

# ARTIST DISCOVERS HIS VOICE IN FIGURES

JACK BALAS FINDS NICHE IN HIS PRESENTATION OF THE HUMAN FORM

By Mary Voelz Chandler

Once upon a time, Jack Balas taught writing, painted buffalo and made sculpture.

But then someone asked him to teach a figure-drawing class, and Balas realized it was time to learn more about how to depict the human form.

With bachelor of fine arts and master of fine arts degrees from Northern Illinois University, Balas took a community college class here in figure-drawing. He had majored in sculpture and taught himself to paint. Five years later, Balas' work is all about the figure, demonstrated in two concurrent shows.

"Tattoo Detour," which just opened at Robischon Gallery, includes watercolors, oils and drawings made while roaming the beach at Waikiki last summer. "We'll Be Seeing You" at MCA DENVER includes watercolors, photographs and images he shot of visitors to a space that is as much a studio as a gallery.

"I started teaching figure-drawing, and the more I painted the figure, the more the figure was saying everything I wanted to say," Balas said, sitting in the gallery at Robischon, where it seemed as if a score of eyes was watching him from the walls.

"It started taking over my life. They turned into figures that are a metaphor or allegory: These are Everyman."

The oils and watercolors at the gallery are derived from photos he took of strangers, then worked into scenic settings from drawings.

The works appear candid but with a hint that more is going on than is visible on the surface. Young men roughhouse in the surf: Is it play, or a fight? A woman standing on the sand looks out to sea where her daughter plays, and a hand is drawn in above her: Is it protection, or a warning sign?

In some instances Balas has included text, and tattoos are frequent. He has paired a couple of the paintings with old towels, and some of his figures sport halos. Balas said he once read commentary that called the figures in that type of painting "St. Beach Boy."