

"A BREATH OF FRESH AIR," 2019.
Oil on canvas, 48" x 70" / 122 x 178 cm
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AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
WITH **Francois
Chartier**

BY ARIEL SU

THE
PURSUIT OF
PERFECTION



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Francois Chartier and Angie at the studio © All rights reserved.

"MARIE ANTOINETTE." 2021
Oil on canvas. 44" x 72" / 111 x 182 cm
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THE PURSUIT OF
PERFECTION
"ALL THE OBJECTS I PAINT ARE MAGNIFIED AS IF THEY WERE SEEN THROUGH A LENS."

Francois Chartier (b. 1950) is a French-Canadian artist. Born and raised in Montreal, Chartier was always interested in the visual arts, and for 25 years, he toiled as an art director and illustrator in magazine publishing and advertising. Working for many well-established Canadian agencies and having many successes along the way. This all changed when he turned 50, Chartier decided to change course and took up painting full-time, and he is among the most renowned and revered Hyperrealist artists working today.

Chartier describes his approach to hyperrealism as theatrical. He must first find a suitable object or object to build a set. Then extensively photographs these objects to ultimately achieve the right composition and lighting. For each painting, he takes hundreds, even thousands, of photos and later uses his Photoshop skills to correct and, in some cases, combine the images. He works from both the selected images and the still life itself.

He works on large-scale canvases to render his subjects larger than life-size.



Chartier's goal is **"TO CAPTURE VIEWERS AND MAKE THEM LOOK AT SOMETHING THEY KNOW BUT AT A DIFFERENT ANGLE WITH THE SMALLER DETAILS REVEALED IN THEIR BEAUTY AND SIMPLICITY."**

Before painting, he coats the canvas with a gesso base to mute any signs of texture and brush strokes. Then, weeks later, he adds the finishing touches and varnishes.

"TOTO, I DON'T THINK WE ARE IN KANSAS ANYMORE," 2012
Oil on canvas. 48" x 84" / 122 x 214 cm
Francois Chartier © All rights reserved.

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BY ARIEL SU

ART MARKET MAGAZINE: Thank you for this interview, François. We were so impressed by your beautiful art made with high-quality hyperrealistic techniques. Your story is unique, as you changed your path from the advertising world to painting relatively at an older age. You had a successful career as an art director and illustrator in magazine publishing and advertising, and you worked for well-established Canadian agencies. **What happened? What drew you to focus on art and be a full-time professional painter?**

FRANCOIS CHARTIER: Well, thank you, Ariel and Art Market magazine's team; It is so pleasant and a

genuine compliment when somebody comes out and says, "we like your work and would like to show it to the world." So thanks to You.

It all started during the early 70s while I was visiting New York. Walking on Prince street, I saw a huge gumball machine painting in a window. I found out later that the painting was by Charles Bell, and I was in front of the Louis K Meisel gallery. I was fascinated by the artwork and spent quite a lot of time looking at it. Then, on my way back home, I thought to myself, one day, I'm going to do paintings like that. This vision changed my life.



"UNCHARTED TERRITORY," 2020
Oil on canvas. 40" x 84" / 102 x 214 cm
Francois Chartier © All rights reserved.

After years of working in magazines and advertising, becoming a commercial illustrator was a dream come true. It was the art school that I had never attended, and every project was a challenge. Deadlines were short, so I would use polaroid and photocopy as a base to illustrate products. It was fun, and I was making enough money to make a good living, so all was good.

By the early 90s, the advertising world had changed. The fun became a little more stressful. Everybody was taking themselves too seriously. During this period, I was invited to a computer presentation and got really blown away by Photoshop possibilities. So, I bought a computer and started to learn. My bible was the

Photoshop WOW book. I would read and learn during the day and do the work at night.... The computer was fun, and it was very nice at 45 to be the new kid on the block with this new toy. I think I got busy non-stop during the following 4 years.... In the blink of an eye, I realized we were in the year 2000, computers were all over the place, and I was going to turn 50. The gumball machine from New York came back to my mind; a good time to give it a try.... So let's go for it... 23 years later, I'm still at it....

ART MARKET MAGAZINE: In your paintings, you mainly focus on situations that are difficult to paint. Paper with folds, fabric fluttering in the wind, and still life underwater while showing the dynamism of

bubbles and waves, all painted in an amazingly accurate way! **And I'm curious to know, what is your background in art? Where did you gain this high-level expertise?**

FRANCOIS CHARTIER: Since I never went to art school, all these years spent in magazines or advertising agencies are my background in art. Hyperrealism is very organized and planned rather than intuitive, so I spend a lot of time preparing my visuals. My approach is theatrical, so my years as an art director help me stage my objects, playing with shape, color, and texture until I get the perfect composition with the proper lighting. As a hyperrealist painter, I obviously depend a lot on the photographs I will take and use as my main reference.



When I'm happy with my composition, it is time to translate the idea I have in my mind into a photograph. So obviously, some knowledge of photography is very important. All these years I spent working in magazines, and advertising let me learn a lot by watching photographers at work.

I use a camera that takes high-resolution photographs to keep the details present in large format, flashes fast enough to stop motion, and I have good friends who are photographers who can answer my technical questions if needed. The more I can build an image that is intricate and different from what is usually seen, the more I develop my own identity.

ART MARKET MAGAZINE: You also have a fantastic series of paintings focusing on childhood toys from different eras. Is there any use of symbolism here? Why toys?

FRANCOIS CHARTIER: Yes, you are talking about the "POP CULTURE ICONS" series. That was my first series of paintings. These ten paintings took three years to make. All of them are the same size, 157 x 157 cm.

I remember sitting in front of that large canvas and wondering what will I paint? Since I had collected through time all sorts of little objects like superheroes, figures, promotional advertising objects, banks, Pez, etc. I thought they would be perfect as subjects. They reminisce about good times

Top: "WHO WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER." 2022
Oil on canvas.
48" x 60" / 122 x 152 cm
Francois Chartier ©
All rights reserved.

Right Page Top:
"WHO LET THE DOG OUT."
2017
Oil on canvas. 40" x 80" /
102 x 204 cm
Francois Chartier ©
All rights reserved.

Right Page Bottom:
Francois Chartier is
working on the painting:
"WHO WANTS TO LIVE
FOREVER." 2022
© All rights reserved.



and hopefully do the same for other people. Their transparencies and reflecting texture are of great interest to me because of all the intricate images they create.

It is not a matter of symbolism; I simply match objects that look good and work well together. I love the fact that people see different things and meaning in my paintings. So, anybody can build their own story.

With **Maggie Bollaert** at **Plus One Gallery**, we presented some of those paintings at a Museum

show, In Brazil, called "*50 Years of Realism - Photorealism to Virtual Reality*". They were also presented in South Korea for the exhibit "*21st Century Photorealism*", at the Daejeon Museum of Art.

When I did these paintings, photorealism was a real obsession for me. The painting had to be a perfect copy of the photography. Today I'm more of a Hyperrealist. I still use a lot of details, but I give myself more liberty in interpreting the photo I prepared as a reference.

“SINCE REALISM HAS ALWAYS BEEN OF TREMENDOUS INTEREST TO ME, IT WAS NATURAL THAT THIS WAS THE DIRECTION MY ART SHOULD TAKE. ALTHOUGH MY PAINTINGS ARE REALISTIC, MY GOAL IS TO CREATE THE ILLUSION OF DEPTH AND A SENSE OF PRESENCE BEYOND WHAT IS FOUND IN PHOTOGRAPHS. ALL OF THIS IS THROUGH THE LAYERING OF MEDIUMS AND THE PLAY OF THE BRUSH.”



Top: "MINERVA," 2013
Oil on canvas.
60" x 60" / 152 x 152 cm
Francois Chartier ©
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Right Page: "CLAUDINE,
Symphony in C major," 2018
Oil on canvas.
36" x 72" / 91 x 182 cm
Francois Chartier © All rights
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ART MARKET MAGAZINE:
You usually use a dark background, sometimes black, in most of your paintings. What is the role of light & shadow in your artworks?

FRANCOIS CHARTIER:
The black background is part of an evolution in my paintings. Slowly true the years, I started to use a black background to remove details that weren't part of the main subject. I want to present my subject as if it was a diamond ring in a jewel box. The black color also symbolizes sophistication, power, and elegance, which matches very well with the subjects I use in my still life.

Sometimes I like to use crumpled paper which gives the impression that the main subject is part of a package that is opened especially for

the viewer. It doesn't distract from the main subject, just isolates it from the background and contributes to building a story.

As for light and shadow, they are the key to bringing the WOW factor into any image. After a photo shoot, I search for this WOW factor when selecting pictures that could become paintings. Without it, the photo will never get to be a painting.


ART MARKET MAGAZINE:
You create paintings on large-scale canvases, some over two meters wide. What is the role of the canvas's size in photorealism and hyperrealism?

FRANCOIS CHARTIER:
I always go back to my New York gumball machine. When I saw it for the first time, I was very far from it.

The more I walked toward it, the better I could see it, even if I was on the other side of the street. If it would have been a 50 x 50 cm painting, I would probably have never noticed it.

There is nothing that I like better than to see in a painting a small object 10 times bigger than it actually is in real life. It's almost like looking true a magnifier. A large painting calls for attention; people see it from a distance and are attracted to it. Doing a large painting is almost like a performance. It also means that I will live with the same visual for a few months, so it is important to be sure that I'm at peace with the subject that I choose to paint.





"SUMMER PASSION."
2016. Oil on canvas.
36" x 80" / 91 x 204 cm
Francois Chartier ©
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THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

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THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO BELIEVE IN YOURSELF. USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO SHOW YOUR WORK TO THE WORLD. PARTICIPATING IN DIFFERENT CONTESTS WAS GOOD FOR ME BECAUSE WHEN YOU WIN, PEOPLE NOTICE. DON'T SPEND TOO MUCH TIME LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION; THE MORE YOU WORK, THE MORE IT COMES.

CHUCK CLOSE USED TO SAY, "INSPIRATION IS FOR AMATEUR. THE REST OF US JUST SHOW UP AND GET TO WORK".

ART MARKET MAGAZINE:

How long does it take to create each artwork?

FRANCOIS CHARTIER: In terms of time, it takes me three to four months to create one painting, working five to six hours a day. This includes all the preparation, photo shoots, and execution. You have to realize that I'm at respectable age and take life easy...

ART MARKET MAGAZINE:

Can you explain the process of your work? Do you first create sketches by hand or on an app based on a photograph? Do you use the technique of dividing the canvas into squares before starting the oil painting?

FRANCOIS CHARTIER:

No matter where I am, and every time I'm out of the studio, I'm always on the lookout for little

objects or whatever is of interest to me, like flowers, vases, or characters that I could use on one of my paintings.

I don't do sketches, but I write in a book any ideas, phrases, or words that inspire me or could trigger any inspiration.

Once a year, normally during springtime, I will take a month to do studio photography. I start by going through my book of ideas and selecting the ones that inspire

me the most; I then prepare a list of all I need for each idea and get it ready. If I need a special object I can't find around me, I will search on the web.

Every day, after the photo shoot is done, I select the best images and see which ones have the WOW factor. By the end of the month, I should have three to five good images ready to be painted, which is enough for the following year. Before starting to paint, I prepare

the canvas. First, I will put three to four coats of gesso and sand them to get a smooth surface. Then I will put base coats of gray acrylic since I dislike working on white.

It is now time to print the photo to the final size. Then, I will divide my image into printable sections and tape them together to get a life-size image. I will trace the image using graphite transfer paper between the life-size print and the treated canvas.

I'm now ready to paint. Almost like if I were painting by numbers, I would follow the elaborated tracing concentrating first on small sections and then blending them together. I will work on the mood of the painting by using more or less transparent paint to give the image its atmosphere, look at the entire picture, add more glow, light, and shadow and intensify color at this point, going beyond the photography.

ART MARKET MAGAZINE:

What would be the most difficult to paint? Reflections/ folded paper / underwater bubbles etc. Is there anything you considered a struggle at the beginning or during the years?

FRANCOIS CHARTIER:

The difficulty is not so much in what I have to paint. I just rely on my photo to give me the information I need to paint any texture or objects realistically. If I did a good job in making my reference photo, then most of my problems are solved.

The most demanding is translating all the information on the canvas. Everything takes a long time on a large canvas. While doing the tracing, I realize how much work is involved in completing the painting. This undertaking is a quest, almost an obsession, that will require all my attention. During the time it will take to finish that painting, I can't allow my mood, good or bad, to affect the way I work. In the end, when the painting is finished, I experience both disbelief at what I have accomplished and great pride in my work.

"AND AWAY WE GO." 2019
Oil on canvas. 36" x 54" / 91 x 137 cm
Francois Chartier © All rights reserved.

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"Good Night Charlie Brown." 2012
Oil on canvas, 36" x 36" / 90 x 90 cm
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ART MARKET MAGAZINE:

During your professional painting career, you had many solo shows and participated in many group exhibitions. What advice can you give to the young artist struggling to create his path?

FRANCOIS CHARTIER: The most important thing is to believe in yourself. Use social media to show

your work to the world. Participating in different contests was good for me because when you win, people notice. Don't spend too much time looking for inspiration; the more you work, the more it comes. Chuck Close used to say, "Inspiration is for amateur. The rest of us just show up and get to work".

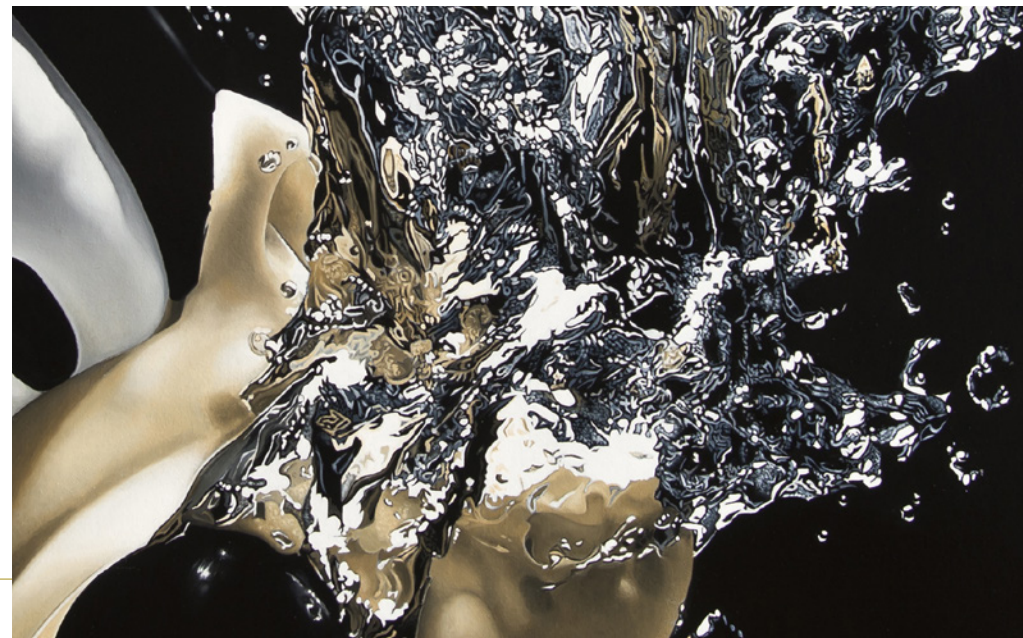


"GO 4 IT". 2018
Oil on canvas, 48" x 53" / 122 x 135 cm
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ART MARKET MAGAZINE:

Where can we expect to see your art in 2023? Any upcoming art fairs or exhibitions to look for?

FRANCOIS CHARTIER: 2023 will be a year of production for me. I'm preparing an exhibit for 2024 and will still be very present at Plus One Gallery in London, U.K., and in Montreal at Galerie d'art Richelieu.





"2000 LEAGUE UNDER THE SEA". 2014
Oil on canvas. 40" x 84" / 101 x 214 cm
François Chartier © All rights reserved.



"PRECIOUS." 2015
Oil on canvas. 42" x 84" / 110 x 214 cm
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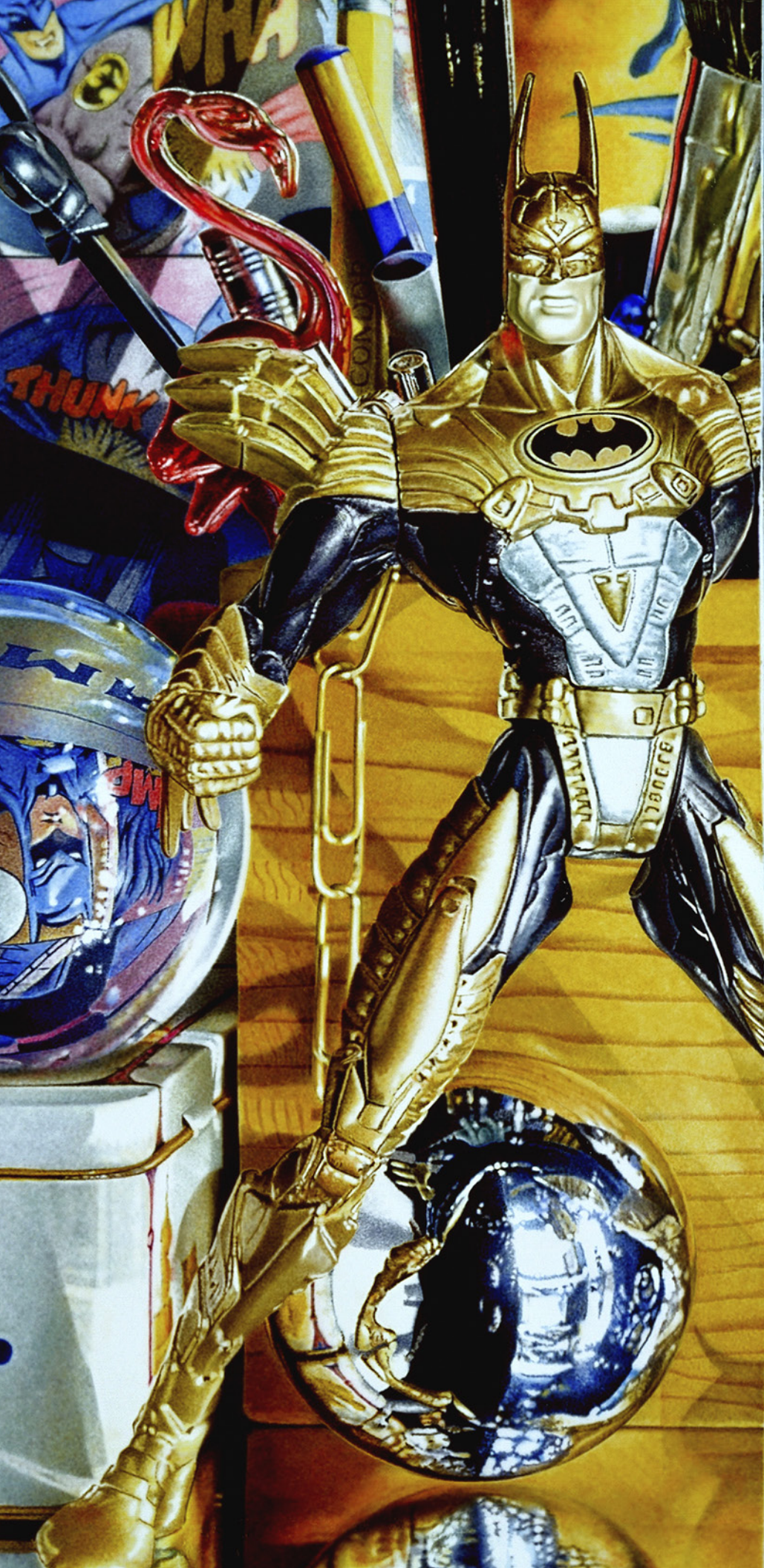


"A NIGHT AT THE OPERA." 2022
Oil on canvas. 34" x 60" / 87 x 152 cm
François Chartier © All rights reserved.



"PRELUDE TO A SYMPHONY." 2022
Oil on canvas. 48" x 51" / 122 x 131 cm
François Chartier © All rights reserved.

THE
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"JULIE 1", 2009
Oil on canvas. 48" x 48" / 122 x 122 cm
Francois Chartier © All rights reserved.



"IN THE END, WHEN THE PAINTING IS FINISHED, I EXPERIENCE BOTH DISBELIEF AT WHAT I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED AND GREAT PRIDE IN MY WORK."

Left Page: "WHERE HAVE I PARKED THE BATMOBILE" 1999. Acrylic on canvas. 58" x 58" / 147 x 147 cm
Francois Chartier © All rights reserved.

Top: "HOME SEET HOME." 2009
Oil on canvas. 36" x 72" / 91 x 182 cm
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Francois Chartier

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