movie and television stars and many of my wrestling heroes. One of my artistic influences now keeps some of my work around their desk as inspiration. My work is on permanent display in a museum.

I know, I know, keep tooting my own horn, right? That's not what I'm doing. I'm thanking you, all of you, for helping me make this happen. The immediate and generous support from all of you has helped me attain these amazing things, and I want you to know your part in this. So: Thank you. A lot.

This book was made as a gift to all of you who helped me with my second Kickstarter project that aided me in my first national tour, of which I'd like to tell you some stories about.

The tour launched in Chicago,

where I got to meet several of you in person for the first time, even though we've been friendly online for a while. The quality of people at that show were of a high caliber, and left a big smile on my face.

The next stop was the following day in Fort Wayne, IN for the Heroes and Legends FanFest, where I had some strong sales and, more importantly, made even more friends.

Two weeks later, I hit the road for WrestleCon in New Jersey, and this was where I had my big setback. Three miles from the venue I was t-boned by a semi truck, demolishing not just my truck but sixty of my paintings. I miraculously walked out with just a scratch, but was left with nothing for my exhibit. That night I got hundreds of notes from family, friends and fans, and the next day my printer here in Kansas City, (Alphagraphics, buy all of your printing needs from them!) reprinted all of my prints and overnighted them to me in time for the show. I had no fancy display, no paintings, just prints on a table, and I had my largest-earning show because I said hello to everyone who walked by and made sure they knew who I was. Thank you again, friends.

A week later I flew out to Las Vegas for the 2013 Cauliflower Alley Club Reunion and had a simply marvelous time. I met a lot of friends, made even more, and met so many amazing people.

At CAC, the Rock's mother, Ata Johnson, got a print from me of one of my portraits of her son.

It hit me in a profound way. I started watching wrestling back in 1998 when Rock was really in his prime, and he was my first favorite wrestler. He seemed like the biggest star in the world, and years later, you could argue that he now is. And here is his mother, deeply touched by what I had done, thanking me for this small gesture. I was floored, and I still am. I hope that the success I'm seeing now makes my own mom as proud of me as Ata is of her son. (My mom will tell you she's always been proud, but it's easier for her to be so now!)

Seeing these paintings from my first year with this collection makes me feel that all of the hard work, all of the time away from my wife and family has been worth it. I did all of this in my first year, and I'm excited to see what comes in year two. I hope you're all coming along with me.

Your friend,
Rob Schamberger

April 24, 2013
Kansas City, MO

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