

January 2008

## WINNER'S CIRCLE

Three young artists talk about winning the Contemporary's Great Rivers Biennial, what drives their work and what they'll unveil in February



Photo: Jennifer Hengst

Designed to recognize talented, emerging artists in the St. Louis area, the Contemporary Art Museum's Great Rivers Biennial receives hundreds of applications every year. These are then winnowed down by a panel of nationally recognized art professionals, who must choose just three young artists. Winners receive \$20,000 (up \$5,000 from past years) and, most important, have their work shown in a group exhibition at the museum. Writer and artist **Elizabeth Wolfson** sat down with this year's Biennial winners for a one-on-one discussion of their work, their process and being a working artist in St. Louis.

### COREY ESCOTO

*Mediums: Drawing, Watercolor, Sculpture*

#### **On his current work:**

This most recent series of work is all about saving the world. And that in and of itself is a humorous idea, especially for an artist to think he or she knows what it would take to save the world. I have this collection of vintage United Nations memorabilia, and it lead me to start making this organization modeled after the U.N. called "the Global Repair

Service." There's this logo, the hand wrenching on the Earth, and the Global Repair Service is going to save it all. There's a couple of other ones where it looks like they're struggling really hard ... So they're slightly directed at the U.N., being critical of these large, maybe too large, organizations that are maybe really inefficient, and maybe don't do as much as they could do because they are so large.

But at the same time, my organization is modeled after them and has these big trucks and gas guzzling type things. So it's filled with a little of humor, sarcasm, irony...

And I did other series of works that in some ways relate to this. A lot of the stuff has to do with the idea of inspiration and motivation. I did this series of works called "The Library of Audio, Visual and Textual Sources of Inspiration and Motivation." It's another fictional organization that has this building in the desert... I've been struggling with whether I will include these organizations or if I'll just focus on one and kind of elaborate on that.

#### **On his creative process:**

Mostly, everything kind of comes out of drawing. That leads into watercolor, because it's so much like drawing, it's a good way to get ideas out on paper quickly. I like paper as well, I don't like to work on canvas, I haven't really done oils. From there it's gone to making other things that support the drawings, or anything that could support the ideas I'm drawing. I'm completely up for sculpture, video, animation, whatever.

I think good ideas are hard to come by, probably the toughest part for me now, because I feel like I can pretty much draw or paint anything, but the hard part is coming up with a solid idea that makes sense and it's clever in whatever way. Once

I come up with that it goes into the making part, which, for me, is easy.

#### **On the role of politics in his work:**

Yeah, it's political artwork, just not the brand that wears me out. I used to hate political artwork, and I still kind of do ... I generally don't like it because often it tells people what to think, so you're turned off before you get to see into the work, even if you might agree with what it's saying. I wanted to find a way to make it enjoyable for myself ... The idea of making something you don't like, and trying to make it better, conceptually improve upon it. So then it went into a more satirical mode, where humor is important.

I try to not be preachy, I try to include myself in the things I might be critical about. In being an artist, all your energy goes into making your work, not necessarily changing anything. At same time there are groups of artists that are like intervention or activist artists that maybe do a project. But even those artists, in my opinion, don't do very much, because they only do the project for as long as the show is. The people who really inspire change among the masses are people who devote lifelong attention to an idea.

*The 2008 Great Rivers Biennial opens Friday, February 1, and closes April 20. See it at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 3750 Washington, 314-535-4660, [contemporarystl.org](http://contemporarystl.org). Hours are 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Tue–Sat, 10 a.m.–8 p.m. Thu and 11 a.m.–4 p.m. Sun.*