

ALL TOO

The Art of
Mark Strickland



HUMAN

The Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art | California State University, San Bernardino



ALL TOO HUMAN

THE ART OF MARK STRICKLAND

February 17-May 19, 2018

1,000 copies printed on the occasion of the exhibition, "All Too Human: The Art of Mark Strickland"

February 17- May 19, 2018

The exhibition and catalog have been funded by
California State University, San Bernardino
RAFFMA

Copyright © 2018 California State University, San Bernardino
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or
transmitted in any form without the written permission of the publisher

RAFFMA (Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art)
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Eva Kirsch
Director and Exhibition Co-Curator

John Fleeman
Exhibition Co-Curator and Designer

Participating Museum Staff:
Michael Beckley, Assistant Exhibition Designer and Preparator
Diana Nieto-Godinez, Administrative Support and Visitor Services
Coordinator
Emily Sack, Education and Collection Assistant
Stephanie MacLean, Marketing, Membership, and Engagement Coordinator

Student Assistants:
Fred Brashear (Assistant Preparator), Annery Sanchez (Graphic Designer),
Debbie Nuño and Maia Matheu

Catalog Design: Annery Sanchez

Installation images courtesy of CSUSB

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN 0-945486-38-3



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction By Eva Kirsch
- 2 The Proper Study Of Mankind Is Man, And Woman:
Mark Strickland And The Figure, Essay By Peter Frank
- 7 Works In The Exhibition
- 12 Mark Strickland: Biographical Information
- 13 Mark Strickland On His Art & Interdisciplinary Projects

The Choice, 2005
Oil on canvas



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to RAFFMA's new exhibition featuring Mark Strickland, a Southern California artist who in part lives and works in Southern France, near Montpellier. The artist's dual geographical location and formal training as a visual artist and psychologist, together with many other dualities, define him and his art.

Drawing, painting, and sculpting the human form for close to 50 years, Strickland has been ardently exploring the human condition, fascinated by the duality of human nature - its many flaws leading to falls or tragedies, but also its endurance, dignity, compassion, and the ability to atone. His art, visually strong and often virtuosic, is remarkably versatile. It oscillates and modulates in its own distinctive way between the clean classical harmonies and violent expressionistic cacophonies. Deeply emotional, this art is engaged and engaging, bold and poetic, grand and intimate. It is impulsive and spontaneous, but it has mathematical undertones. It is unpleasant and unsettling, but optimistic and uplifting at the same time. It confronts (and sometimes confuses, too ...) our minds, hearts, and senses.

Being tutored by some big teachers of the past, his art is desperate to be free from today's trends and academic rules, unwillingly and painfully conforming to the guidelines and the accepted worldview at the same time - suffocating and contorting, almost crushing ... But, being honest in its very core, it reveals much to those with open minds, willing and curious, looking from different perspectives while reaching for answers. It reveals far beyond what meets our eyes or grabs our throats, all too human ...

My warm thank you goes to Mark Strickland for all his passionate involvement and assistance with many aspects of the exhibition, to Peter Frank for his erudite essay on Mark Strickland's art, and to all the dedicated supporters of the museum, who made this exhibition, and many others, possible. I also thank all the dedicated RAFFMA staff and student assistants, who conceived, designed, installed, and promoted the exhibition, as well as successfully planned and organized all the accompanying programs. As always, I am very grateful to them.

Thank you all!

Eva Kirsch
Director and Exhibition Co-Curator

THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS MAN, AND WOMAN:

MARK STRICKLAND AND THE FIGURE

By Peter Frank

The human figure, commentators on art assert, is "coming back." Is such a return due to mere fashion? Did we simply get bored with abstraction and start wanting to see faces and bodies in our art again? Or does the tenor of our times demand that we re-picture our species, that we in effect reconsider our future by musing upon our present? And how do we go about "re-picturing"? The news, true or otherwise, keeps rattling us awake to our condition, but does so in a cascade of bulletins and statistics. "Human interest" stories hit closer to home, but it's hard to keep reading about the starving child, the suddenly exiled, the exploited, the disenfranchised, the murdered, the manipulated without retreating back into one's shell, if only to reclaim the energy and hope one needs to keep on living. Art - and perhaps art

alone - can address these issues dramatically, with vast generalities given image - re-pictured - in the beautiful frailties of the human form. In this light, it is easy to understand the particular thrall Mark Strickland's painting has us in. Strickland's devotion to the human figure, and to the atrocities and ecstasies it witnesses, has been long-enduring and unwavering. It has survived several art-world resurgences of the figure just as it has several art-world abandonments. It does not, in fact, depend on the art world. The longer, vaster reach of both Western and non-Western art histories sustains its aesthetic credibility; and Strickland's unstinting preoccupation with human life, whether as classic theme or as contemporary reality, keeps him cleft to his subject and to the methods he has devised for manifesting that subject in all

“Strickland doesn’t just exploit that understanding; he speaks directly to it, he appeals to the need for people not simply to see pictures, but to see pictures of people.”



Hands in Supplication, 2007; Oil on canvas

glory, terror, debasement, and apotheosis.

Yes, the world now clamors for a figural art of forceful expression and visual grace. This results in great part, as mentioned, from the news we take in daily. But such hunger for the figure also comes out of the current conflation of high and low artistic modalities, the equalizing of value between the museum masterpiece and the comic book. This new artistic democracy has its many pitfalls, but it does awaken an aesthetically challenged populace to the crucial necessity of visual vitality. And, being human, what the populace understands most readily is the human figure, as a locus of meaning in general and as a cipher for themselves and their loved ones. Strickland doesn’t just exploit that understanding; he speaks directly to it, he appeals to the need for people not simply to see pictures, but to see pictures of people.

For all that, Strickland is hardly painting to appeal to people’s eyes. The images he conjures are easy neither on the eyes nor on the soul. Rather, he wants to reach viewers’ hearts and guts. The people Strickland portrays are, by and large, caught in various states of torment. He is a virtuosic portrait painter, to be sure, and his faces are compelling for their balanced study of physical visage and emotional intensity: if you don’t know who that is, you still know how she feels. But it is the non-specific human figure – gendered and perhaps aged, but not identified – that serves as Strickland’s existential hero/victim, an everyman thrown against a fate visited on him by both his fellow humans and the forces of nature (forces which human exploiters have perverted in futile

attempts to control). It’s an age-old story, and it’s no wonder that so many of Strickland’s largest and most ambitious paintings – murals for all intents and purposes – offer up images of biblical proportions, Dante-esque tumults, horrific events that reach for a Kantian sublime.

Strickland’s painterly style is entirely coherent with his catastrophic view of life. His brush is as volatile as the circumstances he depicts, circumstances that hover at the point where symbol, dream, and actual event converge. His is a classic Expressionist approach, applied to fraught versions of effulgent post-Renaissance murals and the *grandes machines* of the 19th-century Academy. Indeed, Strickland is nothing if not a neo-Baroque painter, in the swirling, agitated rhythms of his compositions no less than in his concentration on the human figure. His “loaded brush” comes right out of the Venetian Renaissance and fast forwards to the early 20th century, regarding the expressionist touch as a modernist function, a tool for making human existence vibrant and pained even as it is rendered monumental.

In this, Strickland is not simply keeping alive the general tradition of Expressionism but reaffirming its durability, particularly in Southern California. His restless, fulminatory manner, anchored by a keen sense of composition all but buried beneath the bodies, harks back to the mid-century humanist painting of such local artists as Rico Lebrun, Howard Warshaw, and Connor Everts – as well as to the bumptious and extravagant approach to the human body found in the work of Strickland’s old friend Jirayr Zorthian. Zorthian’s wit set him a little apart from his fellow Los Angeles-area figurative painters two generations back; similarly, Strickland’s mordancy and urgency distinguish him from the growing ranks of contemporary local figurative painters.

So, in fact, does Strickland’s anti-academic attitude. Clearly, he is as indebted as anyone to the exemplary history of Western art. But Strickland is willing to paint things “wrong” – “wrong” colors, “wrong”

compositions, “wrong” pictorial combinations – regardless of what techniques the masters themselves employed. This allows for a compelling sense of immediacy in his pictures, as if Strickland’s mind saw the whole image in a hallucinatory flash and as if, as a result, the painting poured forth in one giant effusion from the artist’s hand. Poured forth they have, but not from a single unified forethought: however much (or little) the figures in a large work might be based on preliminary sketches, Strickland rarely envisions a whole picture before painting it, allowing much room for spontaneous addition and subtraction, modulation and reformation along the way. His whole method relies on modification and last-minute decision, at least as much as it does on original vision and compositional rigor.

Mark Strickland, in effect, answers to the human situation by situating humans in questions. Who are we? Why are we in the circumstances we’re in? What does this mean? Will it endure? What is to become of us? The vital subjects of the day rock us, as Strickland attests. But we are in the end most rocked by our own mortality. Our fragility hints, strongly, at the fact that none of us gets out alive. Strickland paints people living and dying at the same time, because that is what we do. What he protests, what angers him to the point of screech, are the myriad insults and exploitations that force us to die more than live. We can’t live forever, but can’t we live decently? Here, Strickland’s heart goes out to the friends he renders in his portraits and even more to the anonymous figures he sets in motion so that they seem to answer like acrobats to the challenges posed them by ominous forces. The matters, the circumstances, the force of life and inevitability of death, all these factors comprise our beings, our being, and our beingness. As Strickland keeps reminding us, we are all too human.

Los Angeles
January 2018

“As you’re moving from left to right, you’re unblocking the flow, which is also raising your signal input, and it’s my idea that, from my own experience, that the less blocked I am, the more I can take the fist off my heart and the more compassion I can feel.”



Humanity in Crisis, 2004
Oil on canvas

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION



Flying Fish (Improvvisazione Fibonacci), 2011
Oil on canvas
198.1 x 274.3 cm (78 x 108 in)



The Choice, 2005
Oil on canvas
259.1 x 457.2 cm (102 x 180 in)



Raising of Consciousness, 2005
Oil on canvas
243.8 x 731.5 cm (96 x 288 in)



Gaza, 2010
Oil on canvas
182.9 x 221.0 cm (72 x 87 in)



Humanity in Crisis, 2004
Oil on canvas
259.1 x 457.2 cm (102 x 180 in)
Courtesy of CSUSB



Resurrection of Liberty, 2009
Oil on canvas
182.9 x 457.2 cm (72 x 180 in)



Crouching Man, 2004
Oil on paper
114.3 x 85.1 cm (45 x 33.5 in)



Libertas, 2014
Oil on burlap stretched over canvas
309.9 x 335.3 cm (122 x 132 in)
Courtesy of CSUSB



Man Struggling with Himself, 2004
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 121.9 cm (60 x 48 in)



Tipping Point (or Sacrifice of a Grandfather), 2015
Bronze
106.7 cm, 147.1 cm with base (42 in, 57.9 in with base)



Marguerite with Walker, 2005
Oil on canvas
182.9 x 61.0 cm (72 x 24 in)



Self-Portrait (Auto Portrait), 2009
Oil on canvas
121.9 x 61.0 cm (48 x 24 in)



Armenian Father, 2007
Oil on canvas
182.9 x 152.4 cm (72 x 60 in)



Polish Mother, 2007
Oil on canvas
182.9 x 152.4 cm (72 x 60 in)



Contention, 2007
Red charcoal on paper
49.5 x 60.1 cm (19.5 x 24 in)



Hands in Supplication, 2007
Oil on canvas
182.9 x 152.4 cm (72 x 60 in)



Maria Leon, 2001
Pen and ink on paper
68.6 x 50.8 cm (27 x 20 in)



Ink Painting 12, 2005
Ink on paper
50.8 x 69.9 cm (20 x 27.5 in)



Leap of Faith, 2016-2017
Bronze
99.1 cm, 203.2 cm with base (39 in, 80 in with base)
Courtesy of CSUSB



Ink Painting 11, 2005
Ink on paper
48.3 x 69.9 cm (19 x 27.5 in)



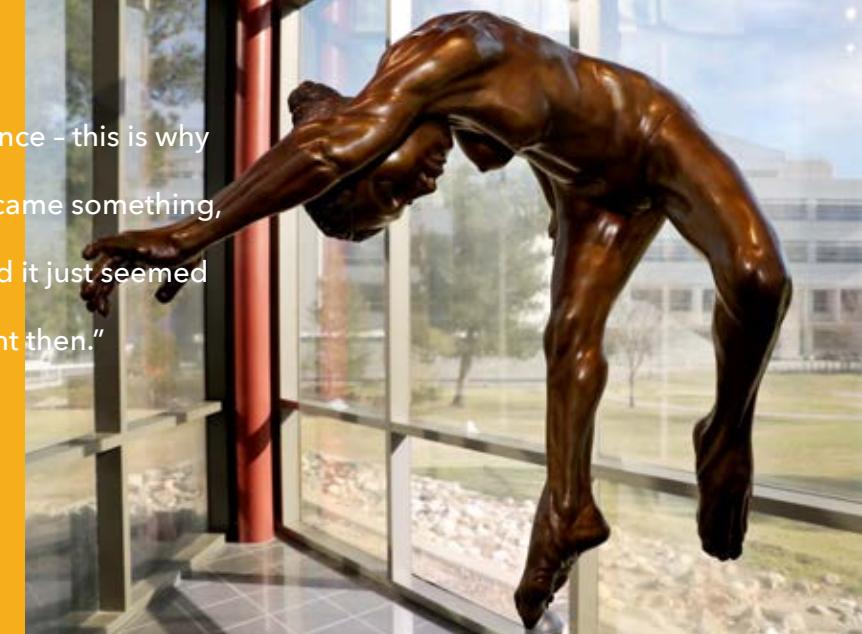
Longing, 2007
Red charcoal on paper
49.5 x 69.9 cm (19.5 x 27.5 in)



Flying Fish (Improvvisazione Fibonacci), 2011; Oil on canvas

"I had a dream during this time, and I dreamt that I was a flying fish under water. And I was stuck, and I was just going along anesthetized, and then all of a sudden I started moving upwards with enthusiasm because I saw the sparkling of the surface of the water. Then I broke through the surface of the water and I opened my wings and said, 'Oh my god, I'm a flying fish. I've been a flying fish for millennia.'"

"From performance giving inspiration to performance - this is why I really believe I became a sculptor because it became something, a living, three-dimensional presence on stage, and it just seemed to come intuitively, and I became a sculptor right then."



Leap of Faith, 2016-2017; Bronze

"The important thing about Marguerite for me is that I was learning the technique of layering of paint to layer the depth of the soul, and she was the perfect subject."



Marguerite with Walker, 2005
Oil on canvas

"This brush that can move so fluidly in all directions, can say anything that ever happened to anyone in the history of humanity."



Ink Painting 11, 2005; Ink on paper



Libertas, 2014; Oil on burlap stretched over canvas

"In his crown is the hope of America, but it has the thorn of rusted barbed wire."

“I sought the kind of freedom that comes from caring about someone besides myself. I see in humanity this duality of these, metaphorically speaking, angelic qualities and monstrous qualities.”



Mark Strickland (b. 1948)

An adjunct Professor of Art at Art Center College of Design of 34 years (1978-2012), Strickland has also taught at the University of California, Los Angeles (1982-1992) and Santa Monica College (1978). He was also a drawing course instructor for the Walt Disney Imagineering in 2011 and 2015.

Strickland received his B.A. in psychology from UCLA in 1969, then studied art at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena for three years, and then earned his M.A. in art and psychology from California State University, Long Beach in 1978. He studied privately with the painter, Joyce Treiman, from 1978 until 1982. During his long career, the artist has participated in numerous multi-disciplinary projects in Southern California and abroad, including Italy, France, and Germany.

Mark Strickland On His Art And Interdisciplinary Projects

After having done two live paintings with music performances with an Emmy-winning composer, Misha Segal, at the Museum of Tolerance and then, with a twelve-piece orchestra for Disney Imagineering, I saw a component of communication with art and music on a large theatre screen. Images of my work were rhythmically set to music

and it opened a vista to another dimension. Through performance, the work became a collaborative multimedia tool to communicate a message of raising consciousness in regards to the human condition much stronger than just my art ...

... If I tried to paint monumental works 15 to 40 feet to carry the urgency of a message of the duality of the human nature, so that people could become more aware that they actually have a choice between being compassionate and being anesthetized. Then, I saw that message could be carried in an epic way through collaboration with another artist and multimedia that can reach more humans to offer a choice of who they want to be. I saw the passion of work that can be projected onto a large screen or on internet in front of a world audience as an expanded tool for a message to humanity. So, in a purely intuitional way, my work evolved from a two dimensional projected screen to have the more physical presence upon a human theatre stage.

When I create, I often look at what manifested from my being in this life as if I hadn't done the work. Sometimes I discover an older work and have no memory of having done it ... It seems as though the work comes from its own longing for itself to come into being and not from me.



“I think that the self-portrait, historically speaking, is one way that you can afford to spend hundreds and hundreds of hours examining how you want to change your style, your inspiration, and your painting.”

(Top)
Gaza, 2010
Oil on canvas

(Bottom)
Self-Portrait (Auto
Portrait), 2009
Oil on canvas

Solo Exhibitions

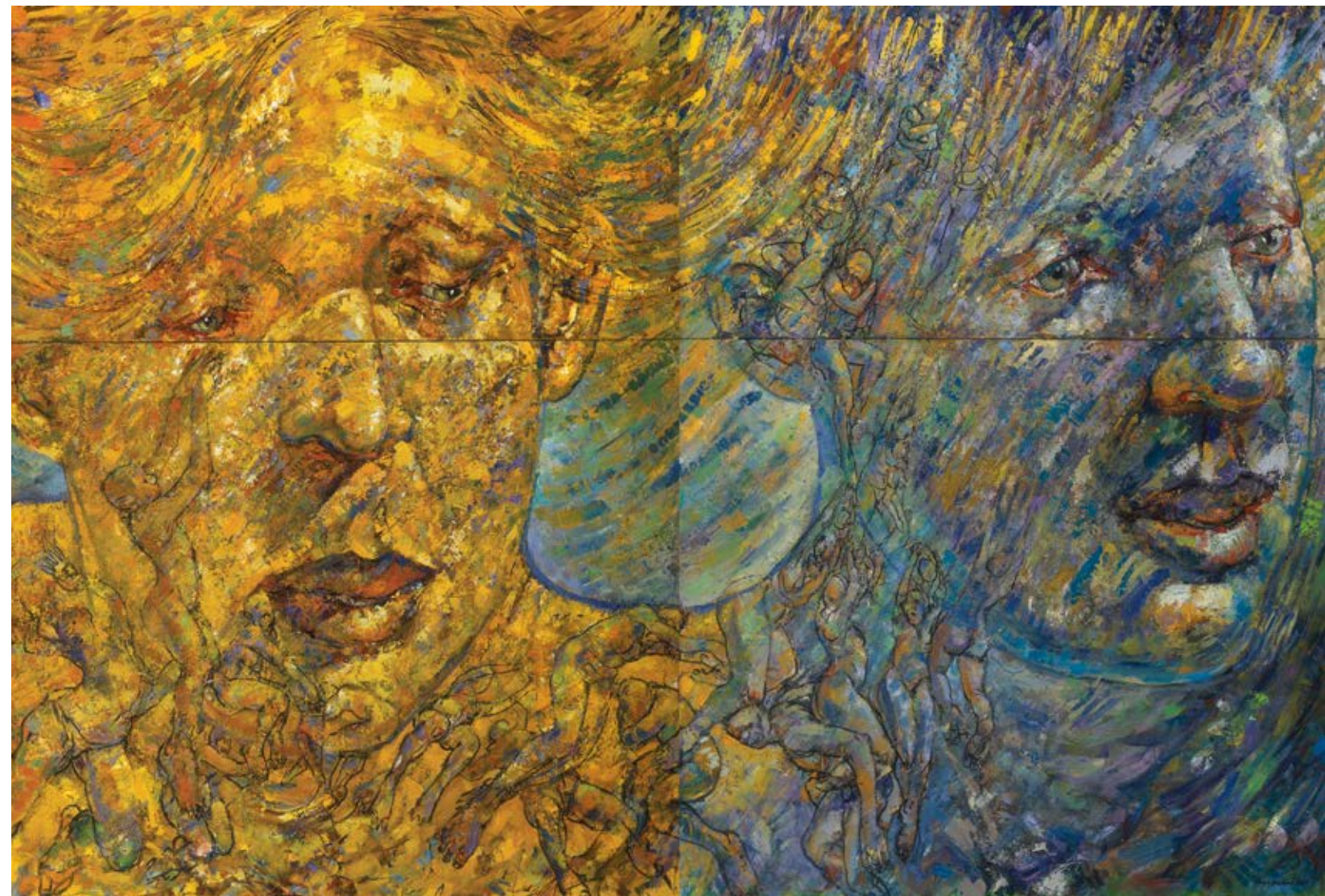
RAFFMA (Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art) at California State University, San Bernardino, CA, 2018
Fremont Gallery, South Pasadena, CA, 2012
LA Artcore, Los Angeles, CA, 2010, 2007 and 2005 (*La Condition Humaine*)
Indomitable Spirit, Ladelund Concentration Camp Memorial and Community Centre, Ladelund, Germany, 2009
Indomitable Spirit, Flossenburg Concentration Camp and Museum, Flossenburg, Germany, 2008
Children of Dachau, Versohnungskirche, Munich, Germany, 2007
Children of Dachau (Learning Works), Pasadena, CA, 2007
Faces and Figures, Lois Neiter Fine Arts, Malibu, CA, 2003
Miracle of Consciousness, Shumei Hall Gallery (Pasadena Cultural Affairs Grant), Pasadena, CA, 2002
Studio De Fazio, Rome, Italy, 2001
Painter of The Soul (Peintre de Lame) La Maison Pays, Valleraugue, France, 2001
Memories, Dreams and Reflections, Koplín Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, 1996
Subway series, Lizardi Harp Gallery, Pasadena, CA, 1987

Group Exhibitions

Lois Neiter Fine Arts, Los Angeles, CA, 1998-2005
Koplín Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, 1997-1998
Galerie Contemporaine Montfort L'amaury, Paris, France, 1996-1997
Sarah Bain Gallery, Fullerton, CA, 1995
Les Artistes Francais, Grand Palais Museum, Paris, France, 1994
Pasadena Art Alliance, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA, 1992
Tortue Gallery, Santa Monica, CA, 1989
Barclay Simpson Gallery, Los Angeles Convention Center, Los Angeles, CA 1989
Barclay Simpson Gallery, La Fayette, CA, 1989
Lizardi Harp Gallery, Pasadena, CA, 1986, 1987, 1988
Swope Gallery, Santa Monica, CA, 1984
Pink's Gallery, Santa Monica, CA, 1984
Otis Parsons College, Los Angeles, CA, 1983

www.artofmarkstrickland.com

(Inside Cover Pages)
Raising of Consciousness, 2005
Oil on canvas





5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397
(909) 537-7373 | raffma@csusb.edu | raffma.csusb.edu

RAFFMA
CAL STATE SAN BERNARDINO

 @raffma_csusb

 @RAFFMAmuseum

 @raffmacsusb

 @CSUSBmuseum