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## Task Master

BY FELICIA FEASTER

If the phantasmagoria of the human unconscious could be interpreted not by Salvador Dali, but by a combination of Modigliani, Marc Chagall and Cirque de Soleil, you'd have some idea of the lyrical spin artist Duy Huynh puts on psychology.

This Vietnamese-born, Charlotte-based artist's paintings can currently be seen at Virginia-Highland's Aliya Gallery. Using a palette of rich earth and jewel tones -- intense scarlets, muddy yellows, ochres and chocolates -- Huynh trains every element of his images to gentle seduction. His style is ethereal, characterized by literal flight and flights of fancy, with long-limbed figures that levitate like magician's assistants inside golden hoops in "Half Life in Full Circle," or who sail fantastical oceans on "boats" made from a human hand in "The Optimistic Traveler." Difficult, impossible labors are a common motif in the artist's work. In diptychs executed on large ceramic tiles, Huynh uses a repeated motif of figures balanced on a rubber ball or walking on stilts as a metaphorical expression of life's difficulties. The activities and appearances of circus folk (the women often wear fey striped tights and the men, huge Pierrot pajamas) underscore Huynh's assertions of a similar whimsical fluke and precariousness to life.

When not dressed in such dreamy garb, many of Huynh's figures wear the quotidian working-class costumes of suits and ties. The artist often invests even these Everymen figures with comparably fanciful properties as they go about their lyrical labors. In "Collecting Thoughts," a man in business attire gathers light bulbs from a vast expanse of brown horizon. But Huynh's work is far better when he uses a less precious bag of tricks to get at life's absurdities. A true standout amidst the often cloyingly presented travails is "The Fight for Job Security." On a conference table, two business-suited executives wielding sticks are cheered on in their battle by a room of co-workers. The work is a sophisticated contrast of light style and dark content, as Huynh shows what lurks behind the neutered, bloodless lingo of corporate America. In one arresting image, the seemingly innocuous notion of "job security" is transformed into an ugly, violent life-or-death matter.

The worst of Huynh's images suggest trite high-caliber poster art, and the best ones speak in a poetic vocabulary to the surreal difficulties and challenges of experience.



"Firebreather" by Duy Huynh