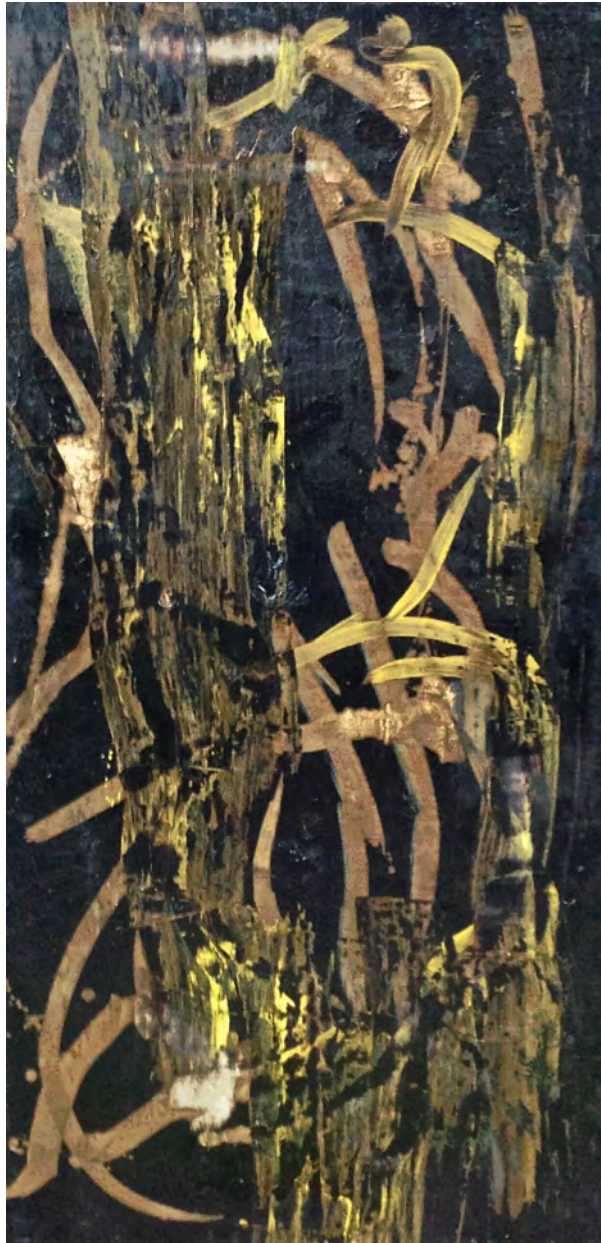


In order to best view this paper and its video content, please download this PDF and open it in [Acrobat Reader](#).

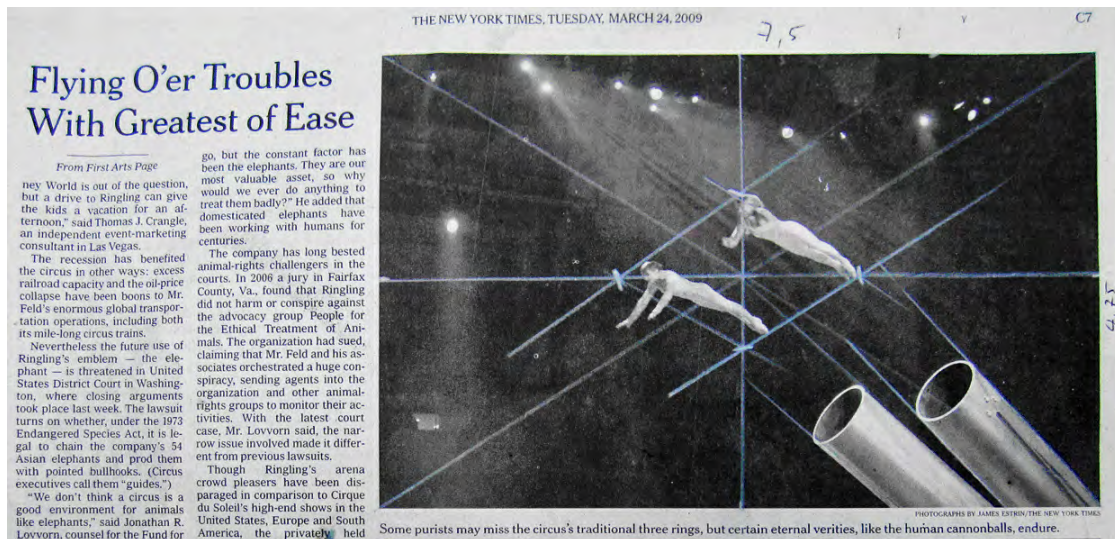


## **Cannonballing into Tar**

**Matthias Leutrum**

I have divided this presentation into three parts. To begin, I will introduce the human cannonball theme and some of my paintings that are based upon it. In the second part I will give a condensed history of the human cannonball act and talk about how that history connects to my current understanding of the subject. And to conclude, we'll take a look at how the cannonball theme has evolved in my most recent work.

Four years ago I came across this image in the arts section of the *New York Times* and was immediately stopped in my tracks. I had never been a big circus kid growing up and this photo was my very first introduction to the whole phenomenon of human cannonballs. What struck me immediately was the spectacle of these two figures being propelled into space at the same time as they were suspended in the frozen frame of the photograph. This contradictory tension carried a wealth of visual possibilities. And with every-one of those possibilities came questions.



**Figure 1** New York Times article

I began addressing some of these questions by working on a painting drawn directly from the source image.



**Figure 2** First Human Cannonball Painting, 36" x 48", oil on canvas, 2009

I remember the process as being slow going and tentative as I tried to sort out the visual problems presented by the image, the 2 dimensionality of my canvas versus the 3 dimensionality of the actual event. Meanwhile I was also trying to mentally get inside and under the skin of the performers. I tried to develop a physical understanding in my own body of what was happening to them during their act. How did they experience and process the forces of propulsion, flight and free fall?

I proceeded by tracking down more human cannonball imagery and by looking at the event from different angles. Let's look at a few amateur clips to get a sense of what I'm talking about. In general the performer is "shot" out of the cannon using either a system of springs or compressed air. The explosion and fireworks at the mouth of the cannon are bogus, entirely for show; they exist simply to add to the illusion and theatrics of the event.



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The collection of all this new visual information led to more questions.

Is the cannon going to be a part of the painting, or not? Should there be smoke or not? Will the figure(s) be ascending or plummeting. Or both?

How to convey the powers at work, explosive at the beginning of the act, fast and furious during the flight phase, earth bound and heavy at the end?

This group of paintings shows some of my responses to these questions.

A few of the pieces focused on the problems of depicting speed and the forces of eruption in a still image. Others as you can see, emphasize the campier aspects of the performance: the red gloves and boots and the red body suit. Some explore twisted and unusual positions and postures, a sort of Kamasutra of the human cannonball.



**Figure 3** Top row: 36" x 60", oil on canvas, 2010; 36" x 60", oil on canvas, 2010; 36" x 66", oil on canvas, 2010; 42" x 65", oil on canvas, 2010; Bottom row: 46" x 52", oil on linen, 2009; 48" x 60", oil on canvas, 2009; 48" x 60", oil on linen, 2009



**Figure 4** Specter, 42" x 56", oil on canvas, 2010

In "Specter" I started out with the cannon as part of the composition but ultimately erased it. Instead I focused on the sensation of the body being suspended in mid-air, still accelerating, as if rising to the surface from deep water.



**Figure 5** State Fair, 52" x 80", mixed media on canvas, 2010

In this piece called "State Fair" the new element that entered the picture was that I made the audience part of the painting. This happened in such a way that the performer became sandwiched in between the different witnesses of the event.

In general the larger fact that seemed to be emerging was the back and forth between a more whimsical take on the cannonball act, its cartoon-like superhero quality and a more serious and dramatic take that emphasized the risk and danger.

In "Head First" 1 and 2 I tried to capture both the exhilaration and the scariness of flight and free fall, the possibility of either a benign or catastrophic ending to the act of falling through the air.

They are also anatomical studies of bodies in motion and a step in my process of visually understanding what was physically happening to the protagonists in the paintings.



**Figure 6** Head First I, and II, 48" x 72", 50" x 72", oil on canvas, 2009 / 2010





**Figure 7** Human Cannonball Painting, 48" x 60", oil on linen, 2009

In this piece I believe that I am loosening up a bit, focusing less on the describing of the event but letting it take shape through the materials. The descriptive aspects that aren't completely fleshed out, which are more suggested or hinted at, are just as present if not more so.

This approach led to a less anatomical and literal take on the figure and a more experience-based understanding of the bodies, such as in the next piece entitled...



**Figure 8** Curled / Uncurled, 60" x 72", mixed media on canvas, 2010

"Curled" / "Uncurled". This painting really was the first time that I tried to create more of a cipher of the falling body rather than an anatomically "correct" depiction of it. I wanted the bodies to develop from the inside out, as from a muscle memory of the cannonball event. I wanted to visually experience and relate the arched movement from the toes all the way to the finger tips in the figure on the right. And in the smaller figure on the left I wanted to find a visual equivalent for the feeling of extreme extension of the left arm during the fall. So what might look anatomically "incorrect" is visually true from the point of view of the physical experience.

In the two "Double Shot" pieces and in "Quartet" I became an air traffic controller of sorts coordinating the different flight paths, avoiding collisions and spatially organizing my flat canvas yet still trying to convey a feeling of spaciousness. Visually "Quartet" is intended to work both horizontally and vertically. The red, white and blue cannon barrels became a sort of "flag painting", especially when viewed horizontally.



**Figure 9** Double Shot I, 50" x 70", oil on canvas, 2010, Double Shot II, 42" x 48", oil on canvas, 2010; Quartet, 64" x 90", oil on canvas, 20

These two paintings tackle the sequencing of the cannonball act. The idea was to capture the event in a manner reminiscent of a "Muybridge" photograph, showing all the flight phases in one take. Also of interest to me was the interplay and contrast between the graphite powder, the free flowing paint and the more defined spaces of the bodies, in the piece up top. In the sequence painting below the figures are really developing out of the "stuff" of the oil paint and become more of a mark, a trace or track of the flight path rather than depictions of bodies in motion.



**Figure 10** Sequence I, 36" x 72", graphite and mixed media on canvas, 2010, Sequence II, 16" x 39", oil on canvas, 2010

At this point things became increasingly about something being “under control”, because of my increasing familiarity with the subject matter and “out of control” because I was taking more risks with the choice and use of materials and tools.



**Figure 11** Smoke and Mirrors, 48” x 96”, mixed media on canvas, 2010

Speaking of “under control” and “out of control!” “Smoke and Mirrors” really was about giving up control and working fast on the whole surface of the canvas all at once. I wanted the background and the figures to be equally important. Ultimately the painting came together in a constant back and forth of drawing first one then two figures and erasing them, like I was obscuring them in smoke. I reworked the entire canvas each time and started afresh. There was one human cannonball at first, but somewhere in the process the figure on the left became doubled up as a mirror image. The resulting symmetry actually fused the two bodies into one continuous mark, one cipher that is coming straight at you.



**Figure 12** Study for Human Cannonball Triptych, 16" x 20" each, mixed media on canvas, 2010

For a show in Northampton in 2010 I decided to create a large-scale triptych that would take advantage of the gallery's long, divided walls and focus my thinking about the human cannonballs. This initial study is comprised of the three distinct phases of the act: launch, flight and plummet. Originally, as you can see, I intended the middle panel to show the figure flying over a Ferris wheel as in one of the video clips we saw earlier. But when done on a larger scale, that diminished the impact of the flying body by drawing attention to the more anecdotal element of the Ferris wheel. So I dropped that part of the plan.

These snap shots show a bit of my work process on the triptych. One of the challenges with the triptych was to have the three paintings be cohesive but also work individually as self-contained pieces.



**Figure 13** Work process on triptych

As I was trying to “activate” all areas of each individual panel I turned the canvases on their side or upside down to avoid a too heavily “one sided” image. In that process, the trajectory of the body from the cannon barrel into the net found an equivalent in the way the paint was dripping and running down the surface of the canvas. Following the paint travel down the panel became completely absorbing and almost as much of a kick for me as watching the cannonball act itself.

So let’s look at the panels individually.



**Figure 14** Launch, 72" x 84", mixed media on linen, 2010

In "Launch" the human cannonball is emerging from the cannon. The surface of the painting is amorphous and liquid and somewhat "vague" or undefined as one can observe in the settling of the smoke right after the fake "explosion" at the launch.





**Figure 15** In-flight, 72" x 84", mixed media on linen, 2010

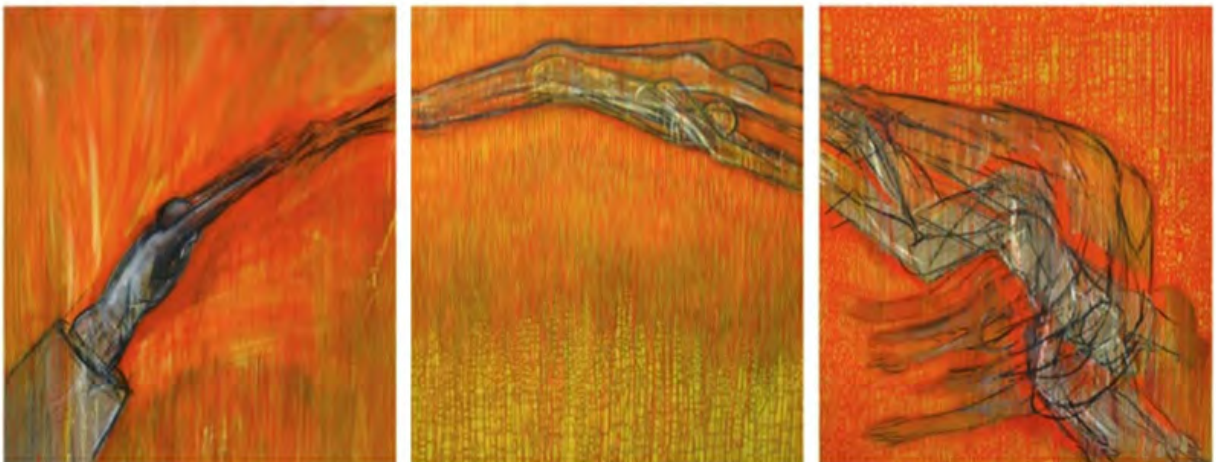
"In-flight" shows both the highest point in the arc of the event and the beginning of the descent. Visually I felt that the figure needed somehow to receive buoyancy by the surroundings, as if the surroundings themselves were keeping the body in the air. The yellow highlighting of the negative spaces in-between the vertical and horizontal drip marks seemed to do the trick.



**Figure 16** Plummet, 72" x 84", mixed media on linen, 2010

In "Plummet" all these elements come together for the grand finale.

The patterns and traces created by the drip marks press down on the figure and emphasize the flight track of the falling body.



**Figure 17** A view of the finished triptych

As I was working on the large triptych, I decided to work on a slightly smaller version that would show events from another perspective. The figures would be frontal and the vantage point of the viewer would be different. The launch remained the starting point, but the pieces read from right to left instead of left to right and the emphasis would be on the flight phase. The composition here, as you can see, is based on the diagonal as opposed to the arc.



**Figure 18** Second Triptych, 60" x 72" each, mixed media on canvas, 2010



**Figure 19** Launch, 60" x 72", mixed media on canvas, 2010

So here we have the "Launch" panel with the focused, intensely inward looking protagonist emerging from the cannon barrel.



**Figure 20** Forty-Five Degrees, 60" x 72", mixed media on canvas, 2010

In "Forty Five Degrees" the figure developed out of the grid that was created by the flow of paint and the highlighted negative spaces. The viewer is positioned directly under the figure that is passing overhead, a bit like standing at the end of a runway at night with planes passing directly over you.



**Figure 21** Third section of triptych, 60" x 72", mixed media on canvas, 2010

This triptych has a "happy ending" so to speak: it's the flight that doesn't end. The figure is quite literally flying off the grid that was present in *Forty-Five degrees*, instead of crashing to the ground.

It definitely seems a more open-ended piece and to me conveys a feeling of levity and liberating fun.



**Figure 22** Tight Spot, 50" x 66", mixed media on canvas, 2010, original source image

In my search for new angles on the cannonball act I came across this photograph of a performer inside the barrel, moments before being launched. While working on the piece based on this unusual photo, the expression of the person anticipating the impending launch shifted many times. In the finished painting it seems to me one of focused and confident determination as opposed to the whiff of apprehension and concern that seems to be detectable in the photograph. I came to consider this painting to be a kind of self-portrait.

As I recently began to do some historical research on human cannonball phenomena for this conference, I was really dumb-struck by a number of intriguing themat-

ic elements and cultural connections that seemed more than just coincidental. They made me wonder if perhaps there wasn't an element of self-portraiture in all of these paintings.

Here now is some of what I discovered.

The history of the human cannonball act, as it turns out, is a story of cross-pollination and cross-migration, from the United States to Europe in the 19th century and then back to the States from Europe in the 20th century. And on top of it we have the three countries of the fascist axis, Germany, Japan and Italy, connected through this revival and its subsequent export and re-introduction to the "new world."

In 1871 William Hunt of Port Hope, Ontario, widely known as "The Great Farini," patented a device for launching human projectiles. In 1873, at Niblo's Garden here in New York City, Samuel Wasgate, also known as "Lulu, the Human Meteor," became the first person to use Farini's device. The act was called "The Lulu Leap" and propelled Lulu 40 feet into the air to catch a trapeze. Farini had adopted Sam as a young boy and initially marketed him as "El Nino Farini" for performance purposes. But because Sam had a feminine build and maybe because Farini thought the audience would be more titillated by that, he transformed him into "Lulu," a girl, to engage potential audiences. So, interestingly, the first human cannonball acts contained an element of drag.



When, after an accident and his admission to the hospital, Lulu's true gender was discovered and made public, great upset struck "her" male fans. They had been misled into an unwitting/ non-consensual homoerotic fantasy. Despite the sexual ambiguity, or maybe because of it, Lulu returned to performing quite successfully, as can be seen in these later photographs that clearly show him as a man albeit in rather racy and gender bending outfits.

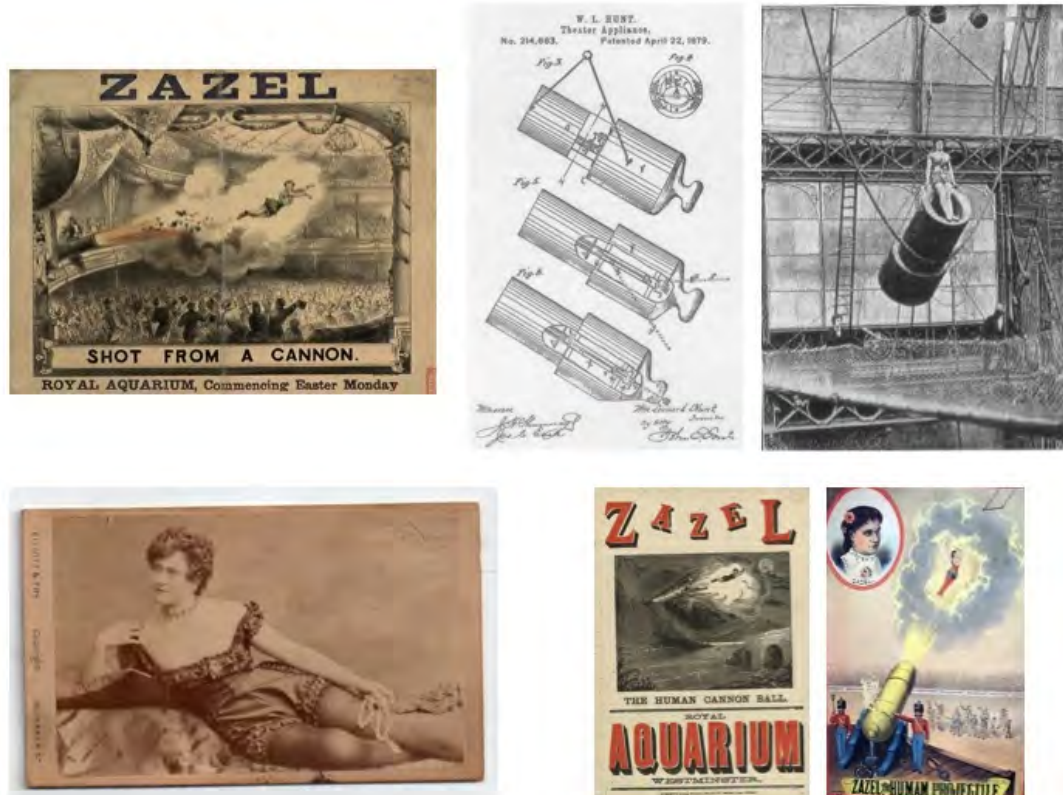


**Figure 23** Top Row: 1. William Hunt, "The Great Farini", 2. William Leonard Hunt and his adopted son, Sam, as El Nino Farini, 3. Sam as "Lulu", 4. Vintage poster for Lulu performance Bottom Row: 4. 'Lulu' (El Nino Farini) as a man 5. "Lulu", Sam in men's clothes after being discovered to be male, 6. Vintage Lulu poster after Lulu has been exposed as male. Images #2,3 and 5 from The Victoria & Albert Museum/Guy Little Theatrical Photography Collection.

In 1877 Rossa Matilda Richter, a 14 year old girl, whose stage name was "Zazel," became for all intents and purposes the first official Human Cannonball. This happened at the Royal Westminster Aquarium in London where The Great Farini was the manager at the time.

In the middle of the slide you see William Hunt's design of his cannon and on the right Zazel at the Royal Aquarium performing her act. Zazel was fired from the cannon to the top of the pavilion where she caught a trapeze and leaped, head first, into the net while a band was playing below.

"Zazel" became the brand name of the human cannonball act, with performers all over the country using it, as you can see in this sampling of vintage posters.



**Figure 24** Top row: Zazel at The Royal Aquarium, vintage poster 2. Drawing of cannon patent issued to William L. Hunt in 1879 3. Zazel, First Human Cannonball, 1877 English photographer (image 2 & 3 appear in Bandwagon November 1976, Circus Historical Society) Bottom row: 4. Zazel, Rossa Matilda Richter, vintage photo 5. Zazel at The Royal Aquarium, vintage poster 6. "Zazel the Human Projectile", vintage poster, Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin

The huge popularity of Human Cannonball acts began to diminish in the 1890's and they mostly disappeared from the world of the circus and popular entertainment. But imagine my surprise when I discovered that a revival started taking shape, out of all places, in the Germany of the 1920s. Paul Leinert (top left corner) and his sons built a cannon that was modeled on a large artillery cannon used in World War I by the Ger-

man army. A second cannon built by Leinert found its way to Japan in 1931 and was in use there through the mid-thirties. In Italy the Zacchini family (two brothers and their 6 sons and 2 daughters) captured public imagination with their revival and revamping of the human cannonball spectacle. The Zacchinis' act was picked up and shipped to the United States by John Ringling in 1929 Julius Jäger also known as "Cliff Aeros" is another German circus performer who built and used cannons in the 20s. His act was performed at the Sells-Floto circus in Chicago in 1929

And last but not least, I will discuss Willi Wiedrich, from Dresden, later known as "The Great Wilno."

Willi Wiedrich met the original Zazel, by then a retired high wire artist, while working as an acrobat in England. And it is Zazel who inspired him to revive the human cannonball act. So "The Great Wilno" built himself a cannon, hit the road and arrived in the United States in 1929 as well.



**Figure 25** Top row: Paul Leinert being shot from the cannon and waving from the mouth of the cannon, Berlin, 1920s 2. Sells-Floto Circus Poster, Erie Litho Co. ca. 1929 3. Julius Jaeger, "Cliff Aeros", vintage photograph. Middle image . 4. Hugo Zacchini autograph Circus Magazine page Bottom Row: 5. Willi Wiedrich, "The Great Wilno", vintage photo, ca. 1933 6. Egle Zacchini being shot from the cannon, photos taken by Cornell Capa in March 1948, first published April 26, 1948, LIFE Magazine

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As I was sorting through all these fascinating details about the history of my theme of the past few years, an intriguing possibility began to assert itself: What if the story that I had been telling, about how I found the original human cannonball image "by accident" and reacted so strongly to it was a little more complex than that? Not so much a "chance encounter" but a story of cultural imprinting in which I responded to the viewing of the first cannonball image like a receptor to a chemical that is needed to open a lock. And once this "activation," this "cracking of the code" had taken place, I was able to confirm and access the knowledge of something that was there all along but that had been dormant and inaccessible to me until that very moment.

Due to my father's profession, my own family had to pick up and move many times, had to adapt to different cultures and countries, not unlike the members of a traveling circus, always wondering where and what the next gig was going to be. And I remembered that, later, as an adolescent when I was in boarding school in Germany, a small circus passed through our sleepy Bavarian town and the circus kids showed up in class for a few days---and then just as they had appeared, they were gone. As different as their upbringing and daily life surely was from mine, I do recall feeling a sort of visceral kinship with them.

So aspects of my family's itinerant biographies intersect with the history of these human cannonball shows. They mirror this circus act. Granted the comparison to a "circus act" works for any number of families. That said, I couldn't help but wonder about the extent to which I had been tuning into a cultural transmission of the kind that all of us carry around within ourselves, one that gets triggered, consciously and unconsciously, by certain events, images and markers along the trajectory of our lives?

No wonder then that I considered "Tight Spot", (the painting of the person squeezed inside the cannon barrel, before the launch), a self-portrait. All of a sudden,

my involvement with the cannonball theme that had at times seemed a little strange or peculiar to me made such poignant sense. Everything in and about it screamed "Matthias, these human cannonballs are about you!"

Now, before I show you some more recent paintings and how the human cannonball theme evolved for me before these recent discoveries, I want to share with you two other takes on the idea of the human projectile that caught my attention. The first one by Stanley Kubrick is from the iconic scene of Major King riding the bomb in "Dr. Strange Love," the second clip is from the 1943, German movie "Adventures of the Baron Münchhausen." Some of the visual metaphors as you will see are quite astonishing and allow for a whole new set of associations and connections. I've placed them at this particular juncture in the presentation since they bring in a few of the more disturbing aspects of the cannonball theme, disturbing because something similar happened in my personal journey with the cannonball paintings, if not nearly as dramatic as this.





The fresh but slightly menacing addition to my cannonball story arrived in the form of another media photograph, this time of a boxer, training vigorously on a dummy. Once I decided to bring him into play with the human cannonball the visual result was the propelled body being forcefully obstructed and halted by the boxer. It was as if the force of the human cannonball had found its anti-force, its dark or shadow side. The human cannonball meets Darth Vader. The painting became the playing field of the collision of these opposing forces.



**Figure 26** Human Cannonball Painting / Boxer, 48" x 96", roofing tar, mixed media on plywood, 2012, original source image New York Times, 4/20/2011

This piece also marked the introduction of two new materials that had been left over from a construction project at my studio: roofing tar and plywood. I circled that barrel of roofing tar for a while, wanting to use it but not quite sure what I could do with it. Finally I decided to spackle the tar onto the rugged surface of the plywood. Drawing into the thick and sticky roofing tar feels like treading through molasses or having your mouth full of peanut butter. Moving through it with a brush or a pastel stick is a messy and unpleasant business, a physical struggle and challenge. The tar is extremely resistant to any kind of manipulation and therefore makes working on top of it a very deliberate gesture of imposing your will onto the material all the while having to accept its strict limitations.

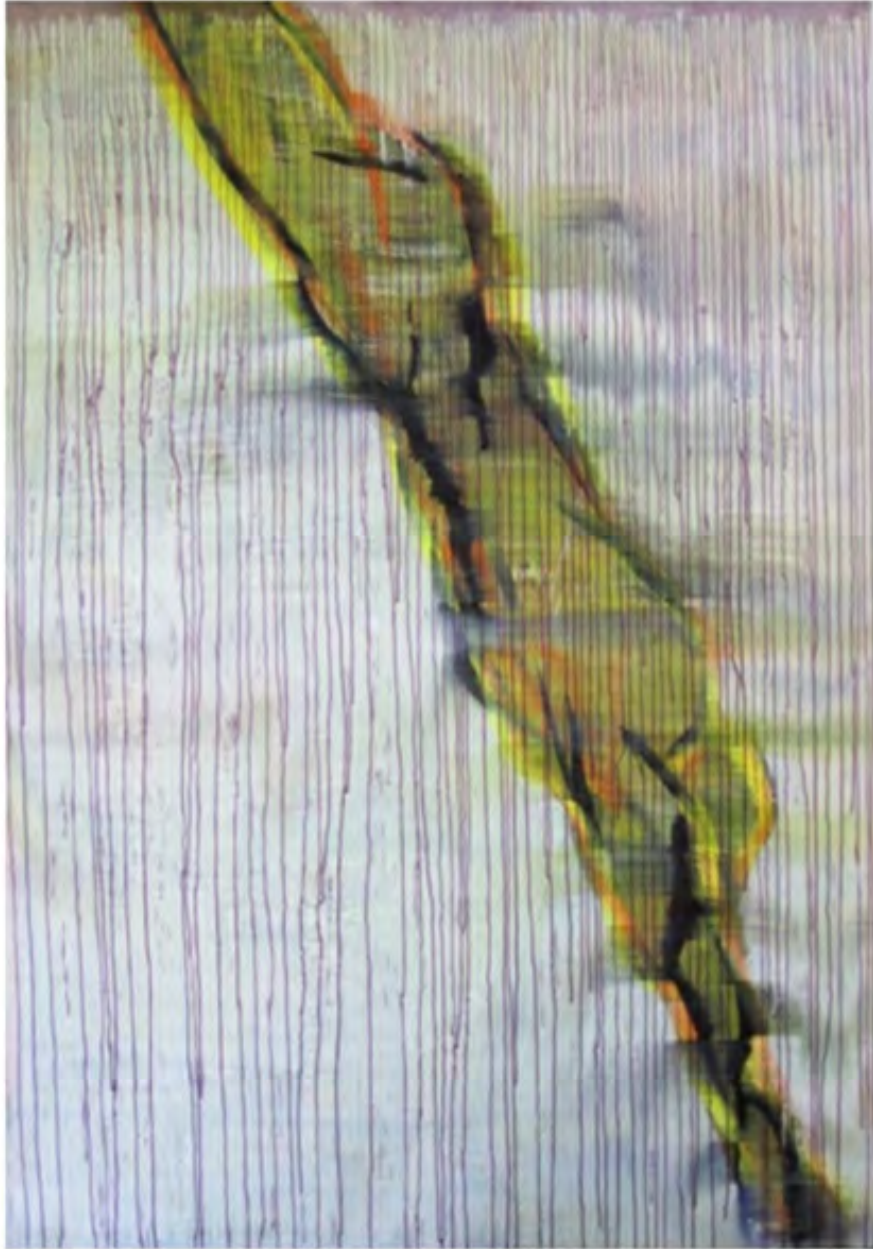
But there is something alluring in that messiness and stickiness of the tar. In these two pieces I superimposed and accumulated cannonball and boxer images on top of each other with the goal of creating a dense and energized surface on top of this awkward material. Applying highly diluted paint with the brush onto the repellent, goeey and somewhat hostile roofing tar is actually quite seductive and sexy.



**Figure 27** Left: Human Cannonball Painting, 24" x 32", roofing tar, mixed media on plywood, 2012; Right: Human Cannonball Painting, 48" x 96", roofing tar, mixed media on plywood, 2012

In "Chute" some of the liquid, free flowing elements of the large triptych from 2010 encounter the resistant qualities of the roofing tar material. The dripping paint and the brush strokes that are arrested and smudged by the roofing tar come together to create what looks to me like a body in free fall with incredibly strong g-forces acting upon it.





**Figure 28** Chute, 60" x 87", mixed media on canvas, 2012

Then, during a trip through South East Asia in 2011, I encountered the antithesis to the dark energy of the boxer, and discovered yet another facet of what being a human cannonball can look like.



**Figure 29** Human Cannonballs / Luang Prabang, 54" x 72", mixed media on canvas, 2012

I took this photograph in Luang Prabang, an ancient Buddhist capital in Northern Laos. Every morning between 5.00 and 6.00 AM monks of all ages follow a designated route through the town and receive alms, mostly in the form of sticky rice. The monks never make eye contact with the alms givers. They open and present their pales in a simple sweeping motion to each person that they pass, and close it after the food has been deposited. This procession is called the "Tak Bat." It is impressive in its simplicity and in the way in which it codifies an exchange in which a perfect balance between giving and receiving appears to have been struck. The transaction seems equally beneficial to both parties: the monks have food for the day and the inhabitants, who are free to partake in the ritual or not, have started their day with a gesture of generosity.

In the photo the steady flow of these meditative and inwardly focused "human cannonballs," their swaying orange robes, seems to constitute one single movement, filling past the man who is giving out the sticky rice.

The association between the original human cannonballs, the boxer and now the monks from Luang Prabang might seem far-flung, but they are connected in my mind by the same trait of inward looking, fierce focus. All three of them, to be successful in their respective endeavors need to be fully on/fully tuned into both their bodies and their minds.

In the above painting based on this image I attempted to capture that quality and the trajectory of these "human cannonballs," in a rhythmic line, a hand written sign or character with and through my material. In this particular instant I was using oil sticks over roofing tar and paint.



**Figure 30** Turning Monk, 26" x 77", mixed media on canvas, 2011  
Human Cannonball / Luang Prabang, 48" x 96", mixed media on canvas, 2012

This second photo from Luang Prabang, shows a monk as he turns a street corner during the "Tak Bat".

The motivation for this painting was surely all the movement, flowing in many directions that you can observe in the fabric of the robe and in the turning body. I tried to capture it in the study on the left. In the large piece on the right I attempted to bring all of these elements together in a composition of vibrating strings. I broke down the literal and descriptive image as far as I could without losing the actual figure. The superimpositions, drippings and colored lines, or "strings" create a phantom or ghost image of this human cannonball.



**Figure 31** Human Cannonball Painting / Boxer, 48" x 60", mixed media on canvas, 2012  
Human Cannonball Painting / Luang Prabang, 42" x 56", mixed media on canvas, 2012

Finally, side-by-side we have the two variations on the original human cannonball idea. On the left side the ascending and accelerating figure being forcefully obstructed by the boxer and on the right side the flying human cannonball passing through the turning monk.



**Figure 32** Human Cannonball Painting, 54" x 68", mixed media on canvas, 2012

This painting, the final one in last year's presentation, brings together a lot of the different strands of thought and approaches to the human cannonball theme.

That may sound a little pat, but the making of this piece was not particularly pleasurable or uplifting, more of a chore and a protracted slugging through many stages really. At the end, just as I was going to give up, things came together. On a good day that can happen.

Incidentally I used most of the tools and materials in this one piece that I had used in all the other cannonball pieces. I painted, poured, scraped, spackled, scratched and drew. The paint was liquid and dripping at times, thick and controlled at other mo-

ments. The surface seems to be barely holding together by a grid that is breaking open but provides just enough stability for the action to unfold, for the trajectories and flight tracks/marks to take their places. I thought of this piece as a summary of sorts, a tipping point and also as the launching pad for the explorations ahead.

Following the presentation at the "Art and Psyche in the City" conference, I returned to my studio energized by all the feedback and exchanges. Having talked about the process and the discoveries behind the many layers of the Human Cannonball Paintings positioned me in a new way towards the work, allowing me to recalibrate my approach.

My method took on a slightly more structured and deliberate aspect. Since I had gained some perspective on the characteristics of the roofing tar, its interaction with the paints and the content in play, I was able to zero in more precisely on the interface of these components in the moment I was making the paintings.

I made sure that all the necessary elements were prepared and ready at hand. I spread the roofing tar onto a sheet of plywood. I tried to minimize any planning or preconception of an image. I took a deep breath and launched myself into the void where anything could occur. I painted, drew, scraped on top of the wet, sticky surface that was lying flat on the floor. I responded to whatever was happening in the moment, completely, instinctively and within the limitations of my materials.

Whatever came together in that particular window of time seemed utterly random yet completely necessary and logical. It also felt immensely spontaneous and direct. With each panel I seemed to loosen up a bit more and be able to be more "artless," more present and less self-conscious.

I liken this process to a kind of "tea ceremony with tar."

It is comprised of three stages:

1. The preparing, assembling and bringing together of all the elements of the "ceremony," the tar, the paints and various brushes and tools. This has a pedestrian yet also almost ritualistic aspect to it. The spackling of the tar onto the plywood is an intense, very physical but sort of meditative job that is also dependant on the outside temperature as it influences the consistency of the tar and how it interacts with the paint.



**Figure 33** Stage one - preparing



**Figure 34** Stage two - marking the prepared surface

2. The marking of the prepared surface. The tension and the release of having all of these components interact in a very short time frame with great density.

3. Lastly, the cleanup of the materials and the contemplation of what occurred while the piece “put itself together” so to speak. This is also the time when I frequently turn my attention to smaller works on paper. Since at that moment I tend to be at my loosest after the physical intensity of working on the large formats. Following are a series of studio shots taken after these painting sessions.



**Figure 35** Studio shot

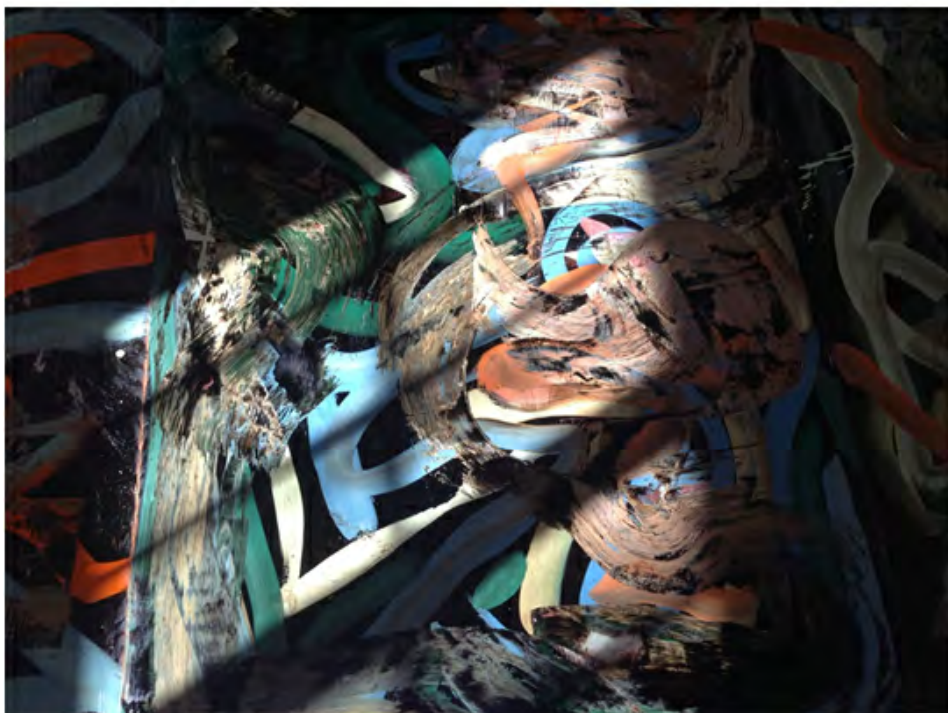




**Figure 36** Studio shot



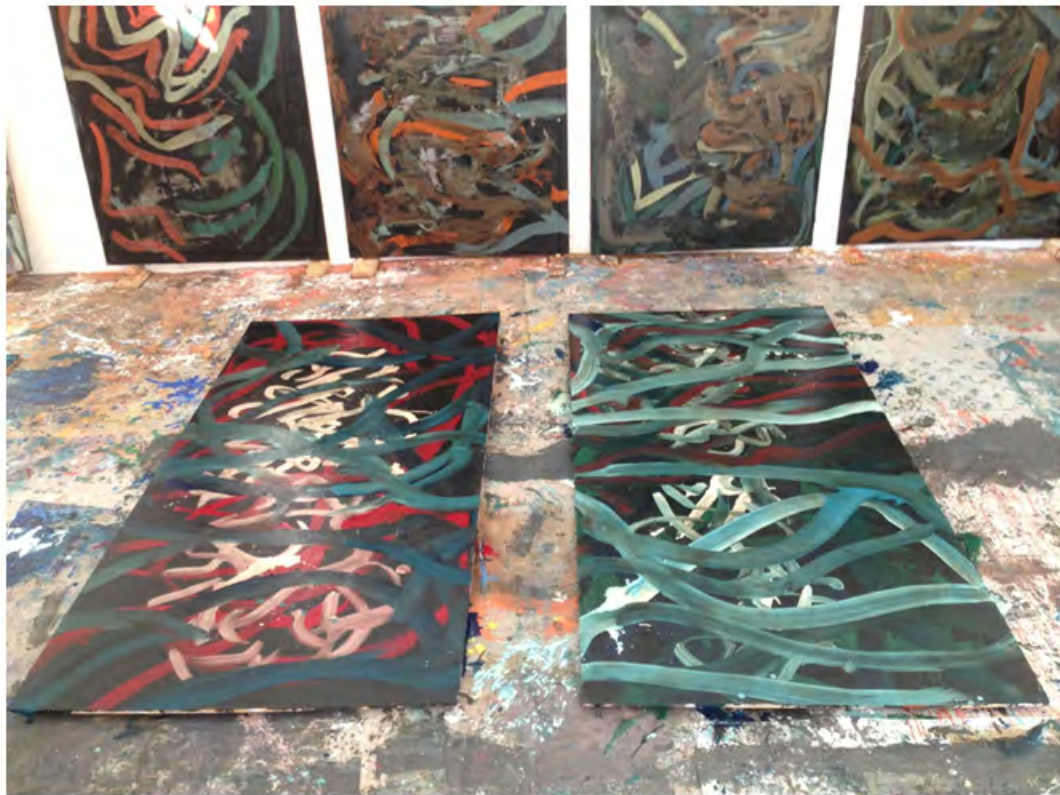
**Figure 37** Studio shot



**Figure 38** Studio shot

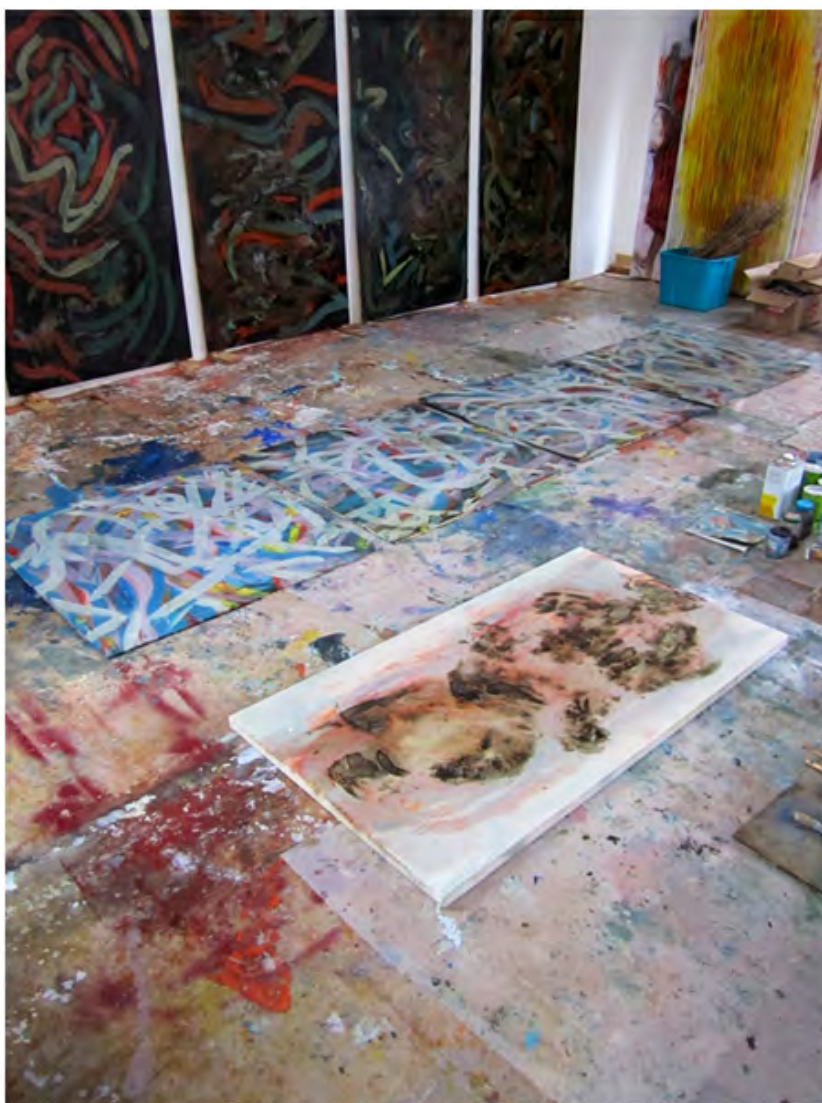


**Figure 39** Studio shot



**Figure 40** Studio shot

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**Figure 41** Studio shot

In April of this year I showed the “Roofing Tar Paintings” and some related works on paper at the A.P.E. Gallery in Northampton, MA. As always, an exhibition marks a bit of a culmination point and an opportunity for a different view upon the work. What began four years ago, as an outside observation of a deeply intriguing circus act seems to have evolved in these pieces into visualizations of the energies released by the human cannonballs as they are propelled from their cannons through time and space. At the risk of sounding a little sci-fi they look to me a bit like wormholes, strange cosmic ener-

gy fields and zones in interstellar space, yet they are completely defined by the materials that they are made with.



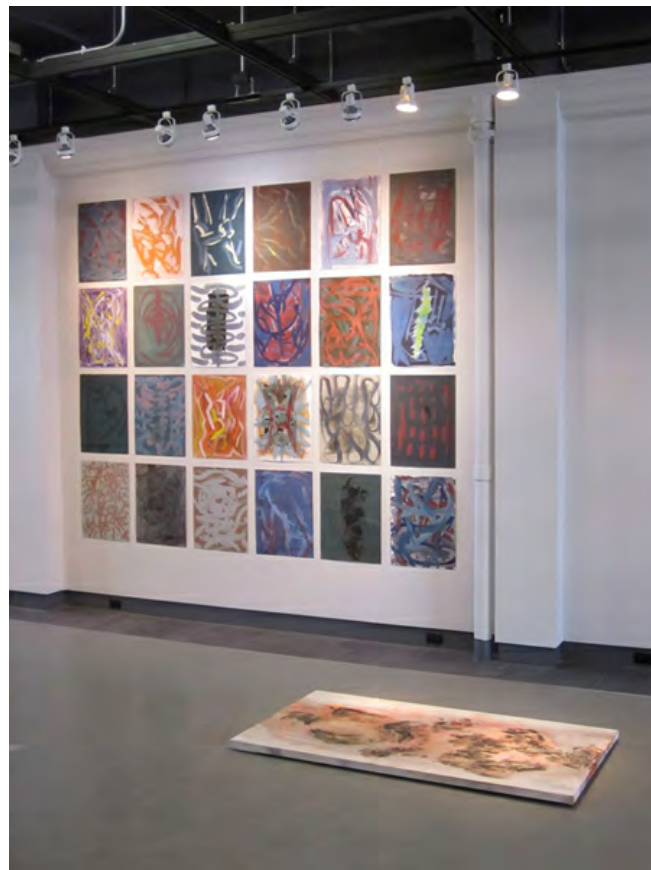
**Figure 42** "Roofing Tar Paintings" at A.P.E. Gallery



**Figure 42** "Roofing Tar Paintings" at A.P.E. Gallery



**Figure 43** "Roofing Tar Paintings" at A.P.E. Gallery



**Figure 44** Works on paper and floor piece at A.P.E. Gallery

The floor piece, which is still very much based on the turning monk from Luang Prabang, reminds me of the medieval grave slabs embedded in the floors of European cathedrals which is why I decided to display it that way.



**Figure 45** "Roofing Tar Paintings" at A.P.E. Gallery

After the Northampton show I wasn't quite sure if and how the roofing tar would remain a component in my paintings. I wondered if the attraction had played itself out or if there was some "juice" left in the confrontation with it. After a two-month hiatus I returned to my studio this summer and decided to order three Medium density fiberboard panels and see what would happen. I prepared the boards with a transparent gesso. By changing the paint surface from the rugged and absorbent plywood to the smooth and sealed one of these new MDF panels I was shaking things up and avoiding the anticipation and knowledge of how the materials would respond to my manipulation.



**Figure 46** Studio shots of the MDF panels in progress





**Figure 47** Roofing Tar Paintings, 49" x 97" each, roofing tar and mixed media on MDF board, 2013

I think these most recent pieces are headed in an exciting new direction. I certainly feel that with each painting I am a bit more physically and mentally present, fully on/fully tuned in, when I am working and marking the surface. Over the course of this process I have quite possibly become a bit more of a human cannonball myself. I am curious to find out how these trajectories will continue to evolve and manifest.