

AMERICAN
art
COLLECTOR

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WENDY CHIDESTER

Resurrection

In summer 2013, painter Wendy Chidester received an unexpected note. Pete D'Acosta had stumbled upon her still lifes of antique items and wrote her in hopes of sharing his unique collection with her. He called her work brilliant, saying he had been waiting for years to come across something that would "move him to action"—her art did exactly that.

His collection was indeed unique, an assortment of 50 rare candlestick telephones dating back from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. Because the devices are irreplaceable, the collector never displayed them publicly, but they've found new life in her paintings. Chidester has painted 20 of his phones so far, such as her oil on canvas Wilhelm Electric Company 1898, and the collector often comes to her receptions to share their history with viewers.

"From the moment I laid eyes on the collection, it literally took my breath away," Chidester, based in Draper, Utah, says. "It was truly one of the most beautiful collections I have ever seen. Each of these phones seems to take on a personality of its own both in the

design and the shadow it casts."

Besides the collections she is offered to paint serendipitously by admirers, Chidester finds subject matter in antique stores and on bidding sites. She paints objects such as antique fans, typewriters and luggage from life, using a single light source to dramatically set up subjects. She says her process allows for a more intimate connection with the objects, removing the guesswork painting from photographs sometimes provides.

Her exhibition of 15 pieces at Arden Gallery in Boston is called *Resurrected*, as she brings new reverence to forgotten goods in today's fast-paced world. She says she remembers using machines such as movie projectors, rotary phones and record players as a child, their smells and sounds vivid in her memory.

"I feel a duty to resurrect the items by painting them as icons, giving them new life and respect for the complex and ingenious machines they were," Chidester says. "After all, where would we be right now without their invention? They were

the very beginning of what we call our communication today."

Chidester's ability to rejuvenate relics and expand their lifespans is part of what attracted Arden Gallery to the artist, says director Zola Solamente, who explains Chidester's passion for what she paints is evident to the viewer.

"Composing worn luggage cases, Golden Age toys of the 1950s, vintage typewriters, out-dated cameras and slide projectors, and dented and scratched tin oil cans, the artist immortalizes such mementos of bygone eras with love and affection," Solamente says. "She captures the heart and soul of once-beautiful and most-likely handmade objects, an almost nonexistent reality in today's culture."

Chidester's painting *Records & Players* is highly personal, featuring a record player from her childhood, while her father's and friend's record collections are shrouded in mystery, filed in cases and stacked without titles. Other objects included, such as a cased-up clarinet and hand-crank record player, were found in antique stores, composed meticulously and captured in fine detail.





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One of Chidester's collectors, Peter Gladstone from Boston, says while the subject matter is comprised of artifacts from generations past, her work has a very contemporary feel.

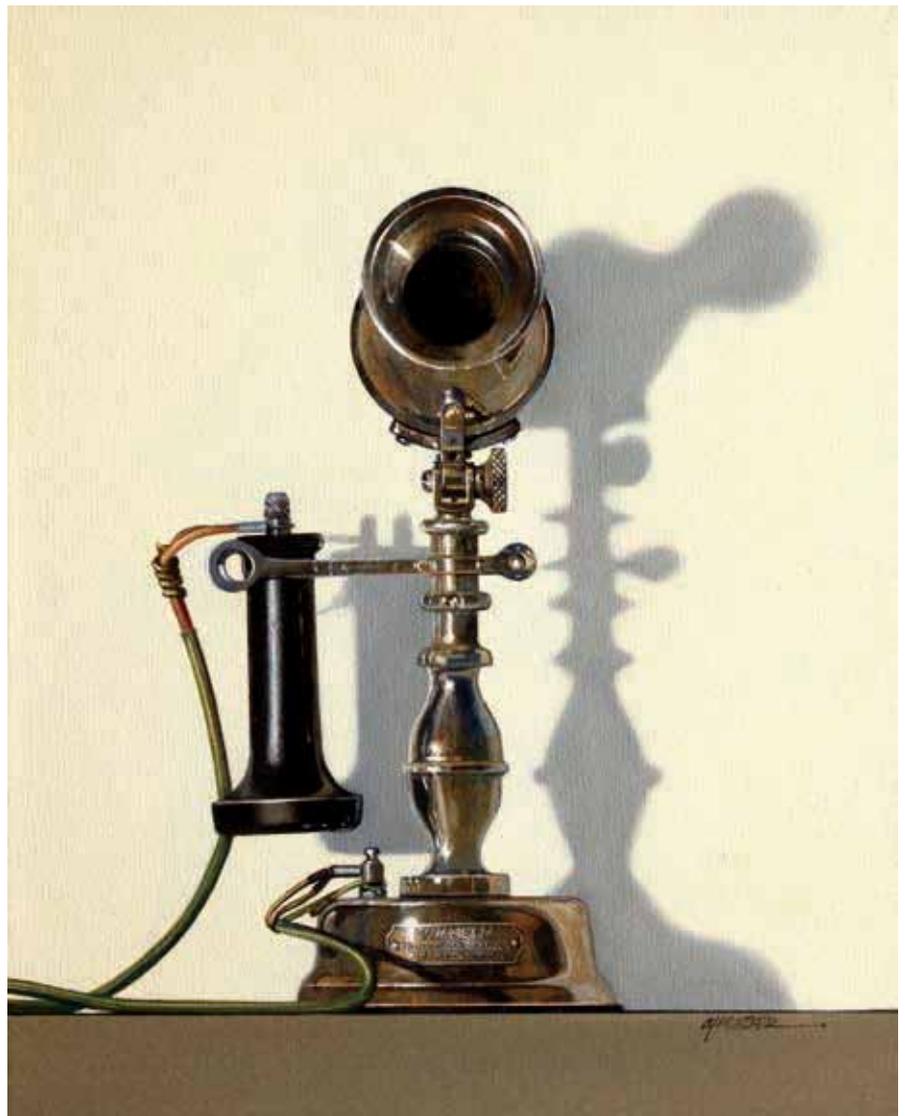
"There's something special about Wendy's still lifes that makes them recognizable from across a room," Gladstone says. "It's wonderful how much time you can lose by standing in front of one."

A similar experience is felt by those who see Chidester's work in Largay Travel, Inc., says owner Paul Largay, who purchased her work for his office.

"The best thing is that every client who views the painting pauses in front of it, reflects back to a simpler time, smiles, and walks away happier than they were when they arrived," Largay says. "I was captivated by the perfect selection of colors, shadow lighting and detailed execution. Wendy incorporated and blended a historic narrative with just the right amount of whimsy."

Chidester says she enjoys telling the story behind each painting with viewers, which allows them to share their own narratives.

"I would like the viewer to feel a reverence for the objects I paint," Chidester says. "Their story needs to be told to the younger generation who has no idea how to dial from a rotary phone or type a simple paragraph on a typewriter or what camera film is. I almost feel like I am giving a history lesson in each one of my paintings to the millennial generation. These objects once used on a daily basis need to be observed closely and remembered to truly be appreciated." ●



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1
Records & Players,
oil on canvas,
28 x 60"

2
Busy B, oil on
canvas, 25 x 22"

3
*Wilhelm Electric Company
1898*, oil on canvas,
25 x 20"

4
Keystone Regal K109,
oil on canvas, 45 x 40"