

## Martin McMurray

Kristin Chambers

Left//*The Procession (A Nigerian)*  
and *The Procession (A Russian)*,  
both 2005//acrylic on rag board//  
30 x 40 in.//collection of Neil  
Wiesenberg//

**M**artin McMurray came of age during a complex era; he was reared on images of the Vietnam War, the cold war, the first moon landing, and the Watergate scandal. McMurray was enamored of his father's stories of serving in the air force, the images he watched on television, the pageants of a Veteran's Day celebration, and even the deposition and exile of formerly powerful leaders. Since then, the artist has developed an abiding interest in the history and trappings of military and political power, or the lack thereof.

Over the years, McMurray has prolifically depicted various symbols of power and might—models of air force helicopters and fighter planes,

political figures, warships, soldiers, parade floats, and even matadors. His painting style is raw, immediate, and expressive, following in the tradition of fellow Bay Area artists—from the gestural representation of the Bay Area figurative artists of the late 1940s, to the funk art of Robert Arneson and William T. Wiley in the late 1960s, to the street-inspired work of his contemporaries of the recently christened "Mission school." McMurray's subject matter is depicted as if seen through the wide eyes of a young boy standing on the side of the street watching the procession pass by, but with a healthy dose of the cynicism that comes with being an informed adult.

Take, for example, the recent series of paintings collectively titled *The Procession* (2005–6). Rendered in acrylic on board on a solid and empty ground, the men are painted in a direct yet deliberately naive style. Each painting depicts a single significant figure from the stage of world political history. From the merely shady to the downright diabolical, each man is shown sitting behind the wheel of a "period" car—some slick and others completely pedestrian—his nation's flag waving sadly from the hood.

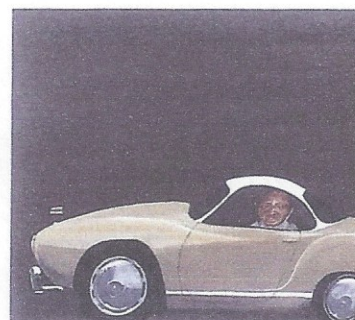
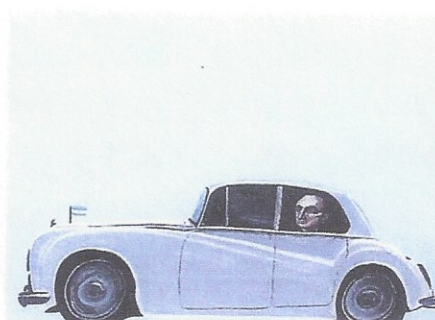
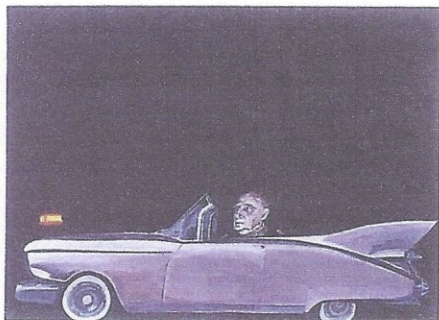
Removed from the official motorcade, figures ranging from America's Henry Kissinger to Haiti's Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvalier wear menacing smirks and direct, evil glares. There is a palpable absence of the pageantry that usually accompanies such leaders. McMurray shows the men alone, exiled perhaps, on the way out of town. These once-commanding figures are stripped of any aura of power, made slightly more pathetic by the artist's profoundly simple and at times cartoonish style. Although often recognizable, none of the men is directly named, leading one to imagine them as amalgamations of powerful and sometimes notorious figures who have shaped history.

McMurray ultimately suggests that the symbols of power—whether a political figurehead, an "official" car, a parade float, or a public monument—are empty and often interchangeable and that any narrative that we might imagine to accompany these images is historically complex and dependent on one's own political and social perspective.



*The Procession (A Liberian)*, 2005/  
cat. no. 65//

Below, left to right // *The Procession (A Spaniard)*, 2005//cat. no. 67//  
*The Procession (An Argentinean)*, 2005//acrylic on rag board//30 x 40 in.//collection of Neil Wiesenbe  
*The Procession (A Central African)*, 2006//cat. no. 70//



Left to right, top to bottom//**MIL MI-28 HAVOC**, 2002//  
**MIL MI-4PS HAZE-C**, 2002//**MIL MI-10 HARKE**, 2002 (cat. no. 53)//**SA 341-342 GAZELLE**, 2002//  
**MIL MI-4 HOUND**, 2002 (cat. no. 58)//**KAMOV AK 1943**, 2002 (cat. no. 50)//**SA 330 PUMA**, 2002//**MIL ROBINSON R22**, 2002 (cat. no. 57)//acrylic on wood panel//  
 11 x 13 3/4 in. each//  
 courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects//

