

# *A Thousand* **WORDS**

The phrase “a picture is worth a thousand words” (or ten thousand words) was largely popularized by writer Fred. R. Barnard in the 1920s. At the time, he used the saying to describe the huge impact of images in advertising and news articles. This Connections Café exhibition features two Valley artists paired together by a jury panel during a call for art cycle for the Tempe Galleries program. Each of these artists approaches their art making and meaning practices differently, yet, they both share an interest in visual narratives. While Mansfield and Stephenson’s works may not be as light-hearted as Rockwell’s Saturday Evening Post illustrations of idealistic American life. These two contemporary artists do join an ongoing historical tradition of Americans telling difficult stories through art, like those of photographer Dorothea Lange and painter Thomas Hart Benton during the Great Depression.

## **Nick Mansfield**

Mansfield was born into a working class neighborhood in Memphis, TN. He says he spent much of his youth surrounded by the violence and crime that tore apart American cities in the 1980’s and 90’s. After moving to California as a young adult, he began using art as a tool to resolve troubling events of his childhood. These early experiences greatly affected his perspective on American life, which would later become the foundation of his work. Today, he is able to pursue art full-time after a successful career as an art director in commercial advertising. Mansfield says, “My goal is to explore with you those singular moments in life; the moments when life, actually happens. My images are windows into the lives, homes, and thoughts of those experiences. I use techniques from film, theatre, literature and photography to create ‘single cell movies’ offering you a glimpse into a possibly different or maybe all-too-familiar world as your own.” Mansfield says of the pairing with Stephenson: “we both use a level of escapism to engulf our viewer. Creating just enough space to make it comfortable for the viewer to enter the space and began to wrestle with the work’s context. I believe it is that sort of push and pull that offers the viewer a dynamic experience with our work.”

[nickmansfield.com](http://nickmansfield.com)

## **Tom Stephenson**

An Arizona native, Stephenson was born in Phoenix and has lived in Tempe most of his life. His paintings take many forms from traditional canvas paintings to custom art on lowriders and motorcycles. Stephenson is a self-taught artist who credits his great start to an art teacher at Trevor Brown High School in the early 1980s. He has shown extensively throughout the Valley including exhibitions at Tucson Museum of Art, Alwun House in Phoenix and Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport Museum. Today his work is represented by Art One Gallery in Scottsdale. Stephenson says “I want to push the boundaries as best I can. I want my art to say something with the images, a clear something but not too obvious, a something that is focused on the human nature, the emotion, the feelings, the struggle. These works I am presenting to you I call ‘tattoo heads,’ they are from a series of ten paintings that focus on the ‘need to want’ mentality of this culture.” The people depicted in Stephenson’s airbrushed paintings are not specific portraits but are models Stephenson selected from an internet-based model agency. He places tattooed sayings on the subjects to create a narrative about the theme of greed.

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