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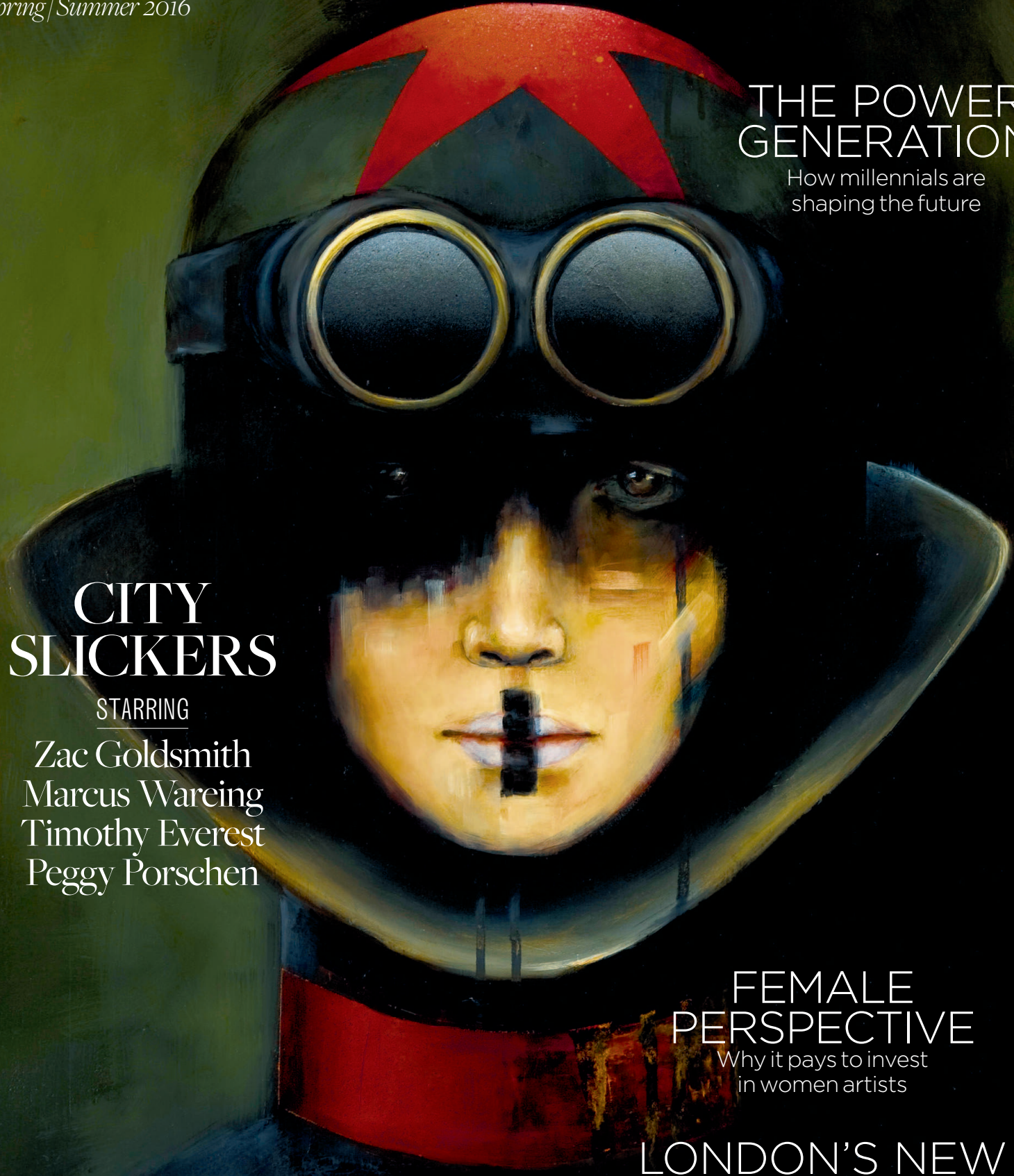
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MICHELE MIKESELL'S DARK SIDE

Our cover artist is one of America's top pop surrealists, and there's more to her eccentric characters than meets the eye

Words: KATIE MCCABE



Mikesell says her work is inspired by Art Informel and Art Brut as well as the theatre of the circus and its workers. She likes to paint animal/human hybrids as an homage to old Dutch paintings



Born in Alabama, raised in Dallas, Michele Mikesell is an all-American artist, but when it comes to human identity – things aren't always so simple. With her haunting pop-surrealist portraits, inspired by 17th Century Dutch paintings, she explores the concept of what it means to be human. Mikesell speaks to *Platinum Resident* about a recent family revelation and creating art 'by any means necessary'.

I am the black sheep of the family, I've always been into the arts and everybody else is in computers. It was something I found on my own. I was raised without a television, so that's how I passed the time. My dad had these big nature coffee table books that had all these animals in them, so I used to just draw the animals. I remember seeing Prometheus in the encyclopedia, it's so burned into my brain, the image of this bird pecking out a liver. These illustrations were all educational, I was never given anything that was not educational in some way; I thank my parents for that.

When I was in grad school and I was a young painter, I was very influenced by Art Informel and Art Brut. There was this mentality of 'by any means necessary' and by any materials necessary. I started using gallons of Rust-Oleum paint enamel that you would buy in a hardware store because that's what I could afford. I still have that mentality but it's not so much about materials as this sacrilegious treatment of paint. I am an academically-educated painter that longs to be an art outsider. I draw from folk art and Art Informel still, but you can see the



My mother died when I was three. She was from the Philippines, and recently some of her family found me on Facebook, I've never had any contact with them, because my mother was a runaway. She had children before she met my dad, so I am going to meet a half sister, her kids and my mother's best friend. I know there are about 12 people who are excited to see me, so it's really bizarre. I am nervous, excited, maybe I'll know what I feel when I get there.

I was raised in this Caucasian family, and my brother and I were these little Filipinos. If I am not looking in the mirror, I think I have blonde hair and blue eyes. A lot of my work is about identity and I think that's why. It's this idea of trying to find out how we are all the same, and how we are all different; it's something I've been trying to find out since I was little.

See more of Mikesell's work and exhibitions at decorazongallery.com

elements of design in my work. I think that my style is this walking contradiction, like I am.

I began painting animal/human hybrids as a reference to Dutch genre paintings. They would paint a scene of a family in the kitchen, and there would be a cat on the table or a dog stealing food. They used animals as a cautionary tale like: 'don't carry these animalistic tendencies'. I used to really enjoy going out in public and people-watching just to name the animals I could see, but I have grown out of it now. As you get older you start seeing different shades of grey and other anomalies in people on the street.

The circus is such an easy metaphor; I use it in my work. It's this element of performance, and a touch of chaos that anything could happen. Then there's this darkness to it that's in a shroud of light. Fellini and so many others have used the circus as a metaphor, and I can't let that bandwagon pass me by, there's such a wealth of textures and colours.

Dallas has started to appear in my art. In Texas, the State Fair is a big deal. A few years ago, Big Tex [a 55ft cowboy structure] caught on fire. My goodness, the image of Big Tex burning, it was one of the most profound things I've ever seen. It was tragic, beautiful, all of it.

