

DAVID LIGARE

Magna Fide (The Great Belief), 2014
Oil on canvas, 54 x 84 in



COURTESY WINFIELD GALLERY AND HIRSCHL & ADLER MODERN GALLERY™

MOLLY GLOSS

Dead Men Rise Up Never

These days, he's famous. You pick up a magazine and there's a story he's written, you open a newspaper and he's covering the Russo-Jap War or sailing around the world, escaping cannibals in the South Seas. But when I first knew him he was just a kid, a "work beast" he liked to call himself, on account of he was up every morning at three delivering newspapers, out again with the late papers after school, working Saturdays on an ice wagon and Sundays setting up pins in a bowling alley. Then a couple of years later—this would have been '90 or maybe '91—he was an oyster pirate, hanging around the Oakland waterfront and pretty often drunk. But I was there too, stealing oysters and becoming pretty thoroughly alcohol soaked, so don't take any of this as judgment.

We were school chums, Johnny and me, which you wouldn't have thought. You'd have thought he was a sissy and a bookworm, owing to the fact he'd plant himself on a bench in the school yard every recess and stick his nose in a book, which was a long mile from my own practice, which ran more to shooting squirrels with a pellet gun and collecting cigarette coupons, trading them for picture cards of racehorses, prizefighters, stage actors, and such. But one time this big kid, Mike Pinella, ground his boot into my best set of Indian chieftain cards, and Johnny just popped off the bench, lit into the kid, and bloodied his nose, which redeemed him in my mind. Then it turned out he collected cards too, so after that we started hanging around together. When his afternoon papers were finished, we'd go after mud hens on the Oakland Estuary with homemade slingshots, or rent a rowboat if we had the price, pull out onto the bay and fish for rock cod, or just stroll along the waterfront watching ships sail through the Golden Gate. And I visited him at home a few times, which was how I first got acquainted with Plume and the rest of that spiritistic realm.

His mother's name was Flora, though she wasn't any pretty flower. She was dwarfish with a skimpy head of dark hair, black squinty eyes, a thin mouth always set in a hard, straight line. I wouldn't say she was ugly, although she came near to it, and she had a savage glare verging on madness. But she advertised herself as a medium holding séances and planchette readings, and in that field of work odd looks were the wonted thing, an inkling of her profession.