



## DRAWN TO HIM

Paul Wolski imagineers the 'Alter-Ego' of gay Atlanta

David Atlanta Magazine, August 13, 2008

**ABOUT SEVEN YEARS AGO**, after a lifetime of illustration and graphic design, Atlanta artist **Paul Wolski** found himself in a decade-long creative drought.

"Sometimes I would sit down with a drawing pad on my lap, and it was a struggle to figure out what to do," says Wolski, the force behind **Alter Ego Pop Art**.

Then almost as if it were a present under the tree, Wolski's inspiration returned during the Christmas season of 2001.

"I decided to illustrate a Christmas card for my friends, and then I found myself doing a couple of more," Wolski says. "I sort of got into this mood and style that I've been doing for six years now. It combined my love of pop culture, fashion and humor, and I just suddenly found it was all coming together."

Today, it's a lot easier for Wolski to get his creative juices flowing.

"I'll see somebody at the airport, and they're such a hit of inspiration that it will immediately get me going," he says.

The result is a series of recognizable characters and archetypes that truly live up to Wolski's company name: his works are literally the alter egos of gay Atlanta and all our fabulous friends.

Even more recognizable is Wolski's style, which most David readers have seen, even if they don't know it comes from him.

Since settling into his Alter Ego venture in 2002, Wolski has established himself as one of the city's most sought-out portrait illustrators. He's responsible for mass-marketed caricatures of gay club scene fixtures like Bubba D. Licious and Nicole Paige Brooks, as well as renowned international DJs like Chus & Ceballos, Roland Belmares, and Atlanta's own David Knapp.

Alter Ego Pop Art has graced the walls of Outwrite Bookstore & Coffeehouse, as well as the covers of David and the 2005 travel guide "ATLANTAboy." Wolski's work also helped spread the message of several gay rights groups like the Human Rights Campaign, AID Atlanta and YouthPride. Most recently, he designed all the marketing materials and ads for Joining Hearts.

Last December, Wolski and Alter Ego Pop Art even made it to the small screen, when the artwork was featured on TBS "Movie & A Makeover."

**THE SUCCESS OF ALTER EGO POP ART** helped pull Wolski out of a creative funk that partly started when his dream job — as a Walt Disney Imagineer — turned into a nightmare.

"I grew up with Disney, and even at an early age, that was my ultimate goal," Wolski says.

Shortly after graduating art school in Miami, Wolski worked in a Disney theme park when the company launched its first in-house search for artistic talent. Charged with submitting an idea for a new Disney attraction or ride, Wolski created a

proposal that used Disney characters on a ride to promote literacy.

Wolski became one of eight Disney staffers transferred to the company's Imagineering division in California.

"It was surreal, something I thought was going to take a lifetime to achieve fell into my lap so soon," he says. "You're working at one of the most creative places on the planet, surrounded by incredible artists — it was inspirational."

After three years of drawing and designing signs for Disney theme parks, Wolski was part of a company-wide layoff in 1993.

"The dream kind of ended as abruptly as it started, and I felt myself unprepared to deal with being let go like that," Wolski says. "That was a huge blow for me — I envisioned myself to be a lifer with the company, staying until I wasn't able to walk in anymore."

He relocated to Washington D.C., then moved to Atlanta in 1996. He designed for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and David, and was finally able to put his early career trauma behind him.

"[Disney] happened early enough in my life that I figured in the bigger scheme of things, I was meant to do other things," he says.

**HAVING CREATED CARTOON** portraits of some of gay Atlanta's most notable personalities, Wolski launched his website, where you can buy all sorts of prints and products with his images, and it's catching on in a big way.

Now he also does custom prints to bring out the alter ego of everyday customers. So much better than playing "If I Was An Avatar," Wolski helps you imagine your "Alter Ego" instead.

"I like to know I'm creating special gifts for someone's partner, or spouse, or child," he says. "It's fun — they give me all kinds of information and reference, and basically it's up to me to turn that person into a rock star, so I get enjoyment out of that."

We all do.