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**POST Plus**




**Movies  
Theater  
Music  
and Life**

# Sleaze colors artist's palette

By JOHN O'MAHONY

**S**IX Mafia hoods, their pinky rings glistening, stare long, hard and questioningly at artist Tom Christopher.

What they see is a sure-footed Texan, resplendent in a 10-gallon hat, who is there to make a deal for his millionaire father — a crook like them — for a slice of the bootleg perfume action.

Christopher is shown counterfeit Chanel and Lancome in a secret New Jersey factory and given the run-down on how it is made and packaged.

One honcho, the boss of the operation, pushes his molars to within an inch of Christopher's cheek and growls at him: "We can produce it. A nickel a bottle. I own the formulas."

Christopher is doing what he can not to shake in his size 12 alligator boots. He frets that the goons can see him for what he is.

For, far from being a fellow crook from south of the Mason-Dixon, Christopher is an artist on assignment from NBC to take in as many details of the crooked operation as possible and provide drawings when he gets out.

Fortunately, he does. That episode, however, signaled the end of the unorthodox part of Tom Christopher's art career.

"I remember thinking I must need money real bad to do this," he says. "I couldn't sleep for two days after."

## 'Dangerous New York' paintings make killing

Christopher still paints and draws, but has fewer money worries now.

He's turned his experience of 15 years of living in New York's edgy subterranean tension into paintings that are selling like green-tea ice creams to Japanese fans.

Christopher paints the city as we know it — screeching taxi-cabs, speeding bike messengers and threatening presences lurking in shadows.

"The Japanese think the city is the most dangerous place in the universe and



**STROKES OF GENIUS:** Artist Tom Christopher shows off an example of his meal ticket: paintings that depict the frantic nature of New York City.

they want a piece," he says. "I didn't understand their perception of us until I went to Japan and they were asking me if people walked around with sidearms and ate rattlesnake and alligator. They want to hear it was dangerous."

Christopher, a classically trained painter who actually comes from California, doesn't bend New York into a downtown Sodom and Gomorrah. But he does attempt to pick up on the city's frenzy and danger in expressionistic, oddly angled and glaringly lit streetscapes. Price tags range from \$3,000 to \$10,000.

His years as a court artist, working for NBC, People magazine and the Wall

Street Journal, wired him up to the city's intensity and random violence, he says.

"I covered the 'Phantom of the Opera' case where the guy, Craig Crimmins, tried to rape [a woman] and when he failed tossed her down the elevator shaft in the Met," he remembers.

"Then there was the headmistress, Jean Harris, who shot the diet doctor. Then, let's see, Lee Marvin's divorce, Mark David Chapman shooting John Lennon, ... you know, it's an insane city."

Christopher has just opened his second one-man show at the Japanese owned Tamenaga Gallery on Madison Avenue at 76th Street, where it runs until

Nov. 3. Then he's off to Hong Kong for a show of local streetscapes he painted there during the summer.

He believes that his Asian patrons, especially the Japanese, coming as they do from a more regimented society, want his paintings because they want a dangerous-looking piece of New York hanging in their Tokyo apartment. It says to them they've been here and have lived to tell the tale.

"This city breaks all the rules for them," he says. "They're a gracious and wonderful people but very confined. Here, they feel they can do what they please as long as it's legal. Our Western world is their Wild West."