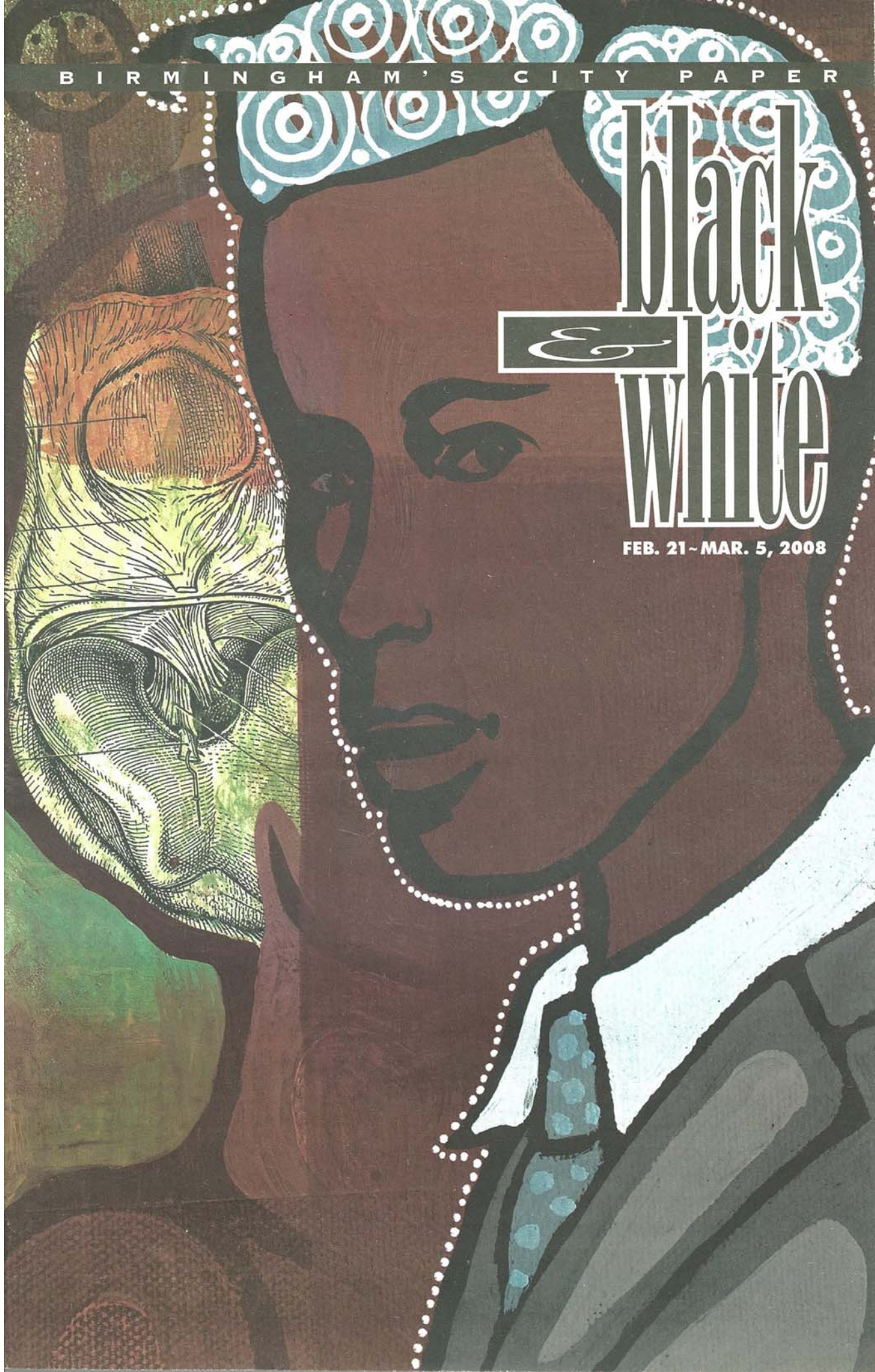


B I R M I N G H A M ' S C I T Y P A P E R

# black & white

FEB. 21 ~ MAR. 5, 2008



# Not Your Standard Fare

By David Pelfrey

**U**rban Standard is a new downtown coffee shop, bakery, lunch-and-breakfast spot, and home accent store that also carries stationery, jewelry, vintage prints, and holiday gift items. It's what Birmingham's "Retail Theatre and Historic District" has needed for some time: one-stop shopping for a mocha latte, scrambled eggs with Polish sausage and tomatoes, strawberry cupcakes, old

the bottle. The breakfast, with its decidedly unselfish portions of scrambled eggs, creamy grits with smoked sausage, and a huge biscuit, seems better suited to strapping country boys than urban types, and that's by no means a complaint. Less hearty appetites may take an interest in blueberry or cinnamon scones with a cup of tea or hot chocolate (employees I spoke with boasted

from somewhere in eastern Europe that has been converted into a candy counter; well, it's a candy counter as Tim Burton or the Brothers Quay might imagine it. Each drawer (lined with weird illustrations from a long defunct encyclopedia) holds some odd, yesteryear candy item that is there solely for its quirk factor, and not because there's a measurable demand for BB Bats taffy, EL BUBBLE bubblegum cigars, or chocolate coins. Anyway, the array is so visually pleasing, especially the Bit-O-Honey bars in the top drawer, that it seems a shame to spoil the effect by actually making a purchase.

The shop side of the old building is basically a quarter-scale Anthropologie with a street vendor/European flea market selection of Old

Curiosity Shop merchandise for hipsters and the aesthetically inclined. For sale at dear prices are paper wallets with Japanese art, potpourri (dried redwood cones, lavender, and cinnamon sticks sold by the scoop), color posters—circa mid-20th century—of soccer players and other European athletes, and some extremely appealing framed covers of old *Fortune* magazines. Overall, the touchstone for style here is a *Pigalle* junk store, the art direction in *Amélie* and Wes Anderson movies, or a fondly remembered vacation in Paris, Prague, or somewhere on the Mediterranean Coast.

This is marginalia at upper-income prices, purveyed in a thrift-store coffee shop filled with the kind of things Oscar Wilde once admired because they were useless. It brings to mind the climactic scene in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, when Brick and Big Daddy have a heart-to-heart in the cellar where all of Big Momma's bizarre acquisitions from their European honeymoon are stored. "Europe: just a great big fire sale," grunts Big Daddy. Perhaps, but all that stuff makes a pretty cool movie set, or a setting for your next rainy Saturday with coffee and a magazine. So naturally Urban Standard's decor includes a leather sofa and a coffee table in the front corner with a view of the street. ☘

*Urban Standard is located at 2320 Second Avenue North. Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. 250-8200.*



maps, cinnabar jewelry, dried pomegranates, and vintage ribbon.

But I kid the proprietors of this unique establishment; their eclectic offerings and atmospheric space really do provide downtown workers and residents with a rare commodity: a place to be.

On one side is the food-and-beverage business. There is a different lunch menu offered for each day of the week, and the selections are a galaxy apart from most of the lunch-joint fare downtown. Thursday's menu, for example, includes a chicken panino sandwich with caramelized onions on ciabatta bread, a Polish "street sandwich" (ham, capicola, and salami on ciabatta loaded with pickled red onions, tomatoes, and a special sauce), Brunswick stew, or home-made chicken noodle soup. Boylan Root Beer and Ginger Ale are sold by

about their hot chocolate "research" and the requisite in-house taste test).

The bakery counter may turn out to be Urban Standard's calling card. Their cupcakes are in the first-class category, and apparently the very enthusiastic and house-proud staff understands this; each cupcake sold is carefully wrapped and neatly placed in a folding box. I was devastated, however, to learn that the superb chocolate with chocolate buttermilk icing cupcake is "not in regular rotation." But regarding the light, moist, pink and red strawberry cupcakes, if young people weren't purchasing these for their sweethearts this past Valentine's Day, romance is dead. I'm told that someone's mom makes the large sugar cookies—so chewy that they tear apart instead of breaking.

At the rear is an old glove case



**Belly Dance with Aziza!**

Middle Eastern Belly Dance

PERFORMANCES FOR YOUR EVENT OR CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Award Winning Performer/Instructor Featured on ABC's "20/20"

Call 879.0701

**IRENE RIMER DANCE ACADEMY**  
International School of Dance  
MEN | WOMEN | CHILDREN

Flemenco | Belly Dance | Ballet  
Modern | Dance Essentials  
Egyptian | Turkish Bazaar

www.DANCEIR.COM

visit our studio at  
**COBB LANE**  
above the Blue Monkey  
**933-8922**

black & white

GET CARDED.

www.bwcitypaper.com

compass necklaces and other hand made wonders by a wacky pack of artists

**nakedartusa.com**  
buy online!

595-3553  
3815 clairmont ave  
forest park  
[next to silvertron]

**NAKED ART**