

# Pushing Culture Forward

Off the Cuff with artist Daniel Fleming

BY JUDITH ANN MORIARTY

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The Gallery of Wisconsin Art (GOWA) rises from the remains of a former West Bend tire shop. The 6,000-square-foot space opened June 3 and has tony neighbors, for instance, the Museum of Wisconsin Art (MOWA), directly to the north. Soon, they'll be connected by a strip of land enhanced by Jim Shields of HGA Architects. Their proximity is a win-win.

Milwaukee artist Daniel Fleming's big, bodacious paintings are in GOWA's lower level—gutsy, experimental and the opposite of serene landscapes like the Gibson Byrd painting one floor above. A Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design (MIAD) graduate, and a former Shepherd Express designer and illustrator, Fleming

changed course when he switched his major from painting to design. The change taught him to be analytical.

***Graphic designers are usually pretty structured aren't they? That said, you greatly admire the paintings of Anselm Kiefer whose work is darkly political.***

I grew up looking at modern and post-modern work, so I've never felt restricted by materials or styles. I start out with a concept, but I paint and repaint and end up far from where I thought I was headed.

***Are your paintings political?***

Well, I get more out of art, far more, if it has a message beyond just being attractive or interesting. Of course, artists don't need to be political, but why, when you can push culture forward, would you choose not to?

***OK, so you've chosen to push culture forward. In what way does your work reflect that choice?***

My messaging is more aimed at exploring differences rather than reinforcing them. From that standpoint, I'm not so much purely political as I am socially minded.

***When you aren't painting in your home/studio on Milwaukee's East Side, what occupies your time?***

I have a job as an artist and designer in Glendale for Black Forest, LLC, a Mercedes-Benz restoration firm. Have you heard of "Disc Gulp?" That's a game I designed. It's produced here. As a kid in Rochester, Minnesota, I drew cartoons with my dad. A doctor, he often drew images, in order to better explain things to a patient. My cartoons were dinosaurs and goofy stuff. At one time, though, I did want to be a cartoonist or graphic novelist.

To learn more about Fleming's work, visit [danielflemingart.tumblr.com](http://danielflemingart.tumblr.com).

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