

Layers & Sediment

STEVE WELLMAN RETROSPECTIVE

KUNZELMANN-ESSER GALLERY, MILWAUKEE, WI MARCH 22 - APRIL 16, 2011

CURATED BY SUSAN BARNETT

Layers & Sediment

Susan Floyd Barnett



Dedicated to Jeffrey Hayes 1946–2012

LAYERS & SEDIMENT

STEVE WELLMAN RETROSPECTIVE



Trophy 2, 2008
Take a Painting a Day
Reverse painting on Plexiglas
20 x 8.25 in.

Frontispiece:
Belmont Headframe, Butte, 2011
Digital photograph by the author

Cover Image:
Fossil, 1985-1997
Oils, ink and tape on canvas
12.5 x 9.5 in.

Copyright © 2011, 2012 by Susan Floyd Barnett

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by illumination, lithography, photostat, microfilm, xerography, telepathy or any other means, or incorporated into any information retrieval system, electronic, biological or mechanical, without the written permission of the copyright owner.

Text, photographs and design are by the author with the following exceptions:

Houston Home & Garden, March 1985, pages 11, 13

Steve Wellman, pages 17, 25, 39

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
QUESTIONS	2
METHODOLOGY	3
THE HISTORY OF THE NOW	5
EARLY INFLUENCES	11
PLACE	14
PROCESS	16
PAINTING	20
PAINTERLY ASSEMBLAGE	22
AUDIO ASSEMBLAGE	25
THREE-DIMENSIONAL ASSEMBLAGE	26
REVERSE-PAINTED GLASS	31
OUTSIDE IN	35
CONCLUSION	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY	40
INSTALLATION	42
EXHIBITION CHECK LIST	43
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	47

LAYERS AND SEDIMENT

STEVE WELLMAN RETROSPECTIVE



INTRODUCTION

A resident of Butte, Montana, a city defined by a century of mining, Steve Wellman juxtaposes and melds disparate elements from his life and the outside world into painterly, layered assemblage. *Layers and Sediment*, a graduate thesis exhibition and catalog curated by Susan Barnett, featured more than 120 works of art from Wellman's major series from 1990 to 2010, with particular focus on his recent work.¹

An art-world outsider by choice, Steve Wellman is an eclectic and prolific contemporary artist who lives and works outside of the main urban centers. Although he has exhibited regularly, the record of his artistic life is still mostly unwritten. This mid-career retrospective provides an opportunity to consider his body of work within a larger context, to introduce him to new audiences, and to survey the myriad themes and mediums he has explored over the course of twenty years. While art historians' carefully foot-noted monographs often build on decades or even centuries of earlier scholarship, this exhibition explores the process of historicizing the contemporary.

Busy Building a Lost Civilization, the title of a mixed media painting, might serve as an allegory for Wellman's obsessive art production or for the strip-mined hills around his home in Butte, Montana. In this work, geometric constructions float just beneath the transparent surface, contrasting with the random cracks and drips of the textured ground. The abstract structure is complex but tenuous, diagonal rays thrust into an uncertain future, stairs progress to dead ends, and cogs turn aimlessly. The colorful geometric foreground suggests abstract animated cartoon characters trapped in a perpetual motion machine.

Wellman uses experimental physical media blended with humor to explore themes including time, memory, love and procreation, construction and disintegration. His artistic practice is an investigation of complex interactions between disparate concepts, materials, and processes. Overlapping planes of paint and resin are layered over textured sediment or discarded artifacts that index their histories of interaction with nature and human use. His art consumes and renews itself, embodying time, personal experience and the essence of a particular place.

Busy Building a Lost Civilization,
2009-10
Latex, oil, frozen paint and
pigmented resin on panel
30 x 42 in.

¹ March 22-April 16, 2011, Kunzelmann-Esser Lofts Gallery, 710 W. Historic Mitchell St.



Star Curve, 2004
Fabric paint, pigment, oil in burnt
antique frames
23 x 15 in.

Attic Dust Bunny #5 - Tile Floor,
2005
Tile samples, grout, paint marker
and pigmented resin
18-1/2 x 18 in.

Opposite:
Red Sphere Rolling
Latex paint, acrylic paint, spray
paint and pigmented resin
on weathered timbers in a
reconditioned 25 cent frame
12 x 14 1/2 in.

Over the past twenty years, Wellman's oeuvre has spanned numerous series, using a wide range of media and iconography. Working in relative isolation, he sometimes quotes or appropriates from the art historical canon, but has intentionally distanced himself from the art world since college, attempting to achieve something "unique." While many artists of his generation embraced post-studio practice, or turned to digital technologies, Wellman uses traditional physical media to ground his experimental work process. Maintaining a Dada sense of humor and play, but departing from the reductionist trajectory pioneered by Duchamp, who claimed to be "interested in ideas, not in visual results,"² Wellman engages with art expansively—exploring its material, spiritual and visual, as well as conceptual aspects. Paradoxically, by turning his back on art publications and museums, his body of work has paralleled various contemporary trends.

QUESTIONS

Viewing a contemporary body of work within a historical framework reveals a web of complex questions. How does art become historical? If history is no longer viewed as a vertical progression, in what ways does art continue to reference the past and influence the future? How does a particular body of work reflect its zeitgeist? What is the relationship between an artist and community, and what constitutes an artist's community? Does outsider art methodology help shed light on the work of an educated artist working in relative isolation, or is very concept of "outsider" art problematic? What are some of the principal themes that unite these paintings and sculptures, and how do they relate to mainstream contemporary art?

² Duchamp, quoted in Werner Hofmann, "Marcel Duchamp and emblematic realism" 1965, in Mashek, *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, Artists in perspective series; A Spectrum book, edited by Joseph Masheck, 53-66, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974. 56

METHODOLOGY

I demand the abstract use of critics and the indivisibility of all their essays... —Kurt Schwitters³

Since there is little historiography for Wellman (exhibit reviews, articles, catalog essays, etc.), I will use my interviews with the artist, his geographic and cultural influences, and the art itself as the primary basis for discussion. Using the art historical canon and scholarly literature on modern and contemporary art for comparison, I will consider Wellman's influences and analyze his work in light of recent trends. This investigation starts by focusing narrowly on a specific person's experience, geographical place, and artistic practice. Expanding outward, terms such as inside and outside become unstable, and questions surface about what constitutes an artist's community, and how history is woven from contemporary threads.



³ Kurt Schwitters, from 'To All the Theatres of the World' 1926, compiled in Kolocotroni, Vassiliki, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou, *Modernism, An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 286



THE HISTORY OF THE NOW

When there are no longer any artistic movements, it seems that we are all working under the auspices of this singular ism that is deliberately (and literally) not one at all...

—e-flux journal⁴

The process of creating historical narrative from contemporary art is problematic at best. The long-term importance, or even temporary relevance, of current trends is always uncertain, and linear historical progression has itself become a historic concept.⁵ Various social and economic conditions have added to the confusion. As the majority of paper-based media outlets have folded, or been forced to drastically cut staff, fewer professional art critics are writing the contemporary narratives that once formed the first layer of written history. A multitude of voices have rushed to fill the void, but the atmosphere is more like a bazaar than a cathedral; a democratic (or anarchic) cacophony of opinion and popular wisdom.⁶ The construct of history has shifted from a vertical progression to a model more closely resembling a Wiki network of interconnected horizontal links.

Belief in the inevitability of progress eroded in the twentieth century and history shifted away from a single narrative, and toward “many parallel, contingent but identifiably specific histories.” Beginning in the 1980s writers began to speculate that “we might always live in the aftermath of ‘crisis,’” in a perpetual state of “periodlessness.”⁷ The phrase “temporal drag” was first used in the context of identity to explain “the pull of the past upon the present.”⁸ Julia Bryan-Wilson expands on this concept to explain the instability of the contemporary, “Temporal drag implies a chronological distortion in which time does not progress seamlessly forward but is full of swerves, unevenness, and interruptions.”⁹ Bourriaud proposes that our time is one of “heterochrony,” or multiple temporalities, that leads to an “altermodern” art, “a positive vision of

4 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle, “What is Contemporary Art?” *e-flux journal* #12, January 2010, Issue Two, http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_109.pdf, (Accessed January, 2011).

5 Aranda, et al, *e-flux journal* #11, “What is Contemporary Art?” Issue One, December 2009. http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_96.pdf, (Accessed February 2011). E-flux attempted to develop a wiki archive for contemporary art, but the would-be authors encountered “a small technical problem.” Because “no objective structure or criterion exists with which to organize artistic activity from the past twenty years or so,” they were unable to decide how to structure the archive, let alone how to make it comprehensible, and the effort was postponed indefinitely.

6 Gener, Randy. “Criticism in the Hybrid Newsroom.” *American Theatre* 26, no. 6, (July, 2009): 44-50, 44. Ibid 50

7 Smith, Terry. “The State of Art History: Contemporary Art.” *Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (Dec, 2010): 366-83. 374

8 Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(Er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31, no. 4, Is There Life after Identity Politics? (Autumn, 2000): pp. 727-744. 728

9 Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Julia Bryan-Wilson on Sharon Hayes”, *ArtForum*, May 2006, <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=200605&id=10867>, (Accessed January 2011).

chaos and complexity... exploring all dimensions of the present, tracing lines in all directions of time and space.”¹⁰

Although most scholars view “Contemporary Art” as a separate category from “Modern,”¹¹ it is still debatable whether artists have indeed moved past the issues that defined the twentieth century. Discussing art of the 1930s using words that could just as well refer to the present moment, social and cultural historian George Mosse described the modern age as a time that “seemed to threaten the coherence of life itself.” He perceived a “new velocity of time,” resulting from rapid industrial and technological changes, that caused “a certain disorientation, a ‘simultaneity of experience.’”¹² The Museum of Modern Art’s Kirk Varnedoe argued that the revolutions that produced modern art “have not been concluded or superseded,” and that “contemporary art today can be understood as the ongoing extension and revision of those founding innovations and debates.”¹³ Critic and curator Jan Verwoert commented on the regressive state of contemporary experience:

We have experienced the fact that history never ended. We have seen the unresolved tensions of modernity erupt in local conflicts, plunging modern countries around the globe back into hell. This is not over. It never was, and it doesn’t look like it will end anytime soon. Articulating our contemporary experience, we cannot therefore be anything other than uncontemporary.¹⁴

As recently as the 1960s, a few influential critics and philosophers were able to articulate, and even to shape, the critical terms of historical art, continuing a Western narrative of progression that traced its roots back to the ancient Greeks. Since the 1970s, however, the situation has increasingly resembled a scattered chorus of voices without sheet music or conductor. Hal Foster succinctly frames the problem of defining the state of the contemporary:

In its very heterogeneity, much present practice seems to float free of historical determination, conceptual definition, and critical judgment. Such paradigms as “the neo-avant-garde” and “postmodernism,” which once oriented some art and theory, have run into the sand, and, arguably, no models of much explanatory reach or

10 Nicolas Bourriaud and Tate Britain (Gallery), *Altermodern : Tate Triennial, Tate Triennial Exhibition of Contemporary British Art* (4th : 2009), London; New York: Tate Pub., 2009. 13

11 Julieta Aranda, et al, “What is Contemporary Art?” Issue Two. “The term [contemporary] has clearly replaced the use of “modern” to describe the art of the day. With this shift, out go the grand narratives and ideals of modernism, replaced by a default, soft consensus on the immanence of the present, the empiricism of now, of what we have directly in front of us, and what they have in front of them over there.”

12 Mosse, George L. “Beauty without Sensuality.” In *Degenerate Art : The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, edited by Stephanie Barron, Peter W. Guenther, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Art Institute of Chicago, 25-31. Los Angeles, Calif; New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; H.N. Abrams, 1991. 25

13 Kirk Varnedoe, *Modern Contemporary: Art at MOMA since 1980*, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2000. 12

14 Jan Verwoert, “Standing on the Gates of Hell, My Services Are Found Wanting,” *e-flux Journal* #12, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/108>, January 2010 (Accessed January 2011).



intellectual force have risen in their stead. At the same time, perhaps paradoxically, “contemporary art” has become an institutional object in its own right...¹⁵

Foster is one of a handful of scholars who might wield the authority to shape a new master narrative but, in the spirit of our time, he prefers instead to “suggest the state of the debate on ‘the contemporary’” and act as a curator of responses, without any attempt toward summation. Foster cites market conditions and “globalism” as general causes of the current free-floating feel of the contemporary, and yet he limits his discussion to curators and critics based in North America and Western Europe. This Western perspective is inadequate in an art world that encompasses the globe. To identify the trends of today is to begin by questioning where the new centers of influence are located, and whose voices best represent their creative energies. As the status of the United States as the world’s leading economic power wanes, new centers of art are rising to prominence, especially in China and India. A Tate Modern curator points out that, “serious art is being made in China, Latin America, South Africa, and so on, but few [Western scholars] have the opportunities to see what is being made.” In these circumstances, naming a new totalizing paradigm would be “akin to a hubristic, neocolonial move.”¹⁶

In attempting to summarize frequently cited contemporary trends, I will generally avoid discussing media since this element of artistic fashion seems to fluctuate like hemlines; for example in 2002, Documenta 11’s “theme of the demise of the studio resulted in there being little painting in evidence—it appears to have been officially buried with the old century.”¹⁷ Two years later the Whitney Biennial asked us to “consider painting—and its “center stage” status today—as a ‘rejoinder to the photographic homogeneity of mass media surface and image, and its impact on individual and collective identity.’”¹⁸ In 2005, Jan Verwoert discussed the cyclical re-entry of painting and other physical media-based practices, wondering “whether a renewed examination of the intractable materiality of certain media-specific approaches might not actually be what is needed at this precise moment.”¹⁹ Following are a few excerpts from scholarly conversations on the state of the contemporary that seem to represent major themes and recurring threads of the overall discussion.

15 Hal Foster, “Contemporary Extracts,” *e-flux Journal* #12, www.e-flux.com/journal/view/98, January 2010 (Accessed January 2011)

16 Mark Godfrey, quoted in Hal Foster, *e-flux Journal* #12

17 Allara, Pamela. “Documenta 11: The Disappearing Element.” *Art New England* 23, no. 6 (October/November, 2002): 22-4. 23

18 Bankowsky, Jack. “Many Happy Returns: The Whitney 2004 Biennial.” *Artforum*. <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=200405&id=6721> (accessed February, 2011).

19 Jan Verwoert, “Why are Conceptual Artists Painting Again, Because They Think it’s a Good Idea,” *Afterall*, Fall/Winter 2005, <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.12/why.are.conceptual.artists.painting.again.because>. (Accessed March 2011). 5

Verwoert explains contemporary appropriation as “the hope that it should be possible to cut a slice out of the substance of this commodity culture to expose ... the different temporalities that overlie each other like strata in the thick skin of the commodity’s surface.”²⁰ In addition to the ubiquitous use of objects selected from “commercial culture and the detritus of urban waste,” art historian Terry Smith sees artists taking interest in “the nature of time, in temporalities of all kinds—social, personal, bodily, geologic, world historical, scientific, eternal—and in the intersections between them.”²¹ He points out a “densely textured interplay between artists,” through personal or sympathetic connections, artists making linkages between “objects, ideas, people, and institutions” and art history.²² The catalog for the New Museum’s inaugural 2007 exhibition, *Unmonumental*, remarks on “a global trend towards the fragmentary and contingent in some of the strongest sculpture being made today ... work that reflects the extreme delicacy and fragility of life in the twenty-first century.”²³ Similarly, a review of the 2008 Whitney Biennial commented on a quality of “lessness” that involved explorations of “nonmonumentality, antispectacle, and ephemerality.”²⁴ Critic Yates McKee credits curator Okwui Enwezor for recognizing “the increasingly transnational scope of contemporary art in discursive, institutional, and economic terms. He believes that the centrality of a global diaspora and its experience of exile offer a double perspective that “results from the bi-cultural knowledge it produces, generating in its positive expression a sensitivity towards difference.”²⁵

Obsessed with issues of temporality and layered with nostalgic references and materials, art of the twenty first century continues to reflect the disorientation and rapid changes of the modern world. Like many artists of the moment, Wellman’s art is human in scale and connected to the impulse to construct or assemble, using the waste of commercialism, and elements of the ephemeral along with traditional art materials. His concerns with time resonate with the unresolved issues of modernity, now rephrased within the contemporary concept of the “altermodern.” He draws inspiration in part from the fractured world outside his studio windows, a literal view of the great divide that separates nature from a century of resource exploitation.

20 Jan Verwoert, “Apropos Appropriation: Why stealing images today feels different,” *Art & Research*, Volume 1. No. 2. Summer 2007, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/verwoert.html> (Accessed February 2011)

21 Smith, *State of Art History*, 367-368

22 Ibid

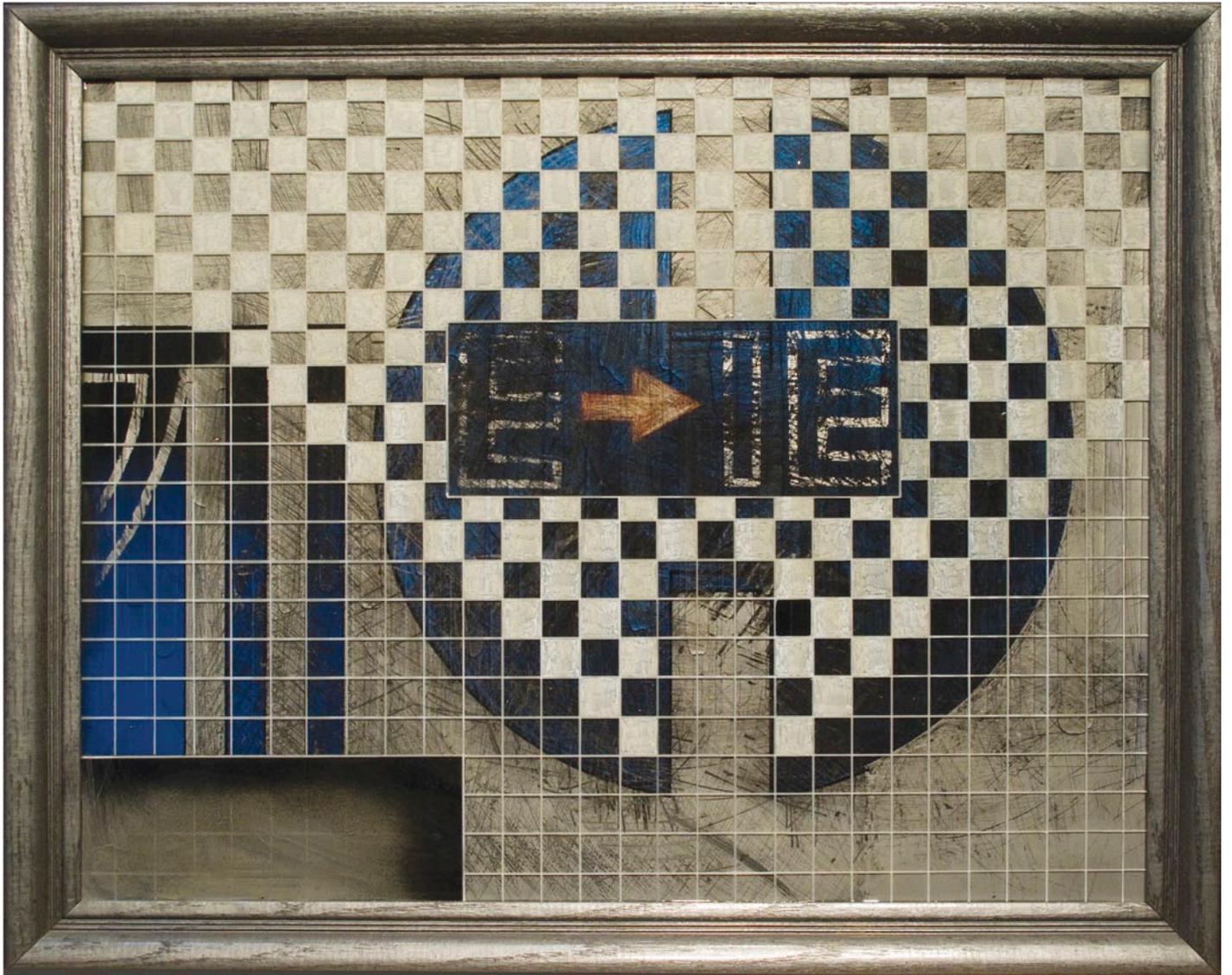
23 Richard Flood and New Museum, New York, N.Y., *Unmonumental : The Object in the 21st Century*, Preface

24 Elizabeth Schambelan, “Whitney Biennial,” *Artforum*, Summer 2008, <http://artforum.com/inprint/id=20396>, accessed January, 2010

25 T.J. Demos, “The Ends of Exile: Towards a Coming Universality?,” in Bourriaud, *Altermodern*. 76.

Opposite:
E-I-E-I-OH!, 2005
 Oil, latex and resin on salvaged
 Plexiglas sign
 25 x 31 in.

Wellman explores the instability of the temporal through music, discarded objects, chance, and analog and digital memories of obsolete technologies. His art reveals small, local and personal histories, connects with twentieth century artists and movements, and reflects the humor and tragedy of the rusty, but still contemporary, modern project.





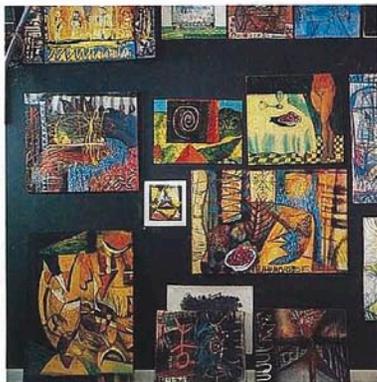
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID J. LUND

DARING DUO

Artists Wes Hicks and Steve Wellman filled Lawndale's raw space with wall-to-wall exuberance.

BY GARY MCKAY

No Houston exhibition of work by fledgling artists has ever been stronger, or more sheerly pleasurable, than last November's show of 375 paintings, drawings, and sculptures by Wes Hicks and Steve Wellman at Lawndale. The number of pieces alone was amazing, and most of them had been completed within the year. Works covered the walls, stood or lay on the floor, were hung from the ceiling, or dangled from cords like clothes on a line. It was a spectacular installation, and indeed proved overwhelming for some visitors—even



Top and above: Pieces large and small were massed together to create a sensation of visual pandemonium in a show by artists Wes Hicks and Steve Wellman at Lawndale last November. They dubbed the installation "Salon de Compressionism."

though they might have heard of new Lawndale director Moira Kelly's affinity for the adventurous. But though a few people left thoroughly dislocated, many others emerged tingling with elation from the Hicks-Wellman joyride.

The artists called their very intense show the "Salon de Compressionism," a name that succeeded on several levels. Obviously it referred to the jamming of so many works of art into a single gallery, and, too, the art represented a great deal of the world. Pictures of horses, cats, fish, and snakes were hung among cityscapes and views of pyramids. Still lifes containing calmly rendered domestic details—potted plants,

EARLY INFLUENCES

Art in its execution and direction is dependent on the time in which it lives, and artists are creatures of their epoch. The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday's crash...—Richard Huelsenbeck²⁶

Born in Caspar, Wyoming in 1960, Wellman spent most of his childhood in Calgary, Alberta, attended high school in Chicago, and followed his family to Houston in 1978. He attended the University of Houston from 1979-1985 and actively participated in the city's lively cultural milieu, heralded at the time as an emerging regional center for the arts.²⁷ The University of Houston provided three years of rigorous academic training in painting, science and liberal arts and then, in the third year of a five-year program, he was "turned loose" in the Lawndale Annex.²⁸ Wellman recalls, "Lawndale was 3 or 4 miles off campus giving it a 'wild west' feel that we all took advantage of ... [an] amazing free-for-all place."²⁹

His early career looked promising, as he took part in critically, if not financially, successful one- and two-person exhibitions in Houston's various alternative spaces. In 1985 he and Wes Hicks presented *Salon de Compressionism* at Lawndale,³⁰ a sensory overload installation in which they encrusted every inch of the walls and much of the ceiling and floor with two and three dimensional assemblage, drawing and paintings. An exhibition review by Gary McKay praised the venue as well as the Wellman/Hicks collaboration. "No Houston exhibition of work by fledgling artists has ever been stronger, or more sheerly pleasurable, than last November's show of 375 paintings, drawings, and sculptures by Wes Hicks and Steve Wellman at Lawndale."³¹ Eight years later, writing for a Lawndale retrospective catalog, he still recalled the Wellman-Hicks collaboration as one of the center's most exciting moments:

26 "First German Dada Manifesto," 1918, reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003, 257

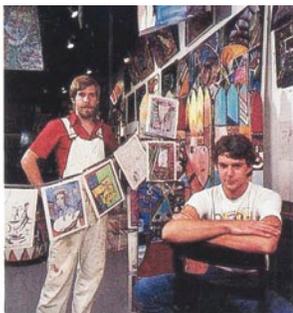
27 Rose, Barbara, Susie Kalil, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. *Fresh Paint: The Houston School: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*. Austin, Tex: Texas Monthly Press, 1985. Rose's catalog essay argues for Houston's consideration as a "vital regional school."⁶⁵

28 Barbara Rose, *Fresh Paint*, 45. Lawndale is a 15,000 square foot former cable factory. Beginning in 1979 it was used for painting and sculpture classes, with two galleries and an experimental performance space.

29 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from email and conversations between the author and artist that took place between February, 2010 and February 2011.

30 John E. Bowlit, Bowlit, John E. "Some Thoughts on the Condition of Soviet Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 4 (Dec., 1989): pp. 542-550. Applied to Soviet art in the mid 1980s, the appropriated term "Compressionism" means "the combining and blending of many cultures into one."

31 Gary McKay, "Daring Duo", *Houston Home & Garden*, Houston TX, March 1985. 60



Hicks (left) and Wellman created most of the 375 works in their exhibition within the year.



Sculptures made from found materials contributed to the overloaded atmosphere.

Steve and Wes had a great rapport. They were using a lot of found stuff; they were reading the same people. And then there was the general sort of atmosphere of collaboration at Lawndale. . . . So it was almost organic, the way it worked for them. It was very very natural. Things were hanging everywhere, floor to ceiling. Things were free standing, and instead of being lost by being jammed together, the pieces actually gained a great deal of power from being displayed that way. They complemented each other, and the effect was as if the fellows had even worked with an architect somehow. The room had that kind of finished feeling, of being a space that was thought out as a complete environment, like the Sistine Chapel or someplace that's thought out from the idea to the completion. That is how it looked. You didn't want it to come down.³²

Wellman and Hicks also showed together at the Museum of Fine Art Guys, a space run by a media-savvy artistic duo described by the New York Times as “part Dada, part David Letterman . . . a cross between John Cage and the Smothers Brothers.”³³ A 1987 *Art in America* article on the Houston Scene mentioned Wellman and Hicks in the context of their collaborative assemblages “that combine kitsch and cartoony, sci-fi motifs.”³⁴ Ed and Nancy Keinholtz were among the collectors who purchased paintings from these early shows.

Wellman's artistic practice was shaped in part by his formal education,³⁵ which in turn, was influenced by the Houston Art scene. In the exhibit catalog for *Fresh Paint*, Barbara Rose speculates that “a sense of isolation and marginality” within Houston's booming commercial culture led its artists to concentrate on “personal relationships, psychological content, intimate sentiment,” and to work within “the boundaries of human scale.” Some of the tendencies she cited can still be applied to Wellman's work today, including complexity, humor instead of irony, and attention to detail, craft, and process.³⁶ Wellman's painting and sculpture teachers, quoted in the catalog, mention the importance of connections between art and life, humor, beauty, communication, and a belief in the compatibility of abstraction and figuration.³⁷

Installation Photographs “Daring Duo”

Houston Home & Garden, March
1985, 61- 62

Opposite:

Cadmium Curve 3

Poured cans of latex paint,
pigmented varnish, oil paints and
paint markers on a framed dry
erase marker board purchased for
a dollar at a thrift store
35 x 23 in.

32 Gary McKay, quoted in Ranta, Rachel, Elizabeth Ward, and Lawndale Art and Performance Center (Houston, Tex.), *Lawndale Live!: A Retrospective, 1979-1990* : September 13 - October 16, 1993, Lawndale Art and Performance Center. Houston, TX: The Center, 1993, 34

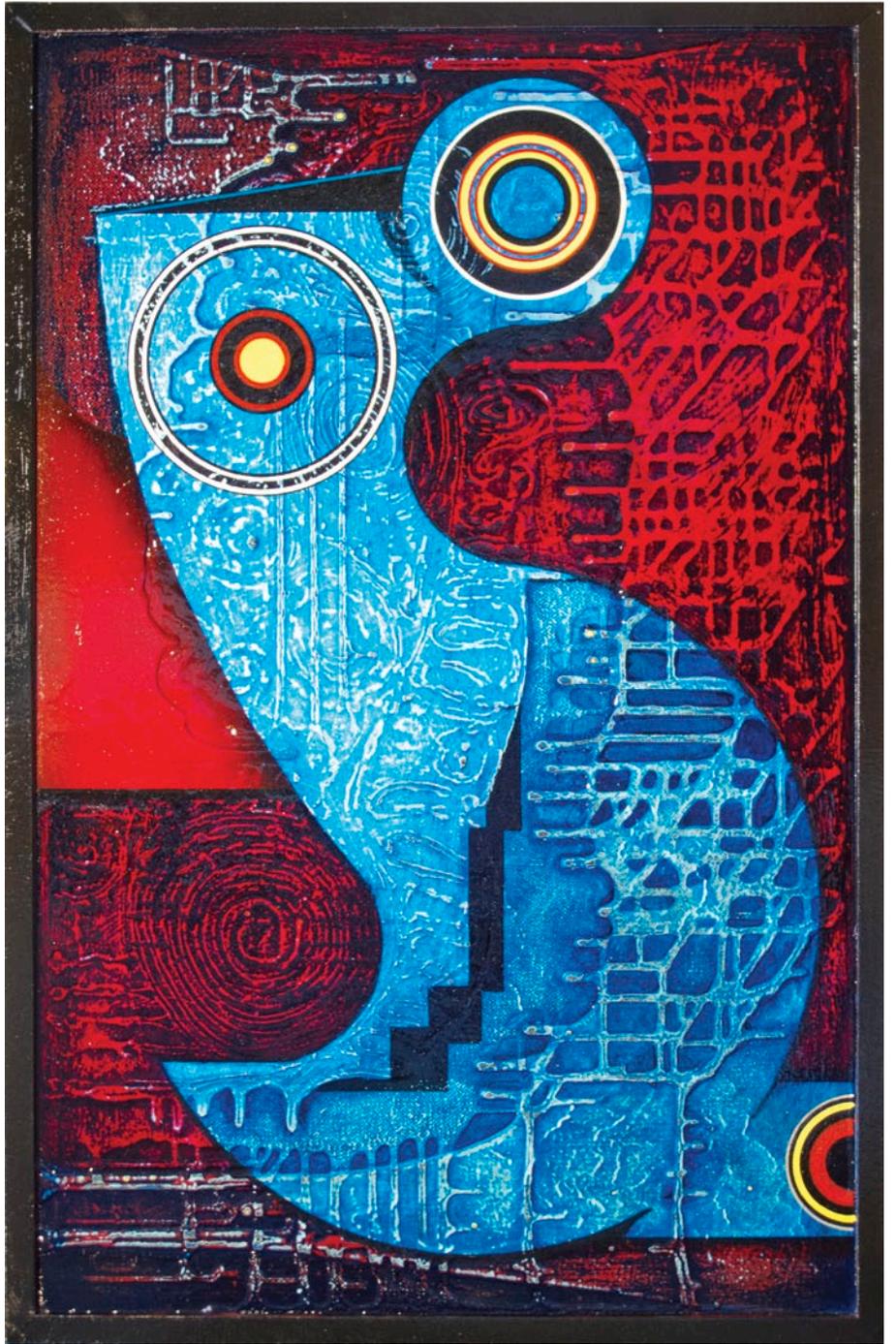
33 Sam Howe Verhovek, “At Work With: The Art Guys; In Performance: Life Imitates Art Imitating Life” *New York Times*, August 9, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/09/garden/at-work-with-the-art-guys-in-performance-life-imitates-art-imitating-life.html>, (Accessed November, 2010).

34 Gambrell, Jamey. “Art Capital of the Third Coast.” *Art in America* 75, April, 1987: 186-201. 201

35 1984 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Magna Cum Laude in painting from the University of Houston

36 Barbara Rose, Susie Kalil, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. *Fresh Paint : The Houston School* : The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Austin, Tex: Texas Monthly Press, 1985. 65-67

37 Ibid, John Alexander 96, Derek Boshier 106, Gael Stack 170, and Richard Stout 176





East Ridge, 2011
 Vogue Cleaners, 2011
 Homestake Pass, 2006
 Digital photographs by the author

Opposite:
 Steve Wellman
 East Ridge, 2010
 Masking tape, oil paint, latex paint
 and spray paint on glass
 9 x 10 1/2 in.

PLACE

Artistic styles and formats must henceforth be regarded from the viewpoint of diaspora, migration and exodus. —Nicolas Bourriaud³⁸

After moving to his wife's home town in 1990,³⁹ which he refers to only half-jokingly as "Butte-Siberia," Wellman became increasingly isolated from the art world. He painted obsessively and exhibited locally, but without the encouragement and synergy that comes from daily contact with a community of artists. He stopped promoting his work, ignored the world of academic/mainstream art, and found refuge in his family, imagination and memory, and in the rich history and natural beauty of his new home.

Butte, Montana is a culturally isolated historic mining town, set in a high desert valley and surrounded by the sublime beauty of the Rocky Mountains. For the past twenty years, Wellman has worked within his adopted community, obsessively producing paintings and assemblages, and selling mostly within the local market, if an art market can be said to exist in an economically depressed community of less than 35,000 people. Wellman's oeuvre has maintained a degree of consistency through numerous themes and across a wide range of media, unified in part by a juxtaposition of extreme contrasts that reflects the local landscape.

The home of Teamster's local no. 2, once the hub of five railroads, and now the location of America's largest federal Superfund site, Butte's history is the boom and bust of twentieth century America; the rise and fall of labor and its losing battle with capital. Three of the 83 photographs in Robert Frank's 1959 distillation (or critique) of American culture, *The Americans*, were taken in Butte, pointing to its mid-twentieth century relevance as a microcosm of industrial America.⁴⁰ Once the primary supplier of copper to the world, every aspect of Butte was shaped by mining and the Anaconda Minerals Company, known in Montana simply as "The Company."

Modern globalization began in Butte in the 1920s, when ACM purchased mines in Chile and began using its foreign holdings to leverage worker concessions.⁴¹ Open pit mining, begun in the 1950s, terraced the East Ridge and

³⁸ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Altermodern*. 14

³⁹ A regional office for the FBI for many years, Butte "was notorious as the backwater dumping ground for agents who displeased Hoover. The FBI director reportedly thought a Butte winter would do wonders for mavericks." Wellman sometimes signs his name, "Steve of Siberia," referring both to Butte's climate and its reputation as a place of exile. "Butte Office Shuts Doors FBI Purgatory Closes." *Orlando Sentinel*, January 20, 1995, http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1995-01-20/news/9501200602_1_purgatory-butte-office-fbi. (Accessed December 2010.)

⁴⁰ Robert Frank and Jack Kerouac. *The Americans*, Göttingen: Steidl, 2008.

⁴¹ Janet Finn, *Tracing the Veins: Of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 33

consumed entire neighborhoods, machinery replaced labor, and the population steadily declined. The mines stopped operating in 1983 following a crash in copper prices, power was cut to underground water pumps, and the Berkeley Pit and the underground tunnels slowly filled with a toxic solution of heavy metals dissolved in acid.⁴² Montana Resources purchased the mining rights in 1985 and now 350 non-union workers continue the work of blasting and hauling the “overburden” of the ridges surrounding the community.⁴³

More than a century of mining left the mountain valley “littered with un-vegetated or sparsely vegetated mine wastes, often containing hazardous concentrations of metals and arsenic.”⁴⁴ Today, grand architecture from the

1880s stands beside urban blight, mercury bubbles up from sidewalk cracks, and the scarred hillsides leach metallic patina. Butte’s stripped hills, stark iron monuments, gilded architecture and moonscape of mine waste are a powerful influence on its resident artists, regardless of their chosen subject or media. Butte juxtaposes pre- and post-industrial landscapes with the decayed suburban strip malls of the present, continually slipping between past and future.

Although Wellman believes that since moving from the “uptown” historic district down to the suburban “flats” in 2004 the color and texture of Butte’s history has had less influence on his work, the layers, metallic pigments and broken grounds of his paintings still resemble the crumbling terraces of the urban landscape. His work also mirrors the sharp contrasts of the surrounding mountains, the impossibly blue sky, and the clear air and cold nights of the high desert. Wellman acknowledges his connection to this landscape, “I love the light of Butte. When it’s really cold out you might as well be in Nepal it’s so clear ... especially in the winter when it’s just snowed and it’s crystalline, a mile high, it’s a drawing point for any artist.”

To the West, Butte is linked to Anaconda by the shared toxic aftermath of mining and smelting, but elsewhere it is surrounded by a horseshoe bend of the continental divide, national forest, clear trout streams and pristine wilderness. These complex and relatively undisturbed webs of life provide a source of inspiration, an affirmative influence that contrasts with the mined and smelted urban landscape. The dual influences of natural beauty and urban decay are evident in the radical juxtapositions between the brilliant colors, textures, mediums, and forms of Wellman’s assemblages.

42 Finn, *Tracing the Veins*, 8-9

43 Montana Resources International, <http://www.montanaresources.com/> (Accessed March, 2011)

44 EPA Superfund Program. Silver Bow Creek/Butte Area. <http://www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/mt/sbcbutte/>. (Accessed 4-16-10)





PROCESS

Duchamp showed the usefulness of addition (*moustache*). Rauschenberg showed the function of subtraction (*De Kooning*). Well, we look forward to multiplication and division. It is safe to assume that someone will learn trigonometry. —John Cage⁴⁵

Wellman blurs the lines between art-making and science experiment, sculpture and painting; setting up conditions for content to be revealed through chance, experiment and repetition. “One line leads to another,” he says, “where that line is headed, I don’t really know.”⁴⁶ Wellman’s dimensional assemblages suspend layered paint in transparent medium, creating actual physical depth within the picture plane in addition to spatial illusions. “I try to blur the lines between sculpture and painting,” he explains, “especially the poured pieces ... they have physicality.” Since the end of high modernism, the space between painting and assemblage has been a popular medium for artistic exploration, partly in reaction against the Greenbergian dogma of purity, but more importantly, in an attempt to connect with “the real.”⁴⁷

The “poured paintings” involve working from back to front: Wellman creates a ground inside the backing of the frame—often using collage, frozen paint or other uncontrolled media—then adds layers of transparent paint, and finally melds the elements with tinted resin. Sometimes the ground is almost completely obscured by layers of glaze. The poured resin surfaces are highly reflective and suspended “interference” pigments create directional variations in hue, causing the colors to shift depending on the angle of view. The complexity of these painterly objects is almost impossible to capture photographically. In a sense, they become interactive and sculptural, revealing and concealing their inner elements depending on lighting and viewing angle.

Some of the early twentieth-century ideas that Wellman revives in his artistic practice include a concern for art’s formal structure, craftsmanship, and the aesthetic sensibilities of the viewer. He believes that a successful painting must have four elements, which he describes as:

1. **Conflict.** You have to have textural diversity, complementary colors.
2. **Depth:** illusionary or physical, even as little as 1/8-1/2 inch. It is very important with the glass paintings to have the illusion of depth.

45 John Cage, “26 statements re Duchamp,” (1963) in *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, 67

46 Steve Wellman, quoted by Tim Trainor, “Surrealist Suburbanite”, *Montana Standard*, 11-29-2009, http://www.mtstandard.com/special-section/local/article_92475248-1494-5b66-855d-92468f03a3f6.html, (Accessed March, 2011).

47 Thomas McEvilly, *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt*, Aesthetics Today, New York: School of Visual Arts ; Allworth Press, 1999. 41

3. **Motion.** People don't like to be bored. Motion is needed to keep your eye rolling around, to focus on different things you don't see when you see it as a whole. I don't want to bore people.

4. **Unity.** If you can bring that diversity, the conflict, the things making your eyes go this way and that way, and then if you can unify it somehow through composition, somehow unify something that's disjointed. The circle is a great way to do that. The content is secondary.

The dark paintings displayed in Houston's Rothko Chapel, where Steve and his wife Mollie were married in 1984, have exerted a lasting influence on his work. He insists, "What appear to be massive black paintings are in fact excitedly vibrant, intensely colorful and very much alive." Wellman speculates that Rothko achieved this effect by using multiple layers of colored glazes, a strategy he employs in his own painting.



You'd think they're nothing, a lot of people think they're nothing. It's all natural light—[what you see] depends on whether it's light out. ...They're not black at all; they're extremely colorful. That always intrigued me too. How many coats of blue does it take to almost make black—glazes of paint on paint on paint? How dark is red before it goes black? I did a black drawing then added glaze, glaze, glaze of alizarin crimson. That's the darkest red I've ever seen. I've been into glazes ever since I discovered these weird pigments; "interference" [pigments], depending on your point of view, will literally change colors. Mix it just right, and from the left it's red, from the right blue, with brush strokes, the physicality of medium, it starts to look like crumpled paper—floating prisms.

The concepts beneath Wellman's processes are linked to disparate sources: the Surrealist and high Modern desire to draw from the unconscious, a Dada interest in random chance and entropy, and a concern with the environment that connects with the critical issues of the present. While Duchamp, and many artists of the late twentieth century, attempted to remove all traces of the artist's hand from process,⁴⁸ Wellman balances rational intention with intuition, setting up the terms for each series of experiments and then allowing nature and random factors to influence the outcome. He tries to connect his art to the spiritual by bringing "forces of nature, gravity, time of day, science" into his work. His paintings do not seek to imitate the natural world through illusion,

⁴⁸ Duchamp, quoted in Hofmann, "Marcel Duchamp and Emblematic Realism," in Mashek, *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*. "I took the machine as a point of departure. I was not interested in its mechanical aspect but in the design of a new technique. I wanted to return to an absolutely dry design, to dry art. What better example could I find than a mechanical blueprint."



The Last Brain Cell, 2009
Frozen Paint and Plastic on
Framed Panel
15 x 17 in.



History's Fence, 2010
Spray paint and pigmented resin
on brutalized 50-year-old fence
20 x 21 in.

Attic Dust Bunny #4, 2005
Tile samples, concrete, doily, latex
paint, cardboard and
pigmented resin
17 x 15 in.

but to emulate some of its underlying structures and processes. He states, “It’s not so much my doing. I’m not in control—I’m controlling chance and chaos.” This is in complete contrast to the “I am Nature”⁴⁹ statement attributed to Jackson Pollock, and yet parallels the absence of conscious control that took place in the gap between Pollock’s stick and the canvas.⁵⁰ Wellman described the elaborate ritual he performs during sub-zero temperatures to arrive at some of the randomly cracked sculptural underpinnings of his poured paintings:

I love working with the frozen paintings—oil and latex cracked surfaces, like “The Last Brain Cell.” I knew it was going to be 16 below and I had this frame, about ¾” depth to the panel. . . . I got some heavy gauge cardboard, glued it to the panel, and painted it all black. I have this god-awful five-gallon bucket of primer. Subtle images—a couple of curves, hit it with Verathane, heat that thing up 5-10 minutes, fill to the brim with paint (and it was deep.) Literally this thing’s steaming, and set it out overnight. Originally when I poured it was a flat surface of paint, the next morning it was evaporated, frozen, drying faster than the Verathane, didn’t want to stick to it. I knew it was going to do something, but didn’t know it was going to do that! You’re not supposed to put latex over wet oil, but you get some really cool results.

Wellman’s experimental work process often leads to connected themes and variations. In his 2009 show at the University Gallery in Dillon, Montana, he installed his work to emphasize “the relationship between certain pieces and the interaction between thought processes and methods.” He compared the installation to an album, “that flows from one song to the other seamlessly,” and becomes “much more powerful” as a group.

Using recycled materials is one way Wellman establishes sequence; for example, a fifty-year-old fence was incorporated into five poured paintings that explored time, random destruction, and the tactile qualities of weathered paint and wood. He also connects with every-day reality. One piece uses a blackboard left behind by a long-ago student as a ground, another incorporates a paper doily left over from the previous night’s dessert. Connecting to the world outside of art through discarded objects is important to him, as is the history of interaction they index—the marks of time, natural processes and human use. He follows more closely in the surrealist tradition of choosing objects for their associations rather than elevating impersonal commodities in the manner of Duchamp.⁵¹ He explained the formal advantages of using recycled materials in his work:

49 Lee Krasner interview, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-lee-krasner-12507>, 1964, (Accessed February, 2011).

50 Chave, Anna C. “Pollock and Krasner: Script and Postscript.” In *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, edited by Francis Francina. 1st U.S. ed., 329-17. New York: Harper & Row, 1985. 333

51 Duchamp, quoted by Octavio Paz, “The Ready-Made,” in Masheck, *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*. 88. “The great problem was the act of selection. I had to pick an object without it impressing me and, as far as possible, without the least intervention of any idea or suggestion of aesthetic pleasure. It was necessary to reduce my personal taste to zero.”



I would say 97% of the entire show is recycled in one way or another. ... I like working on materials that have seen some use in their day ... [because] they have a built in texture going for them or perhaps it is just a scratch or a random knot hole—something ... to use as a starting point with the painting. Working on a brutalized piece of plywood WILL have starting points—unlike working on a canvas painted white with gesso.

Wellman's work is a continuing investigation of materials, processes and interactions. He invites accident and collaboration from natural or random forces by combining incompatible mediums such as oil and latex, or by exposing a substance that is not supposed to freeze to sub-zero temperatures. He tends to mine each series of formal and thematic ideas until the vein gives out, creating unified sequences that often branch and cross. A new exploration of media may incorporate previous intellectual content, and new ideas can find expression through older processes.

Sometimes Wellman re-works his paintings and constructions, adding more elements and additional layers of resin, risking destruction to push the idea one step further. While most of his work is executed within a few days, weeks or months, a few painterly assemblages were completed over the course of more than twenty years. Some of these started as glass paintings or traditional oils, and eventually became grounds for new works.

He accidentally destroyed a recent self-portrait that was planned for this exhibition. "I took a blow torch to the back and melted it and the glass shattered. That was pretty f-ing cool. I should have filmed it." Casually risking, and even courting destruction enables him to build richly layered compositions and discover new processes and meanings along the way. The broken self-portrait became raw material for the ground of a new assemblage. It also inspired a new work process, wherein he begins by defining the medium, in this case, "Recycled Random Acts of Reverse Vandalism and Intentional use of Conscious Chaos on Shattered Glass." He used a pellet gun to perpetrate the "acts of reverse vandalism." Eventually the layered fragments will be partly concealed under new elements, sealed in resin, and a range of dates documented on the back. Like a nautilus, the painting carries its own history forward within its sealed chambers.

Pablo's Futuristic Vision #1, #2, 2010
 Bisected electric guitar, oil,
 pigmented resin
 19 x 15 in.





Transformation Dance, 1992
Oil on Canvas
25 1/4 x 19 1/4 in.

Opposite:

The Exotic Winter, 1996-7
Oils and ink and tape on canvas
19 x 13 in.

Abundance, 1984-97
Fabric paint, resin, mixed media
17 x 13 1/2 in.

Golden Pursuit, 1996-7
Oils and ink and tape on canvas
19 x 13 in.

PAINTING

If painting is to speak to us today, it will speak (if not always in immediately discernible ways) out of or against our condition under mass media; and (this last point is implicit) a part of telling the present to ourselves necessarily entails a retelling of the past.

—Jack Bankowsky⁵²

Wellman's early paintings used traditional mediums to depict simple shapes, complicated with painterly glazing, scumbling and layering, often containing art historical references. A review of his work from the 1980s mentions his affinity for quotation, "Slyly squeezed into the paintings and drawings were allusions to styles and motifs found in a number of twentieth century art movements, from the distant, flat horizon lines so favored by the Surrealists to the skulls and eagles reduced to pure Pop imagery by Andy Warhol."⁵³ In the manner of Jasper Johns as well as members of the Houston School, Wellman has consistently adopted elements from both geometric and expressionist abstraction, using a compass and rule to create an impersonal structure, while also incorporating humor, chance and painterly expression.

One canvas from the early 1990s, *Transformation Dance*, which superficially recalls Theosophist cosmogony diagrams, depicts a central circle containing six-sided stars with a smaller circle and cross at the center.⁵⁴ However, in addition to charting theological relationships, Wellman's spatially complex painting proves that a circle in the center of the canvas is not necessarily static, undercutting a truism of composition theory. Lines drawn in ball point pen thrust the central sphere into rotation, while simultaneously creating the illusion of horizontal movement. Wellman slyly references and undercuts the "still life" genre, resting a sphere on a cloth-covered table, and then endowing the form with the illusion of perpetual motion. Under the edge of the table a second circular form is barely suggested, denying the edge of the picture plane and suggesting a universe of infinitely repeating forms. Wellman explained the apparent connections between the symbolism of this painting and Theosophy:

"Since I have chosen to use compasses and templates and straight lines and T-squares and angles as my visual language tools it is almost impossible not to fall into the symbolism of Cosmology and Theosophy because they too depended greatly upon geometry. A circle will fit in a square, an equilateral triangle will fit in a circle—as to their symbolic meaning I have not a clue ... It is the collision of a shared geometric vocabulary.

⁵² Jack Bankowsky, "Many Happy Returns,"

⁵³ McKay, "Salon de Compressionism," in Ranta, *Lawndale Live*, 62

⁵⁴ Maurice Tuchman, Judi Freeman, Carel Blotkamp, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago, Ill.), and Haags Gemeentemuseum. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1986. 65



Despite his denial, Wellman's spirituality is connected to nature and mathematical structure in a way that resonates with the geometric symbolism, if not the dogma, of the Theosophists. He also shares their concern with numbers, preferring to use two, three, five, and seven elements.⁵⁵ Asked if classical influences, such as Leonardo's Vitruvian man, inspired his geometric figuration he replied, "It would sound better if I was to say 'Yes it was through my studies of da Vinci and his acknowledgment of the geometric nature of the human form' ... However, I believe it came from the Album cover of Brian Eno's *Another Green World*."⁵⁶ While he has intentionally distanced himself from the visual art world, he listens to recorded music while he works and attributes his remaining awareness of contemporary artistic practice to his interest in music.

In the mid 1990s, when his two sons were born, Wellman's paintings verged on overt representation. Executed in visceral reds, a central vase image anchors each composition, bursting with open, leafing growth, sometimes joined by phallic shapes, intertwined, and writhing. The vase is anatomically female in some of the paintings, a more subtle container in others. The *Fertile Ground* series celebrates intimacy, sex, pregnancy and birth as an explosion of life energy.

Wellman's portrayals of sexuality depart from both the Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists, influenced in part by societal shifts in the performance of gender and sexuality. Assuming the traditionally female role of primary caregiver within his family, his perspective of parenthood is still unusual in America today.⁵⁷ His paint handling does not share the ejaculatory connotations often ascribed to Pollock,⁵⁸ nor does it communicate the misogyny or castration anxieties of the Freud-influenced Surrealists. These paintings depict sex as a shared pleasure of intertwined male and female, and reflect the artist's awed reverence for the explosion of new life that often results. Sexualized plant forms link human procreation to the growth and reproduction of other living beings, celebrating the sexual energy of life.

In the process of working on the *Fertile Ground* series, Wellman began experimenting with using resin to build up layers of paint within a deep, womb-like inner space, adding transparent glazes to reveal and conceal the inner elements. His more recent work expands on this process, using the space behind the picture plane to layer transparent films of paint over dimensional elements.

⁵⁵ Tuchman, *Spiritual in Art*, 65

⁵⁶ Cover art by Tom Phillips (detail from *After Raphael*)

⁵⁷ Wellman stayed home with his children when they were small, while his wife returned to full-time law practice. He has remained close to his sons as they've grown into young adults, and especially credits his younger son Max with being the most important part of his current artistic community.

⁵⁸ Chave, in *Frascina Pollock and After*, 333. Chave quotes William Feaver in 1979, who envisioned the artist "casting paint like seed ...", his paintings composed of "manly ejaculatory splat."

PAINTERLY ASSEMBLAGE

I use any material the picture demands. By harmonizing different types of materials among themselves, I have an advantage over mere oil painting, for besides playing off color against color, I also play off line against line, form against form, etcetera, and even material against material...—Kurt Schwitters⁵⁹

Hybrids of painting and sculpture, Wellman's low-relief assemblages meld material fragments from daily life beneath layers of paint and resin. *The Unintentional Grace of Time* is Wellman's title for a loosely autobiographical series based on scavenged artifacts that embody small histories of construction and decay. The materials include shards of pigment from failed glass paintings, filament from CDs of self-recorded music, scraps of lumber, historic wainscoting, house numbers, and a bisected guitar. Planned in groups of five, they refer to the decades Wellman has lived. The objects create a compositional base, which he alters with paint and mixed media and fuses with resin.



Intersection, 2010
Recycled paint peelings, tack cloth
shards, circular stickers, pencil,
white glue, pigmented two-part
epoxy resin and BB on painted
1960's era 2 x 6" wooden timbers
17 x 17 in.

59 Kurt Schwitters, from Merz 1921; 'Consistent Poetry', reprinted in Kolocotroni, in *Modernism Anthology of Sources*, 282



Change of Address or Five, 2010
Acrylic paint, brass numeral and pigmented resin on a bisected address marker salvaged from a demolished building that once read 125
15 x 15 in.

Migration, 2010
Acrylic paint, pigmented resin, table saw cuts, dirt and God only knows what on 100 plus year old salvaged wainscoting
15 x 15 in.

Five recent assemblages integrate scraps from a fifty-year-old fence, using the weathered boards as a textural element, an index of process, and metaphor for aging. *Intersection* pays homage to Mondrian with a deceptively simple grid and limited palette, but this “modern” quotation references Mondrian’s painting as a historic style rather than part of the temporal now. This painterly construction is modeled after Mondrian’s work as it looks today: aged, cracking, and yellowed; modern art as a historic relic. Unlike his modern predecessor, Wellman incorporates two-inch dimensional lumber into his assemblage; its attributes include weight, depth, and physical presence as an object.

The pioneering New York art dealers, Harriet and Sidney Janis argued in 1945 that Mondrian’s asceticism “carried him to a finality of logic” in reduction—to the canvas rectangle, primary colors, paint and brushes. They contrasted him with Marcel Duchamp, who “thinks and works in terms of mechanics, natural forces, the ravages of time, the multiplex accidents of chance.”⁶⁰ Working in the medium of assemblage, Wellman combines the handwork and simple formal elements of Mondrian with a Duchampian fascination with ordinary materials, chance and entropy as he reflects on the nature of time.

Another series of painterly assemblages elegeize Wellman’s previous home in Butte’s historic district, which he and his family left in 2004, moving across town to a 1960s subdivision. Through these works, Wellman comes to terms with the dislocation he experienced in the move. He explores the upheaval of changing residence and community in a way that sincerely reflects a sense of loss, and inadvertently both mocks and channels the centrality of exile and the global diaspora in contemporary art discourse. He saved a section of antique wainscoting when he restored the historic kitchen in his former residence, and used it as the base for these compositions. The bare wood is partly revealed where moldings once covered the edges, contrasting with multiple layers of chipped paint and a century of patina. In *Migration*, Wellman adds his own paint layers and carving over the historic ground, carving a Mondrian-influenced fret board, with alternating patterns of drips and circular notes establishing rhythmic movement. The piece betrays sentimentality for an ordinary thing from a left-behind place, and for the craftsmanship of another century. It symbolizes movement while both representing and embodying a useless thing carried from one place to another to establish “home,” a small piece of the past carried into the future.

⁶⁰ Harriet and Sidney Janis, “Marcel Duchamp, Anti-Artist”, March, 1945, reprinted in Mashek, *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, 31

Geometric Beatnik

The Day I turned Geometric I
curved into a Crystallized Form a
Fractured Walking Mosaic a Million
Pixels PSI.

Rapidly as if seen through an
Electron Microscope—Pulsating
Atoms connected in a Fluid Grid.
Dripping.

I was a Cubistic Structure Crawling.

A Whispering Shadow brought to
my Obtuse Attention that the once
Organically Smooth Earth Tone
Rocks and Boulders I was Flowing
Through had suddenly become
Brightly Colored.

Two Dimensional Rhombus Shapes
Pasted with Exacting Precision onto
a Back Drop of Two Billion Acute
Triangular Shards of seemingly
Infinite variety of Reflective
Qualities.

The Day I turned Geometric was
the same Day the Ecosystem upon
which I Grabbed had also become
a Cubistic Structure Living.

The Whispering Shadow once
again brought to my Trapezoidal
Attention that the Source of its
Shadow Existence was also in a
Hurried State of Transformation.

My Geodesic Dome of a Head
Perfectly Level and Balanced on the
Tripod of my Neck pivoted Quietly
Skyward. My Eye Heard. Observe.

Beheld with Blinding Speed.

A Square Sun.

Rising.



Music for the Eyes, a series that began in 2009 with *Crystalline Triptych*, transforms recorded audio information into a visual framework. Wellman scraped the filament from his own CD recordings, constructed three sealed frames as vessels, and then poured resin over the disembodied bytes of sound. Each holographic fragment is suspended like a faceted, reflective gem within the three-dimensional space of the poured medium. These small and precious objects, displayed as a trinity, serve as vessels of the ephemeral, evoking religious icons or relics. The series playfully explores the transfiguration of decomposed digital audio data into archives of visual analog information. Wellman speculates, “I wonder what it would ‘Sound’ like?” The CD is a disk, like a communion wafer, its destruction akin to mastication, its disembodied rebirth within the dimensional space of resin, a sort of afterlife. This triptych simultaneously serves as the record of a genuine spiritual exploration and a subversive transubstantiation of religious symbolism into material culture.

Sharing an Episcopal upbringing with Andy Warhol, it is never completely clear whether the religious works of either artist are devout or ironic. For example, Warhol’s *The Last Supper (Dove)*, with two corporate logos and a price tag pasted over an outline drawing of the last supper, has been interpreted variously as a social critique and genuine religious expression.⁶¹ Wellman rejects his early religious training, but still attempts to imbue his art with a sense of the spiritual, as he sees it manifested within the physical world.

Geometric Beatnik

Sonic Caveman lyric by Steve
Wellman, 2010

Crystalline Triptych, 2009

Scraped and ground CD material
from Sonic Caveman recordings
11 x 9 in. (x3)

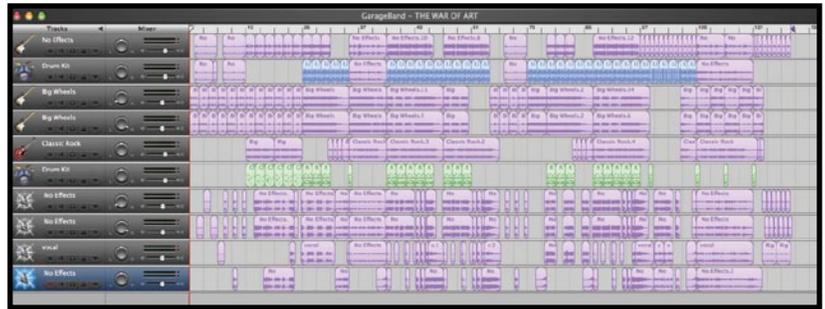
⁶¹ Jane Dillenberger and Andy Warhol, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, New York: Continuum, 1998, 92

AUDIO ASSEMBLAGE

You work with the textures of the sound, the arrangement of them ... using conflict, texture and depth. With headphones on, you've got a 3-D space to work with, panning left and right, something drilling straight up through your head. And motion too. I approach it very much the same way [as painting]. —Steve Wellman

Audio collage is an important facet of Wellman's artistic production. Self-taught as a musician, he combines his own lyrics, voice and guitar with sampled music and sound, layering recorded lyrics and melody over textures and grounds. He finds analogies between music and painting—the heavy, dark colors, low in the composition, are equivalent to the base line; fancy paintwork to the “screaming lead guitar.” When the tracks of his “Sonic Caveman” productions are viewed on screen, the sedimentary layers of audio information demonstrate the consistency of his working method regardless of medium.

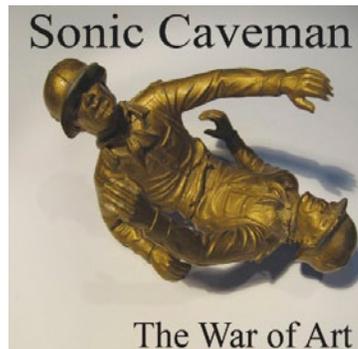
Wellman often attempts to capture the abstract feeling of music in his paintings, and his song lyrics sometimes refer to visual images. “Geometric Beatnik,” from *The War of Art*, resonates with his *Music for the Eyes* series of deconstructed and transfigured CDs, envisioning the constant flux of a geometric spiritual universe populated by animated psychedelic cartoons.



Screen Shot
The War of Art, 2010
 Audio collage

The War of Art, 2010
 Unpublished CD recording
 (Left) Front cover image:
 Gary Wellman
Endless Conflict

(Right) Back cover image:
 Jack Massing
Erasers



THREE-DIMENSIONAL ASSEMBLAGE

The method of assemblage is inconceivable without Dada's negativism, for the precondition of juxtaposition is a state of total randomness and disassociation. Like a beachcomber, a collector, or a scavenger wandering among ruins, the assembler discovers order as well as materials by accident. —William Seitz⁶²

Wellman's sculptural production is invariably the product of assemblage, often animated and sometimes functional: self-propelled remote-controlled "toys", lighted biomorphic figures, art lamps, musical instruments, an art car, and a variety of low-tech electronic devices. His constructions combine dark humor, playful improvisation, and a sense of the absurd. His use of found objects and chance descends from a noble yet subversive art historical ancestry, from Duchamp and the Surrealists through Fluxus, post-Expressionism, and the contemporary appropriation of cultural detritus.

New Museum curator Massimiliano Giani observes that the "first decade of the twenty-first century produced a sculpture of fragments" and modestly scaled forms "in an age that defines itself by the disappearance of monuments and the erasure of symbols." He goes on to question even using the word *sculpture* in referring to contemporary three-dimensional work, "because these new objects clearly defy the traditional limits of sculptural form as they extend to incorporate found materials, artificial objects, second-hand images or, more simply, waste."⁶³ The organizers of *Unmonumental* see twenty-first century sculpture as departing from modernist and minimalist values by rejecting the values of monumental art. "Recuperating the tradition of the assemblage and the prehensile alertness of collage, today's sculpture seems to be less engaged in interrogating its own status than it is overexcited by the idea of annexing the whole world to its own body."⁶⁴

Wellman's sculptural assemblages are relatively small, ranging from human in scale to the size of a child's toy. They recycle past styles and materials, and may bring a twinge of nostalgia to those who remember avocado green or aqua as trend colors. His use of recycled materials relates to the surrealist *objet trouvé*, "singled out for possessing, through the workings of the elements of nature, fantasy, esthetic configuration or paranoiac images."⁶⁵ Some of the raw materials have personal meaning, salvaged from departed family members' estates; others were rescued from the trash or scavenged from thrift stores, evoking childhood memories, or a narrative connection to another life. In spite of their nostalgic components, the finished assemblages depict a warped and out-of-control, even



Johnny 7, 1999
Toys for Toughs
Found melted unidentifiable
plastic object with found wheels,
table lamp and lamp parts
15 x 7 x 6 in.

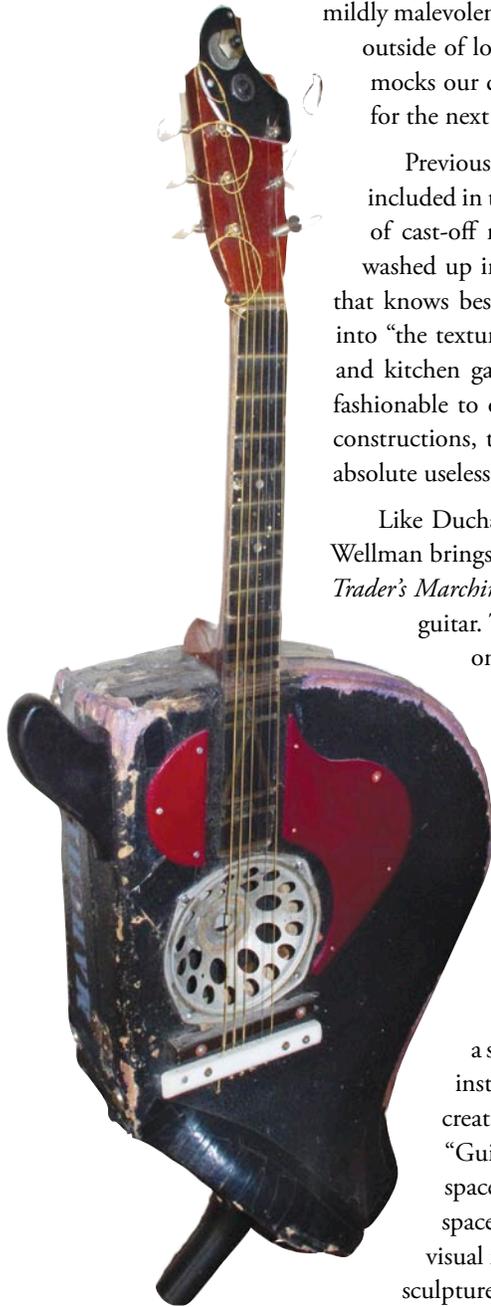
Opposite:
Tony the Trader's Marching Band
(T3), 1996-2009
Battered french horn case,
electric guitar parts, speaker
parts, stapler, plexiglas, copper
tape and mixed media
46 x 19 x 18 in.

62 William Chapin Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*. New York; distributed by Doubleday: Museum of Modern Art; Garden City, N.Y., 1961, 38

63 Massimiliano Giani, "Ask the Dust." In Flood et al *Unmonumental*. 65

64 Ibid, 64

65 Janis, "Marcel Duchamp, Anti-Artist," in Mashek, *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, 35



mildly malevolent force—anthropomorphic animations of a mutant technology that exists outside of logic and nature. The elaborate dysfunction of these mechanical chimeras mocks our dependence on and trust in evolving technology; the never-ending quest for the next new time-saving and fashion-forward device.

Previously unexhibited, several “toys” built from remote-controlled junk are included in this retrospective. Benignly demonic and amusing, Wellman’s assemblages of cast-off metal and plastic playfully critique consumer culture and the detritus washed up in its wasteful wake. Richard Flood poses that sculpture “is the medium that knows best how to live in the present and find the future,” by insinuating itself into “the texture of the world.”⁶⁶ These combinations of past-trend audio devices, toys and kitchen gadgets combine humor and nostalgia to reveal the rapid slippage from fashionable to obsolete; from new to retro to landfill. Akin to Duchamp’s mechanical constructions, they deny the central premise of technological invention “through their absolute uselessness.”⁶⁷

Like Duchamp, who constructed a visual phonograph disk, the 33-rpm *Rotorelief*, Wellman brings musical instruments and audio equipment into his assemblage. *Tony the Trader’s Marching Band* is a battered french horn case transformed into a dysfunctional guitar. The sound box opening is a speaker housing, “MARCHING” is stenciled on the side, and graphic “branding” has been hand-painted on the back.

The strings are inserted randomly in the wrong order, their ends curling messily, and one of the pegs is a large wood screw. Two sleekly curved fins from an electric guitar call attention to the ridiculous and bloated form of the body. The battered seams are patched with duct tape, glue and caulk, and then artfully glazed with lavender pigment. This “instrument” merges the sleek cult of electric guitars with the nerdy shabbiness of school music programs and small town marching bands, blending pop culture and tradition. Vaguely figural, this is not an idealized human form, but appears middle-aged, frumpy, and obese.

In 2009, Wellman transformed a box of broken instrument parts into a series of fourteen guitars. Carved biomorphic wooden hangers position the instruments a few inches from the wall, enhancing their sculptural form and creating dramatic shadows that connect the surrounding space. He explained, “Guitars are sexy, figurative, human body shapes, and when you’ve got them spaced like studs, sixteen inches apart, the lines work together, the negative space of the wall becomes part of the whole thing.” This spacing creates a visual rhythmic musicality, like the repeated forms of Donald Judd’s Minimalist sculptures, but Wellman rejects the aesthetic of uniform mechanical production.

66 Flood, *Unmonumental*, 13

67 William Rubin, “Reflexions on Marcel Duchamp,” (1960) In Machek, *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*. 51

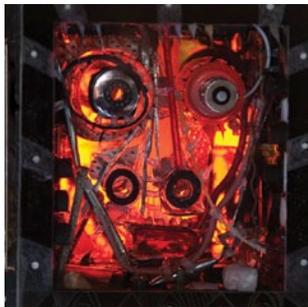


In fact, these sculptures transform a machine-made commodity into something unique and hand-crafted. Jean Arp, an early member of Zurich Dada, used a similar formal precision to carve sensuous, biomorphic forms, masking his raw materials with paint.⁶⁸

While some of the guitars have undergone minor cosmetic surgery, others are completely transformed. A chrome four-slice toaster serves as the body of one guitar; another has its head and tailpiece reversed. The *Zen String* reduces the guitar to its essence—a section of aluminum pocket door rail transfigured into a fretless fingerboard, combined with a bass pick-up and a single string. The minimal instrument produces a trippy, distorted sound that works for percussion or melody. Re-purposing an object intended for a different function into a working audio device appeals to Wellman's artistic sense of humor, creating a disconnect or juxtaposition between concept and material object. He is also fond of dichotomies such as concept and craft, male and female, departing from the Dada refusal to judge or to choose, by instead merging both sides of each duality.



A one-man Butte exhibition held in 1998, "Lust for Light," was a sculptural peep show housed in anthropomorphic mechanical devices and re-purposed antique luggage. Wellman found a set of 1960s art instruction binders at an estate sale that included "excellent black and white pictures of real live human models—almost soft porn." Holding the pages to the light revealed images on both sides, so Wellman decided to incorporate them into a "lamp." The first construction was "Up Periscope," a strange juxtaposition of gendered images; a man's smiling face on the bottom and a nude female body at the top, set within what Wellman refers to as an "overtly phallic symbol structure." The lighted art education text from the reverse shows in the white space around the man's face, and the word "HEAD" has been cut from the book and pasted beneath. The female form set in the top frame is juxtaposed with reaching and grasping arms and hands that become indistinct as the layers recede. Wellman uses deadpan humor to critique the societal and art historical constructions these gendered images reflect: male is "head" and female is a sexualized body, the object of the male gaze trapped within a phallic object. However, head and body are reversed.



Wellman searched second hand shops statewide looking for more "vessels to use to host the images," especially things that would not ordinarily be used as lamps. By making Xerox copies, he was able to prevent the random images and text on the reverse pages from showing through and juxtapose the images with greater control, "blending the female and male figures together through the use of light." Exhibited in a dimly lit space, the lighted constructions project

68 "Three Modern Sculptures." *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 58, no. 8 (Oct., 1971): pp. 231-232.



Honeymoon, 1997
Antique computer mainframe disk, found illuminated photo, Hanovia alpine travel model sunlamp, and mixed media
18 x 14 x 9 in.

Up Periscope, 1997
Illuminated found photograph and Xerox images and mixed media
71 x 14 x 10 in.

Opposite:
Six Shooter, 2009
Assembled electric guitar
32 x 12 x 4 in.

Detail: *Up Periscope*

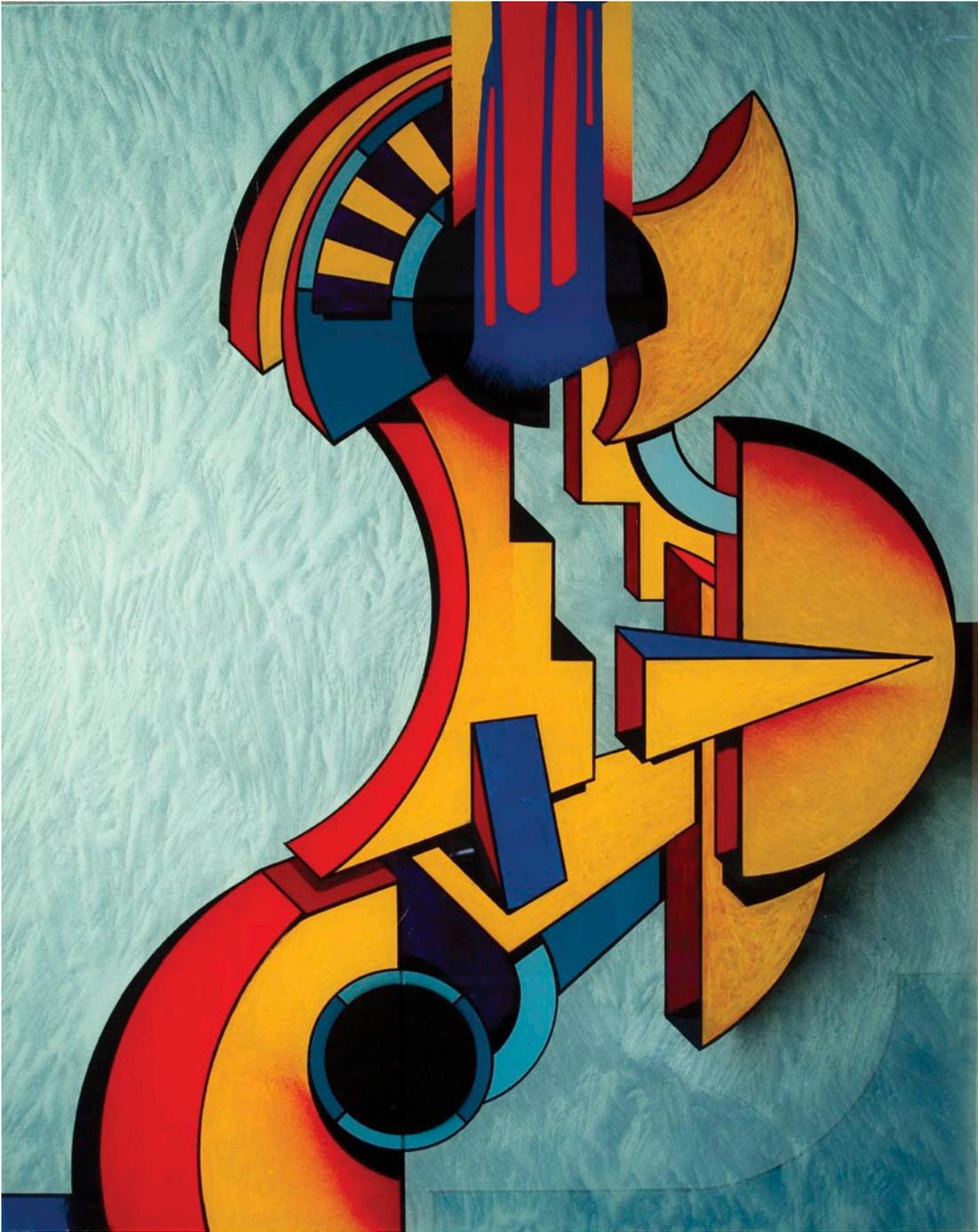
Mr. Projector Head, 1997
(detail)
Plastic shards, wood, rubber, hardware, and lamp parts
16 x 14 x 10 in.

an alien, semi-human presence, both humorous and disorienting. Approaching them, they first appear as a group of lighted vertical forms; seen closer, they reveal female nudes, gazing males and reflective elements, mirroring the gaze of the viewer.

Honeymoon combines a small leather case containing a 1940s travel sun lamp with the memory disk of an obsolete mainframe computer. Duchamp used a traveling salesman's sample case for his "Boîte-en-valise" portable museum. George Maciunas used the valise to contain "suicide kits," and collections of artworks by his colleagues in his *Fluxus Kits*. While the Dada (and Neo Dada) valises revealed their contents within a private exhibition space, like the contents of a book, this case is closed. The window reveals merged layers of male and female images when the light is switched on. A small metal timer disk replaces one of the Os in the stenciled "MOON," referencing the passage of time and the male/female duality of day and night. "MOON" also cancels the intended purpose of the case as a container of artificial sunlight. The computer disk frames the window, and provides the extra baggage of memory appropriate for a honeymoon travel case.

Wellman's more elaborate lighted constructions are assembled from carved Plexiglas and found objects, some taking on the aspect of wall-mounted trophy heads, others grounded by four legs. Multiple portals offer alternate viewing angles into glowing three-dimensional interiors packed with jagged figures, toothy cartoon faces and colorful geometric forms. Layers of etched plastic relate to one another like motion cells, creating dimension through layers of transparent space. The interiors visually represent the electronic space of the mind in its layered complexity. The lamps cast light, like a gaze, into the surrounding space, and the boundaries of the objects shift into an unstable mix of outline, interior and exterior space, seeming to question the discrete boundaries of the individual, and by extension, the viewer.





REVERSE-PAINTED GLASS

Religion was the predominant theme in folk art reverse-glass painting. Affordable, brightly coloured and believed to possess special powers, demand was great among villagers and farmers, who hung them in special corners of their homes in the belief that they would protect them from disease and disaster.⁶⁹

Fragile Beauty, a solo Butte exhibition held in 2000, introduced an ongoing series of reverse-painted glass. Wellman enjoys the medium for its fragility, its intense, permanent color, the quality of line, the formal challenge of layering opaque elements within a two-dimensional space, and the absolutely flat surface. He mixes his own metallic “interference” and colored pigments to form shimmering, watery grounds, broken by stark lines that are sometimes drawn, but often carved, and set against brilliant blocks of contrasting color. He creates tension between an expressionistically painted ground that refuses to recede, and the more mechanical drafting style of the foreground elements.

The list of modern artists who experimented with painting on glass reads like a roster of Wellman’s acknowledged influences. The German expressionist group, *Der Blaue Reiter* revived and transformed the folk art of reverse-glass painting in the early 20th century, led by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Franz Marc, and Gabrielle Muntz, and followed by Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jackson Pollock.⁷⁰ The rhythmic forms and intense colors of Wellman’s glass paintings resemble Kandinsky’s musical geometric abstractions. Unlike the religious art of the Germanic folk tradition, his glass paintings contain visual elements from the contemporary world: the brilliant color of LED displays; the dynamic abstraction of commercial graphic design; scientific models of DNA; fragmented modernist architecture; microscopic life forms and cartoon animation.

Because there is a complete lack of physical depth in this medium, Wellman creates tension by creating illusionistic space, overlapping linear elements and fields of color. The forms sometimes suggest human figures, machinery, architecture, or cartoons. Wellman stated, “I like to think of what I have been doing lately as “organic geometry” ... [using] purely geometric shapes to create abstract representations of the human body.”

Wellman’s glass paintings are painted from the back and are often carved, the paint chipped away with a dental tool, sometimes using a magnifying lens.



Exploded View of a Sun Burst Guitar, 2010
Reverse spray paint and oil painting on 1/4” tempered glass
32 x 26 in.

Above: reverse side of painting

69 Nevesor Askoy and Pera Müzesi. *Around the World Under Glass: An Excursion through the Enchanting World of Reverse-Glass Painting with Examples from Four Continents*. Pera Museum Publication; no. 16; Istanbul: Pera Museum, 2005. 14. Reverse-glass painting came to the attention of the Blaue Reiter group and into Modern Art through nineteenth-century German and Bavarian folk art traditions.

70 Ibid

It is a tedious process, but it creates a more physical line than can be achieved with a brush or pen.⁷¹ Wellman generally uses free-hand brush work for the background and a compass and straight edge to draft the foreground elements thus creating formal tension. The brushwork is more expressive when viewed from the reverse, and he commented on the secret space behind the glass, “I think it is funny how different the fronts and backs are with these reverse paintings. I end up liking the backs as much as the fronts.”

While many of the glass paintings use a full palette of gem colors, others silhouette simple forms over luminous, textural grounds, recalling David Smith’s sculptures or Calder’s mobiles flattened by dusk. *Attic Dust Bunny Migration*⁷² is painted on the reverse of an antique mirror that has been scraped, broken, and healed with resin. The residual silvering resembles a horizontal photographic landscape rendered in grainy black and white. Subtle after-images mirror the sculptural foreground elements like photocopies or dim reflections, questioning the authority of pictorial representation. The simple dark silhouettes and their faded shadows seem to represent mechanical inputs and outputs, superimposed over the scratched and broken ground, the negative space suggesting a mountainous landscape. As in Paul Klee’s *Twittering Machine* (1923; New York, Museum of Modern Art), there is a sense of looming menace within a deformed natural world. This piece also has many conceptual and material parallels with Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, in its depiction of a mechanical universe, with scraped mirroring, broken glass, and a reference to dust (an accidental pigment that Duchamp intentionally incorporated).⁷³ While Duchamp links human sexuality to a series of impotent mechanical actions, this painting seems to depict machinery duplicating itself in a landscape completely devoid of life.



Attic Dust Bunny Migration, 2005
Oil, silver and pigment on broken
mirror
12 x 48 in.

⁷¹ Tim Trainor, “Surrealist Suburbanite.”

⁷² The *Attic Dust Bunny* series was inspired by news articles reporting dangerous arsenic levels in Butte attics.

⁷³ Janis, “Anti-Artist” in Mashek, *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*. Wellman commented via e-mail, “I think Duchamp actually used Dust as a valid medium.”

The more minimal *Motion Detector* is a pair of small reverse paintings in 8x10 recycled frames. Flattened mechanical forms, resembling weather vanes or navigational aids, are incised into a ground that evokes sun-drenched beach sand sculpted by waves. The carved shapes function as an open “window” into a shallow space, humorously backed by a screen. Instead of opening out into the world, the carved openings reveal the finite space of the object itself. Since the ground creates an illusion of depth and casts a shadow, while the screen has actual dimensionality; ambiguity and tension are established between the shifting positive and negative spaces of window and ground. These forms are both biomorphic and machine-like, with a kinship to the carefully balanced tension of Smith’s 1951 *Australia* (New York, Museum of Modern Art) or his untitled spray paint on paper sketches. They also resemble Kandinsky’s geometric abstractions, such as *Curves and Sharp Angles* (1923; New York, The Guggenheim Museum).

Part of the allure of glass painting is the layered process, especially the challenge of having to “literally think and work backwards.” Wellman also finds the medium symbolically appealing, “It is GLASS. Glass can break. The title ‘Fragile Beauty’ sums up not only the material of the art work (glass) but also life and human frailty.”

Motion Detector 1 and 2, 2009
Oils and screen on reverse glass
10 1/2 x 8 1/2 in.





Sediment Self Portrait as Sonic Caveman, 2010
Paint shavings, duct tape, gold dust, and guitar strings behind plastic
7 x 9 in.

OUTSIDE IN

*The first thing that needs to be said about Outsider Art (and for the moment I will lump Outsider Art with Naive Art, Art Brut, Raw Art, Grassroots Art, 'Primitive Art', Self-taught Art, Psychotic Art, Autistic Art, intuitive Art, Vernacular Art, Folk Art, contemporary Folk Art, nontraditional Folk Art, Mediumistic Art, and Marginal Art) is that it does not exist. At least I would like to say that.*⁷⁴

His grandfather, a self-taught artist and musician, provided the spark that ignited Wellman's childhood dream of becoming an artist. Wellman remembers him as "a great carver—he made whirligigs, toys, guys that would spin around on trapeze and an entire circus that worked. ... He was a miner; it ultimately killed him, a folk artist, an incredible guitar player." This early role model, an obsessive compulsion to make art, and isolation from artistic communities, museums, and markets are all influences that link Wellman to "self-taught" or "outsider" art. Although education is often used to separate inside from out, many of Wellman's primary mainstream influences, such as Kandinsky, Picasso and Klee, appropriated from non-Western, folk and outsider art, passing their interpretations of these "styles" through the avant-garde into the mainstream. The University of Houston also transmitted a southern and Mexican "folk" influence through its academic art curriculum.⁷⁵ In many ways, Wellman has an outsider's perspective, living in a place that is no longer considered relevant to the mainstream and working in solitude to produce a personal, idiosyncratic body of work.

"Outsider Art" is the English synonym for *Art Brut*, defined by DuBuffet as consisting of "those works created from solitude and from pure and authentic creative impulses – where the worries of competition, acclaim and social promotion do not interfere."⁷⁶ Art defined as marginal by the centers has influenced mainstream styles throughout the Modern era. Japanese prints led the early modernists toward a flattened picture plane, African visual culture influenced Picasso's sculpture and Cubist representation and, throughout the twentieth century, Western artists looked to the mentally ill, children and other cultures seeking models of "pure" artistic expression. Clement Greenberg

74 James Elkins, "Naïfs, Faux-Naïfs, Faux Faux-Naïfs, would-be Faux-Naïfs : There is no such Thing as Outsider Art." In *Inner Worlds Outside*, edited by Roger Cardinal, Jon Thompson, Whitechapel Art Gallery, Fundación "La Caixa" (Madrid, Spain) and Irish Museum of Modern Art (Kilmainham, Dublin, Ireland), 71-8. Madrid : Fundación "La Caixa"; Dublin; London: Irish Museum of Modern Art; Whitechapel, 2006. 71

75 Jamey Gambrell. "Art Capital of the Third Coast," 191. The home of the Orange Show, a vernacular environment that grew into an annual event, Houston has traditionally included folk and outsider art in the regional mainstream. At the time Wellman lived there, "the most important Texas artists," three of whom were his teachers, John Alexander, Bert Long, and James Surls, were credited with common influences that included "a mixture of folk art, Mexican art and Surrealism."

76 Jean Dubuffet, *Art and Text* no.27, December 1987 - February 1988. p.36



created a tautology to “prove” that artists’ “concept of purity is something more than a bias in taste,” by claiming “Oriental, primitive and children’s art as instances of the universality and naturalness and objectivity of their ideal of purity.”⁷⁷

Limited “outside influence” is used as a badge of authenticity in marketing folk and self-taught art. Isolation is the mythical source of “pure” expression; yet the lives of even the most secluded artists reveal connections to other artists and to the outside world. Martin Ramirez spent his entire artistic life in a mental institution. Despite limited education, language barriers and nearly total seclusion, he used contemporary magazine illustrations, among other improvised media, to portray the trains and auto traffic of the modern world outside his window.⁷⁸ Ramirez’s work was absorbed by the mainstream because it flowed in the currents of its time, reflecting “many of the specifics of his cultural and historic moment.” It also corresponded to the work of “insider” artists, “especially in his use of collage and images from popular culture.”⁷⁹ His art began to enter history after it was discovered by mainstream artist Jim Nutt, and then was marketed and legitimized by the art gallery/dealer/museum system.⁸⁰

According to art historian James Elkins, “Outsider Art is a symptom of Modernism, nothing more.” Linking Western appropriation of “outsider” and international art, he states that “Modernism has always required an ‘Other’: Picasso required Rousseau, just as Duchamp and Breton enjoyed Raymond Roussel’s stage productions, or as middlebrow, mid-century American consumers loved Grandma Moses.”⁸¹ Mesoamerican art scholar Esther Pasztory argues that throughout history members of the dominant society have looked to the outside, hoping to mine the “technologies of the spirit” belonging to people they considered less advanced. She writes that “the lowly, the exotic, the disabled, women, slaves, and animals were always believed to have intuitions and secrets of the mind.”⁸²

According to most contemporary art scholars, the universal “insider” narratives of the colonial era have been replaced by a multiplicity of perspectives that include voices from the margins and rising global centers. However,

77 Greenberg, Clement. “Towards a Newer Laocoon.” In *Fascina, Pollock and After*, 66

78 Russell Bowman, “Martin Ramirez,” In *Common Ground/Uncommon Vision: The Michael and Julie Hall Collection of American Folk Art*, edited by Jeffrey Russell Hayes, Lucy R. Lippard, Kenneth L. Ames and Milwaukee Art Museum. Milwaukee, WI: The Milwaukee Art Museum, 1993. 302

79 Smith, Roberta. “Outside in.” *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/2007/01/26/arts/design/26rami.html> (accessed February, 2011).

80 Julia S. Ardery, *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth-Century Folk Art*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. 125

81 Elkins, *Inner Worlds*, 75

82 Esther Pasztory, “Nostalgia for Mud.” *The PARI Journal* 2, no. 1 (2001): 17-18. 18



Recycled Paint 2, 2009
Paint scraps and resin on reverse
glass
9 x 8 in.

Steve Silvertone's Amazing Box
with a Lid, 2009
Steve Silvertone Sonic Structure
Silvertone guitar body parts
with salvaged strings and tuning
mechanism
9 x 17 x 7 in.

Opposite:
Steve Wellman, 2006
Digital photograph by the author

controversy over how to truly represent these diverse perspectives, as opposed to importing de-contextualized exotica into the centers for exploitation, continues to this day on an international level. China, the most populous nation on Earth, with GDP third only to the European Union and the United States⁸³ was until recently considered to be “outside” of contemporary art currents. The watershed 1989 exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*, which included art that had developed in “isolation” and previously circulated only within China, repositioned the work within an international context for the first time.⁸⁴ The exhibit was both hailed as the first contemporary exhibition of global art, and condemned for once again exoticizing artists from “emerging” nations.

In 2002, *Documenta 11*, curated by Nigerian-born Okwui Enwezor, attempted to create a space where outside voices could challenge Western hegemony.⁸⁵ However, as a 2004 essay pointed out, the capitalist structures of the West have a long history of successfully absorbing resistance, and converting marginal art into exotic commodities.⁸⁶ The increasing popularity of folk, outsider, and self-taught art mirrors the long-term trend by which the economic centers commodify the cultural production of people marginalized by income, education, and geography.

It may turn out that the recent focus on non-Western art merely answers to global capitalism's persistent need for new commodities. If this is so, Enwezor's role may have been to bring these artists and marginal centers of art to the purview of the West, thereby making them available for consumption. Rather than reflecting an identity politics that empowers marginalized societies and structures their demand for recognition, the exhibition may be constructing the conditions for a new appropriation of the “other” by the West, in a manner similar to modernism's appropriation of African and other “non-Western” arts at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁸⁷

83 CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html#top>, (Accessed January, 2011).

84 Carol Yinghua Lu, “Back to Contemporary: One Contemporary Ambition, Many Worlds,” *e-flux journal* #11 December 2009 (Accessed February, 2011)

85 Chin-Tao Wu, “Biennials without Borders?” *Tate Papers*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09autumn/chin.shtml>, (accessed February, 2011). “Although the 1989 *Magiciens de la terre* exhibition at the Pompidou Centre is generally considered the first truly international exhibition and a trend-setter for the next decade, North Americans and Europeans were still predominant at the 1992 and 1997 *documentas*. The real change came with Okwui Enwezor's *documenta 11* in 2002, when the proportion of Western artists fell to a more respectable sixty per cent. It remained fixed at this lower level in 2007.” Despite their origins, nearly seventy-eight per cent of these artists were living in North America or Europe, particularly within the urban economic centers.

86 Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, Emanuel Araújo, Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften, and Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums, Global Future of Local Art Museums*. 2009. 69

87 Ogbecchie, Sylvester Okwunodu. “Ordering the Universe: *Documenta 11* and the Apotheosis of the Occidental Gaze.” *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring, 2005): 80-9.



Bird Bones, 2009
Spray paint on glass
53 x 25.5 in.

Opposite:
Studio, late 2010
Photograph by Steve Wellman

The 2009 Tate Triennial constructed a narrative that describes meaningful art rising from global linkages among offshore “clusters and archipelagos of thought,”⁸⁸ a shift to “off-centre structures of production and dissemination; the dispersal of the universal, the refusal of the monolithic, a rebellion against monoculturalism.”⁸⁹ This would seem to turn the concept of “outsider art” on its head. However, artists in large biennial events are still overwhelmingly from cities in America and Western Europe. Even the artists that “represent” emerging nations tend to be emigrants, selling their experience as Other within the major markets.⁹⁰ Wu argues that “despite its decolonising and democratic claims, [the biennial has] proved still to embody the traditional power structures of the contemporary Western art world; the only difference being that ‘Western’ has quietly been replaced by a new buzzword, ‘global’.”⁹¹

Artists throughout the world “draw on the vocabularies of their personal experiences, visions, histories, and beliefs,”⁹² and this tendency is neither specific to the celebrated nor the unschooled; it includes the center and margins, and an international diaspora of economic refugees. In the end, each of us is an insider to ourselves and an outsider to every other, and it is this specificity that provides art with profound potential for communication and connection. Peering through concentric layers of context makes it possible to see relationships that spiral inward from the universal to the personal, while close analysis of specific works has the potential to reveal the greater experience of being human at a particular moment in time.

Isolated from the mainstream by choice, Steve Wellman is educated, white, male and American. Despite this position of privilege, like residents of communities throughout the world that have been mined and discarded, he lives in an economically and environmentally devastated place. Disconnected from art world systems of money and power, his experience is both inside and out of the contemporary mainstream. Wellman’s perspective is a view from the divide: between youth and old age, center and margin, civilization and wilderness. On one side, the ideas of the mainstream are shaped by appropriation from the margin; on the other, the periphery serves and is defined by the center. Linear

88 Bourriaud, *Altermodern*, 32

89 Enwezor, Okwui. “Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence.” In Bourriaud, *Altermodern*, 31

90 Wu, “Biennials Without Borders?” states that “up to and including the 1982 documenta, nearly one hundred per cent of participating artists lived in North America and Europe. This proportion begins to fall from 1987; for the 1992 and 1997 documentas it was around ninety per cent, dropping to seventy-six per cent in 2002 and sixty-one per cent in 2007.”

91 Wu, “Biennials Without Borders?”

92 Leslie Umberger, and Erika Lee Doss. *Sublime Spaces & Visionary Worlds : Built Environments of Vernacular Artists*. 1st ed. New York; Sheboygan, Wis: Princeton Architectural Press; John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2007. 47

time is neither here nor there; the places left behind by industry reflect the past and predict the future of the still-thriving centers.

Wellman cannot help but channel the ghosts of yesterday's bright futures, still undead beneath Butte's toxic soil. Alternating mining and reclamation, he encapsulates the tailings of his time and place in resin. Melding the sediment of his life, imagination, and humor with fragments from the ever-so-modern contemporary world, he creates a body of work that spans technology and nature, beauty and desolation, history and this morning's news.

CONCLUSION

I am a sponge. I am a thief. Is it possible to be 'Original'?—Steve Wellman

Wellman carves into the world, cutting and pasting obsolete systems of communication and memory, surfing a web of overlapping time. His juxtapositions reflect the uncontemporary state of the contemporary through layers of memory and loss, and preserve a series of inconsequential histories under resin and glass. Constructed from entropic materials within a physical space of controlled chaos, these paintings and assemblages refuse to negate. They absorb objects, movements and mediums, affirming, combining, assembling, connecting, and saying “yes” to the logical and the irrational, to body and spirit, hand and mind; “yes” to additive sculpture, sculptural painting and technological craft. If his layered objects were represented as keywords the list would sprawl across media, methods, forms and imagery, to include painting, glass-painting, craft, sculpture, music, assemblage, folk and outsider art, and all of the art historical styles of the past century. In a flattened virtually interconnected world, where all links are presumably equal, this could be the new criterion for relevance.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Orlando Sentinel. "Butte Office Shuts Doors FBI Purgatory Closes." January 20, 1995, http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1995-01-20/news/9501200602_1_purgatory-butte-office-fbi (accessed December 2010).
- CIA. *The World Factbook*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html#top> (accessed January, 2011).
- "Three Modern Sculptures." *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 58, no. 8 (Oct., 1971): pp. 230-235.
- "EPA Superfund Program: Silver Bow Creek/Butte Area." <http://www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/mt/sbcbutte/> (accessed May, 2010).
- Montana Resources International, <http://www.montanaresources.com/> (accessed March, 2011).
- Aksoy, Neveser and Pera Müzesi. *Around the World Under Glass : An Excursion through the Enchanting World of Reverse-Glass Painting with Examples from Four Continents*. Pera Museum Publication ; no. 16. Istanbul: Pera Museum, 2005.
- Allara, Pamela. "Documenta 11: The Disappearing Element." *Artforum* 23, no. 6 (October/November, 2002): 22-4.
- Aranda, Julieta, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle, "What is Contemporary Art?" *e-flux journal #11*, January 2010, Issue One, http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_96.pdf, (Accessed January, 2011).
- . "What is Contemporary Art?" *e-flux journal #12*, January 2010, Issue Two, http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_109.pdf (accessed January, 2011).
- Ardery, Julia S. *The Temptation : Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth-Century Folk Art*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Bankowsky, Jack. "Many Happy Returns: The Whitney 2004 Biennial." *Artforum*. <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=200405&id=6721> (accessed February, 2011).
- Belting, Hans, Andrea Buddensieg, Emanoel Araújo, Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften, and Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe. *The Global Art World : Audiences, Markets, and Museums. Global Future of Local Art Museums*. 2009.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas and Tate Britain (Gallery). *Altermodern : Tate Triennial*. Tate Triennial Exhibition of Contemporary British Art (4th : 2009). London; New York: Tate Pub; Distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, 2009.
- Bowlt, John E. "Some Thoughts on the Condition of Soviet Art History." *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 4 (Dec., 1989): pp. 542-550.
- Bowman, Russell. "Martin Ramírez Catalog Entry." In *Common Ground/Uncommon Vision : The Michael and Julie Hall Collection of American Folk Art*, edited by Jeffrey Russell Hayes, Lucy R. Lippard, Kenneth L. Ames and Milwaukee Art Museum. Milwaukee, WI, Milwaukee Art Museum. 1993.
- Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Julia Bryan-Wilson on Sharon Hayes." *Artforum*, May 2006. <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=200605&id=10867> (accessed January 2011).
- Cage, John. "26 Statements RE Duchamp." (1963) In *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, edited by Joseph Masheck. Vol. Artists in perspective series; A Spectrum book, 67-9. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1974.
- Chave, Anna C. "Pollock and Krasner: Script and Postscript." In *Pollock and After : The Critical Debate*, edited by Francis Frascina. 1st U.S. ed., 329-17. New York: Harper & Row, 1985.
- Dubuffet, Jean. *Art and Text* no.27, December 1987 - February 1988. p.36
- Demos, T.J., "The Ends of Exile: Towards a Coming Universality?" in Bourriaud, Nicolas and Tate Britain (Gallery). *Altermodern : Tate Triennial*. Tate Triennial Exhibition of Contemporary British Art (4th : 2009). London; New York: Tate Pub; Distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, 2009.
- Dillenberger, Jane and Andy Warhol. *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*. New York: Continuum, 1998.
- Elkins, James. "Naïfs, Faux-Naïfs, Faux Faux-Naïfs, would-be Faux-Naïfs : There is no such Thing as Outsider Art." In *Inner Worlds Outside*, edited by Roger Cardinal, Jon Thompson, Whitechapel Art Gallery, Fundación "La Caixa" (Madrid, Spain) and Irish Museum of Modern Art (Kilmainham, Dublin, Ireland), 71-8. Madrid : Fundación "La Caixa"; Dublin; London: Irish Museum of Modern Art; Whitechapel, 2006.
- Enwezor, Okwui. "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence." In *Tate Triennial Exhibition of Contemporary British Art (4th : 2009)*, edited by Nicolas Bourriaud and Tate Britain (Gallery), 27-40. London; New York: Tate Pub; Distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, 2009.
- Finn, Janet L. *Tracing the Veins : Of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Flood, Richard and New Museum (New York, N.Y.). *Unmonumental : The Object in the 21st Century*. London ; New York: Phaidon in association with New Museum, 2007.
- Foster, Hal. "Contemporary Extracts." *e-flux Journal #12*, www.e-flux.com/journal/view/98, January 2010 (accessed January 2011).
- Frank, Robert and Jack Kerouac. *The Americans*. 1.th ed. Göttingen: Steidl, 2008.
- Freeman, Elizabeth. "Packing History, Count(Er)Ing Generations." *New Literary History* 31, no. 4, Is There Life after Identity Politics? (Autumn, 2000): pp. 727-744.
- Gambrell, Jamey. "Art Capital of the Third Coast." *Art in America* 75 (April, 1987): 186-201.
- Gener, Randy. "Criticism in the Hybrid Newsroom." *American Theatre* 26, no. 6 (Jul, 2009): 44-50.
- Giani, Massimiliano. "Ask the Dust." In Flood, Richard and New

- Museum (New York, N.Y.). *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*. London ; New York: Phaidon in association with New Museum, 2007.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Towards a Newer Laocoon." In *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, edited by Francis Frascina. 2nd ed., 62-70. London ; New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Hofmann, Werner. "Marcel Duchamp and Emblematic Realism." In *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, edited by Joseph Masheck. Artists in perspective series; A Spectrum book, 53-66. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1974.
- Janis, Harriet and Sidney. "Marcel Duchamp, Anti-Artist." In *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, edited by Joseph Masheck. Artists in perspective series; A Spectrum book, 30-40. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1974.
- Kolocotroni, Vassiliki, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou. *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Krasner, Lee. "Oral history interview with Lee Krasner, Conducted by Dorothy Seckler." Smithsonian Archives of American Art, 1964. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-lee-krasner-12507> (accessed February, 2011).
- Lu, Carol Yinghua. "Back to Contemporary: One Contemporary Ambition, Many Worlds." *e-flux journal* #11 December 2009. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/102> (accessed February, 2011).
- McEvilly, Thomas. *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt*. Aesthetics Today. New York: School of Visual Arts ; Allworth Press, 1999.
- McKay, Gary. "Daring Duo." *Houston Home & Garden*, March, 1985. 60-63.
- Mosse, George L. "Beauty without Sensuality." In *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, edited by Stephanie Barron, Peter W. Guenther, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Art Institute of Chicago, 25-31. Los Angeles, Calif; New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; H.N. Abrams, 1991.
- Ogbechie, Sylvester Okwunodu. "Ordering the Universe: Documenta 11 and the Apotheosis of the Occidental Gaze." *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring, 2005): 80-9.
- Paszatory, Esther. "Nostalgia for Mud." *The PARI Journal* 2, no. 1 (2001): 17-8.
- Paz, Octavio. "The Ready-made." In *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, edited by Joseph Masheck. Artists in perspective series; A Spectrum book, 84-9. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1974.
- Ranta, Rachel, Elizabeth Ward, and Lawndale Art and Performance Center (Houston, Tex.). *Lawndale Live!: A Retrospective, 1979-1990: September 13 - October 16, 1993*, Lawndale Art and Performance Center. Houston, TX: The Center, 1993.
- Rose, Barbara, Susie Kalil, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. *Fresh Paint: The Houston School: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*. Austin, Tex: Texas Monthly Press, 1985.
- Rubin, William Stanley. "Reflexions on Marcel Duchamp." (1960) In *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*. edited by Joseph Masheck. Vol. Artists in perspective series; A Spectrum book, 41-52. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1974.
- Schambelan, Elizabeth. "Whitney Biennial," *Artforum*, Summer 2008. <http://artforum.com/inprint/id=20396> (accessed January, 2010).
- Seitz, William Chapin. *The Art of Assemblage*. New York; distributed by Doubleday: Museum of Modern Art; Garden City, N.Y, 1961.
- Smith, Roberta. "Outside in : Art Review | Martín Ramírez." *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/26/arts/design/26rami.html> (accessed February, 2011).
- Smith, Terry. "The State of Art History: Contemporary Art." *Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (12, 2010): 366-83.
- Trainor, Tim. "Surrealist Suburbanite." *The Montana Standard*. http://www.mtstandard.com/special-section/local/article_92475248-1494-5b66-855d-92468f03a3f6.html (accessed March, 2011).
- Tuchman, Maurice, Judi Freeman, Carel Blotkamp, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago, Ill.), and Haags Gemeentemuseum. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1986.
- Umberger, Leslie and Erika Lee Doss. *Sublime Spaces & Visionary Worlds: Built Environments of Vernacular Artists*. 1st ed. New York; Sheboygan, Wis: Princeton Architectural Press; John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2007.
- Varnedoe, Kirk, Paola Antonelli, Joshua Siegel, and Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.). *Modern Contemporary: Art at MoMA since 1980*. New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art: Distributed by H.N. Abrams, 2000.
- Verhovek, Sam Howe. "At Work With: The Art Guys; In Performance: Life Imitates Art Imitating Life." *New York Times*, August 9, 1995. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/09/garden/at-work-with-the-art-guys-in-performance-life-imitates-art-imitating-life.html>. (accessed November, 2010).
- Verwoert, Jan. "Apropos Appropriation: Why stealing images today feels different." *Art & Research*, Volume 1. No. 2. Summer 2007. <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/verwoert.html>. (Accessed February 2011).
- . *e-flux journal* #12. January 2010. Issue Two, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/108> (accessed January 2011).
- . "Why are Conceptual Artists Painting Again? Because They Think it's a Good Idea." *Afterall*, Fall/Winter 2005, <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.12/why.are.conceptual.artists.painting.again.because> (accessed March 2011).
- Wu, Chin-Tao. "Biennials without Borders?" *Tate Papers* <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09autumn/chin.shtm> (accessed February, 2011).

INSTALLATION



EXHIBITION CHECK LIST (ALL WORKS LOANED BY THE ARTIST UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.)

1. *Alien Antlers*, 1990
Mixed media
12 x 16
Loaned by Susan Barnett
2. *Mr. Projector Head*, 1990
Mixed media
14 x 11 x 13
Loaned by Jana Mason and Richard Anderson
3. *Highrise*, 1993
Mixed media below Plexiglas grid
8 x 16
4. *Transformation Dance*, 1993
Oil and ballpoint pen on canvas
25.25 x 19.25
Loaned by Susan Barnett
5. *Mr. Living Cube*, 1992-1994
Oil on canvas
25.5 x 29.5
Loaned by Jana Mason and Richard Anderson
6. *Minute Man*, 1994
Brutalized metal tray, copper, tape, latex and oil paints, duc-tape and hammered copper frame
14 x 13
7. *Anxiety Contained*, 1994
Mixed media below Plexiglas grid
10 x 10
8. *Zen Container*, 1996
Paint, screen and copper tape on layered glass
7 x 5
9. *Plant Dimension*, 1996
Cut-out pencil drawings on layered glass
7 x 5
10. *The Crowning of Jupiter*, 1996
Found wooden ornaments, oil and resin
15.25 x 17 x 4
Loaned by Susan Barnett
11. *Flame*, 1996
Fertile Ground
Oil, latex, tape and plastic on panel
11 x 15
Loaned by Susan Barnett
12. *Golden Pursuits*, 1996-1997
Fertile Ground
Fabric paint, resin and mixed media on canvas and panel
17 x 13
13. *Abundance*, 1984-1997
Fertile Ground
Fabric paint, resin and mixed media
17 x 13.5
14. *Fossil*, 1985-1997
Oils, ink and tape on canvas
12.5 x 9.5
Loaned by Susan Barnett
15. *Mask*, 1997
Fertile Ground
Oils, paint marker and resin on panel
20 x 13
16. *Honeymoon*, 1997
Lust for Light
Antique computer mainframe disk, found illuminated photo, Hanovia alpine travel model sunlamp and mixed media
18 x 14 x 14
17. *Up Periscope*, 1997
Lust for Light
Illuminated found photographs, Xerox images and mixed media
71 x 14 x 14
18. *Eden*, 1997
Lust for Light
Illuminated found photographs, Xerox images and mixed media
47 x 10 x 10
19. *Rough Rider*, 1999
Toys for Toughs
Found objects and mixed media
18 x 12 x 5
20. *Johnny 7*, 1999
Toys for Toughs
Found melted unidentifiable plastic object with found wheels, table lamp and lamp parts
15 x 7 x 6
21. *Reach for the Sky*, 1999
Toys for Toughs
Jawbone, aerator, found toy gun and mixed media
15 x 15
22. *Menstrual Cycle*, 2000
Found objects and mixed media
6 x 5 x 5
23. *Fear of Drowning - Sea Monster*, 1999
Baby blanket, oil, and latex paint on panel
16 x 20
24. *Monsterpiece I*, 2000
Oil and acrylic on reverse glass
35 x 44
25. *Seven Years*, 1994-2001
Oil, latex and resin
19 x 18.5
26. *Uptown*, 2001
Oil and latex on Plexiglas with resin
43 x 31
27. *Swimming a Lake of Paint*, 2002
Latex paint, ballpoint pen and resin on panel
13 x 13
28. *Columns*, 2001-2004
Pigmented resin on salvaged ice box grate
12 x 16
29. *Compass—80 years later*, 2004
Fabric paint, pigment, oil in burnt antique frame
23 x 15

30. *Star Curve*, 2004
Fabric paint, pigment and oil in burnt
antique frame
23 x 15

31. *Enter the Dust Bunny*, 2005
Attic Dust Bunnies
Reverse painting on Plexiglas
22 x 15

32. *Attic Dust Bunny 4*, 2005
Attic Dust Bunnies
Tile samples, concrete, doily, latex paint,
cardboard and pigmented resin
17 x 15

33. *Attic Dust Bunny 5 - Tile Floor*, 2005
Attic Dust Bunnies
Tile samples, grout, paint marker and
pigmented resin
18.5 x 18

34. *Attic Dust Bunny Migration*, 2005
Attic Dust Bunnies
Oil, silver and pigment on broken mirror
12 x 48

35. *Lower Area One (Left)*, 2005
Oils and resin on salvaged sign
74 x 46

36. *Lower Area One (Right)*, 2005
Oils and resin on salvaged sign
74 x 46

37. *E-I-E-I-OH!*, 2005
Oil, latex and resin on salvaged Plexiglas
sign
25 x 31

38. *Pan*, 2007
Toys for Toughs
Aluminum pan on remote chassis
2 x 11 x 11

39. *Ming*, 2007-2009
Broken latex, oil and resin painting and
broken frame
22 x 19

40. *Star*, 2008
Take a Painting a Day
Reverse painting on Plexiglas
17 x 17

41. *The Third Month*, 2008
Take a Painting a Day
Reverse painting on Plexiglas
17 x 15

42. *Trophy 1*, 2008
Take a Painting a Day
Reverse painting on Plexiglas
19.75 x 7.25

43. *Trophy 2*, 2008
Take a Painting a Day
Reverse painting on Plexiglas
20 x 8.25

44. *Woven Thought*, 2008
Take a Painting a Day
Reverse painting on Plexiglas
18 x 13

45. *Gutter Ball*, 2008
Take a Painting a Day
Reverse painting on plexiglass
35 x 7

46-58. *Take a Painting a Day*, 2008
Untitled reverse paintings on Plexiglas

46. 5.5 x 6.5

47. 8 x 5.5

48. 5.25 x 8.75

49. 5.5 x 8.5

50. 3.75 x 5

51. 12 x 3.25

52. 7.25 x 9

53. 7 x 10.5

54. 6.5 x 12

55. 12 x 9.5

56. 12 x 9.5

57. 12 x 9.5

58. 19.75 x 6.5

59. *Motion Detector 1*, 2009
Oils and screen on reverse glass
10.5 x 8.5

60. *Motion Detector 2*, 2009
Oils and screen on reverse glass
10.5 x 8.5

61. *Looking Within*, 2009
Oil, paint remover, found imagery and
spray paint on glass in thrift store frame
8.5 x 6.5

62. *Tony the Trader's Marching Band*
(T3), 1996-2009
Battered french horn case, electric guitar
parts, speaker parts, stapler, Plexiglas,
copper tape and mixed media
46 x 19 x 18

63. *Recycled Paint 1*, 2009
Paint scraps and resin on reverse glass
9 x 8

64. *Recycled Paint 2*, 2009
Paint scraps and resin on reverse glass
9 x 8

65. *Crystalline Triptych*, 2009
Music to the Eyes
Scraped off and ground up CD material
that contains Sonic Caveman audio
information, mixed with resin and poured
onto the back of the glass of three lousy
spray-painted frames purchased for a
dollar at a thrift store
11 x 9, 11 x 9, 11 x 9

66. *Sacred Trickster*, 2009
Paint marker and oil on brutalized
plexiglas
54 x 48

67. *The Last Brain Cell*, 2009
Frozen paint and plastic on framed panel
15 x 17

68. *To-From*, 2009
Primary Concerns
Spray paint, pencil, stickers, and acrylic
paint on beat-up plywood
17 x 21

69. *Black Berries*, 2009
Cardboard, acrylic paint, screen and
pigmented resin on glass
9 x 11

70. *Primary Concerns Left*, 2009
Primary concerns
Acrylic on wood with Bob Birkelo maple frames
23 x 15
71. *Primary Concerns Right*, 2009
Primary concerns
Acrylic on wood with Bob Birkelo maple frames
23 x 15
72. *The Change*, 2009
Frozen paint and plastic on framed panel
19 x 27
73. *Hazards of Love*, 2009
Frozen paint and plastic on framed panel
19 x 27
74. *Line Crosser*, 2009
Mixed media on reverse glass
24 x 35
75. *Knap Weed*, 2009
Spray paint, pigmented resin on glass
29.5 x 15.5
76. *The Voyage*, 2009
Reverse painting on glass
9 x 12
77. *Bird Bones*, 2009
Spray paint on glass
53 x 25.5
78. *Reactor*, 2009
Acrylic on bifold doors
79 x 24
79. *Shattered*, 2009
Plywood, tape, spray paint and resin
21.5 x 16.5
80. *Steve Silvertone's Amazing Box with a Lid*, 2009
Steve Silvertone Sonic Structure
Silvertone guitar body parts with salvaged strings and tuning mechanism
9 x 17 x 7
81. *Six Shooter*, 2009
Steve Silvertone Sonic Structure
Assembled electric guitar
32 x 12 x 6
82. *Frank*, 2009
Steve Silvertone Sonic Structure
Assembled electric guitar
32 x 12 x 6
83. *Fretless*, 2009
Steve Silvertone Sonic Structure
Assembled acoustic guitar
32 x 12 x 4
84. *Non-Human Spiral—Remembering a Lost Thought*, 1985-2010
Oil paint, latex paint and resin on panel
22 x 26
85. *The Third Mistake 1*, 2009-2010
Scored, poured reverse glass painting
6.5 x 8.5
86. *The Third Mistake 2*, 2009-2010
Latex paint in resin
6.5 x 8.5
87. *Innerscape 1*, 2003-2010
Pigmented oil and pigmented resin on cardboard and reverse painted glass in a one-dollar thrift store frame
12 x 12
88. *Innerscape 2*, 2003-2010
Foam core used to clean brushes over the course of several years with added imagery in a thrift store frame
9 x 11
89. *Innerscape 3*, 2010
Left over paint collage behind glass
6.5 x 8.5
90. *Innerscape 4*, 2010
Left over paint collage behind glass
6.5 x 8.5
91. *Innerscape 5*, 2010
Left over paint collage behind glass
6.5 x 8.5
92. *Innerscape 6*, 2010
Left over paint collage behind glass
9 x 11
93. *In One Gear and Out the Other*, 2010
Tile, grout, oil paints, pigmented varnish, paint marker, bic lighter gears, piece of a car engine and pigmented plastic in a cheap thrift store frame
10 x 10
94. *Sediment Self Portrait as Sonic Caveman*, 2010
Paint shavings-duct tape-gold dust and guitar strings behind plastic
7 x 9
95. *Busy Building a Lost Civilization*, 2009-2010
Latex, oil, frozen paint, and pigmented resin on panel
30 x 42
96. *Sam was a Crackpot*, 2010
Mixed media on cardboard
11 x 9
97. *Ship Shape*, 2007-2010
Reverse painting on glass, latex paint, etched resin
11 x 9
98. *East Ridge*, 2010
Masking tape, oil paint, latex paint, and spray paint on glass
9 x 10.5
99. *810 Metal Veil*, 2010
Number cut-outs, rusted grate, pigmented resin on panel
6.5 x 8.5
100. *Intersection*, 2010
The Unintentional Grace of Time
Recycled paint peelings, tack cloth shards, circular stickers, pencil, white glue, pigmented two-part epoxy resin and BB on painted 1960's era 2 x 6" wooden timbers
17 x 17

101. *Change of Address or Five*, 2010
The Unintentional Grace of Time
Acrylic paint, old brass numeral and pigmented resin on bisected salvaged building address marker from a torn down building that once read 125
14 x 13

103. *810—The Opening*, 2010
The Unintentional Grace of Time
Acrylic paint, pigmented resin and dirt on salvaged wainscoting
15 x 15

104. *810-The Migration*, 2010
The Unintentional Grace of Time
Acrylic paint, pigmented resin, table saw cuts, dirt and God only knows what on 100 plus year old salvaged wainscoting
14 x 14

102. *Horizon's Time*, 2010
The Unintentional Grace of Time
White glue, hot glue, spring, rusted washers, paint, pigmented resin, and air bubbles on weathered timbers
10.75 x 10.75

105. *The 5th Angle*, 2010
The Unintentional Grace of Time
Spray paint, acrylic paint, hot glue, ball bearings, random chain saw cuts, pigmented resin on weathered timbers
14 x 14

106. *Red Sphere Rolling*, 2010
The Unintentional Grace of Time
Latex paint, acrylic paint, spray paint, and pigmented resin on weathered timbers in a reconditioned 25 cent frame
12 x 14.5

107. *No Idea*, 2010
The Unintentional Grace of Time
Weathered wood, salvaged wainscoting, painted paper, paint marker, acrylic paint, oil paint and pigmented plastic in a cheap thrift store frame
12 x 10

108. *Fall Wire*, 2010
Acrylic paint, spray paint, chicken wire, brass brads, pigmented resin and leaves on panel
11.5 x 11.5

109. *Hole in the Ocean*, 2010
Acrylic paint, washer, ball bearing, and pigmented resin on aged timber
7.5 x 13

110. *Pablo's Futuristic Vision 1*, 2010
Music to the Eyes
Bisected electric guitar, oil, pigmented resin
19 x 15

111. *Pablo's Futuristic Vision 2*, 2010
Music to the Eyes
Bisected electric guitar, oil, pigmented resin
19 x 15

112. *Was Kim the Class Clown?*, 2010
Scratched drawing-paint marker and ball point pen on Kim Koldoff's old chalk board purchased for 50 cents at BSW
24 x 18

113. *History's Fence*, 2010
The Unintentional Grace of Time
Spray paint and pigmented resin on brutalized 50-year-old fence
20 x 21

114. *The Long Drive of Oxidized Copper*, 2010
Reverse-painted glass
22 x 27

115. *Buddha Breeze*, 2010
Acrylic on bi-fold door
12 x 79

116. *Exploded View of a Sun Burst Guitar*, 2010
Reverse spray paint and oil painting on 1/4" tempered glass.
32 x 26

117. *Broken Promise*, 2010
Mixed media on reverse glass
24 x 35

118. *Max's Brilliant Bouquet*, 2010
Rusted tin pan, flowers and resin
8 x 8

119. *Eclipse (Triptych)*, 2010
Sonic caveman CD dust, spray paint and resin on glass
12 x 10, 24.5 x 20.5, 12 x 10

120. *Audio Orbit*, 2010
Music to the Eyes
Scraped CD filament, audio CD, filament and resin
14 x 16

121. *G-String*, 2010
Steve Silvertone Sonic Structure Gear, G-string, VCR part, and bicycle spoke
5.5 x 5 x 2

122. *Cadmium Curve 1*, 2008-2010
Mixed media on a failed reverse glass painting
14 x 11

123. *Cadmium Curve 2*, 2010
Oil on glass
41 x 29

124. *Cadmium Curve 3*, 2010
Poured cans of latex paint, pigmented varnish, oil paints and paint markers on the back of a framed dry erase marker board purchased for a dollar at a thrift store
35 x 23

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For fourteen years I owned a gallery in Butte and for ten years featured Steve Wellman in an annual one-person show. In early spring, right around Tax Day, he would arrive to fill the small space to overflowing with a new series—always something unexpected, fresh and exciting. This is the exhibition I always wanted to present, with enough time to consider the art in a scholarly context, enough space to view individual pieces without distraction, and enough volume to see lines of connection. I am excited to present the work in a building that combines its own layers of history with the energy of a living community of artists.

This exhibition represents a collaboration between artist and curator. Wellman has mined his life and place: digging, concentrating and transforming his experience. I have attempted to translate his physical production into text and reproduction, adding yet another layer to this complex and interconnected work.

This exhibition is the result of many communities, especially Kunzelmann-Esser Lofts, the UWM Art History Department and students, my advisors, family, employers, and friends. The community of Butte, its layered history and sedimentary decay, is also present behind the art and narrative. The flaws are entirely my own.

—Susan Barnett

SPECIAL THANKS TO...

STEVE WELLMAN, who, in addition to producing two new series for the show, participated in a year of conversation and correspondence, sharing images, words, music and ideas. He trusted me to transport his artwork across three states in sub-zero weather, allowed me to write about the details of his life and work, and endured constant questions with patience and humor.

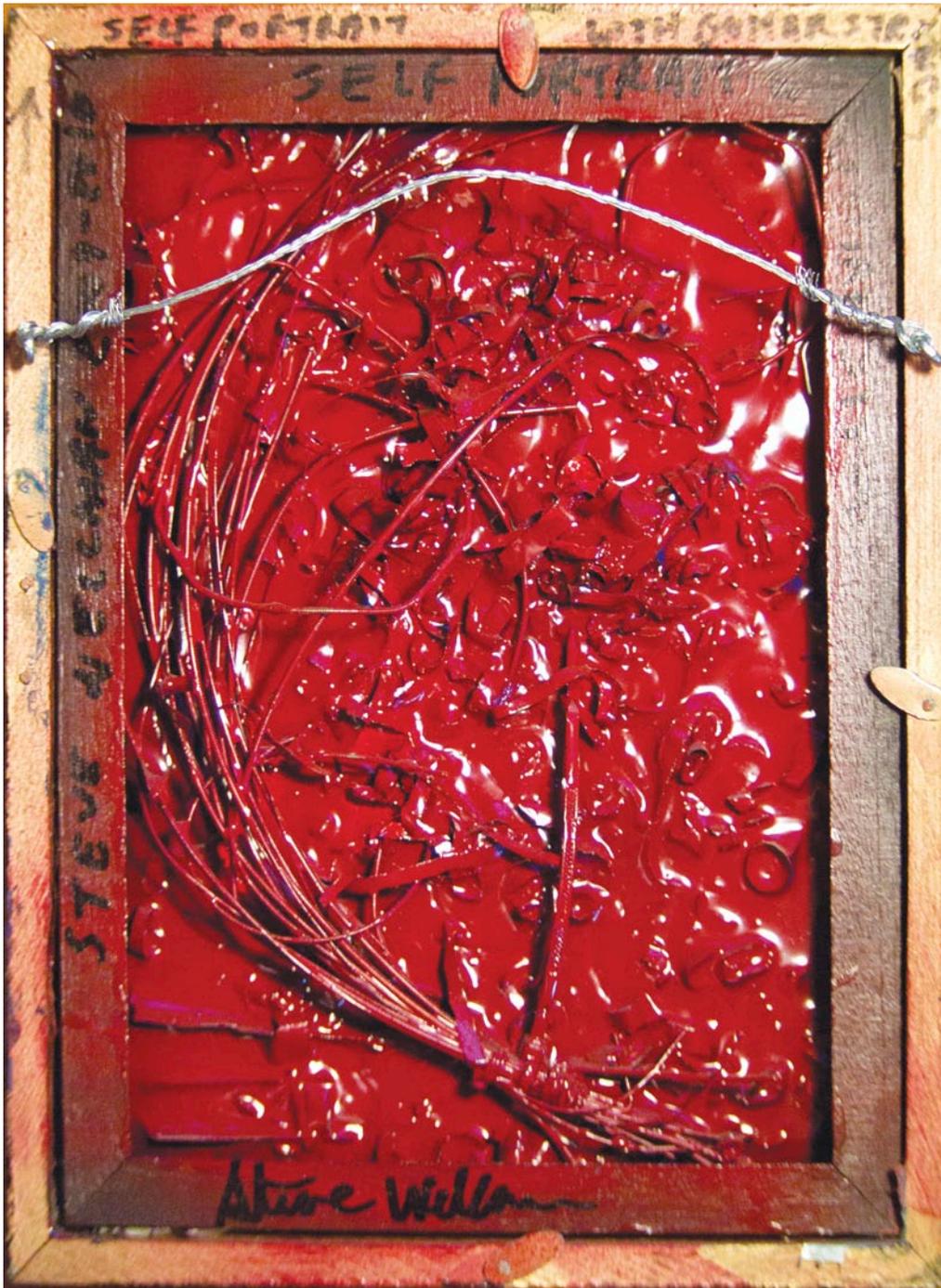
JEFFREY HAYES, my thesis advisor, whose wisdom, encouragement, insight, and guidance pushed me to find layers of connections, consider multiple angles, and question every easy assumption. His creative suggestions led me in many directions, and his acute criticism helped me find the way back to the center.

JENNIFER JOHUNG, for guiding me through the convoluted trends and theories of the contemporary, suggesting invaluable resources to make sense out of the chaos of the now, and cutting to the essence of the architecture.

KUNZELMANN-ESSER LOFTS for allowing me to use their sunny gallery space for the exhibit, and especially Melissa Neils, for making this exhibit a true collaboration between communities.

JANA MASON, whose optimism and commitment to education as a lifelong pursuit is a constant inspiration.

BOB BARNETT, my husband, partner, and best friend of thirty years.



Sediment Self Portrait as Sonic Caveman, 2010
(Verso)
Paint shavings, duct tape, gold dust, and guitar strings behind plastic
7 x 9 in.



Layers & Sediment
Susan Floyd Barnett