

{ story by Lindsey Westbrook }

HIGH VELOCITY

Gregangelo Herrera



GREGANGELO HERRERA

Born in 1966 in San Francisco

*Individualized Major,
graduated in 1989*

Lives and works in San Francisco

CURRENT OCCUPATION

Artist

INFLUENCES AT CCA

Harry Critchfield, Gail Fredell

WEBSITE

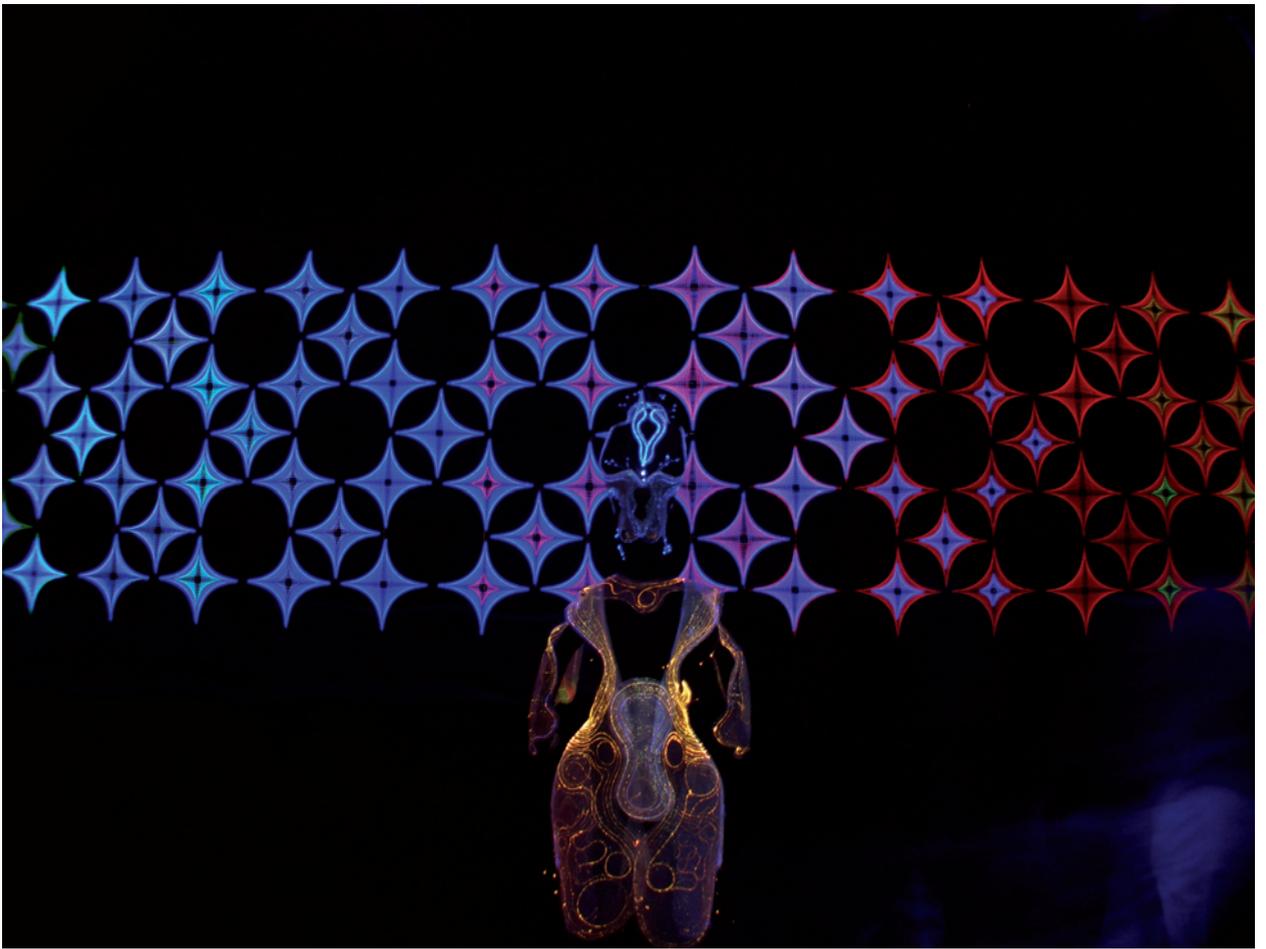
www.gregangelo.com

Walking through Gregangelo Herrera's front door is a little like stepping through Alice's looking glass. From the Solstice Room to the Eclipse Room to the Midnight Hall, the whole thing is decorated down to the smallest detail in Winchester Mystery House-meets-Ali Baba style. Like the productions he puts on with his arts and entertainment troupe, Gregangelo and Velocity Circus, there's some history there, as well as some fine art, some fantasy, and some pure, unadulterated ambition to entertain.

The house is actually a museum, and people pay to tour it, with all the money going to a nonprofit youth arts organization that the artist founded in 2003. It's also the headquarters for his business, which employs about a dozen full-time staff, 70 artists who work as many as three or four of his events every week, and another 100 or so artists who are on call as needed. "Some of them are really specialized," he says. "We might hire a scientist to create an illuminator, which will light fiber optics, which will become a tapestry, which is part of a costume, which will go onto an athlete, who's on skates as part of a larger ensemble." The basement is a combination wardrobe and prop storage facility, costume shop, and office; it hums with sewing machines, computers, and general activity. He shows off a project they're doing for Ghirardelli, creating costumes and headdresses for chocolate-themed characters.

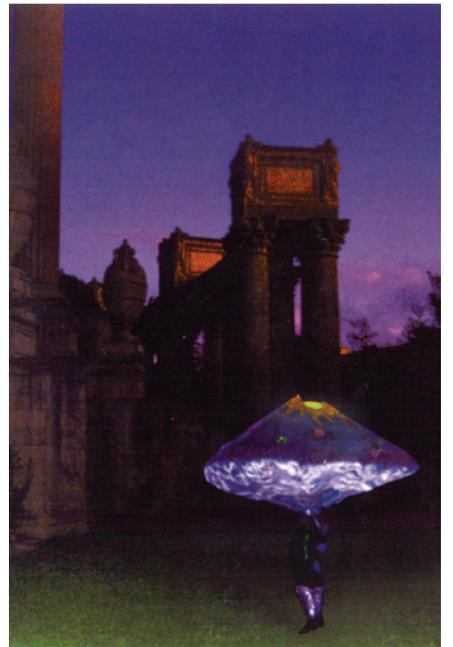
Herrera takes great pride in the fact that he is not dependent on a particular gallery or the whims of a couple of important patrons. "We are all about sustainability in the arts. Most art students come out of college not knowing what to do, or having very idealistic and impractical visions. The politics and the business of art are important parts of interdisciplinary knowledge. The core group of our artists are all sustaining themselves, buying homes." Many of them have been with the company 15 or 20 years, and part of his role, he says, is to keep pushing them to develop and expand what they can do.

His clients range from nonprofits to Fortune 500s to major media giants, but he doesn't make corporate art. More and more lately, in fact, the companies that hire him for their events ask only that he create something amazing. "They give us carte blanche: 'Just make it spectacular!'" And he is constantly pushing the envelope of spectacular. "What we do is intended to be entertaining, but also very ornate and complex—encrypted and layered with all kinds of mysticism, stories, and legends. The audience doesn't necessarily get every single reference, but they come away knowing the experience has been more than just pretty."



GREGANGELO HERRERA, *Performance as an Illuminated Soul Seeker*, 2006

Herrera seems to run in extremely high gear, partly because he's one of those people who doesn't need much sleep, but also because of the stimulation that comes from surrounding himself with so many creative people. His CCA experience, he says, was the same way. He had been involved in art groups and theater since childhood, but CCA offered the opportunity to engage with a huge number of artistically inclined individuals who were passionate about a wide array of pursuits. "Everybody is inspired by their environment," he says. "At CCA I enjoyed learning the foundations of various disciplines, I enjoyed the facilities, the instructors. But the really important part was learning from the experiences of others. Seeing who's succeeding, who's failing, who's serious, who's not serious." Art making can be a very introverted process, and the stereotypical artist is not always inclined to collaborate. In *Velocity Circus*, however, "we're not only bringing different artists together, with their different egos and passions, but we're working right on top of each other."



GREGANGELO HERRERA, *Whirling Dervish*, Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, 1995