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Gallery of Geek: Rene Capone

By Adam Sandel

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Fifteen years ago, Rene Capone began his career as an artist creating dreamlike, sensual, often homoerotic images of young men in search of love, identity, and their place in the world. His paintings and drawings are highly prized by art aficionados, and

they now hang on the walls of private and corporate collectors around the world.

His works have been compiled in the books *Any Given Moment* and *A Boy Named*, both of which are available on Amazon.

He took a four-year absence from creating fine art to dig deep within his psyche and painful childhood to create a series of paintings that inspired his graphic novel *The Legend of Hedgehog Boy*. The novel struck a deep chord within many readers, and it transformed the artist as well.

Capone emerged from the experience with a renewed artistic vision and sense of purpose. *The Advocate* met with Rene Capone in his Oakland, Calif., studio to explore his artistic past, present, and future.

***The Advocate:* What inspires you to create images?**

Rene Capone: Usually they come from joy even if the image is somewhat sad. My images come from a place of defiance: people striving to find their place in life and be happy. I know some artists who say they can only work when they're miserable. I can only work when I'm pissed off, defiant, or happy.

There's a dreamlike quality to a lot of your work. Have you ever been inspired by actual dreams?

One of my favorite types of art is surrealism, so I'm drawn to blending images in a dreamlike way. Most of my dreams are too strange to put down on paper.

Do you consider your work to be erotic?

After 15 years of being an artist, not any longer. When I was younger, I was dealing with a lot of sexual images because of raging hormones. I was a horny boy! A lot of artists get really stuck in the erotic art bin because people expect them to do that. I didn't want to get stuck in that box. Now I'm more interested in mythic, heroic characters than anything overtly erotic. If characters appear naked, it's because they have nothing to hide. I prefer sensuality over blatant eroticism. Sensual is timeless, sex is not.

What inspired your series of paintings that led you to create the graphic novel *The Legend of Hedgehog Boy*?

I read a lot of Joseph Campbell's books on mythology and I had to confront who I was as a person and where I came from. That meant confronting my childhood, which included a lot of abuse. I decided to express my past and my struggles to overcome it by creating a character on a mythic quest with lots of symbolic images. He wears a hedgehog skin on his head to represent protection; there's a ripped teddy bear that's been sewn up and a bag of swords.

What impact did creating *The Legend of Hedgehog Boy* have on you?

It was an epic four-year adventure that almost killed me — but it changed my life. I completely stopped my fine art career to make that novel. Before *Hedgehog Boy* I was thought of as this perfect, ethereal, porcelain boy who created pretty pictures. After *Hedgehog Boy* I became known as this gritty, broken, defiant boy who had to find my way back to grace. Now I can stand up in front of people and be proud of who I am.

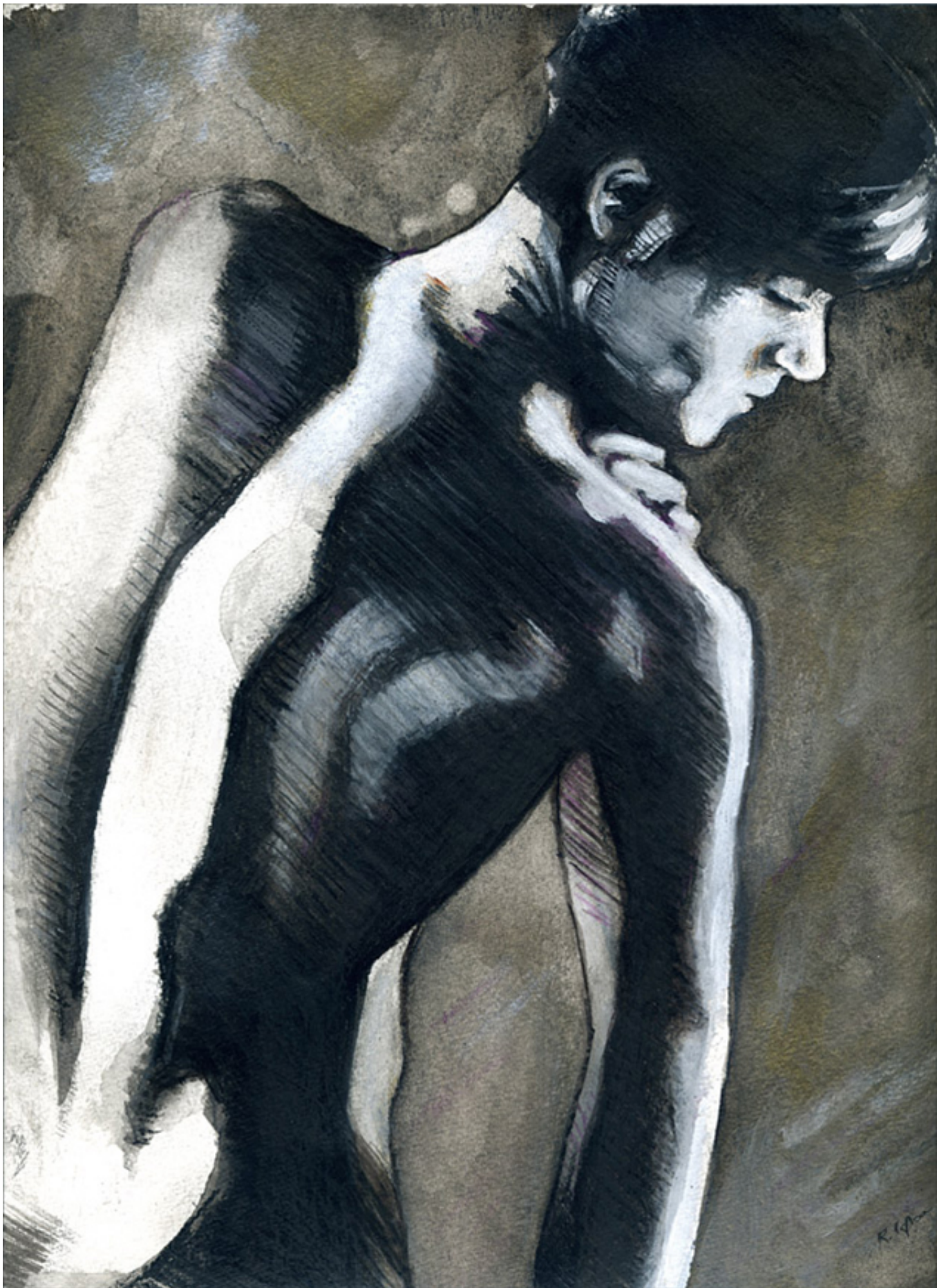
What were some of the reactions to *Hedgehog Boy* from readers?

I received so many letters and emails from kids and adults saying, "Thank you for making a character that represented me without judgment." People don't talk about child abuse or what it takes to survive it. You're supposed to just get on with your life. I was just commissioned to draw two boys in the style of characters from *Hedgehog Boy* that one is going to give to the other as an anniversary present. It lets me know that the book had much more of an impact than I realized.

What happened after your four-year adventure with *Hedgehog Boy*?

I didn't know if I could go back to fine art or if people would still respond to it. I returned to creating fine art and I worked like crazy to prove that I was still a figure painter. People embraced the new work, which was a very beautiful thing for me. Today I want my work to radiate love, not eroticism.

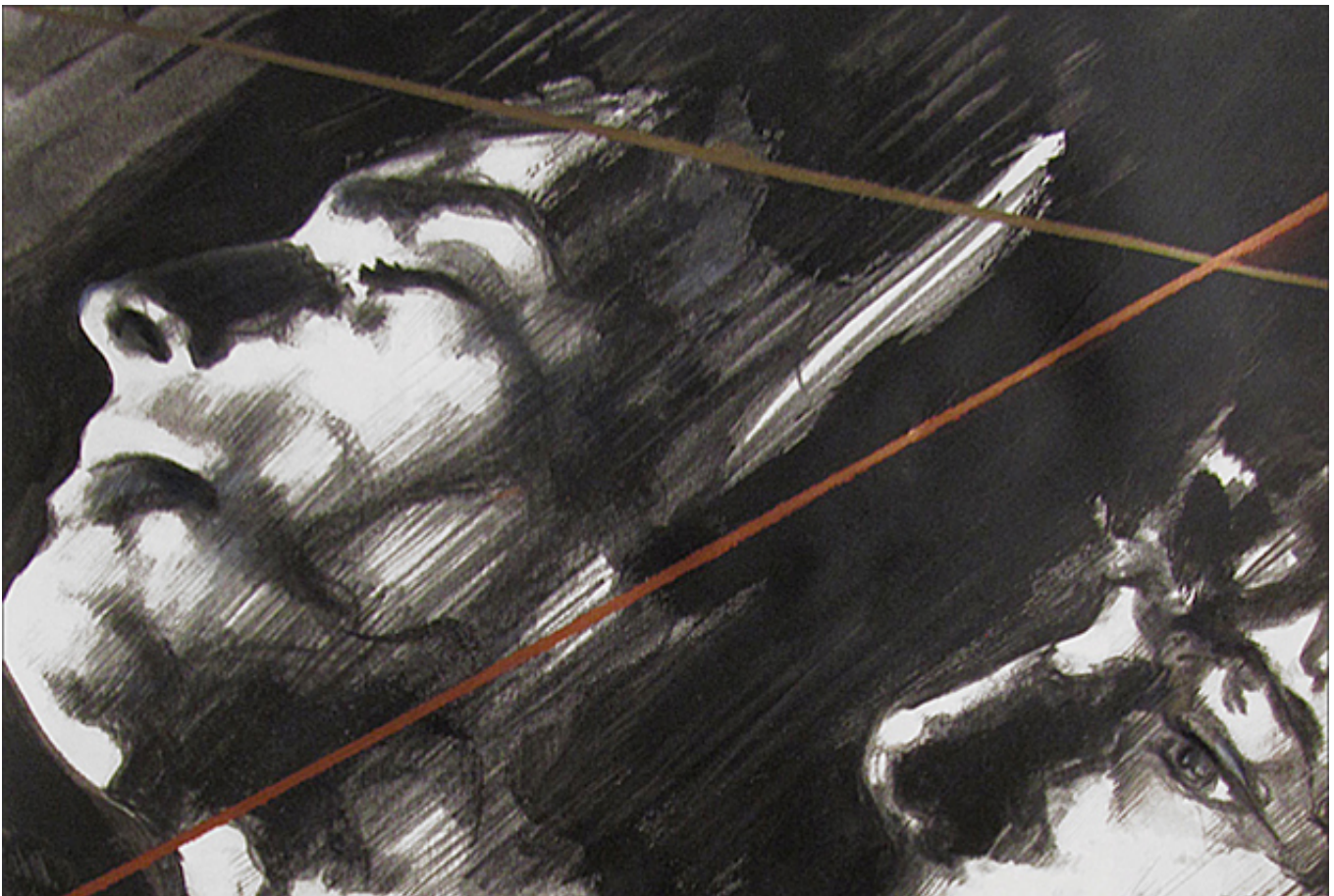
Check out a collection of Capone's art below, and to view more of his work and purchase prints by the artist, go to his website.



Boy Named Shadow, watercolor and ink, 9" x 12" (available)



Admitting Our Falls, ink and charcoal, 30" x 22" (sold)





Dangerous Beautiful Things, ink and pencil, 14" x 20" (available)



Escape by Swan, watercolor and color pencil, 22" x 30" (available)



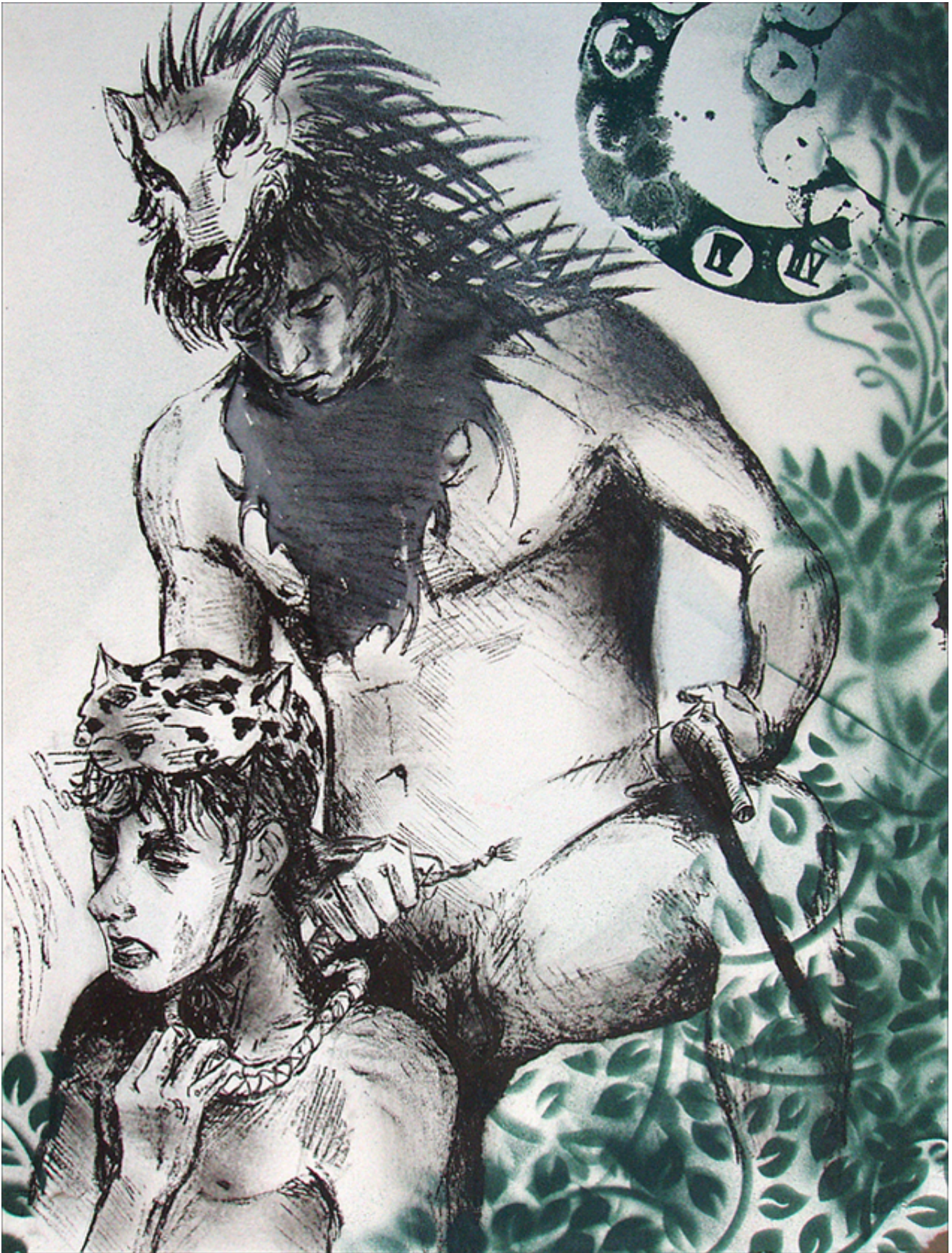
Hedgehog Boy — Legend, watercolor and mixed media, 20" x 24" (sold)



Hedgehog Boy — War, watercolor and mixed media, 30" x 18" (sold)



Hedgehog Boy — Nap, watercolor and mixed media, 20" x 16" (sold)



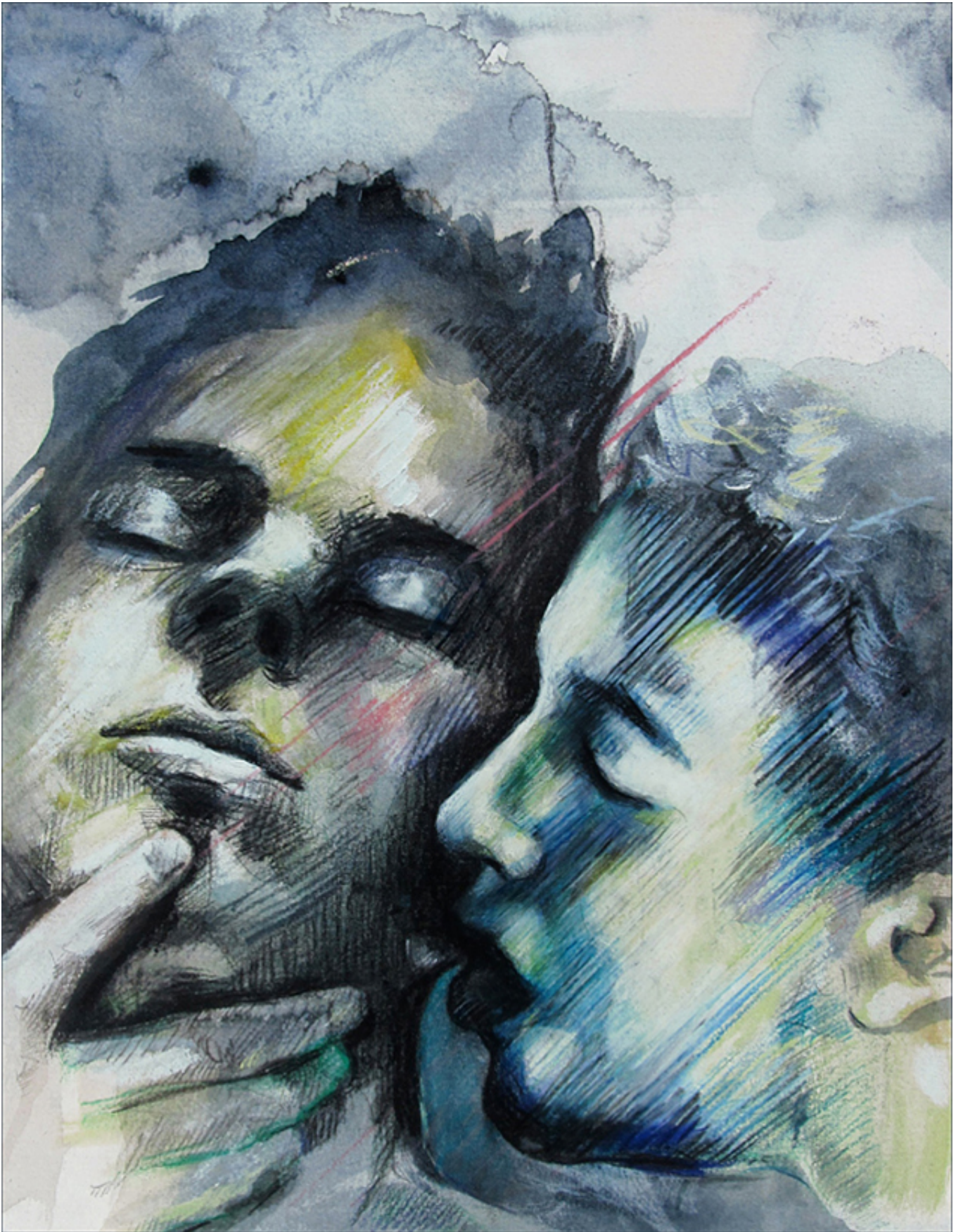
Hedgehog Boy — Captured, ink, 16" x 20" (available)



You Believe in Magic, acrylic, 36" x 24" (sold)



Law of Attraction, watercolor and ink, 12" x 9" (available)



Lost Lovers in Atlantis, watercolor and color pencil, 11" x 14" (available)



Pale Green Whisper, watercolor and color pencil, 11" x 14" (available)



Reluctant Grace, watercolor and color pencil, 22 "x 30"



Silver Stripped and Justified, watercolor and ink, 12" x 9" (available)





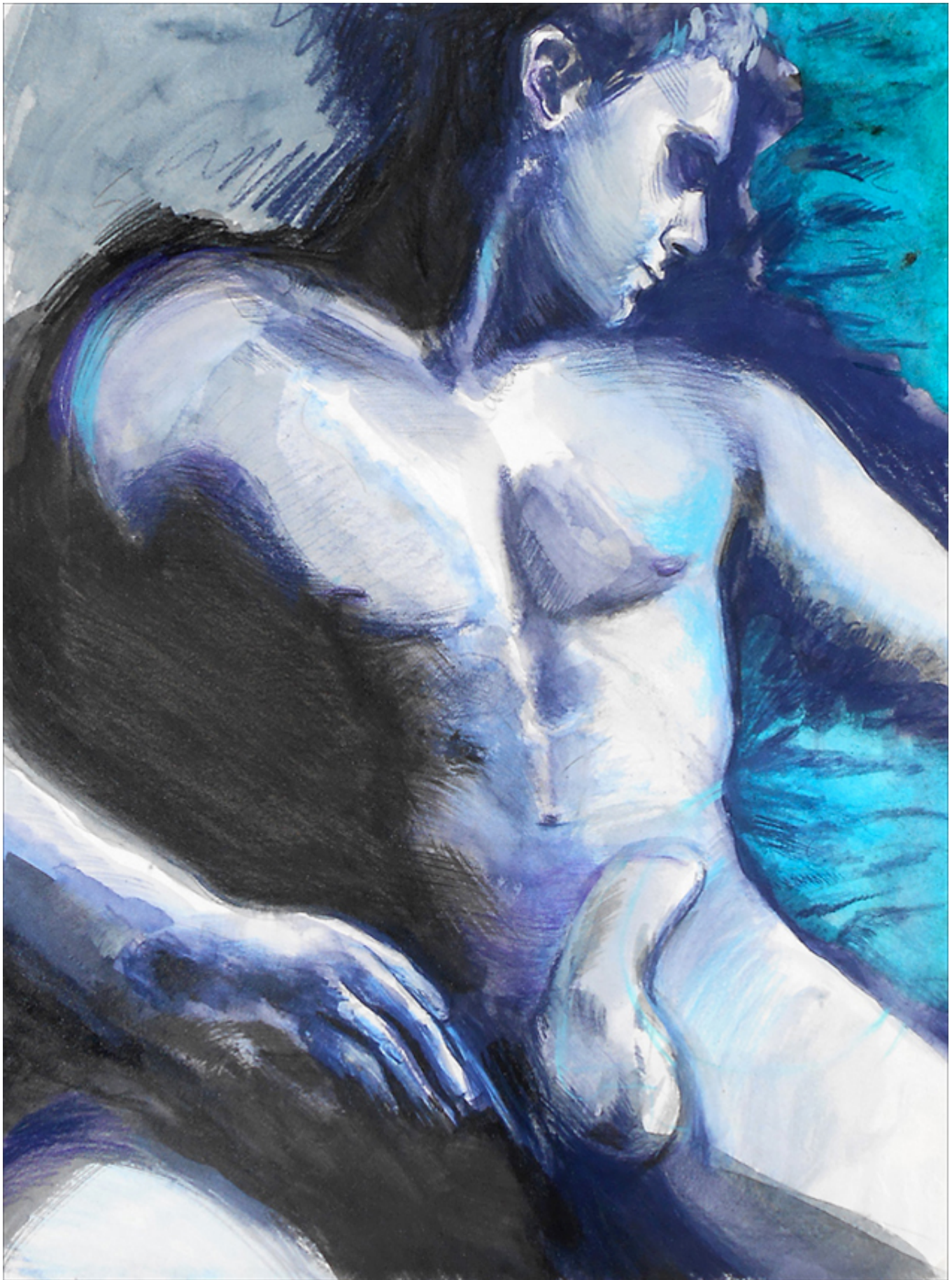
Splash of Blue, watercolor and color pencil, 22" x 30" (sold)



Love Seen Through Streaked Glass, watercolor and ink, 9" x 12" (available)



Two Crows, watercolor and ink, 9" x 12" (available)



Boys Blues, watercolor, 16" x 20" (available)



California Boy, watercolor and pencil, 12" x 9" (available)

Adam Sandel is an arts journalist, screenwriter, and playwright who lives in San Francisco. He has contributed to the Bay Area Reporter, Santa Cruz Sentinel, Los Angeles Times, dot429.com and StartOut.com. He teaches literature, critical thinking, and mythology & folklore at De Anza College.

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