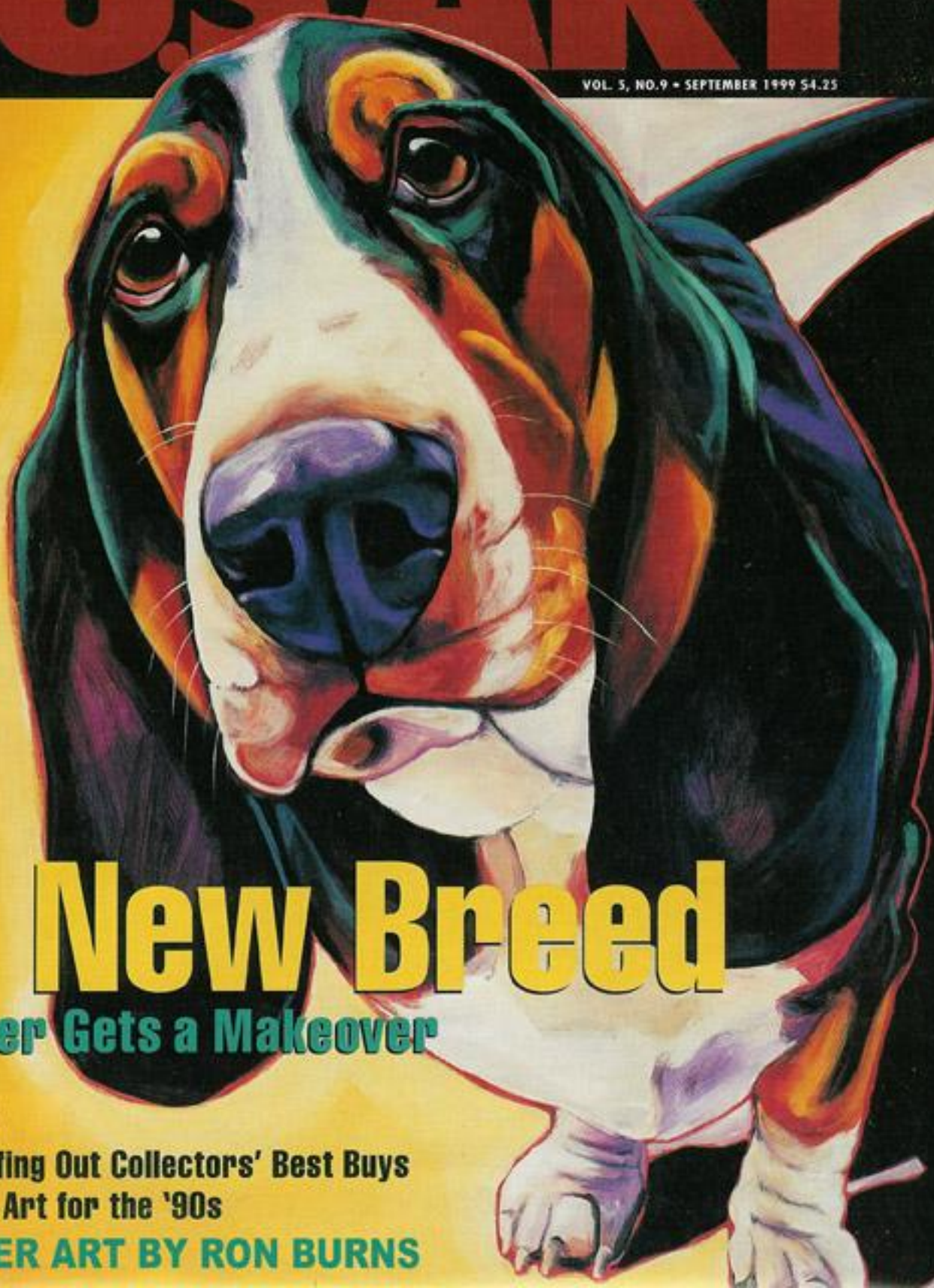


U.S. ART GALLERY

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A New Breed

Rover Gets a Makeover

PLUS:

- Sniffing Out Collectors' Best Buys
- Pop Art for the '90s

COVER ART BY RON BURNS

A Dog's Best Friend

Ron Burns's colorful, pop-arty portraits of dogs are at the service of a good cause.

BY JEFF BARBIAN

ON A RECENT SPRING DAY, A SATELLITE MAN ARRIVED AT RON BURNS'S DOOR TO TWEAK THE TRANSMITTER ON HIS DISH AND OPEN UP THE ARTIST'S REMOTE SEDONA, ARIZONA, home to the amenities of cable and the Internet. Of course, Sedona has a reputation as a transmitter of more earthy sorts. A land of cavernous red canyons, high-rise spires, and reputed energy vortexes, Sedona is something of a New Age Jerusalem.

So while Sedona may be a long way from rural Ohio, where Burns grew up, it's an ideal locale for an artist to set up shop. And that's what Burns has done with his wife Buff, three dogs, and a cat. He paints animal portraits—dogs, mostly, but also the occasional cat or farm animal. He's also a full-blooded animal lover, and his art is a lovely form of activism for their welfare. The majority of his subjects live in animal shelters around the country, and for every painting he sells, Burns donates a portion to animal causes—a tradition he began years before being honored in 1998 as the first artist-in-residence for the Humane Society of the United States [HSUS], a title he holds indefinitely.

"It's a huge honor for me," Burns says. "For years I've tried to do things to get the message out to people about visiting your local shelter to adopt a pet, to spend some time there, volunteer to help walk the dogs. I believe in pets finding good homes, and doing this has allowed me the opportunity to go more national, even global, to get the message and awareness out there."

Although his early animal art won Burns a few ribbons at county fairs, he spent the first fifteen years of his professional career as a graphic designer in Los Angeles. "My first paintings weren't even dogs," he says. "They were bloated business executives with tiny heads. It was my way of making a political statement about the business world."

When Burns shifted into painting full-time in 1993, his own pets proved convenient models. But Buff didn't want paintings of their "kids" up for sale, so her husband discovered another source during a trip to a Colorado animal shelter. The photographs he took during that visit became paintings in a successful exhibition and convinced Burns he was onto something.

One of the keys to the popularity of Burns's painting is the



playful cross-section of artistic styles he draws upon to tug our emotions. Think juxtaposed geometric patterns, vibrant abstraction, and dramatic perspectives, then throw in a scruffy dog. In fact, remove the dog and replace it with a lanky, obscure nude and you might mistake a Burns painting for a work by Henry Matisse. Burns doesn't mind the comparison. He was greatly influenced by a trip to France three years ago, where he soaked in the bril-



Ron Burns's dogs of a different color: "Well Planted" (top) and "Truck' n."

Opposite page: "Olise."

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