

LEFT: *Red Bather with Polka Dots* (2008), 36" sq., photo on Plexiglas, \$3,500.

BELOW, LEFT: *Ideas and Long Hours Make Things Happen* (2007), 16" sq., photo on Plexiglas, \$1,200.

BELOW: *St. Mark's Dome with Venice Background* (2008), 19" x 20", photo on Plexiglas, \$1,600.



JOSHUA JENSEN-NAGLE

THE HIGH-OCTANE CAREER OF THIS TORONTO ARTIST, A FORMER SURFER, IS CRESTING WITH BEACHSCAPES AND ROMANTIC VISTAS.

BY BETTY ANN JORDAN



Joshua Jensen-Nagle, 28, grew up riding the waves along the New Jersey shore. Today, he only surfs on vacation as he transitions from the hazy days of his youthful summers into a successful career as a photo-based artist. Last year, he had an astonishing eight solo shows in multiple cities including Atlanta, San Diego, Calgary and Toronto.

STYLE One can spot a Jensen-Nagle photo-work at 50 paces; romantic scenes of travel and escape, they are picturesque and nostalgic. Golden with sunlight and burnished by holiday memories, his panoramic retro beach scenes are based on vintage postcards of summer shorelines. Recognizing that not all memories are happy, he also creates more pensive pictures that imply the loss of something valuable — innocence perhaps. Taken in the great capitals of Europe, his depictions — of an interior hallway at the Louvre or a tide of tourists on the sun-bleached Piazza San Marco — exude an over-ripeness hinting at decadence, if not decay. Closer to home, there



are introspective views of the Toronto skyline and windblown tall grasses on the Leslie Street Spit. "I have always reacted very strongly to my surroundings," he says. In his bittersweet animal series, elegiac figures appear almost as apparitions engulfed in a velvety darkness. "While my sunnier pictures recall the joys of escapism and luxury, my darker pictures imply the bleakness of nature in decline."

TECHNIQUE Jensen-Nagle's mixed-media works have the heft and look of paintings. Their handsome, self-protective surfaces eliminate the need for framing: In the past, the surfaces consisted of seductive, wet-looking coatings of urethane resin that intensified the colours, and created a gem-bright finish. Concerned that resin would yellow over time, he now uses the Diasac process, whereby inkjet photos are wet-mounted onto the back of a protective Plexiglas sheet. Popularized by German photographers Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth, the process is touted to last 200 years. The effect is cooler and more collected, but these recent pictures, still lustrous, can also be wiped down with a damp cloth.

Jensen-Nagle employs various techniques to alter photos of photos to achieve a painterly effect. While he takes most of the CONTINUED ON PAGE 184

"I HAVE ALWAYS REACTED VERY STRONGLY TO MY SURROUNDINGS"

BELOW: *More Than You and Me* (2007), 36" x 72", photo on Plexiglas, \$6,500.

RIGHT: *Louvre Busy Days with Too Much to Do* (2008), 41" x 43", photo on Plexiglas, \$4,200.
TOP: *Another Dream* (2008), 43" sq., photo on Plexiglas, \$4,200.



ARTIST FILE

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photos himself, at times he uses found imagery such as postcards. For his series on animals, he took photos of mounted specimens at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, then carefully cut the animals out and reshot them with a Polaroid camera against black backgrounds, a strategy that makes the animals look like spirits arising from a netherworld. Similarly distorted is his series on ballet dancers created by inserting cutouts of dancers inside glass jars and re-photographing them through the curved glass to suggest they are floating up, like recurring memories.

For his takes on modern beaches, Jensen-Nagle obtains comparable atmospheric effects by taking photos in situ with a vintage Polaroid. He rescans the small square photos to produce large-scale digital inkjet versions. An aficionado of the happy accident, he savours the distortions to which instant-camera film is prone. Now that the original Polaroid instant film has been discontinued, Jensen-Nagle is constantly developing new ways to attain his pleasingly tactile, grainy effects, including splattering paint on the photo images and applying gold leaf. Recently he's been having some fun with his beach scenes, adding gnat-like clouds of brightly coloured dots in a tongue-in-cheek homage to the Dot Paintings of art-star Damien Hirst.

BACKGROUND Jensen-Nagle grew up in Washington, New Jersey, which he describes as one big suburb of New York. He came to Toronto in 1999 to study photography at Ryerson University, even though his parents would have preferred him to study business. From the beginning, Jensen-Nagle felt very comfortable in Toronto, where he now lives with his wife, handbag designer Jessica Jensen. "New York City is a very easy scene to get lost in," he says. "Toronto's also large, but more easily negotiated."

Seriously entrepreneurial, he has for the past several years, along with

two or more assistants, toiled in an impeccably organized, 2,700-square-foot studio.

LUCKY BREAKS The adage that the harder one works, the luckier one gets, certainly applies to Jensen-Nagle. He would be the first to say, however, that his timing has been consistently fortunate. He began producing large digital photos just when it became acceptable to show digital works in galleries. Also, he found stable, affordable studio space on the gallery-rich Queen Street West strip at a time when many artists were being driven out of the area by the Toronto real-estate boom. And, several leading dealers saw his potential and took him on soon after his graduation.

THE ADAGE THAT THE HARDER ONE WORKS, THE LUCKIER ONE GETS, CERTAINLY APPLIES TO JENSEN-NAGLE.

BUDGET Because they are multiples, each picture comes in a limited edition, usually of only seven, and is technically available in sizes ranging from 16 inches square to seven by 13 feet. Those with vast spaces, take note: Jensen-Nagle says, "I'd make them even bigger if there was a market for it." Prices typically range from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

WHERE TO GET IT Jensen-Nagle works are available at Montreal's Galerie de Bellefeuille (debellefeuille.com), Ottawa's Galerie St-Laurent + Hill (galeriestlaurentplushill.com), Edward Day Gallery in Toronto (edwarddaygallery.com), NewZones in Calgary (newzones.com), and in the U.S. at Susan Street Fine Art Gallery in Solana Beach, California (susanstreetfineart.com). For more information, visit jensennagle.com. 

ENTERTAINING


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What's your best advice for home chefs? The best host is someone who doesn't appear frazzled, so avoid hosting dinner parties that are too large. My rule of thumb is to stick to a number of guests that can sit comfortably around your dining table. For most people, eight is a good number. I can seat 12 people comfortably, but can go up to 16 in a pinch. I also like my guests to feel comfortable and relaxed, so we always start in the living room with drinks and maybe one simple hors d'oeuvre like smoked trout paté.

How do you like to finish off a meal?

I love artisanal cheeses, and one of my trademarks is a cheese course served in between the main course and dessert. Some people serve it after dessert, but I like to serve it first, while people are finishing their wine. My rule with cheese is never more than three on a plate, and usually just one. I like to serve only Canadian cheese, and Riopelle [a triple-cream cheese from Quebec] is a favourite after a meal.

How do you like to serve dessert?

I never bother with cakes for dessert — they're too heavy. My go-to desserts are panna cotta, fresh fruit, a lemon tart or lemon cream. I will make coffee, but I find people aren't as interested in coffee as they used to be. If I serve coffee, I use a French press. For tea, it's always English breakfast or orange pekoe, brewed the old Scottish way: heat the teapot, add one teabag per person, then fill the pot with boiling water and steep for five minutes. Pour milk into the cups before the tea! 

Each month, our

SOURCE GUIDE

(page 192) offers a comprehensive listing of stores, manufacturers, designers and tradespeople in cities across Canada.