

by Michael St Amand

*No One Talks About the Elephant in the Room*  
*Mixed Media on Panel with Cigar Box, Ganesha, Mirrors, LED Lights,*  
*Coins, Glass Spice Containers, Metal Rack, Elephant Image*  
*16" w x 18.75" h x 6.25" d, 2012*  
*Michael St Amand, Private Collection*

In 2005 Michael St Amand was offered the last cigar in the box from one of his collectors. As he smoked the cigar, he admired the empty box and was given that too – the first of many. This was the start of St Amand's work with cigar boxes and fascination with juxtapositions – beautiful container; hazardous contents. This theme of opposites and duality are found in many of the pieces in this exhibit, as St Amand looks at spirituality, society, icons and sexuality. His use of Deglo colors, flashing lights and dancing Buddhas belie the intensity of the subject matter - or is that another intentional juxtaposition.

There is a basic structure to St Amand's "Container Series" – cigar box mounted on painted canvas, LED lights, a sacred icon and a contemplative component. He calls these pieces "Buddha in a Box" - one doesn't need a place to go for a religious experience, "you can take your temple with you," as St Amand says. In "No One Talks about the Elephant in the Room" the White Ganesh represents enlightenment and the White Elephant is a rare and sacred creature, but the title refers to what is big, looming and denied even though it is obvious to everyone. Could the woman at the bottom of the painting represent the deep dark secret that is known yet unspoken?

St Amand juxtaposes the sacred with the profane and leaves it to the viewer to determine where on the continuum their perceptions lie. "All the objects are just objects. As with all art, it is what the viewer brings to it," St Amand says of his work. "It is one's own – very personal – reactionary emotion. Whether it is hatred or shock, passion or compassion, every person will create his or her own truth – now attached to the work."

This is at the heart of St Amand's work. As art, his pieces are unique, beautiful and visually engaging. As social commentary, they are thought provoking. Each piece contains a mirror. As we look at the art, we see our image – the face of our own beliefs and idols.

By Maureen Watson, Watson MacRae Gallery



St Amand is primarily a self-taught artist and honed his skills at the Wooster Arts Center in Connecticut, where he grew up and the Art Students League of New York. Soon after, St Amand interned with Gertrude Barrer, credited by art historians over the past 20 years as having been a leading contributor to American Modern Art. He uses a multi-disciplined approach to his art making – painting, printmaking, digital art, and sculpture. St Amand has been involved in the SW Florida art world for 25 years – exhibiting, curating and organizing. He has exhibited internationally from New Zealand to Germany. Most recently he participated in a group exhibit in the country of Georgia's National Museum. This will be followed by a solo exhibition of his work in June 2013. St. Amand lives and works in Fort Myers, Florida.

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