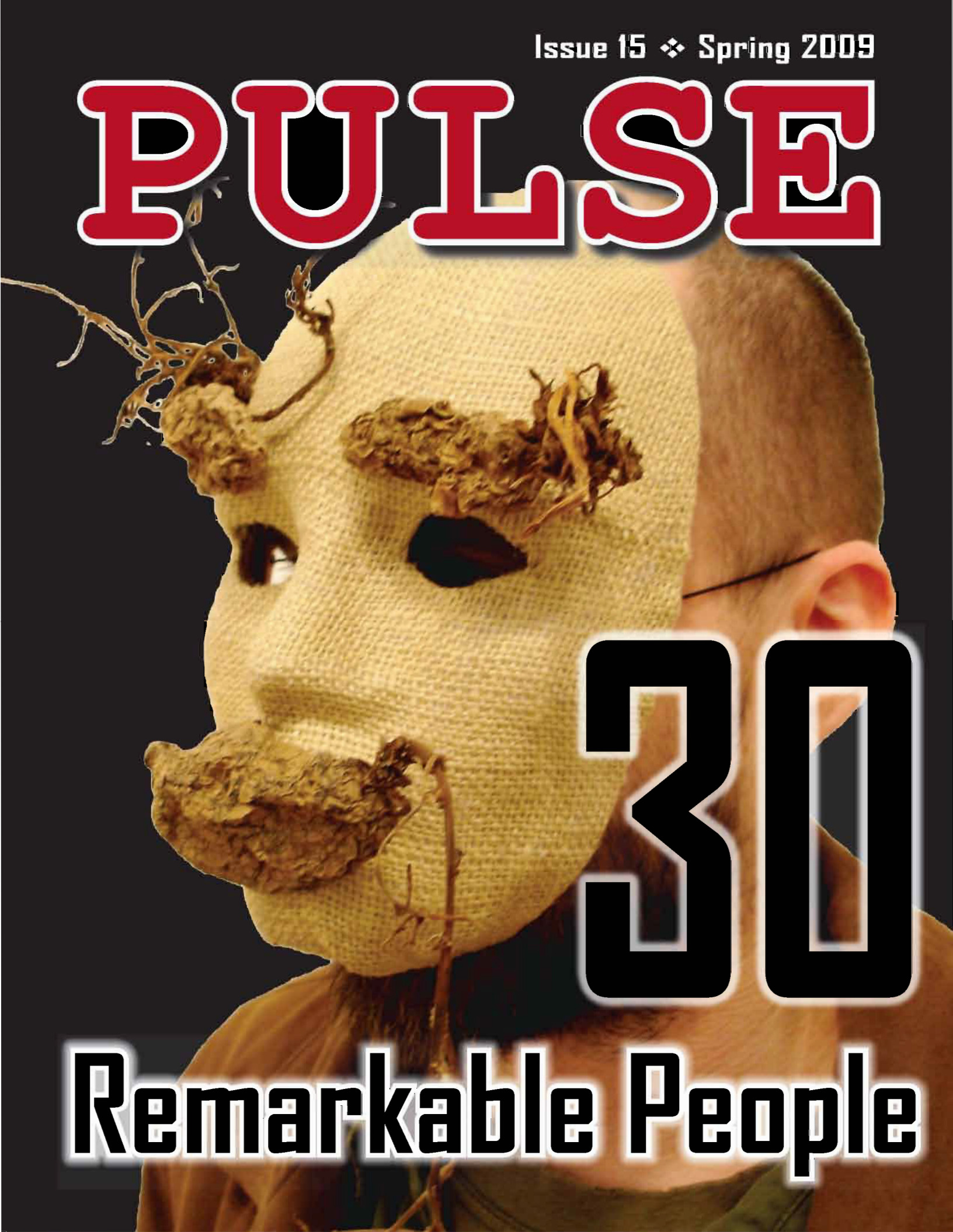


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PULSE

A close-up photograph of a person's face. They are wearing a light-colored, textured burlap mask that covers their eyes, nose, and mouth. Several dried, pressed herbs and roots are attached to the mask, particularly around the eye and mouth areas. The person's hair is short and dark, and their ear is visible on the right side of the frame. The background is dark and out of focus.

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Remarkable People

Potato Guy

By Jacqueline Hlavenka

Creating, carving, and molding one of America's favorite vegetables.

After finishing his 4:30 p.m. class, adjunct art professor Jeffery Allen Price sits down outside the C.V. Starr cafe and takes out an eight-month old potato from a brown paper bag. Upon first glance, it has sprouted many tiny white and purple tendrils that have shriveled up to a size no bigger than a fist.

"I don't have to do very much to this at all," Price explains. "I have dozens of these. If you take a potato and leave it alone and you put it in the dark, and it's not too hot or not too cold, it'll start sprouting these little arms because it's ready to go, it's ready to reproduce. See? The potato is sculpture on its own."

Price is what you call a potato 'guru.' He is not only a potato historian, collector and enthusiast, but he bases his artwork around the idea of 'potato' as 'sculpture' in and of itself. As a self-proclaimed potato artist, he describes the potato as a humble, approachable symbol that is accessible, abundant and unpretentious.

"I realized everybody is connected to it [the potato] somehow," Price says. "Almost everyone can make something out of a potato, like bake a potato and make French fries. Everyone has some type of connection to it. I use the potato as a lens to examine everything."

Born in Arizona and raised in Missouri, Price started working with potatoes in 1996 as an undergraduate student at Missouri State University. He then moved to Long Island to study studio art at SUNY Stony Brook for graduate school. Since then, he's organized numerous potato-based festivals, including 2003's Think Potato festival in St. James that focused on art, environmentalism, sustainable living and community involvement. For Price, creating potato art is not only personal, but it can be a way to bring people together.

"I think this [the potato] is political as well because I use it as a

social vehicle," Price says. "In 1996, I started organizing potato festivals as social events, which I thought of as art because of Joseph Beuy's social sculpture. If I am organizing a social event and say 'let's be a community', that's political. The potato can be funny, but it can be a serious social event. We can get people to bring food for the food banks."

Though Price defines himself as "un-classifiable," he also calls himself a conceptual artist because all his projects have a specific meaning behind them. For Price, "thinking potato" is a humorous symbol for living a healthy, sustainable lifestyle that is constantly shaping and changing—just like the potato itself.

"There's an ephemeral quality of the potato," he explains. "I once carved a self-portrait of me out of a potato and it was hilarious. I left on the skin for my hair and my beard and then it kind of shriveled away. This [the potato] is very fertile and vibrant right now, but in a couple months it is going to dry out and it's going to die. I've used paintings, and those are going to last, but when I carve the potato, it is always transforming. I'm always learning from this process of transformation." ■

Photo By
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