

OCTOBER 18, 2004

People

THE WAR OVER PLASTIC SURGERY STARS TAKE SIDES



JENNIFER ANISTON
'ANYTHING
IS POSSIBLE'



CAMERON DIAZ
'NO WAY'

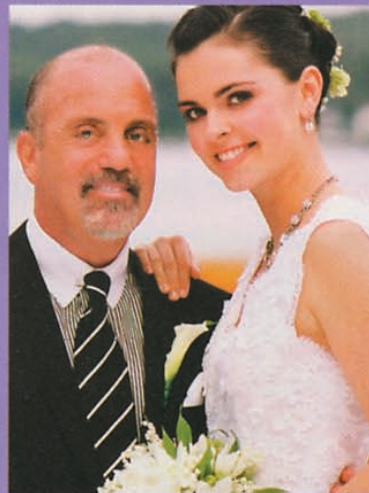


SHARON STONE
'NOT MY
THING'



JULIANNE MOORE
'IT'S INSANE'

BIG WEDDINGS!



Billy Joel gets hitched
(and Tiger Woods too!)



Farewell to
RODNEY
DANGERFIELD



LORI HACKING
Her body found

\$3.29US \$4.49CAN



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Ashes to Paint

Houston artist Wayne Gilbert loves working with people—dead ones

Warhol had his soup cans, William Wegman put Weimaraners on the map, and Wayne Gilbert has come up with his own artistic calling card—dead people. The Houston artist uses human ashes, most obtained from funeral homes where they had lain unclaimed, to create a body of work that inspires reactions ranging from delight to disgust. “Wayne has kept people from being lost forever,” says Marthann Masterson Weaber, 58, who displays his *The Eternal Garden*, a triangular canvas overflowing with images of flowers and fruit, prominently on her dining room wall. She admits, however, that not all her dinner guests can stomach the artwork. “My closest friend is so repulsed. She said, ‘I can’t believe you have it in your house.’”

Stirring things up is nothing new for Gilbert, 57, a onetime salesman of oil-field supplies whose interest in art was sparked when he took a painting class with wife Beverley in the late '70s. His pre-cremains works—including a giant octagon with portraits of people put to death in Texas—were “sometimes very ugly,” admits Beverley, 56. In fact, when Gilbert’s art was exhibited at a now defunct Houston restaurant, customers asked management to take it down. “I like controversy and conflict,” says Gilbert, “from the viewpoint of furthering any kind of intellectual endeavor.”

The cremains concept, Gilbert says, came to him out of the blue one day in 1998; it was, he explains, simply a “spiritual epiphany.” Says Patricia Johnson, art critic at the *Houston Chronicle*: “Wayne is one of these artists who’s pushing medium and pushing ideas.”

With Gilbert’s increasing notoriety he says that finding his raw materials is no longer much of a problem. (He had to search six months for his first ash donor, Anna.) But pricing his paintings—which have sold for as much as \$10,000—still is. “They ought to be priceless because they’re people,” Gilbert says. “But I can’t keep them forever. So I’m trying to make sure they end up in the hands of people who respect them.” ●

“You might not like it, but you’ve got to look at it,” says Gilbert (in his studio) of his art. His early cremains works (right) mixed ashes with paint. But since finding that if he blended the ashes with a clear gel each person produced a different color, Gilbert has stopped using pigment (as in *Dead End*, above).

