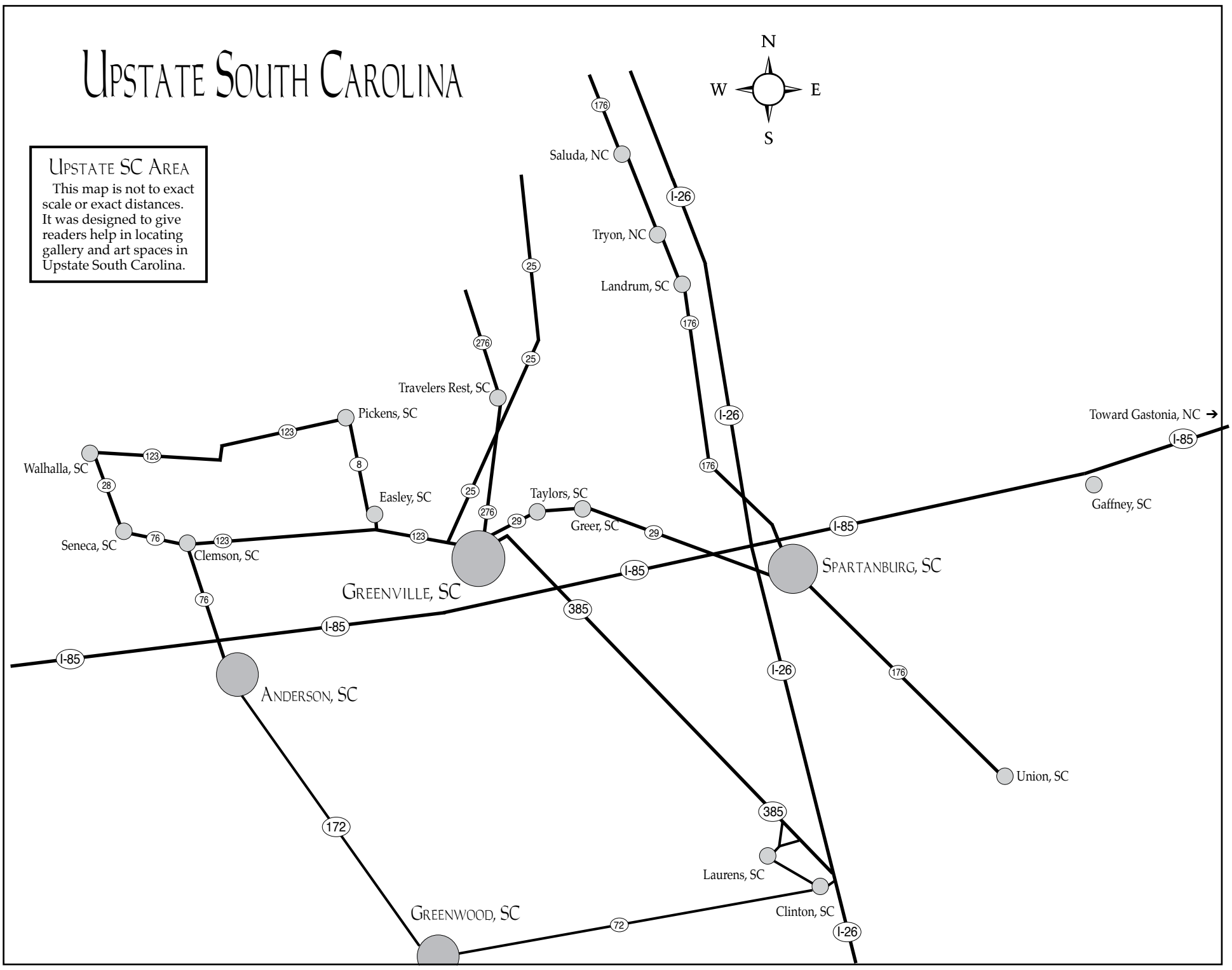


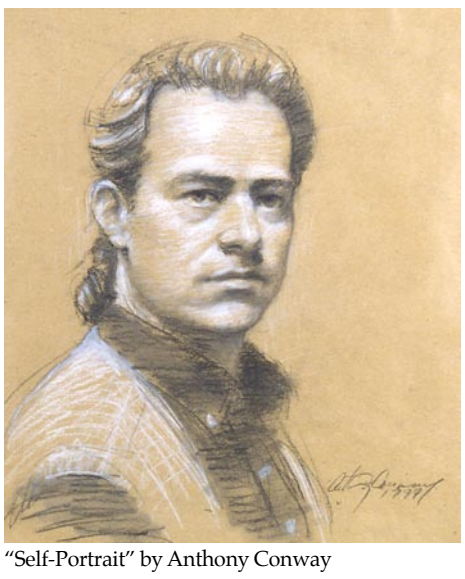
Anderson University in Anderson, SC, Offers Works by Anthony Conway

Anderson University in Anderson, SC, will present *The Classical Portrait: Paintings by Anthony Conway*, on view in the Vandiver Gallery of the Thrift Library, from Mar. 1 through Apr. 10, 2017.

Anthony Conway, b. 1961, is recognized as one of the premier American portrait painters of the twenty-first century. This exhibition was developed through a conscious effort to bring in artists to the Vandiver Gallery of the Thrift Library at Anderson University who will inspire and educate our campus community.

Kimberly Dick, Vandiver Gallery Director offered the following essay, "Serendipity plays a part in this exhibition; that, and timing, is everything. I met Conway in 1998; he was my college Art Professor during that critical time many know as the first years away from home. As Gallery Director, I felt it essential to bring in portrait painter Anthony Conway, as I also primarily co-teach the Foundations year for all Visual Arts disciplines: painting, drawing, ceramics, art education, and graphic design, as well as for students studying to become interior designers, or to work in the theatre arts. I have high hopes that connections will be made with this artist by my current students all the way through the graduating senior class that I taught as freshmen. The impetus for the exhibition is to show the evolving roles as an art student or teacher, and an artist's capability to communicate visually as well as to inspire."

"This is where the serendipitous part comes in; Conway contacted me through professional social media in 2014. I contacted him for this solo exhibition in 2016; subsequently, we met again, for the first time. The advent of the digital age has its advantages and disadvantages. Coordinating efforts to develop a mini mid-career retrospective has been at times anticipatory, at times frustrating, and at times angst-ridden, not unlike witnessing


"Self-Portrait" by Anthony Conway

the potential and growth of our students as they learn. Roles may have changed, yet we still work together and learn from one another. That part remains constant. This exhibition features many distinct artworks spanning 32 years of the fine artist Anthony Conway's career to date."

"I am as inspired by this body of work now as I was in my interactions with Conway as his art student. As a teacher, Conway emphasized mastery of media, simplifying techniques, and concept. In his paintings, this drive for clarity in capturing the embodiment of life is quite evident. The collection of works in this exhibition shows his own transition from student, to developing a personal artistic style, to becoming a current Master of Classical painting. Anthony Conway attributes much of his style to one major influence: his teacher, artist David A. Leffel. Both connected at the Arts Student League with their teachers, Conway to Leffel, and Leffel to his teacher, Frank Mason, respectively. Both are graduates of Parsons School of Design in New York City and

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both can be considered modern-day artists painting in the style of Rembrandt."

"Student studies selected for this exhibition include works Conway created under the guidance of Leffel," adds Dick. "The work *Paint Study after Rembrandt* (1985) is a fine example of learning by emulating another artist. Such 'copy-cat' artworks are developed in the majority of educational systems, and the question of plagiarism versus appropriation is sure to be approached. *Paint Study after Rembrandt* could be considered a forgery; I mean this with the utmost respect. The painting is of great skill and shows mastery in use of oil on canvas with varnish, to capture the illusion of depth and the facial structures of the model, and of Rembrandt's particular style and technique in terms of color, chiaroscuro, and placement of the figure."

"A later work, *Self-Portrait* (1999), is a simple study drawn on tonal brown paper with charcoal and chalk. This piece is intriguing because it shows the viewer how using a midrange value inherent in the paper, or substrate, can become an integral part of creating form. The artwork also captures what I would deem a defining expression of the artist. When viewing it, one can't help but sense the formative years of his progression as a fine artist. Perhaps interwoven in this expression is also the satisfaction of giving back, as this work was created during a class demonstration."

"Though often compared to classical painters like Rembrandt, I prefer to think of Conway as a Modern Renaissance painter with a contemporary edge to his work. This can be seen in many of his current themes and conceptually- driven artworks, such as those in his Flag Series. *In American Idle* (drawn in 2004 and reworked in 2012), the title itself gives the viewer an idea of how to grasp this work by using a purposeful double-entendre: idle/idol. It is a hyper- realistic painting, 40 inches by 30 inches. It portrays an everyday woman whose stance shows an indignant, yet powerful, sense of her current situation. She wears the American flag as

"Trident" by Anthony Conway

sleeves on her jacket, while an exposed midriff with body adornment suggests an attitude, or defiance, of the reality of her everyday life, which is explored further in the background of the artwork."

Another truly powerful artwork is *Trident* (2011). This work readily evokes the sense of spirit it takes to rebuild from devastation, as seen in the dimensions of this artwork. It commands attention through size, as it is 60 inches by 36 inches, and also through realism, by capturing the essence of emotion in a painted self-portrait, the incorporation of objects from the site at Ground Zero, and also the sounds of this experience. This work was created after the artist's firsthand experience of one of America's great tragedies, the attacks of 9-11 on the Twin Towers."

Anthony Conway is highly motivated and generous in nature, and will be on campus working with three different classes in Drawing and Painting for Anderson University. He will also be giving a Gallery Talk about the exhibition and a live Painting Demonstration for the community in the Vandiver Gallery of the Thrift Library. These five events are offered in conjunction with mounting a mini mid-career retrospective, and serve to affirm that the lines between teacher and student in the visual arts continue to be boundless. Likewise, classical portraiture is timeless; Conway captures this essence.

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