



## DAVID HEADLEY



*Admiral Cone Shell*, 1998, 31" x 23", Acrylic on Canvas (a/c)

Cover: *Apex View*, 2000, 24" x 22", Acrylic on Paper (a/p)

## Seashell Collection



*Shell in White*, 1999, 22" x 30", a/p



*Birth, Life, Death*, 1999, 22" x 38", a/p

Several years ago, as I was falling asleep, I had a very vivid dream:

*I was in an art gallery in New York City. The exhibition was a one-man show of huge paintings of seashells. As I walked through the gallery looking at the paintings, the sculptural grandeur of the seashells as well as the beauty of the painting style blew me away. I had never seen paintings like this before. I experienced a sense of awe as I looked at these ten-foot high paintings of tiny seashells. When I turned to walk out of the gallery, to my utter amazement, my name was stenciled on the gallery wall. It was my show! And the paintings were mine!*

I awoke with a start from this dream, grabbed a scrap of paper and pen from my bedside table and made a furtive sketch of the seashell paintings. The next morning left me with a letdown feeling because the paintings I saw in my dream were more beautiful than any I could ever paint. And in the light of day, I recalled that Georgia O'Keefe had exploited the seashell motif so powerfully that she virtually "owned" the motif.

For several months following this dream I dismissed the idea of painting giant seashells, but the concept persisted. I can only conclude that my seashell paintings, which are so different in every way from my previous thirty-five years work, have come from a very deep part of my unconscious mind. I have been on an "artistic vacation," so to speak, since beginning the series, delighting in an extended tour of new forms of beauty and exploring new painting techniques I have had to invent to fulfill the vision of my dream.

After working on the seashell motif for two years, I was surprised while looking back through my early work to discover that the "cosmic spiral" motif of my seashell "Apex Views" is so similar in composition to my very first oil painting, "Tangents to Ellipses," 1964. The fact that ones' first painting is such a naïve expression of the primal creative urge indicates the psychological depth of the dream—it had forced me to revisit my original Gestalt.

## Seashells Sonata



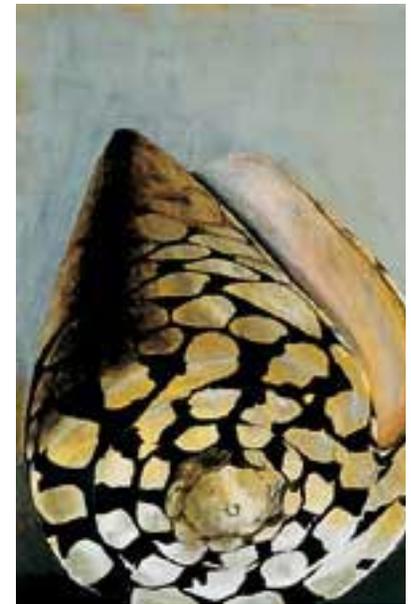
*Allegro*, 1998, 84" x 56", a/c



*Scherzo*, 1998, 84" x 56", a/c



*Largo*, 1998, 84" x 56", a/c



*Finale*, 1998, 84" x 56", a/c

David Headley created for the Marsh Art Gallery at the University of Richmond a series titled *Seashells Sonata*. His four paintings depict the diminutive seashell as human-scale architecture. The cycle of paintings is meant to be experienced like movements in a musical sonata. Headley's four giant compositions of seashells are seven feet high and use the musical structure of the "sonata form." They are appropriately titled *Allegro*, *Scherzo*, *Largo* and *Finale*.

The first painting of the cycle, *Allegro*, introduces the pictorial theme of the series by depicting the syncopated black and white pattern of the *Conus marmoreus* bouncing on a dramatic black background.

In *Scherzo*, the dance movement in a sonata, the orange shell of the rare *Conus nobilis*' deeply-shadowed aperture lures the viewer to enter the undulating interior space of the seashell.

In *Largo*, meaning literally large, the grand design of the distinctive cone shell pattern is magnified to gigantic proportions with only three spots occupying the large canvas, exploring a highly abstract variation on the seashell motif.

The fourth painting of the cycle, *Finale*, returns to the original theme by rendering a complete marble cone shell. By synthesizing the previous full and close-up view compositions and by tilting and receding the *Conus marmoreus* into the distance in foreshortened perspective, the cycle of paintings is brought to a finale.

The poet Paul Valéry wrote that shells "are privileged forms that are more intelligible for the eye, even though more mysterious for the mind." David Headley's cycle of large paintings befit the extreme wonder we experience when contemplating the small seashell.

*Richard Waller, Director  
University of Richmond Museums*



*Shell with Pattern*, 1998, 22" x 30", a/p



*Ivory Cone with Pattern*, 1998, 28" x 40", a/p



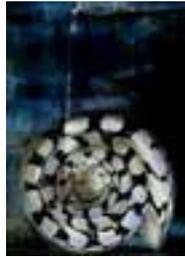
*Shell Pattern in Black # 4*, 1998, 40" x 28", a/p



*Textile Cone Shell*, 1998  
31" x 23", a/c



*Ivory Cone Shell*, 1999  
15" x 15", a/p



*Apex View*, 1998  
13" x 11", a/p



*Scallop Shell*, 2000  
11" x 8", a/p



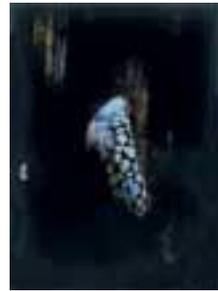
*Cone Shell*, 2000  
7" x 7", a/p



*Conch Shell*, 2000  
11" x 8", a/p



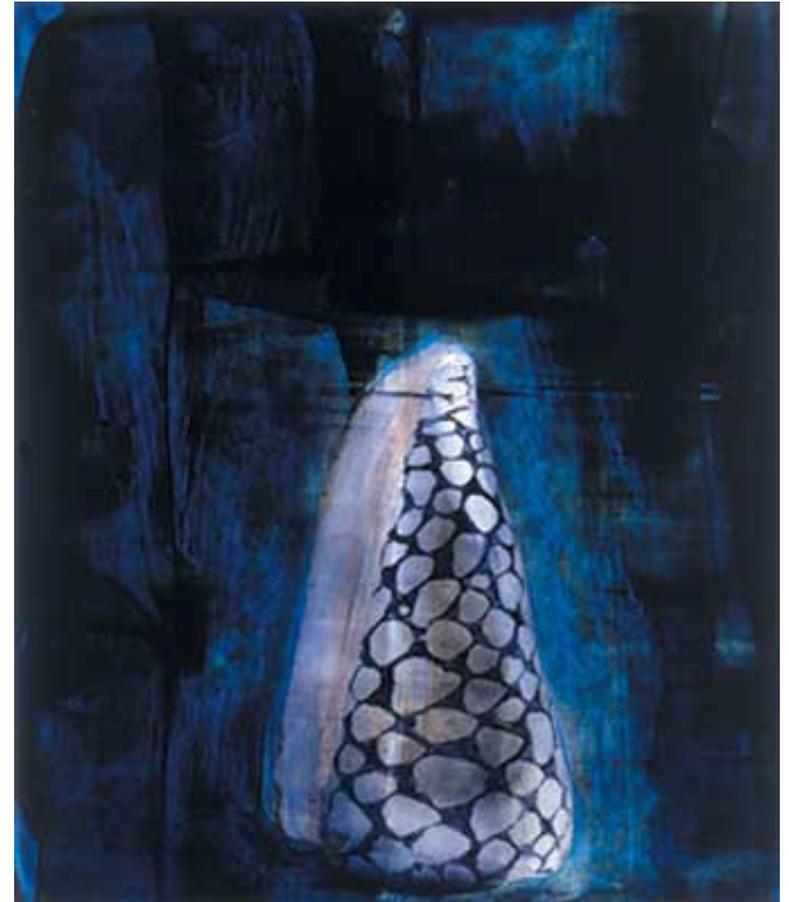
*Cowery Shell*, 1999  
11" x 7", a/p



*Cone Shell*, 1999  
11" x 7", a/p



*Conch Shell*, 1999  
11" x 7", a/p



*Shell in Caribbean Blue*, 1998, 28" x 20", Acrylic on Paper