

IRA UPIN

Slots, 2015
Oil on panel, 72 x 72 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

ELIZABETH MCKENZIE

Evergreen Hero

A conversation with
Douglas Brinkley

Slate once described Douglas Brinkley as a “neo-beatnik” based on his years taking busloads of college students to countercultural sights around the U.S. Since those days, Brinkley has written on a wide range of subjects, from the ecological impact of the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Delano Roosevelt to biographies of Rosa Parks and Walter Cronkite. His latest book, *American Moonshot: John F. Kennedy and the Great Space Race*, has gone straight to the New York Times Best Sellers list, and in March we spoke with him to discuss the origins of his abiding fascination with the space program, his environmental activism, his passion for finding lost classics in the literature of conservation and natural history, and his affection for the turbulent sixties and all that sprang forth from that period.

ELIZABETH MCKENZIE: It was auspicious to have you in *Catamaran*'s inaugural issue in the fall of 2012. You wrote about those iconic large-format Sierra Club books, and in particular, the Ansel Adams, Nancy Newhall book *This Is the American Earth* and how that volume helped kick off the environmental movement of the sixties. I've read you wrote your first book in 1968, at the age of eight—an encyclopedia of Americans you admired, stitched between pieces of cardboard. Do you remember who was in there?

DOUGLAS BRINKLEY: Well, this is actually a good segue, because when I was a boy, I grew up in Ohio, in a town called Perrysburg, and down the road was Neil Armstrong, who was from Wapakoneta. And so I was of the age where going to the moon was a big deal. I was nine years old when Armstrong walked on the moon, and I had collected memorabilia about it and bought all of those Apollo 11 souvenirs. When the moon rock traveled around the country on a train, my family took me to go see it. I was there for the opening of the Neil Armstrong museum in Wapakoneta, and just a year ago, my wife, Anne, and I took our three kids there. So, Neil Armstrong was the evergreen hero of my youth, simply because he was the first man on the moon and grew up down the road from where I grew up.

EM: I recognized a link between your work on historical conservationists and on the space age of the sixties—you