

## WILLIAM GRIFFIN

By Dickson Beall  
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William Griffin blends the traditions of Old Masters with 21st century sensibility. He paints human figures as forms and shapes, touching and reacting in sensual gestures. By using the figure's power to express strong physical and emotional content, and by reducing the informational material, Griffin abstracts his images – much as a photographer or filmmaker crops and frames observed phenomena and concepts. The stylish, large-scale oil paintings he creates are within the long tradition of Western painting and are influenced by early 20th century artists' movement away from representational work. Yet they are by no means retroactive.

Based upon his ideas about ambiguities, Griffin's paintings explore the relationships of man and his nature — what is real and what is illusion, what defines sculptural space and what calls attention to surface pattern, what is representation and what is abstraction. His illusions - in - depth join powerfully with abstracted surface effects, and both share equally valid aesthetic rights.

Griffin's personal style brings immediacy to his work. He integrates plasticity with decoration by painting large forms – human torsos – in a structural manner that makes them appear to be three-dimensional. Yet he creates a new and powerful tension by contrasting the enclosed volume of human figures with unpainted areas, forming shapes that emphasize the flatness of the

canvas. By limiting his palette to grayscale values on the white primed surface, Griffin further accentuates two-dimensional solidity. His paintings, executed on a grand scale, create a compelling experience for the viewer. Figures are pushed up against the frontal plane of the painting, confronting the viewer with an intimacy that resembles the encounter between the artist's subjects.

While studying painting and sculpture at Washington University, Griffin was invited to create sculptures for the St. Louis Veiled Prophet Parade, centerpiece event of the annual July 4th holiday celebration in St. Louis. Griffin has served as Artistic Director of the parade since 1989, bringing that annual event national attention and prominence. Like other painters who've also worked as commercial artists, Griffin's commercial experience has shaped and influenced his imaginative approach. His work has allowed him to explore a variety of styles and methods – producing public art, in sculpture and painted form, with a heightened interplay of illusion and reality.

—Dickson Beall

*Dickson Beall is an art critic for the West End Word in St. Louis, Missouri. This essay is one in a series of the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists and friends.*