

Béla Bácsi & Alexey Steele

American Legacy Fine Arts, November 16-December 21

IF EVERYTHING about the world and ourselves were simple and known, there would be no wondering—and probably no art. But life comes tied with a big bow that invites curiosity, inquiry, and the anticipation of secrets revealed, or at least explored. The American Legacy Fine Arts show entitled *Curiosity: The Inner Self* presents the remarkable results of such exploration by two artists: stone sculptor Béla Bácsi and painter Alexey Steele. The show opens on November 16 with an artists' reception from 4 to 6 p.m. and continues through December 21.

Hungarian-born Bácsi is recognized as one of the most highly skilled fine-art marble carvers in the world, continuing a family stone-carving profession that reaches back at least four generations. *CURIOSITY*, which began as a 650-pound chunk of marble, provided inspiration for the show's theme. Explains gallery director Elaine Adams: "We want to take viewers on a cerebral journey that transports them away from their everyday existence to deeper, dream-like experiences that will inspire them to re-examine how they view their lives and the world around them."

The show presents a dozen new sculptures by Bácsi, ranging in size from 9 inches to 7 feet tall. Each piece involves months of carving and hand-polishing; no sanding is done to achieve the sculptures' satiny finish, notes the 62-year-old artist, who lives in Santa Barbara, CA. Complex works, such as the title piece, require precise planning, while others start more simply with imagination and a block of marble. *BAMBINO WITH CURLS* began with the idea of a Venetian carnival mask, Bácsi says. "But I wanted movement with the hair, like a kid jumping up and curls pop-



Béla Bácsi, *Totem*, marble, 11 x 24 x 7.



Béla Bácsi, *Curiosity*, marble, 22 x 22 x 8.



Béla Bácsi, *Bambino With Curls*, marble, 27 x 9 x 6.



Alexey Steele, Distant Fire on the Full Moon, charcoal, 16 x 12.



Alexey Steele, Sleep, charcoal, 19 x 15.

ping up into the air. It's a little bit of a mischievous character." TOTEM, on the other hand, incorporates elements of Northwest Native American design and reflects a more introspective mood. Appropriate to the theme of exploration and anticipation, the creation of each sculpture is a journey in itself, Bácsi relates. "The stone and I together end up saying what the final piece will be," he says.

Los Angeles-based Steele was born in Kiev, Ukraine, the son of Russian painter Leonid Steele. A passionate, voluble, and articulate artist, the younger Steele also brings classical training and thoughtfulness to his work. This show features about 20 of his newest drawings on handmade De Ponte paper and heavyweight Italian Fabriano paper, which appears to float in front of its frame. Designed by the artist, the mounting system complements a recurring theme in Steele's imagery these days: a dreamlike sense of floating, which he sees as a metaphor for the human spirit transcending the limitations of gravity, and thus, of mortality.

Steele's drawings combine classical elements of gesture and movement with an academic focus on fully developed tonality, all within the context of contemporary cultural sensibility. His aim, he stresses, is not to re-create a classical look but to create from the same artistic impulse toward beauty and inquiry that inspired



Alexey Steele, Floating Dream 2, charcoal, 15 x 19.

the old masters. "Curiosity is one of the fundamental aspects of human nature, and we are the greatest mystery to ourselves," he believes. "It is the inquiry into the nature of beauty that leads us directly to the birthplace of humanity and art."
—Gussie Fauntleroy

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