

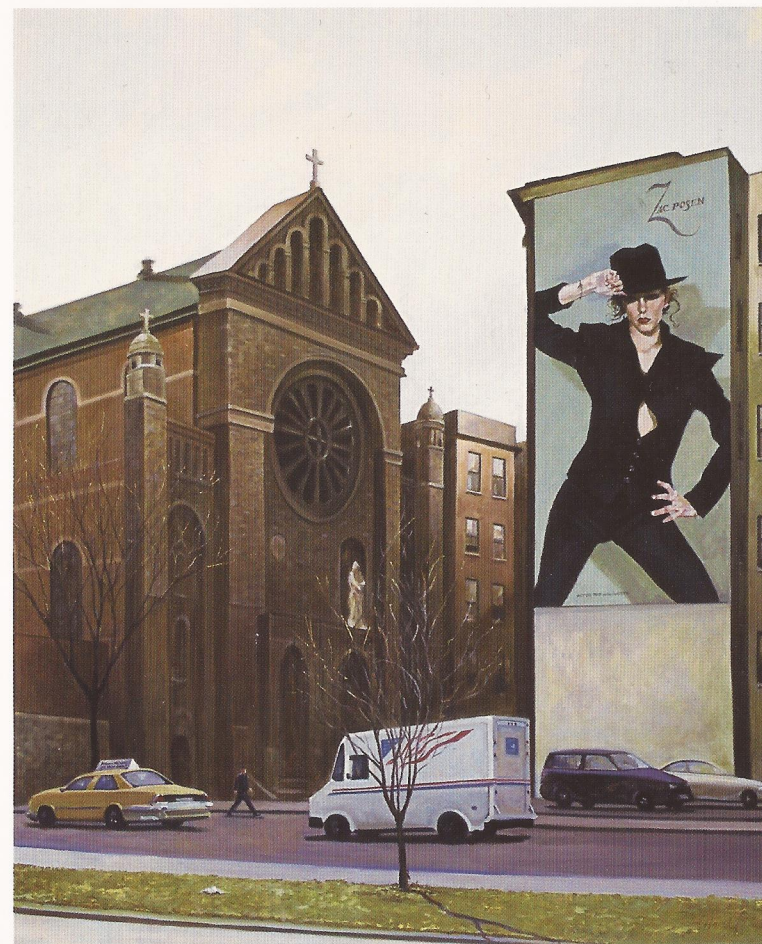
NEW YORK: OBJECT OF DESIRE

John Hardy's paintings, which often imply multi-layered meanings, have distilled the essence of a cultural moment in post-9-11 New York. He allows that his new canvases contain "symbolic metaphors that harbor political undertones." Hardy paints actual scenes of New York, sometimes inventing the colossal fashion advertisements that play on sexual desire in modern lives. By adroitly contrasting the hard geometric forms of New York architecture with the soft, curvilinear shapes of the models' flesh, these paintings confront us with the paradoxes of life in today's city. What appear to be chance encounters are sometimes invented and staged by Hardy himself, who becomes the director of an imaginary drama envisioned as unfolding daily on the streets.

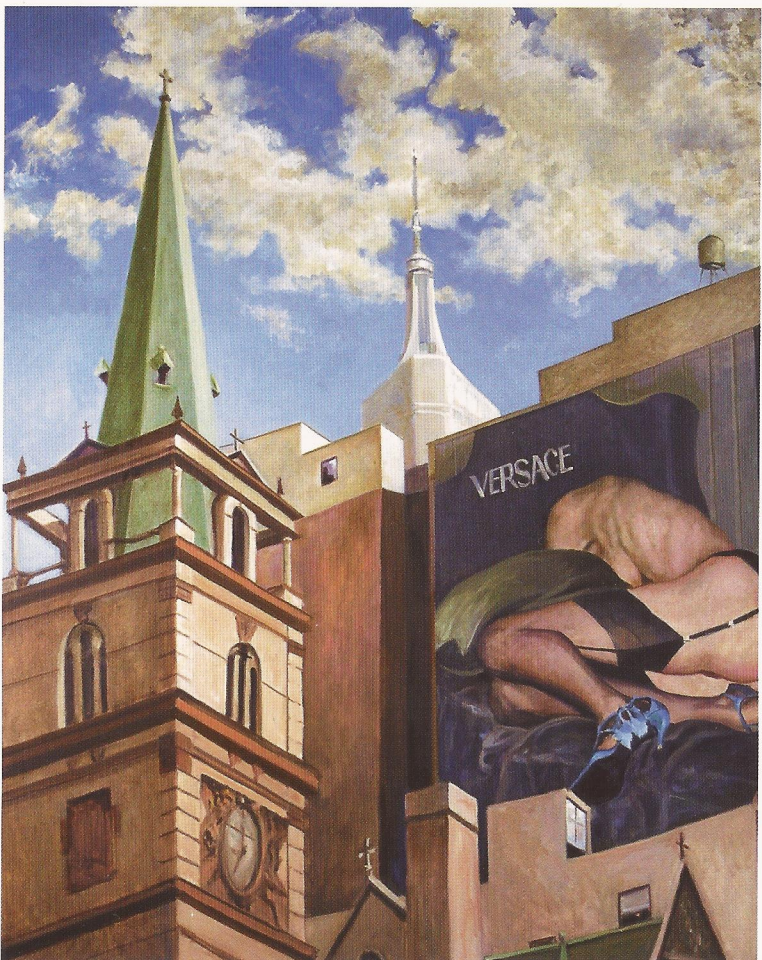
Where Do We Go From Here? contrasts the austere facade of a Catholic church and its pure white statue with a billboard of a female fashion model, clad sexily in revealing black, striking a dramatic pose between seduction and salute. Below passes a U.S. Postal van emblazoned with the American flag; a taxi ad displays the painting's poignant title. The model's gesture mocks the palpable patriotism after 9-11, when Western society's religious traditions and sexual mores came under attack.

References to patriotism recur in both *United We Stand* and *Avenue of the Americas*, where Hardy depicts a traffic-jammed street headed uptown toward a large billboard on which a young blonde sports an American flag arm band and a man's necktie fashioned out of camouflage cloth. In the background, looms the Empire State Building, suddenly again New York's tallest. In *United We Stand*, the American flag and the slogan appear on a poster beneath a billboard of a posturing male model in Calvin Klein underwear. He casts his seductive glance over a crooked street scene framed by the red, white, and blue stripes of an Amoco gas station.

Not only in *Where Do We Go From Here?*, but also in *Bebe and St. Anthony's* and in *Church on 31st Street*, Hardy, who was born in France of a French Catholic mother, has depicted sexy fashion models next to identifiable Catholic churches, pointing out further contradictions and impositions in the contemporary West. The current struggle between the forces of modern secular society and religious orthodoxy, regardless of the faith, resonates throughout Hardy's new work. To infuse meaning into seemingly ordinary scenes, Hardy, like Edward Hopper, selects and manipulates, achieving ironic realism.



Where Do We Go From Here?, oil on canvas, 56 x 44", 2002



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OCTOBER 9 - NOVEMBER 2 , 2002

ARTIST'S RECEPTION: WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 9, 6-8PM