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The spiraling gyrations of Fred Tomaselli go on display at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

BY GAILE ROBINSON

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Alison Hearst, the assistant curator at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, has assembled her first Focus show for the museum using the work of New York City-based artist Fred Tomaselli.

She brought in Tomaselli's giant collages, which can take him months to create, and the front-page quickies that he makes while waiting for paint to dry on his big projects. For these time fillers, he takes the front page of *The New York Times*, scans it into his computer and reprints it on watercolor paper or perforated blotter paper, and then enhances the lead photograph, painting out parts and constructing fantastic backgrounds. The results are wonderful.

He began this series of collages, which numbers 85 pieces, in 2005, when he saw a photo of convicted CEO Bernard Ebbers leaving court with his wife, Kristie. The couple are clutching hands, and Tomaselli has obliterated their surroundings with brightly colored flowers and sparks, adding an additional layer of editorializing to the story.

He began to collect the newspapers, storing them in archival boxes and retrieving ones that spoke to him. Later that same year, he found the front-page photos of New Orleans flooded by levee breaks caused by Hurricane Katrina to be especially compelling. He highlighted the flooded streets with lines of bright colors so that the city is overlaid with a grid of what looks like a subway map. "The water line is sort of a toxic abstract," Tomaselli says.

Angry citizens and politicians are fodder for these works; in fact, three Texans have made his reconstructed covers — Gov. Rick Perry, and former U.S. Congressmen Ron Paul and Tom DeLay.

"This rogues gallery was a coincidence," Tomaselli says. "I can assure you I didn't know they were going to be shown in Texas." But they play well here in Fort Worth, as they strike a familiar note on a gallery wall filled with *Times* front pages.

Each day the newspaper is delivered to his doorstep is like Christmas, he says, as there is the potential for another art project with each disaster, political blunder or outrage.

What he paints on top of the photographs and what he uses to construct his large collage pieces provide additional information and emphasis, some of it accidental, and at other times, by insistence.

For his 15-foot-wide *Flipper*, made in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Tomaselli looped his collage bits in ovals and circles, overlaying them so that the result looks like an oscilloscope patterning of voices. "I wanted a sort of joyful noise," he says. "I wanted it to look like Mardi Gras beads. It is an abstraction of the beautiful chaos there."

For his large resin-coated collages, he uses thousands of carefully snipped images of butterflies, flowers, weeds, birds, gems, body parts — anything he can find in abundance. Each little paper scrap

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is carefully placed in chains of swirling images and each layer is sealed with resin so that the finished surface has a depth that only can be experienced in person.

This, too, is purposeful.

“The relationship between a person and a real thing can’t be replicated,” Tomaselli says. “In this world of computerized imagery and information, it is almost strange to have an experience with a real thing. So to be able to see the surface quality and the depth, people have to see them in person. This is important to me.”

The payoff for seeing them in person is worth the trip. Even though Tomaselli’s main event is the large collage works, it is the little front-page pieces that may prove to have a longer shelf life. As timeliness recedes into past tense, they carry with them multiple interpretations, those of the staff of *The New York Times* — the reporters, editors and photographers — and then Tomaselli’s as the last word, without any words. Later this year, a book of these images will be released, titled *The Times*.

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STAR-TELEGRAM MAX FAULKNER
Artist Fred Tomaselli with his *Breathing Head*, 2002, at Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in Fort Worth, TX,
Friday, Jan. 10, 2014. (Star-Telegram/Max Faulkner)

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Artist Fred Tomaselli's works *Avian Flower Serpent*, 2006, left and *Breathing Head*, 2002, right, at Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in Fort Worth, TX, Friday, Jan. 10, 2014. (Star-Telegram/Max Faulkner)



STAR-TELEGRAM MAX FAULKNER

Artist Fred Tomaselli's work *Flipper*, 2008, at Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in Fort Worth, TX, Friday, Jan. 10, 2014. (Star-Telegram/Max Faulkner)



STAR-TELEGRAM MAX FAULKNER

Artist Fred Tomaselli's *Guilty*, 2005, at Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in Fort Worth, TX, Friday, Jan. 10, 2014. (Star-Telegram/Max Faulkner)