

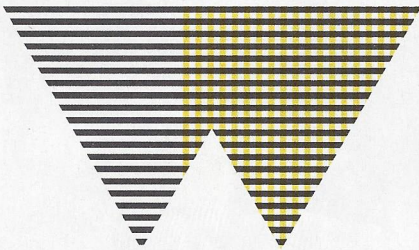
SHOTS

ARTIST
CR OBETZ
SALVAGES
THE ICONIC
DRAWINGS OF
ILLUSTRATOR
ANTHONY
RAVIELLI WITH
21ST-CENTURY
METHODS

BY EMMA
FRANCOIS







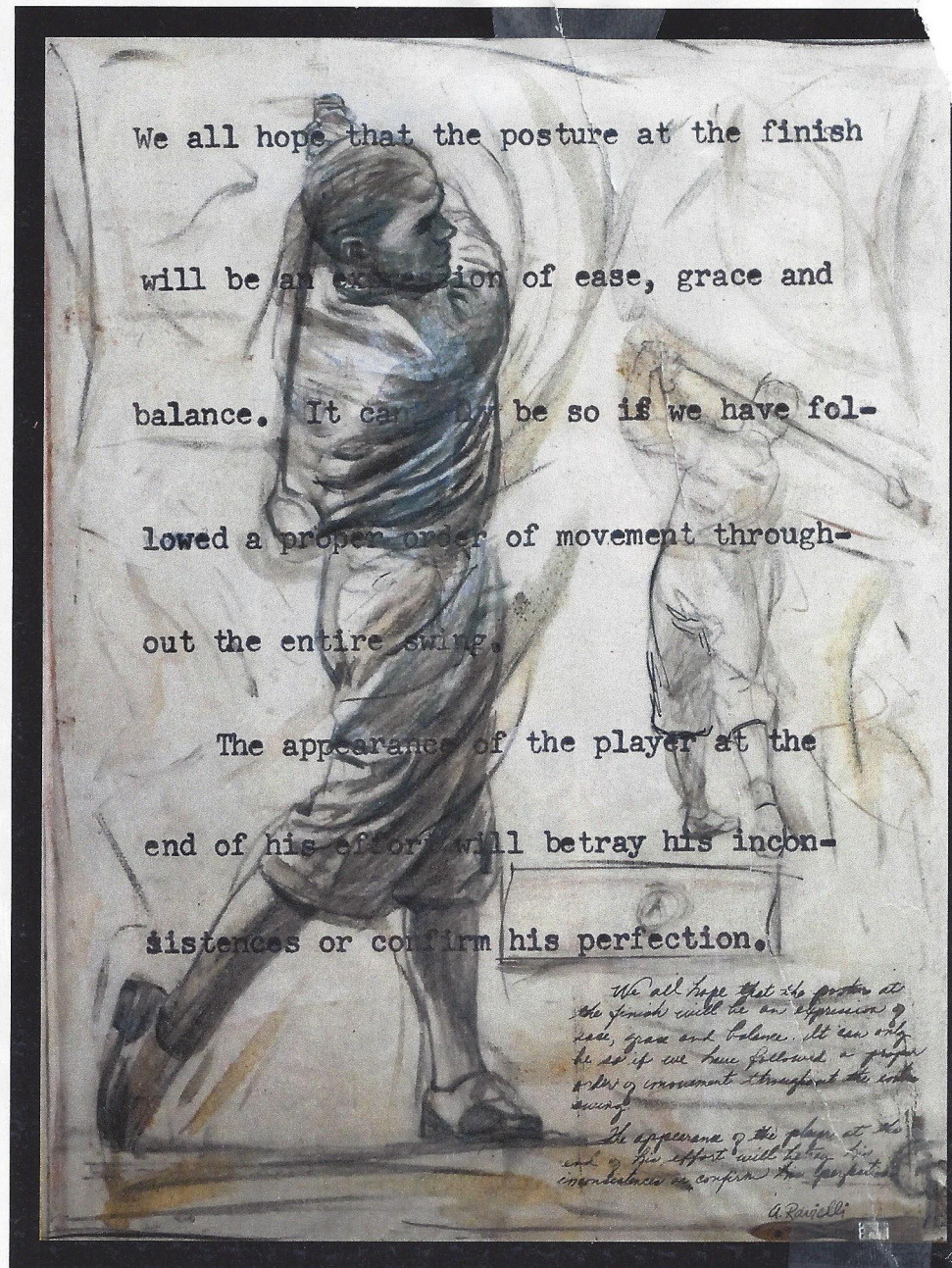
WHERE ROUTE 41 SKIRTS THROUGH Fort Myers, Fla., there's an abandoned SunTrust bank with thick walls that mostly kept out the recent and devastating floodwaters of Hurricane Ian. This was good fortune for multimedia artist Christopher (CR) Obetz, though also the world, because the building became the studio where Obetz breathes new life into the drawings of the late Anthony Ravielli—famous for illustrating Ben Hogan's *Five Lessons*, Bobby Jones' *The Basic Golf Swing* and many books and magazine covers—giving them a way to live on in the digital era.

It was by pure chance that Obetz came to possess the archives of Ravielli, or "Mister Ravielli," as Obetz refers to him. In 2004, seven years after Ravielli died, Obetz was living in New York City and walking his golden retriever in Central Park. The pair turned onto 75th Street and happened upon a gallery he had never visited. As an artist, Obetz's general instinct is to search for the lost and forgotten, so he ignored the paintings on the main walls and ventured into the back room where he found boxes containing thousands of sketches, notes and scratchboards littering a billiards table. Among them, he recognized the sharp black pen of Anthony Ravielli and knew he had to rescue them.

There was one problem. The portfolio had just been sold. Determined, Obetz pleaded his case to the gallerist, explaining his close connection to golf. His great uncle, Neil Postlewaite, was among the original group who traveled to Europe to help bring the Ryder Cup to the United States. Obetz's dad, Robin, grew up playing golf with Jack Nicklaus and, when Nicklaus married, stood by his side as best man. (When Robin married, Nicklaus was an usher.) As a boy, Obetz took a few lessons from Jack Grout. Before that, Obetz, now 55, learned how to swing by reading *Five Lessons*, which he carried in his childhood golf bag, right where his

grandfather told him to keep it. Hogan's words and Ravielli's careful penmanship taught Obetz as much about how to live as they did how to swing a club. The smitten gallerist called his client, and the trio promptly brokered a new deal. Obetz paid about the price of a very nice new car for the trove.

Since then, Obetz has been documenting and preserving Ravielli's work, as well as curating and crafting his own inspired series. During the 2022 Masters, his work was exhibited at the Augusta Museum of History. Never-before-seen Ravielli sketches accompanied Obetz's



BOBBY JONES

"Follow Through" from the Word Series, mixed media on canvas, 48 by 64 inches.

glittering, sweeping physical and digital iterations of those same sketches.

Nancy Glaser, executive director of the museum, called it an immersive experience. "I was fascinated with how Obetz was able to take these illustrations and transform them into bigger-than-life paintings and digital art. He's bringing Ravielli's legacy to a 21st-century audience."

Among some impromptu patrons that week were Bobby Jones' grandson,

Dr. Bob Jones IV, and his wife, Mimi. They had plans to play golf one day, but the air turned “beastly cold,” so they decided to pop into the museum instead. The Jones family had been brainstorming ways to celebrate the centennial of their grandfather’s major-championship wins. The couple hit it off with Obetz at the museum, and Obetz is now an official artist for the family.

“If the temperature had been 5 degrees warmer, it might not have ever happened,” Jones says. He thinks Obetz’s work will keep Ravielli’s art “alive” and is an “irreplaceable” service to the history of the sport.

“CR has a very unique gift to take something that is still and give the sense of motion,” Jones says. “For the most part, things that have been done of my grandfather have been in black and white or sepia, but what is so neat about CR’s work is it brings my grandfather to life in vibrant color.”

To create pieces, Obetz draws from his digital archive of Ravielli’s work, enlarging the original details and stretching them onto canvas. Then, he overlays veneers, wood finishes, acrylic paints, colored resins, diamond dust, lacquers and sometimes even bunker sand. Whereas Ravielli worked with a surgeon’s precision, leaning his nose into his work and etching microscopic details (drawings that, when published, were often at scales only slightly larger than a finger), Obetz works dynamically, stepping in and out and onto works, fluidly pouring paint and rotating large canvases. “My whole paintbrush is a contradiction to how Ravielli worked,” he says. To allow

one sweeping comparison, Obetz is a Jackson Pollock to Ravielli’s Albrecht Dürer. But Obetz shares Ravielli’s reverence for the careful, expert athleticism of elite golfers.

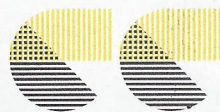
In fact, Ravielli contributed work to *Golf Digest* for more than 30 years, regularly attending staff meetings to discuss his methods and theories. He worked by spending hours carefully observing his subjects, watching each intricacy of their swings and translating this knowledge into sparse yet remarkably detailed lines. Not only did Ravielli capture the precise stance and silhouettes of his golfer-subjects, but also their sense of movement.

In “Anchored,” Obetz refreshes a drawing of 15-time major champ Patty Berg with a zesty wash of mint paint. Staccato lines, with gently imprecise angles and edges, allude to the power and measured confidence of Berg’s body as she prepares to strike. To emphasize her powerful calm, Ravielli drew an anchor over her body, alluding to not only the practiced sturdiness grounding her swing or the tethered energy of her eyes but the geometric relationship of her body to the Earth, swing and golf ball. This ability to create the perfect visual metaphor is enduring to Ravielli, like, for example, his iconic “pane of glass” rendering of Ben Hogan.

As Obetz says, “My role is to reinforce Ravielli and Patty’s vision, to emphasize these tried and true jewels of knowledge from the past.” Obetz often pays particular attention to the frame and for “Anchored” retro-fitted two of Berg’s Wilson Staff putters and wood pilings from the bridge she walked across every day connecting her home to the Cypress Lake Golf Club. “My artwork is honest and truthful,” he says. “I always honor those who came before me and their collaborations. At the same time, I make it my own.” He dedicated “Anchored” to his parents and donated the work to Cypress Lake, which is also their home course.

Obetz goes by “CR,” but his full name is Christopher Robin—yes,

PATTY BERG
“Anchored” from the *Legends and Legacies* series, mixed media assemblage on canvas, 36 by 42 inches.



IT WAS BY PURE CHANCE THAT OBETZ CAME TO POSSESS THE ARCHIVES OF RAVIELLI.

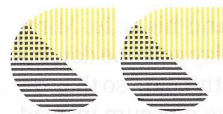
like that Christopher Robin, the beloved children’s fictional character and friend of Pooh, Piglet and Eeyore. Sometimes, when he’s manning his refurbished tugboat, Little Toot (named for another iconic Disney character), he responds to captain Christopher Robin. “It’s really just the three of us,” he says, speaking of him, Little Toot, and his other rescued sidekick, Chair, his motley gang on a mission to spread his guiding troika of “hope, faith, and possibility.”

Through his platform, he hopes to reach more people in need of reminders to “keep on tooting” and discover the “forgotten beauty found” that makes a life worth living. It’s an optimistic, resilient mind-set forged in part by his experience as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse while attending boarding school. Now he’s channeling all he has learned overcoming adversities to cultivate a fulfilling and generous artistic life. “I go out openly into the world and see what comes to me,” he says. “I just want people to know that who you are today isn’t who you are tomorrow.”

Obetz works closely with his local Naples/Collier chapter of The First Tee, the nonprofit dedicated to teaching children life skills through golf. He often invites students dockside to his boat for a reading from *Five Lessons* before sending them off to play golf. In another class Obetz teaches, he nurtures students’ creativity through a pop-art painting session, priming them for a playfully expressive putting lesson.

“I always tell them, you have to make an impact,” Obetz says. “But you also have to follow through.”






BOTH SHARE REVERENCE FOR THE CAREFUL, EXPERT ATHLETICISM OF GOLFERS.

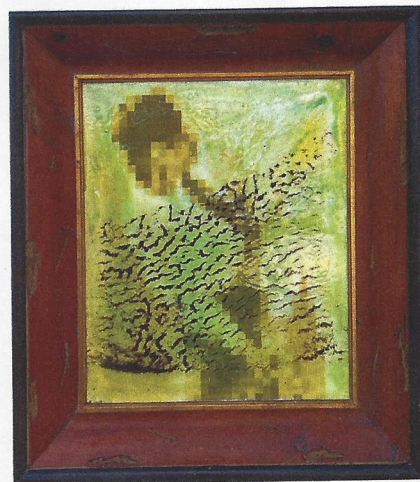
paint for two months. His studio flooded, but, remarkably, only one piece was damaged. It's a small work repurposing an image of Jones at impact, though Obetz recolored and pixelated the face so that it reads almost as impressionistic. The old-fashioned speckled brown wood frame, a nod to the Augusta National pines, juxtaposes the techy rendering of Jones. The most striking details are the fractured amber ripples crossing the canvas, tracing Jones' figure.

"The hurricane left this incredibly painterly stroke across my painting, literally to the same motion of the swing," Obetz says. It's as if the water, too, follows the *Five Lessons*.

Obetz immediately thought, *Oh, my God, I'm saving that. More resin. That's a piece of Bobby Jones art history.* 

BOBBY JONES

"Impact, with Flood Waters" from the Op Art Pop Art Pixel series, 20 by 24 inches.



BEN HOGAN

"Impact" from the Fluid Blue Swing Sequence of Life series, mixed media on canvas, 52 by 72 inches.

To raise money for The First Tee's new learning center, Obetz will be auctioning—as one item—his "Follow Through" painting of Bobby Jones, NFT digital companion and the original Ravielli graphite sketch. With some controlled swings of charcoal, Obetz collaged a reproduction of the sketch with a transfer of Jones' handwritten and typed notes to Ravielli for what Jones hoped the image would convey. *We all hope that the posture at the finish will be an expression of ease, grace and balance. It can only be so if we have followed a proper order of movement throughout the entire swing.*

For an artist whose relationship to his work is so physical—gritty textures, at times walking on his paintings—Obetz's journey into the world of digital art and NFTs might seem unlikely. But for Obetz, NFTs are the natural progres-

sion in his mission to introduce Ravielli's work to a larger audience. What he can do in his pop-art sequences is magnified and animated, literally, by digital replication. Obetz plans to create a new series of works based on Bobby Jones. Buyers will receive bundled together the original piece, the swirling digital counterpart, plus a story, penned by Obetz, about the making of the work, its larger meaning and Ravielli's history. (*Editor's note: Golf Digest will be sharing in commissions for promotional work around this series.*)

"I hope that Mr. Ravielli, Mr. Hogan and Mr. Jones all are looking down and smiling knowing that their lives and legacies had meaning and purpose, and that they are in good hands," Obetz says. "I never knew any of them, but I've made it my passion to get to know them as deeply as possible before I make the first brushstroke."

After Hurricane Ian, Obetz helped his community heal and repair and didn't