



From surrealist to found objects: Christian Thee

S.C. native comes home with a spectacular career and launches into another

by David Moore
Q-Notes staff

A native of Columbia, artist Christian Thee is known around the globe for his spectacular creations of art. Regarded as one of today's leading practitioners of trompe l'oeil painting, his unique style began as a natural extension of his work as a scenic designer for the theater.

For the uninitiated who are scratching their heads at this moment here's a clue: *trompe l'oeil* (trômp loi) n. pl. *trompe l'oeils* (loi)

1. A style of painting that gives an illusion of photographic reality.

2. A painting or effect created in this style.

In simple terms, it's like painting a realistic-looking door or a window on a wall where there isn't one. Thee actually painted his entire Brooklyn studio and living space in the style when the only light coming into the building was from an overhead skylight.

But we're jumping ahead. Let's go back to a time when Thee was a student at USC.

It was there that Thee got his first taste of theatrical design when he was appointed designer for the local community theater. Later he relocated to New York and studied with legendary stage designer Lester Polakov at Columbia University. Polakov went on to open the Forum of Stage Design in New York and Thee joined him on the teaching faculty. During this time, Thee also worked as assistant to another infamous stage designer, Jo Mielziner, and added numerous Broadway, regional and stock productions to his credentials.

"The first show I had the chance to do was the original version of 'Hair,'" Thee recalls. Thee worked on other such notable New York stage productions as "Robber Bride Groom," "The Subject Was Roses" and "The Boys From Syracuse."

Now back to Thee's trompe l'oeil studio

in Brooklyn. Not surprisingly his abode became infamous around New York and he loved entertaining his friends there.

One particular evening, Thee was at home alone watching television when a friend called.

"It was about 10:30 at night," says Thee. "My friend said he had a dinner guest who had heard about my house and wanted to see it — so he asked if they could stop by."

That was Thee's first encounter with Bruce Barr, the man who later became his partner and has been so for over 25 years.

"We had the theater thing in common," says Thee. "He was working in the garment business and doing costumes for 'Pirates of Penzance' and 'Follies,' so we had a lot to talk about. He was very pleasant, so I invited him over for dinner. It was just a very nice way to meet someone."

In the years that followed Thee and Barr often leased out the exotic abode for parties, but they always remained as hosts so they could keep an eye on things.

Many milestones in Thee's career would occur during that time, as well. One in particular came about when a photographer for *British House and Garden* magazine came to take pictures of the legendary residence.

"This photographer was talking while he was taking pictures and he told me he was friends with the royal family. I thought, 'yeah, right' so I didn't give much more

thought to it at the time. Later when he was back in London he called me up and said he was having tea and 'watching the telly with the Queen.'

"I was showing pictures of your work to her and she wanted to know if you would consider doing a portrait of Prince Andrew for his 21st birthday," he said. I just blurted out 'yes' immediately before I would have the time to think myself out of it."

The life-size portrait that Thee ended up

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Artist Christian Thee in the studio.



A dramatic example of Thee's trompe l'oeil painting.

New gay cinema: 'Adam & Steve'

Film chronicles the lives of two gay men who meet for the second time after 15 years have passed

by Tim Nasson

Craig Chester's plate is full. His cup runneth over. But he doesn't seem to mind. In fact, he wouldn't have it any



Craig Chester (center) in a scene from 'Adam & Steve.'

other way.

The 41-year-old is currently starring in the gay comedy "Adam & Steve," as Adam. But Chester also wrote the film and directed it — and dances in it. Line dancing, mind you. Not the stereotypical bouncing around on a gay club dance floor "dancing," with your shirt off, showcasing your perfectly oiled biceps and eight-pack.

"Adam & Steve" was completed in 22 days: "It couldn't have been done without a lot of under-eye concealer," chuckles Chester. "While everyone else went home for the night, I was editing and rewriting and setting up shots for the next day. I was lucky to get four hours of sleep during the three weeks we shot the film."

Not since "Trick" has there been a theatrical gay comedy with such star power.

"Adam & Steve" boasts Chester's best friend, in the movie and in real life, Parker Posey, as well as Tony Award

nominee Malcolm Gets as his boyfriend Steve and Chris Kattan as a friend. That's not all. Academy Award nominee for Best Actress, Sally Kirkland, also stars, as does two-time Best Supporting Actress Oscar nominee Melinda Dillon and Julie Hagerty, Razzie Award nominee for "Freddie Got Fingered," yet best known for "Airplane."

"I am very lucky to have such a great cast," says Chester.

I spoke to him the day his film was released in Los Angeles. He was planning to attend two showings of his film that day. "I am going over to Pasadena this afternoon," he says, "to give it some support and to gauge the audience reaction. "And later tonight, I will be going to the Sunset theater with Sally [Kirkland] to sit in the back and get a feel for what the West Hollywood crowd thinks of the movie."

Chester, who was born in California, raised in Texas, moved to NYC and now divides his time between both coasts, plays Adam, a Jewish goth boy, as the film begins in 1987 at a gay club in NYC. He meets Steve, a dancer at the club replete with REO Speedwagon hair. The

two go home that night, but something goes horribly wrong. Steve has done a few too many lines of coke that have been laced with baby laxative. And the movie spares the audience nothing in the way of imagination.

"I had to do that scene that way," laughs Chester. "I had heard a story in high school, of someone shitting themselves, uncontrollably, while having sex and thought, can there be any more embarrassing experience during a first time?" Apparently not. And, for the record, I asked Chester if he was lying about the 'high school' story and if the scene was not based on an experience more closely related to him. "It wasn't," he says, nonchalantly, which leads me to believe he is telling the truth. "Aspects of the movie are autobiographical. When I sat with Malcolm, before I wrote the film, we talked about experiences we each had with boyfriends growing up and some of the real life events are incorporated into the movie. And Parker Posey, she always wanted to play a comedian in a movie who was the only

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