

# the Lead

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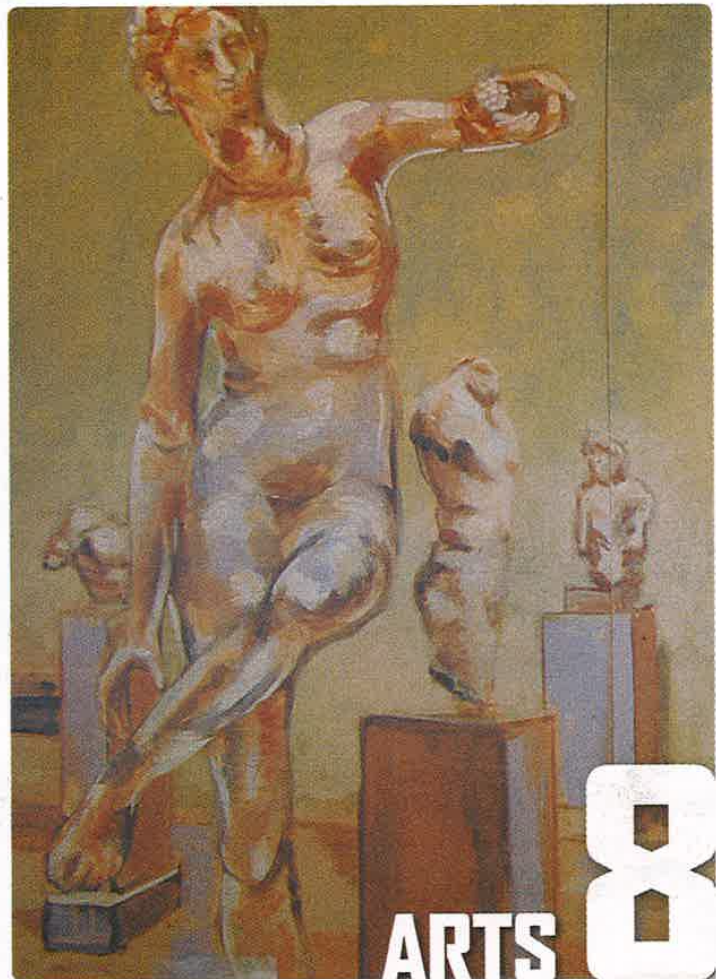
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# ART OF THE ELEM

Wendy Coad Finds Inspiration in the Past and the Future

BY ROBERT NEVEL

The human element in art is not only derived via the forms in a piece. The human element also comes into play with the viewer: *you*, the audience. However, one's perceptions color the image, and that is exactly how Wendy Coad got the inspiration for the dreamy, faded, vintage look of her paintings.

In some of her first art classes she had to view work from faded slides. According to her website, when she saw the originals, they seemed like "copies," and the human element on the other side of art touched her own. From her professional studio, she replicates the worn feel of those pictures.

"As long as I can remember, I wanted to make these pastel and faded images my own," she writes.

This experiential human characteristic is not the only one present, and in most of her pieces, the human form is also prevalent. Through her aged atmospheres, all walks of human life are seen, many times walking side by side.

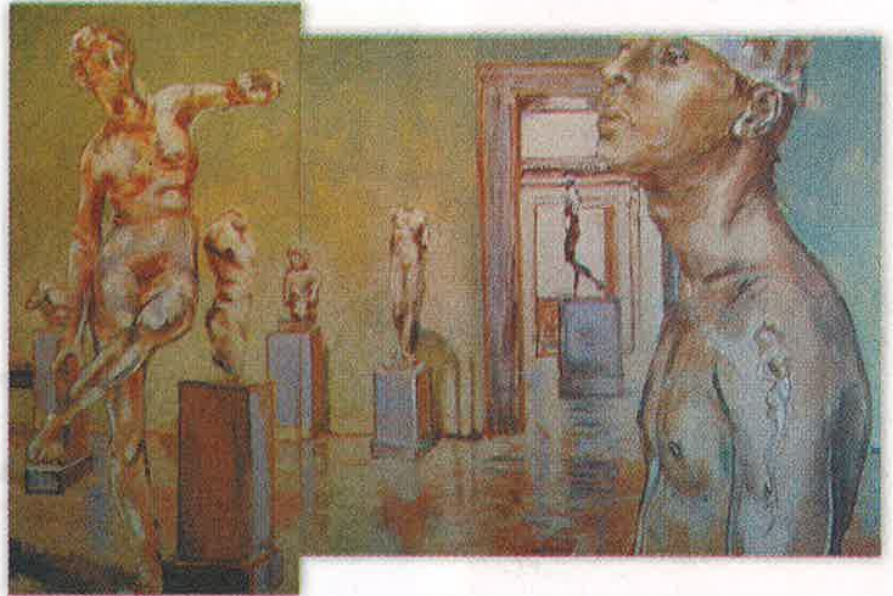
Sometimes the people match, but their surroundings do not. In one, two giant heads kiss above a shadowy cluster of buildings, and in another, a shirtless tattooed man gazes upon ancient statues in what seems to be a museum.

Her work touches on humanity at two levels. The intermingling of people and environments from different times and places are in many of the paintings, and the effect of seeing these "intermingled" images affects the mind of the viewer in much the same way as the faded look.

Coad's latest exhibit, "Love and Industry" follows a similar theme of humanity with the art of the mismatch. It will be on display alongside the photography work of Lissette Schaeffler at Art Center/South Florida on Lincoln Road, until April 25.

**RN:** Can you explain how your fascination with the human form came about?

**WC:** I began my career at a time and in a place when abstract expressionism was considered the thing to do. So I did it. But I would always find the shape of a shoulder or a hip or part of a face in the colors and lines I worked with. About six months after getting my BFA, as I was painting alone in my studio, I just gave in to these forms.



ABOVE: "MUSEUM PUNK"

THEY WERE LARGE, COLORFUL MONOLITHIC FIGURES. THEY WERE JUST SO DELICIOUS THAT I NEVER WENT BACK TO ABSTRACTION.

What emerged was astonishing. They were large, colorful monolithic figures. They were just so delicious that I never went back to abstraction.

**RN:** How have your studies in physiology and anatomy influenced or informed your work?

**WC:** Actually, my painting has had a greater influence on my studies of anatomy and physiology. I first started exploring the figure in painting which is two-dimensional and then moved to studying anatomy, adding the third dimension. It was such a natural and smooth transition. The only break I've taken with painting is when I just dove into studying the anatomy and physiology of the body and also the energy fields in and around the body. I had a practical reason for this because I contracted Lyme Disease and had to focus my creativity internally for a while.

**RN:** Why the move to Miami Beach?

**WC:** Well, my husband Steve was the one who initially wanted to move here. He had visited the beach for many years and then we started to travel here together. About five or six years

ago, when it was our time to leave New York, Miami offered a great community to serve both of our career needs. I'm completely blown away with how many working artists there are here on the Beach. For every artist you see, there are at least three or four more that are quietly working away in their own space. And better yet, people here love art, they support art, they want to know more about art. Plus, it's an international destination. Oh, the list goes on, it's just a fabulous place to be and the art produced and exhibited here is world class.

**RN:** Can you tell me about some influences that encouraged you to put two seemingly opposite things together?

**WC:** Yes, I like things that don't quite fit right. Maybe it's because I'm a problem solver or maybe it's because as an artist I have a way of seeing the opposite of things in general. In painting as in life, there's a lot to consider, like the yin and the yang of things. It can't be all 'high' art without the 'low' to make the contrast. This is another list that goes on, light/dark, warm/cool, night/day, black/white, expanding/contracting.



# ENTS

**RN:** What is it about traditional painting methods that are important to you?

**WC:** I can't believe that I've stuck to being a 'traditionalist' for so long. If painting's dead... well, I'm still here. I think that ever since the beginning of time, people have made marks to reference their environment (both internal and external) with pigment or paint of some kind. I love those ancient markings — they were reflective of the human form.

I also love the way that the medium has come down through thousands of years to celebrate and elevate the human spirit. I feel the thread of humanity in the act of painting. I feel connected to a source in a way that doesn't happen for me in many other mediums. I love to use the arc of my arm to draw a line, to take a piece of wood with hair attached and drag it through paint and then across a surface, leaving a trail of color so astonishing that it can take my breath away.

**RN:** Is there a specific technique you use to make the paintings look faded like the ones you saw before the originals?

**WC:** Well, without giving up all my secrets, I use as 'dry' a paint medium as possible. I work on paper and wood mainly because I can push the paint both into and across the surface in a way that's different than working with the tooth of a canvas. It can dance into the surface many layers deep, and then here and there, I'll rub the just-placed color off, leaving it's shadow instead.

**RN:** Why is it that the versions of the art you saw originally appealed so much?

**WC:** I'm influenced by many things but certainly the sarcophagus paintings of Egypt and the wall paintings of Pompeii. I'm sure the colors were brighter than we even imagine, but time has marked and faded them too — just like the pale images seen from a 35mm slide streaming down a beam of dusty light in those art history classes long ago.

Wendy Coad's work will be on display at the Artcenter/South Florida, 810 Lincoln Road, Miami Beach, until April 25. For more information on the artist, visit [wendycoad.com](http://wendycoad.com).

Comment online at [theleadmiamibeach.com](http://theleadmiamibeach.com)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: "MERMAID," "LOVE AND INDUSTRY LOOKING BACK," "MUSEUM SERIES LINCOLN R





...," AND "LOVE AND INDUSTRY KISS."