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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

EXPLORATION OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN NON-OBJECTIVE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND

by

William A. Keyser, Jr.

October 15, 2005

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My only regret is that I didn't begin this program earlier in my career, while I was still in academia, as I've learned as much about the art of teaching from the above faculty as I've learned about painting and sculpture.

Finally, I'm thankful for the encouragement and moral support of my wife, Joan, and of our children, Melinda and Mark. And none of this would have been possible without the presence of The Spirit.

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THESIS PROPOSAL

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the correlation between non-objective painting and sculpture in the round.

I believe there is an opportunity to create unique work that combines, integrates, juxtaposes or holds in opposition the image, color and surface qualities of painting and the material physicality of free-standing sculpture. I will attempt to blur the distinctions between painting and sculpture. The art of Jennifer Bartlett, Eva Hesse, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella and Jessica Stockholder is among the significant work that points to a hybrid art form.

I intend to pursue this thesis through direct observation, library research, examination of contemporary art and personal exploration with a series of works utilizing non-objective painting imagery and constructed three dimensional forms.

PREFACE

The MFA curricular course work and this subsequent Thesis investigation initiated some significant changes in my work. In order to trace that evolution, it's necessary in the Introduction to describe my earlier involvement in furniture and fine art making, to show some examples of the work, and to distill some characteristics that marked that activity.

The middle sections will describe the Thesis work itself: the research, influences, early probes, the selected process and the resultant work. Subsequently, the conclusion will present comparative evidence of the aforementioned. An attempt will also be made to position this Thesis work within the context of today's contemporary art scene.

Finally, in the Epilogue, some thoughts on what might be next in this ongoing investigation will be proposed.

INTRODUCTION

From as early as I can remember, I've built things. As a youth I worked summers with my Father, a self employed woodworker, or with uncles who were machinists and plumbers. My spare time was spent designing and building Soap Box Derby racers, school science fair exhibits, and model cars for the Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild competitions. These early experiences exposed me to a wide variety of materials and processes, and provided a foundation in conceiving, developing and executing ideas.

After earning a B.S. (Mechanical Engineering) and an M.F.A (Furniture Design), I taught Woodworking and Furniture Design in the School for American Crafts at the Rochester Institute of Technology for 35 years. Along with teaching, I professionally designed and built custom furniture, mostly on commission but occasionally on speculation. This combination of teaching in a rigorous furniture program and maintaining an aggressive commission practice meant that furniture was my primary focus.¹

But ever since taking a sculpture elective in undergraduate school, I had also been interested in making fine art. Therefore I occasionally made sculpture, prints and paintings (or two dimensional constructions). One of my earliest sculptures was *Looper*, 1966 (Fig. 1). In 1967 I did a series of woodcut prints similar to *Black Looper* (Fig. 2). The print was essentially a side view of a double *Looper* sculpture. Present in both was the dominant base form, the curved ribbon arching over on itself, and the gap-like

¹ Note: All works in this Introduction were speculative pieces, unless otherwise noted. The designs of a very large number of additional commissioned works, not shown here, were influenced by not only the factors to be discussed henceforth, but also by the parameters typical of a commission, that is: site, function, budget and client preferences.



Figure 1: *Looper*, 1966, red oak, 23 x 17 x 12.

art making resulted in cross-pollination, and sometimes a close correlation, between the furniture and the fine art. In 1970 I wrote:

“My activity seems to organize itself around two concerns. One is the conception of non-utilitarian objects which sometimes might become sculpture. But I am also

interruption in the journey. In 1969 the curved ribbon became a painting, *Red Looper* (Fig. 3). Here the gap was expressed by the narrow space between the two parts and by the abrupt reversal and almost abutting end of the lower ribbon. In the correlation of these works, the three dimensional sculptures directly influenced the two dimensional prints and paintings.

While furniture accounted for approximately 90% of my studio involvement, these sporadic sojourns into fine

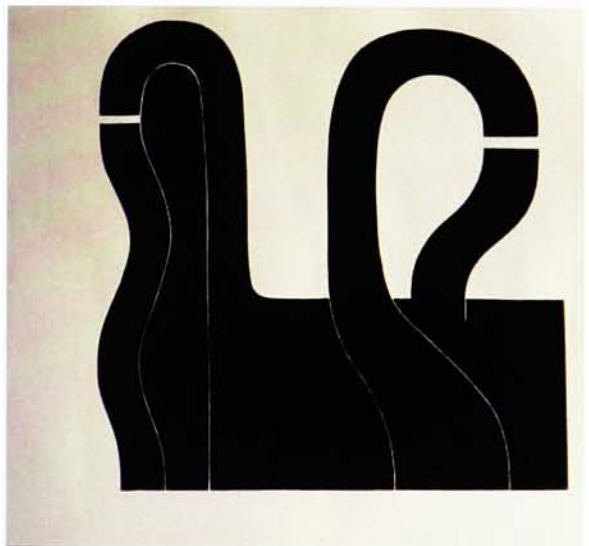


Figure 2: *Black Looper*, 1967, ink on paper, 20 x 23-1/2.



Figure 3: *Red Looper*, 1969, laquer on MDF and wood, 69 x 57 x 1.

preoccupied with the process of applying these formal ideas to functional furniture.

Occasionally, the two categories become less definite, the distinctions unclear. These moments produce the most successful work”.²

Liquor Cabinet, 1967 (Fig. 4), juxtaposed the functional concerns of furniture with the formal considerations of sculpture. The red transition piece between the two wooden elements was painted after the overall form had been

constructed. In 1971, a series of four wall-hung

pieces, typified by *Shelf* (Fig. 5), consisting of long striped planks of variously colored woods, appropriately folded, were at once furniture, sculpture and painting. Again, in 1986, *Bench* (Fig. 6) was a hybrid piece that closely correlated the genres of furniture and fine art.

The furniture was almost always designed on paper, first with sketches and finally on full size working drawings done on 4 ft. wide Kraft paper, many of them 8 ft. long. Since almost all the furniture was being done on commission, this accurately predicted



Figure 4: *Liquor Cabinet*, 1967, benge wood, steel, lacquer, 67 high.

² William A. Keyser, Jr., quoted in *Objects: USA*, by Lee Nordness (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), p.260.

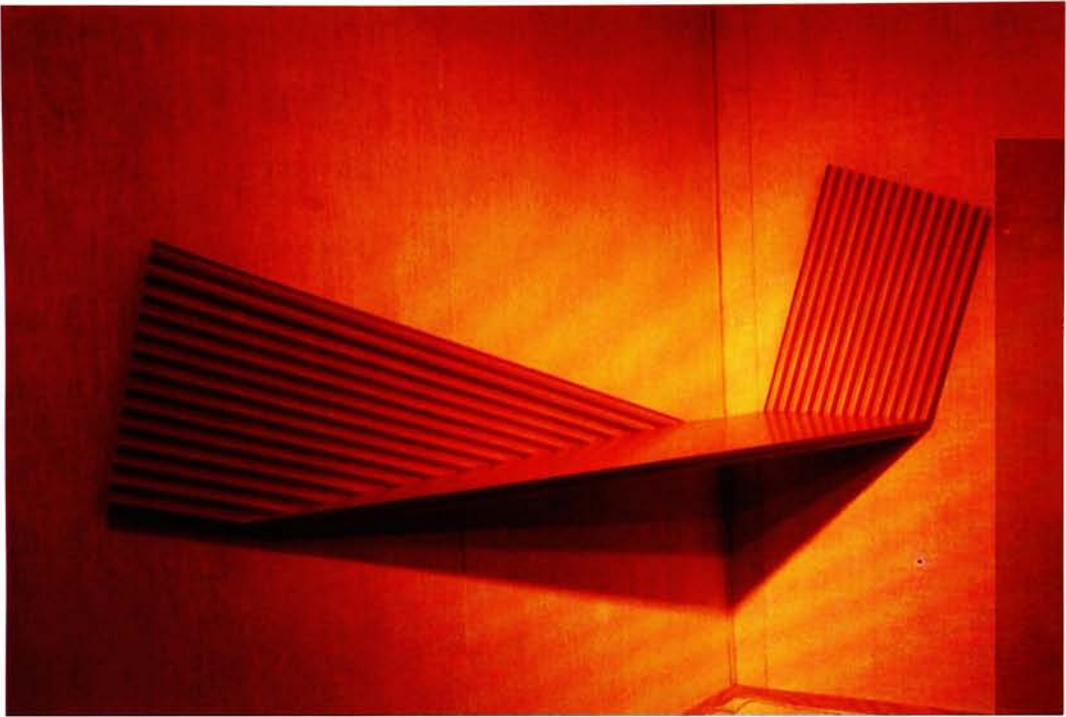


Figure 5: *Shelf*, 1971, assorted woods on Styrofoam, approx. 30 x 93 x 36.

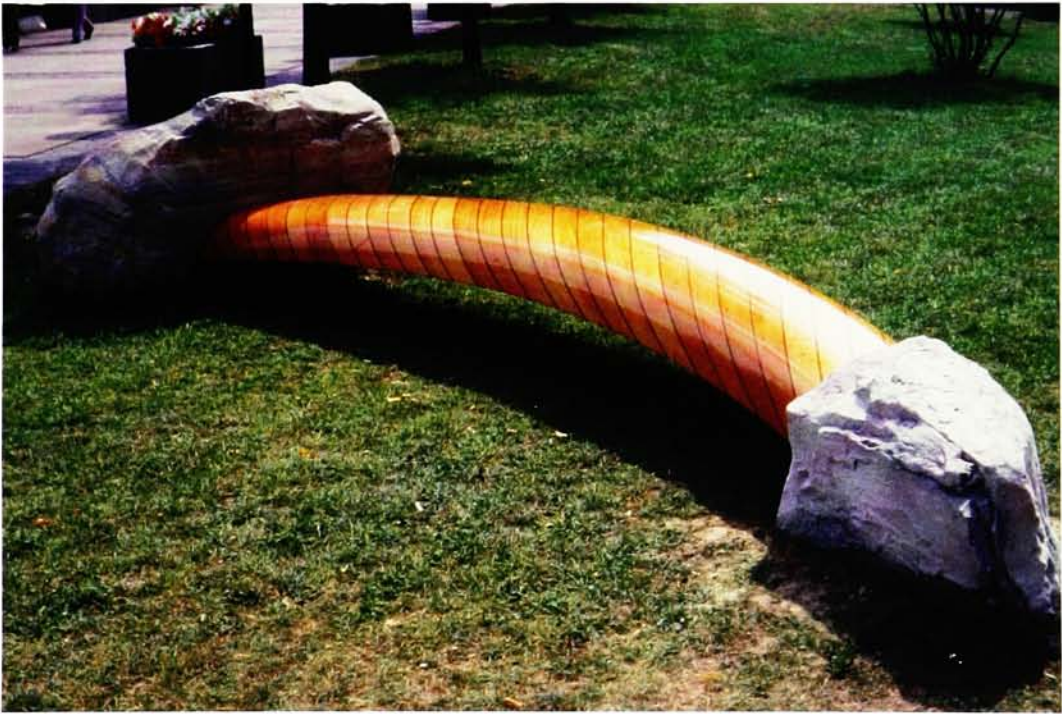


Figure 6: *Bench*, 1986, mahogany, walnut and stone, 36 x 240 x 72.

how the pieces would look for the client, and also provided optimum efficiency during construction. But the creativity was all upfront; few design changes were ever made during construction. The pieces were built following exactly the preconceived working drawings. The early sculpture followed a similar procedure. Interestingly, years later when I first began painting, I did so on some of these full size drawings (Fig. 7). The pencil lines on the drawings, most of which were eventually painted over, provided a starting point and helped to overcome the “blank canvas” syndrome.

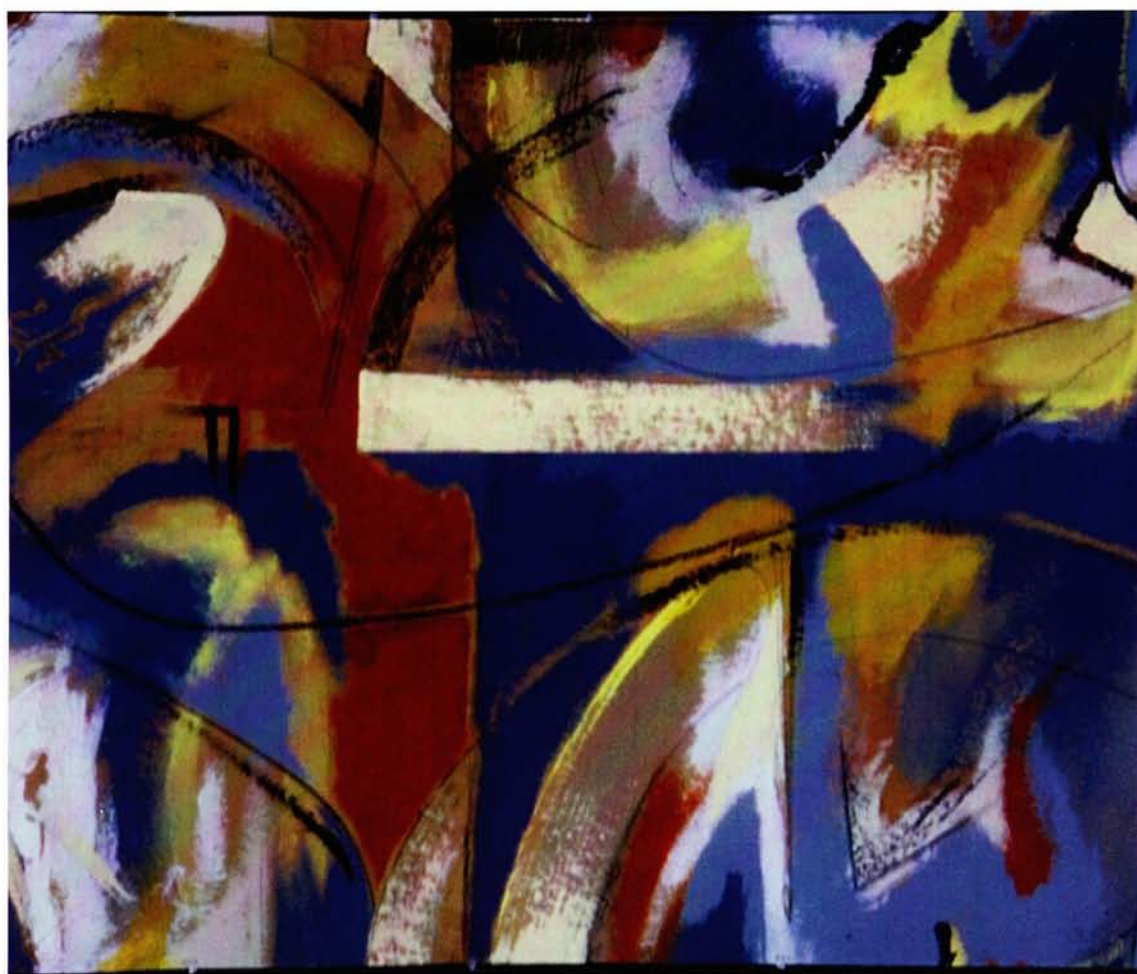


Figure 7: *Untitled*, 2001, latex on Kraft paper, approx. 48 x 60.

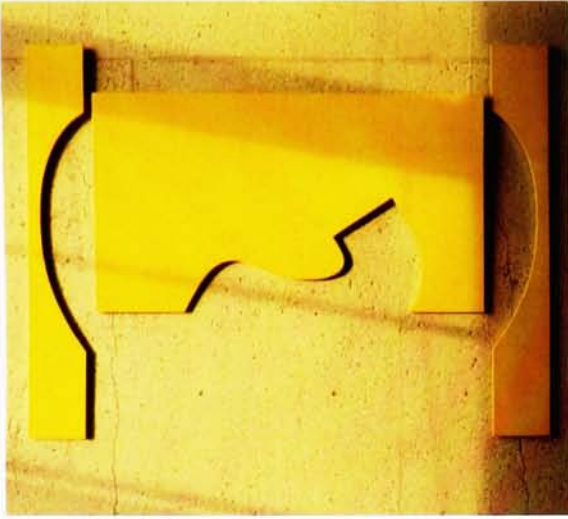


Figure 8: *Untitled Yellow*, 1969, lacquer on MDF and wood, 60 x 82 x 1.

I once wrote, in reference to my working methodology: “Usually I work in a very premeditative way, using models, drawings and mock-ups to predict the outcome. Occasionally, however, I’ll respond to cast-off or left-over pieces in a

much more spontaneous way. Often the scrap or residue from a project is more

interesting than the project itself.”³ Curiously, the left over negative shape of the upper piece of *Red Looper* became the central figure in another painting called *Untitled Yellow* (Fig. 8). Curved stripes of various wood species, residue left over from the commissioned *Buffet*, 1972 (Fig. 9) initiated the wooden “painting” *Untitled*, made in 1973 (Fig. 10), and in 1978 sparked the creation of *Coffee Table With Discs* (Fig. 11). Here the two dimensional elements directly influenced the three dimensional solutions.

In 1974 I investigated the lap strake technique used in building



Figure 9: *Buffet*, 1972, assorted woods, approx. 72 x 72 x 18.

³William Keyser, artist comment in *William Keyser – Wood Furniture, Sculpture and Ecclesiastical Objects* (Rochester, NY: Bevier Gallery, College of Fine and Applied Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1978), p. 2,

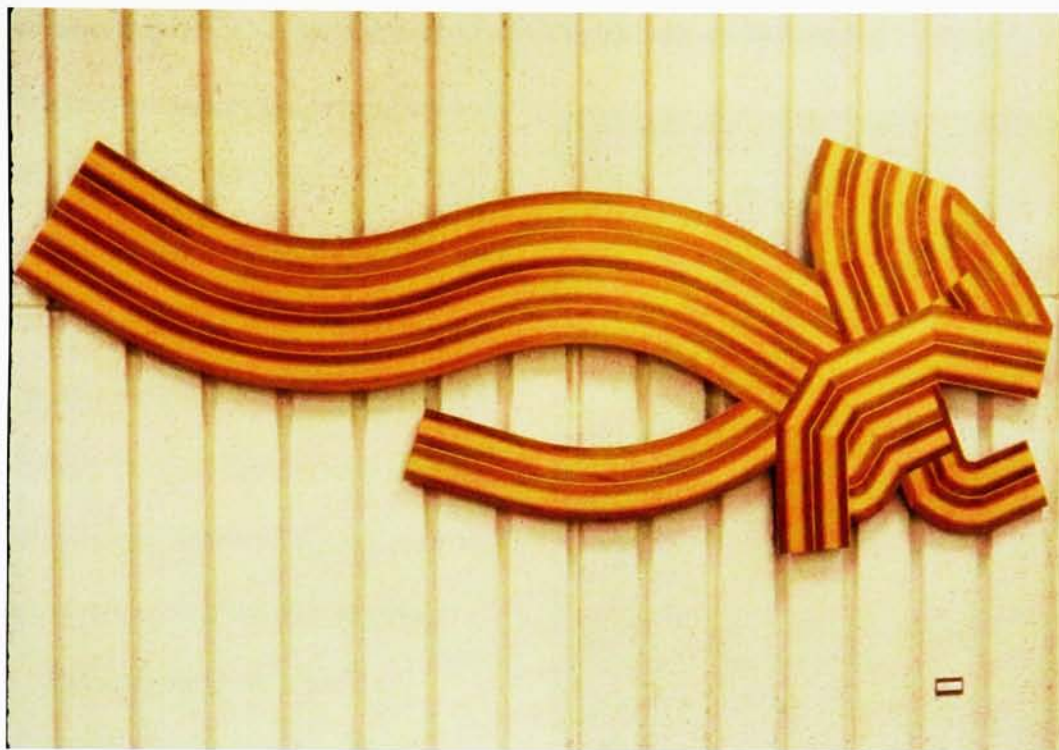


Figure 10: *Untitled*, 1973, assorted woods on MDF, 36 x 96 x 1.



Figure 11: *Coffee Table With Discs*, 1978, assorted woods, 18 x 22 x 69.

wooden boat hulls. A sample composed of three bent strakes, lapped together, was made before constructing the commissioned *Wall Cabinet*, 1976 (Fig. 12). Twenty years later that sample became the major element in the sculpture, *Untitled Lap Strake* (Fig. 13). Parenthetically, when designs evolved from left over remnants, they usually did so freely, without the premeditation of full size drawings.

Process was often a point of departure for the designs of both my furniture and sculpture. Bent



Figure 12: *Wall Cabinet*, 1976, walnut and hardware, approx. 76 x 60 x 24.



Figure 13: *Untitled Lap Strake*, 1996, oak, teak, walnut and hardware, 22 x 29 x 14.

lamination, vacuum forming, steam bending, coopering, veneering and torsion panel construction were among the woodworking processes that suggested form possibilities. I first used steam bending in 1965 on a commissioned sculpture, *Golden Eagle*

(Fig. 14). Before the final assembly of the piece, I temporarily arranged the sub-assemblies differently than intended (Fig. 15). I envisioned the new arrangement might



Figure 14: *Golden Eagle*, 1965, walnut, approx. 72 high.

leading, in terms of future development, is the ultimate”⁴.

sometime lead to an interesting abstract floor sculpture. Instead, in 1973, that appropriated form evolved into the commissioned *Coffee Table* (Fig. 16), and in 1974 became a double-ended version, commissioned *Coffee Table #2* (Fig. 17). I subsequently wrote: “I keep one eye on the current project, and the other on what the piece might suggest. To build one piece is not enough; to be conscious of where it’s

⁴ Ibid.



Figure 15: Rearranged parts, during construction of *Golden Eagle*.



Figure 16: *Coffee Table*, 1973, walnut, approx 72 long.



Figure 17: *Coffee Table #2*, 1974, walnut, approx. 60 long.



Figure 18: *Untitled Pink*, 1989, red oak, dyed maple, 21 x 21 x 49.

In 1989 I began using color in a series of sculptures like *Untitled Pink* (Fig. 18). The color was an afterthought; paint or dye was applied only after the forms had been finalized.

To summarize then, the following points characterized my *modus operandi* prior to beginning this Thesis:

- Correlation among the furniture, sculpture and two dimensional works frequently existed. Sometimes the three dimensional disciplines dictated the two dimensional ones; other times, vice versa.
- A few times the separate disciplines of furniture, sculpture and painting were merged, resulting in true hybrid art forms.
- The design of my furniture, as well as my early sculpture, was almost always predetermined, via a working drawing before construction began.
- Occasionally residue (either left-over parts or appropriated form ideas) from one project would become a point of departure for another, and a more spontaneous design would evolve.
- Process (a woodworking technique) was often a point of departure for designs.
- When color was used, it was always applied after the forms were finalized.

EARLY INVESTIGATIONS

When I chose this thesis topic I tried to think of possible formats with which to explore the correlation between my painting and sculpture. Could a painting be expanded forward off the wall till it becomes a piece of sculpture? Might elements in a painting grow three dimensionally to physically become a related sculpture? Could part of the painting rest on a pedestal, or on the floor in front of the wall? Could the painting be put on the pedestal, and the related sculpture hung from the wall?

Immediately, some artists whose work was relevant came to mind. Robert Rauschenberg, whose paintings and sculpture were often closely correlated, had coined the term “combine-painting” to describe works like *Monogram*, 1955-59 (Fig. 19), featuring a stuffed Angora goat with an automobile tire around its midsection, mounted



Figure 19: Robert Rauschenberg: *Monogram*, 1955-59, freestanding combine: oil, paper, fabric, wood, on canvas and wood, rubber heel, tennis ball, metal plaque, hardware, stuffed Angora goat, rubber tire, mounted on four wheels, 42 x 63-1/4 x 64-1/2. Permission granted.

atop a horizontal collaged painting. My research revealed that the work had gone through earlier versions, described by Lawrence Alloway. “The first format had the goat, no tire, in profile on a narrow shelf against a collage painting, its head extending beyond the picture edge. Next the goat acquired the tire and was turned to face outward from a tall, narrow, collaged panel. Rauschenberg arrived at the final format by standing the goat on a collaged ground, occupying its own ‘pasture’, to use a word of Rauschenberg’s for it”⁵. Rauschenberg had, fifty years ago, experimented with some of the same formats that I was now considering. As the painter Pat Steir recently said, “Rauschenberg found a way to stretch the meaning of painting, and it has been stretching ever since”.⁶

As early as 1984 Jennifer Bartlett began doing large realistic paintings depicting gardens and beach scenes with tables and chairs, boats and outbuildings. In front of these paintings she placed three dimensional versions of the objects in the paintings. I found particularly appealing one executed in 1987 called *Boats* (Fig. 20). Here,



Figure 20: Jennifer Bartlett: *Boats*, 1987, painting: oil on canvas, 118 x 168, sculpture: painted wood, steel support, pine mast, 55-1/2" x 47-1/2" x 46 each. Permission granted.

⁵ Lawrence Alloway, “Rauschenberg’s Development”, *Rauschenberg* (City of Washington: Smithsonian Institution. National Collection of Fine Arts, 1977), p. 6.

⁶ Pat Steir, cited by Linda Yablonsky, “What Makes a Painting a Painting”, *Art News*, April 2005, p. 97.

severely cropped images of two identical sailboats, side by side, dominate a large painting. In front of the painting she placed three dimensional duplicates of the boats, truncated exactly as the painted versions. The resulting objects are extremely fresh and interesting sculptural forms, they set up a wonderful dialogue with the painting behind, and they force the viewer to more carefully “look” and consider the real versus the imitation.



Figure 21: Frank Stella: *St. Michael's Counterguard*, 1984, mixed media on aluminum and fiberglass honeycomb, 156 x 135 x 108. The AMICO Library: LACM.M.84.150.

I have long admired Frank Stella as an artist, and his work. No other artist that I know of has had a more dramatic impact on abstract painting in the past 50 years. Over the years his work has evolved from flat abstract paintings to shaped canvases to relief paintings that

sometimes project as much as 12' off the wall, such as *St.*

Michael's Counterguard,

1984 (Fig. 21). His more recent work combines industrial detritus with paint to produce huge and extremely complex pieces.

Jessica Stockholder, whose huge installations combine a profusion of disparate everyday objects, the architecture of the site and paint, speaks of the transition from her beginnings as a painter to the practice of installation sculpture: “It was not as though I

had stopped painting pictures and then started to make sculpture. I still make pictures, except that they are at the same time sculptures”⁷. Stockholder’s installations are initially confusing, unsettling, disorienting and outright overwhelming. But slowly, as one walks through her art, one discovers

relationships among the elements.

Many of these connections are made with color and paint in particular, directly correlating her sculpture and painting. For example, a swath of orange paint might cover the adjacent ends of two or three upholstered, free standing couches and puddle out on the floor in an interesting pattern, as in *On The Spending Money Tenderly*, 2002 (Fig. 22). That orange “skin”, as Stockholder has called it, might then

be picked up on a nearby wall, travel up and across the ceiling and end up on the sidewalk outside the gallery.



Figure 22: Jessica Stockholder: *On the Spending Money Tenderly*, 2002, mixed media installation at K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf. Permission granted.

⁷ Quote by Jessica Stockholder in Gottlieb Leinz, “Beyond Painting”, in Richter Verlag, Jessica Stockholder. (Dusseldorf: K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2002), p.116.

Discovering and digesting these unifying tactics are what make her installations

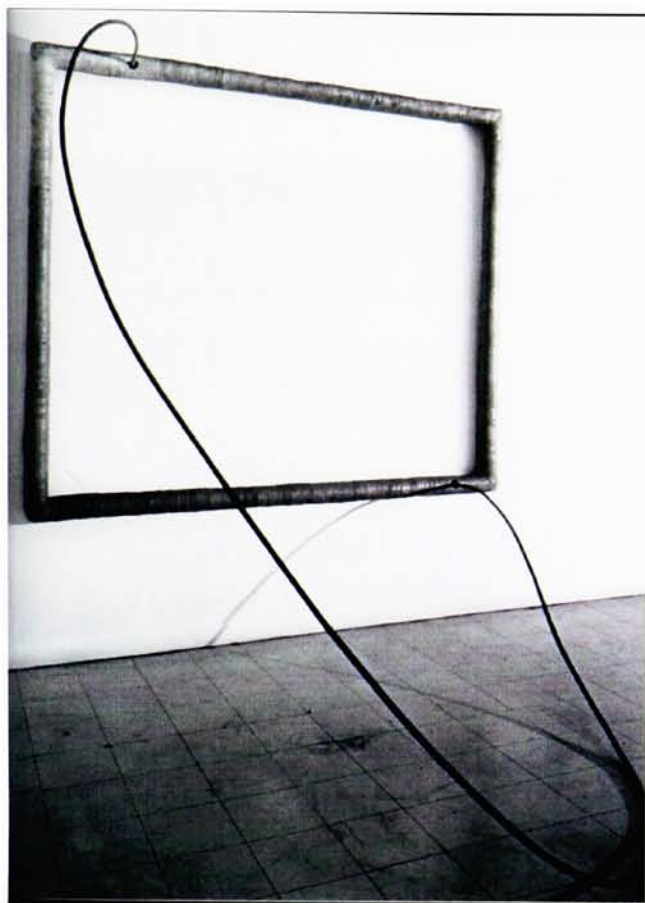


Figure 23: Eva Hesse: *Hang Up*, 1966, acrylic paint on cloth over wood; acrylic paint on cord over steel tube, 72 x 84 x 78. Permission granted.

appealing to me.

I knew the work of Eva Hesse and specifically remembered her piece called *Hang Up*, 1966 (Fig. 23). It consists of an empty wall hung picture frame, 72" x 84", to which are attached both ends of a meandering steel loop that projects outward from the wall 78". In my opinion this piece represents an overt correlation between her painting and sculpture, and was influential in my early musings.

In addition to researching relevant artists, and consistent with

my usual practice of preplanning and predetermining the form of my projects, I did a series of studies exploring some of those initial thoughts on possible formats for correlating my painting and sculpture.

A small unfinished and untitled painting on MDF (Medium Density Fiberboard) (Fig. 24) had been treated in low relief with construction leveling compound and ¼" thick MDF shapes and then painted with acrylics. Influenced by Eva Hesse's *Hang Up*, I attached a projecting U-shaped wooden lamination, to which was fastened a straight

wooden member. A laminated squiggle across the top completed the form. These additions were never painted to integrate them with the relief.



Figure 24: Unfinished painting, 2002, acrylic paint on leveling compound on MDF with wood, 55 x 45 x 17.

At one point I wrote in my journal:

“I think there’s a difference between painted sculpture and sculpture/painting combinations. Painted sculpture is a surface treatment, like a patina applied overall. It’s a coating, a surface that defines the materiality of the sculpture, as in painted metal, poly-chromed wood, dyed fabric, etc. What I want is sculpture that presents a painting; that is a scaffolding upon which is juxtaposed a painting. And yet the sculpture should not be a mere prop. The painting and sculpture should be mutually supportive but independently important.”

Obviously not all the issues concerned with this concept were resolved. But it suggested my desire to get at a more unique approach to the correlation between my painting and sculpture.

A study for a table leg (inverted) led to the concept of a horizontal two-sided painting, supported off the floor by four splayed wooden poles (Fig. 25). The painting could be viewed from below by looking up, or from above, as from a balcony. Perhaps the perimeter of the painting should be shaped, organic in feeling, suggestive of foliage or clouds. I felt the concept would be effective if there were a cluster of these, different heights and sizes, so as to form a canopy of paintings.



Figure 25: Maquette, 2003, acrylic paint on cardboard and wood, 19-1/2 high.



Figure 26: Maquette, 2003, acrylic paint on cardboard, wood and copper wire, 21 high.

A slender wooden pole sheathed with two “splints” (residue from a furniture project) for stiffening was the genesis of another concept. The pole could be free standing, supported by a rigid painted structure (Fig. 26), or used in multiples leaning against the wall, from which could be draped painted canvases, as in the drawing (Fig. 27).

Another concept was explored with the maquette (Fig. 28) composed of curved

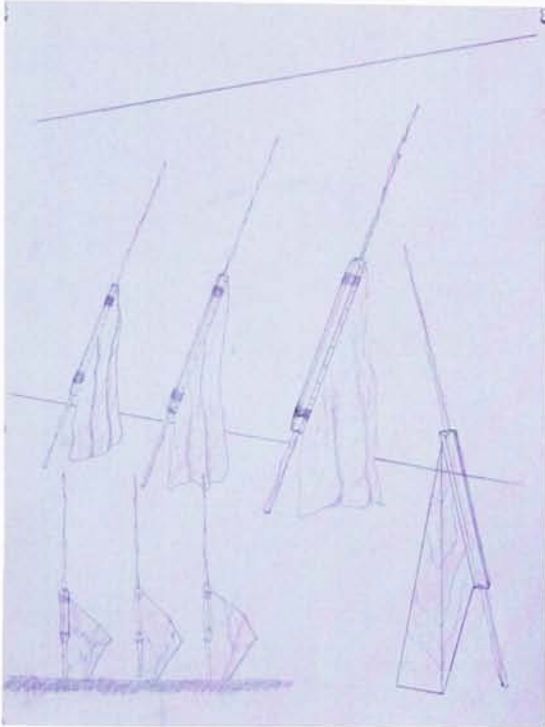


Figure 27: Drawing, 2003, graphite and colored pencil on paper, 38 x 20.

wooden elements and painted cardboard. It was an attempt to combine a mutually supportive (structurally as well as visually) sculpture and painting.

Inspired by Jennifer Bartlett’s work I envisioned free-standing sculptural elements in front of a wall hung relief painting (Fig. 29). The painting was never executed on the primed surfaces of the maquette.

Another strategy involved supporting a folded and fabricated painted plane with three dimensional forms, in this case wedges

of wood and glass (Fig. 30). The painting on this study is incomplete.

Similar concepts are illustrated (Fig. 31 and Fig. 32). Painted panels are supported by structures of sheet metal, wood and rubber. The combination of different materials and the variety of the sculptural forms make these studies exciting.

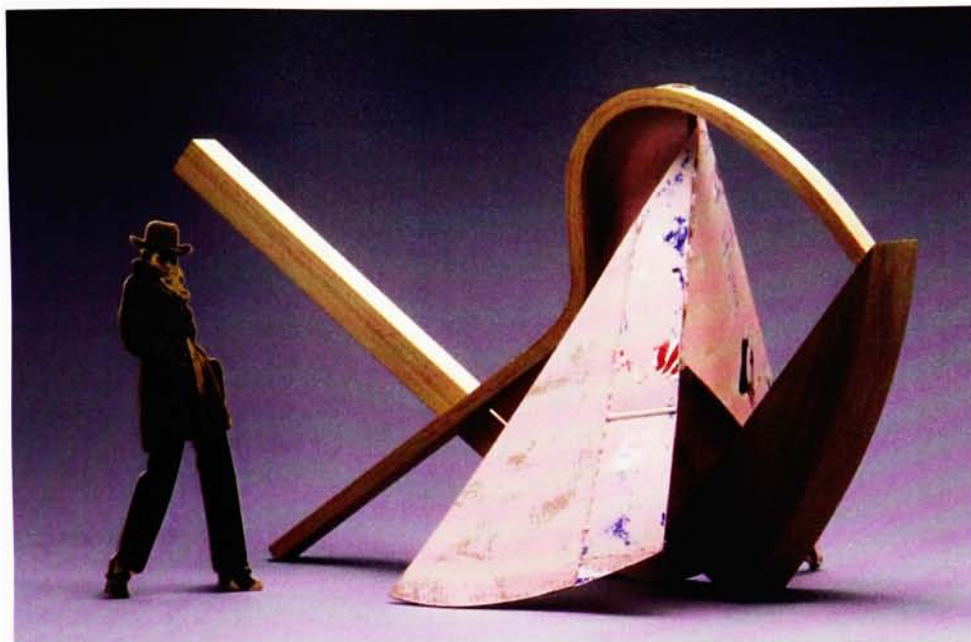


Figure 28: Maquette, 2003, acrylic paint on cardboard and wood, 11 high.



Figure 29: Maquette, 2004, gesso on cardboard, 9 high.

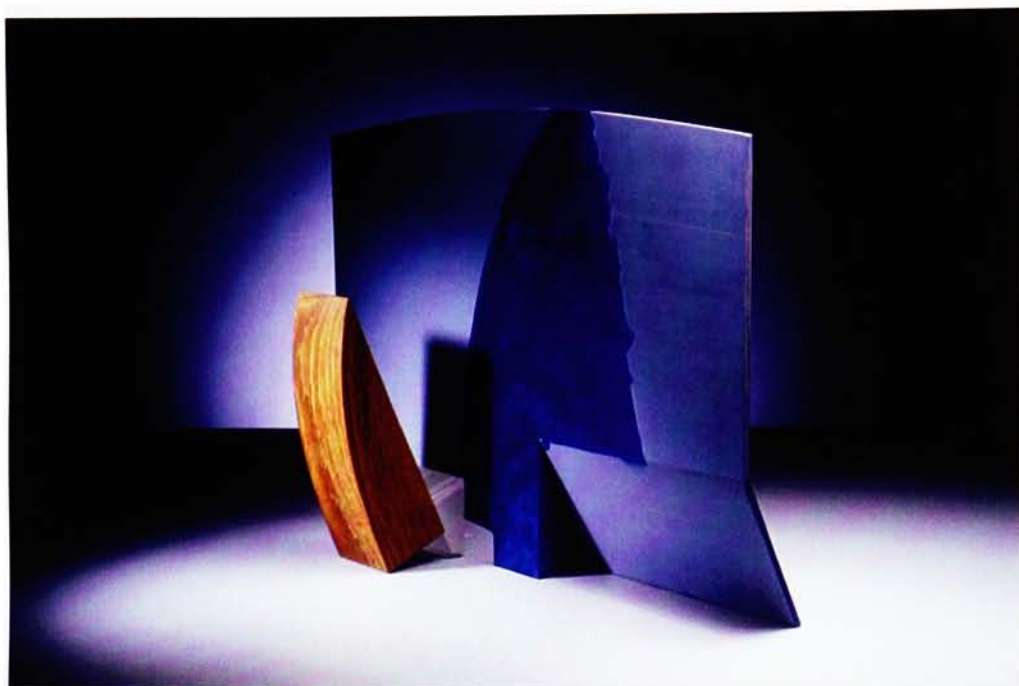


Figure 30: Unfinished sculpture, 2004, acrylic paint on MDF, glass, wood and hardware, 20 x 28 x 14.



Figure 31: Maquette, 2003, encaustic on MDF, rubber, chromed steel, wood and hardware, 6 high.

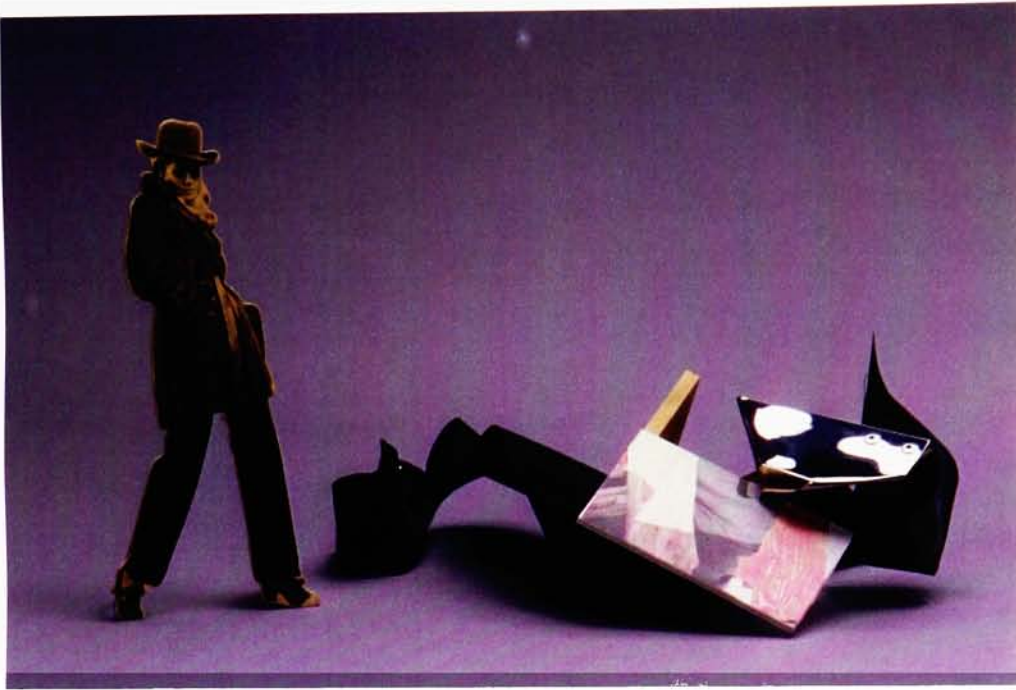


Figure 32: Maquette, 2003, paper, rubber, chromed steel, wood and hardware, 4-1/2 high.



Figure 33: Maquette, 2003, acrylic on plywood, 25-1/2 x 40 x 2-1/2.

A scrap from the band saw sparked an idea for a sculptural form with a flat area that could be painted (Fig. 33). Conceived as a model for a much larger piece, the idea was explored on a drawing (Fig. 34).

Starting with a found object ring, I did a mockup utilizing cut offs from furniture laminations and corrugated cardboard (Fig. 35). The cardboard planes were to be executed in MDF and painted, as were the laminations.

Intended to be a maquette for a larger sculpture, this study (Fig. 36), featured a red stripe painted only on one side and on the 1/16" - wide leading edge. The observer, unaware of any color when on the opposite side, would discover just a slender slice of red as he walked clockwise around, and then get the full force of it on the near side.

Then one day Bruce Sodervick, in a critique during a sculpture class, matter-of-factly said "You should be sculpting with color, sculpting with paint". Building sculpture with color! What a wonderful concept. Bruce's suggestion hit me like a rock, a revelation!

I think on one level it was an honest and direct suggestion: yes, build with color. But on a less simplistic and idealistic level, perhaps what he was also suggesting was that I should find ways to allow the painting process to affect the form of the sculpture. Up to this point I had been conceiving the three dimensional form and then painting it. This was very consistent with the way I had always worked and was the direction I envisioned the Thesis going. But what if the painting, the process of making the painting, or the resultant painted imagery, were to suggest, dictate, and drive the sculpture? It occurred to me that this could be the ultimate correlation between my painting and sculpture.



Figure 34: Drawing, 2003, graphite and colored pencil on paper, 20 x 38.



Figure 35: Maquette, 2003, aluminum, cardboard, wood and hardware, 36 x 139 x 36.

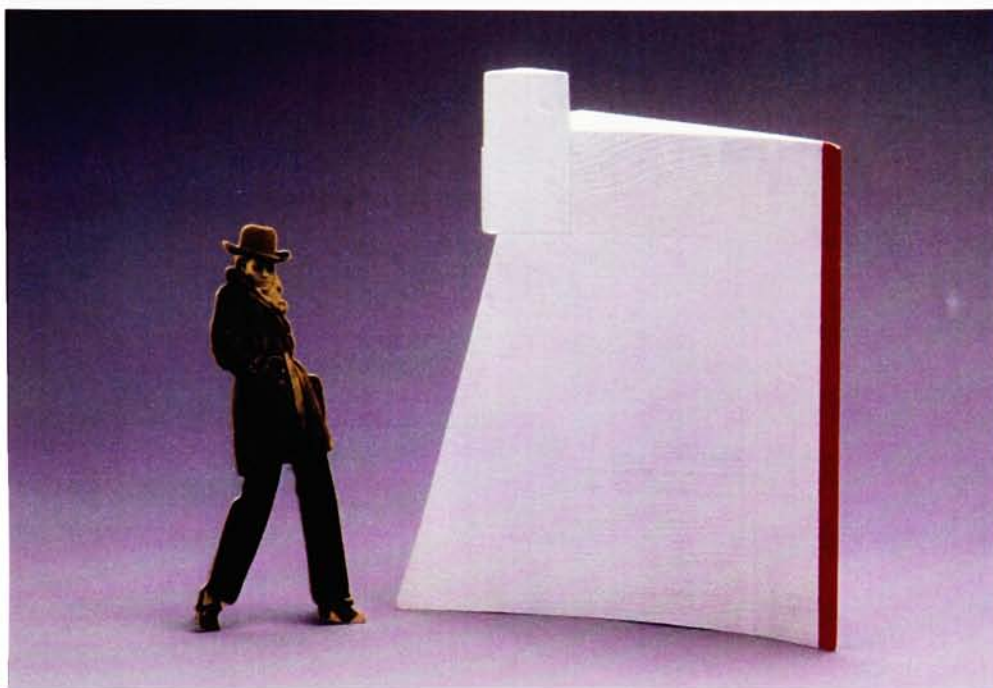


Figure 36: Maquette, 2004, acrylic on wood, 10-1/2 high.

With this in mind, I researched artists who had done work that was relevant to this new direction in my study. I remembered John Chamberlain who, in the 1960's, was making sculpture from crumpled auto body parts (Fig. 37). The original paint, chrome and historical patina of these found materials became his palette. As he assembled the disparate parts into a sculpture, he searched for what he referred to as the right "fit", in terms of both the form and the color relationships of the components.



Figure 37: John Chamberlain, *Jackpot*, 1962, painted steel and gold paper, 60 x 52 x 46. The AMICO Library: WMAA. 75.52.

Anish Kapoor initially made his sculptures, simple objects of modest scale resting directly on the floor, completely out of chalk powder and powder pigments, so that they were literally made from color. These were extremely fragile and were very temporary. Later he made armatures for the forms from rigid materials like wood, plaster and fiberglass, which he then coated with the powder pigment, allowing it to spill onto the floor around the object, forming a kind

of aureole (Fig. 38). The result still maintained the distinct impression that the sculpture was made of color.



Figure 38: Anish Kapoor, *Mother as a Mountain*, 1985, Sculpture (gesso, powder pigment on wood), 55 x 91-1/2 x 40-1/2. The AMICO Library: WAC. 87.117.

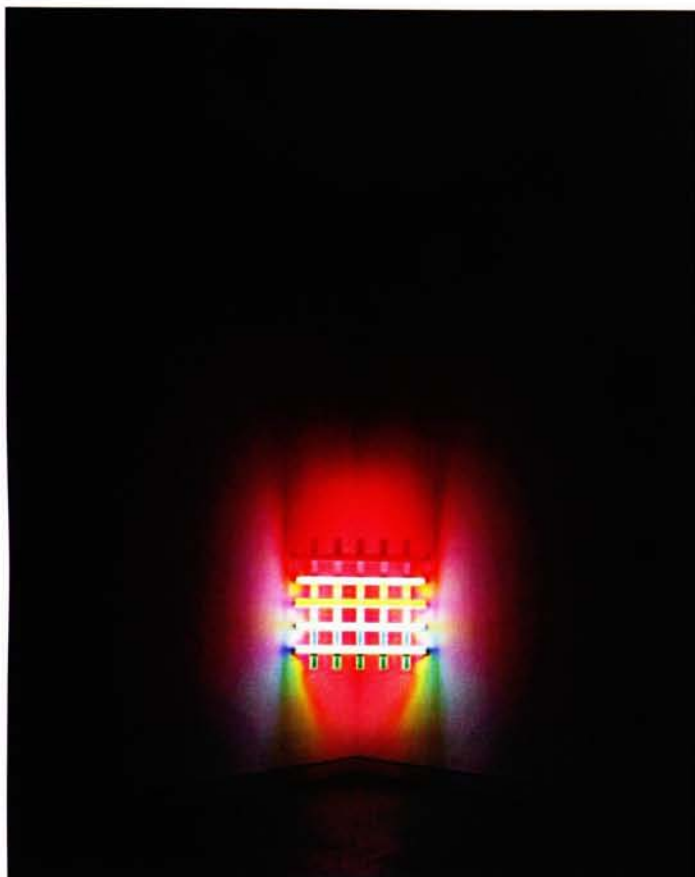


Figure 39: Dan Flavin, *Untitled (in honour of Leo at the 30th anniversary of his gallery)*, 1987. Sculpture (red, pink, yellow, blue, and green fluorescent light) approx. 122 x 122 x 20 cm. The AMICO Library: NGC.37580.

Dan Flavin, from 1963 until 1996, utilizing colored fluorescent tubes, created sculptures out of colored light (Fig. 39). When installed in a gallery with subdued ambient light, the colored fluorescent tubes gave off an aura which enveloped the sculpture and the immediate area around it. .

Marcia E. Vetrocq said in an article in *Art in America*:

“Flavin mastered fluorescent’s power to disrupt and reshape the space of a room, to dissolve a

corner and affect every enclosing surface. ... What becomes clear is the ingenuity with which Flavin found a way to be a painter and to marry that painterly practice to sculpture and architecture”⁸.

⁸Marcia E. Vetrocq, “Dan Flavin: Singing the Art Electric”, *Art in America*, January 2005, p 88.

THE BODY OF WORK

The Process

At the outset I should state that I have a deep belief in abstract, non-objective art, and no interest in, or desire to make, art based on realism. My feelings were summarized in a paper I researched and wrote in 2002 titled Concerning The Legitimacy of Abstract Painting:

What I have learned then, from this inquiry, is that abstraction is an innate capacity/function of the human psyche, and that it satisfies my definition of art, as well as the definitions of art posited by some great thinkers of the past. What I have discovered too, is that pure abstraction is not a natural, logical development from realism, nor does it occupy, as I once thought, an inferior position on the hierarchical scale; quite the opposite, it is considered by many to be on a superior plane to realism. The knowledge gleaned from this investigation has eased my anxieties about abstraction and bolstered my resolve to continue.”⁹

Following Bruce Sodervick’s directive to “sculpt with color”, and influenced by Anish Kapoor’s powder pigment pieces, I first tried painting with acrylics on polyethylene sheeting and peeling off the dried film of paint. The film was very flimsy, tore easily and obviously needed reinforcement. I used wood framework and copper window screen for structure under the skin in a maquette (Fig. 40). But I abandoned the investigation because I realized the obvious size restrictions and feared that

⁹ Bill Keyser, “Concerning The Legitimacy of Abstract Painting”, paper written for Seminar in Aesthetics & Philosophy of Art, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY, 16 October 2001, p. 5.

predetermining the supportive structures would lack spontaneity and be too reminiscent



Figure 40: Maquette, 2003, acrylic on copper screen and wood, 7 high.

of how I had worked in the past. (Note: I've since discovered an artist, Linda Besemer, who does acrylic peeled paintings. Deidre Stein Greben describes the process: "Besemer applies layers of acrylic to glass or plastic, forming long, even stripes and bold plaids. Once the pigment is dry, she peels it off, producing a thick floppy sheet of colors that she then drapes over a rod like a dishcloth or lets spill onto the floor and buckle in smooth, horizontal folds."¹⁰)

Then I remembered reading about a show of Henry Darger's two-sided watercolors on paper at the new American Folk Art Museum in NYC.¹¹ That got me thinking about painting on both sides of that polyethylene sheeting, and hanging it on a supporting

¹⁰ Deidre Stein Greben, "Return of the Blob", *Art News*, April 2005, pp. 102-103.

¹¹ David Ebony, "High-Tech Home for Folk Art", *Art in America*, May 2002, p. 37.

structure. But what would be the relationship of the painted imagery on the two sides of the transparent membrane? Would they be in conflict, and confusing? That led me back to Darger's opaque foundations, with painted information on both sides. Perhaps the painted substrates should not remain flat, but be shaped or folded so the painting itself would become sculptural. Imagining the process of deciding where to cut or fold the two sided painting suggested the strategy of cutting, alternately following information on both sides of the painting. This process would avoid, to a large extent, preplanning the shapes, and result in shapes that would be new to my form vocabulary. The resultant pieces could then be assembled three dimensionally to make sculpture. It seemed to me that here was a fresh and unique way to sculpt with color!

I wanted to be as spontaneous as possible with the whole process: while painting the panels, when cutting them apart and when reassembling the pieces into sculpture. I frequently painted with commercial latex mis-tints, house paint that had been wrongly mixed and subsequently sold at clearance prices. I didn't want to have to spend time making decisions about mixing colors. I bought a large number of existing colors so that when painting, I could simply choose colors that seemed to be compatible, without over-analyzing the selections.

I arbitrarily began with one color, applying the paint, sometimes randomly, sometimes in response to nuances in the gesso priming, to drawing I had done on the surface, or frequently just in response to how I felt at the time. Then I selected another color and painted in response to the first images. Subsequent color additions were made in a similar fashion. Both sides were usually painted with a consistent palette. I often felt as though the pictures were painting themselves. During good sessions I frequently

found myself in a trance-like state, oblivious to everything around me except the painting in front of me. At that point I was pretty much painting with emotions, without any preconceived notion of what the painting should look like, rather trying to find out what the painting wanted to be. Often I lost all track of time. I would continue until I either grew tired, or was so confused that I didn't know what to do next. At that point, I'd switch to the other side of the painting, or put it aside. I often found that I was better able to evaluate a painting after it had been out of sight for a period of time. Paintings done one day often looked much better the day after.

I'm reminded of a quote by Robert Rauschenberg: "I'd really like to think that the artist could be just another kind of material in the picture, working in collaboration with all the other materials. But of course I know this isn't possible, really. I know that the artist can't help exercising his control to a degree and that he makes all the decisions really finally."¹²

Along similar lines, Eva Hesse once said, "I would like the work to be non-work. This means that it would find its way beyond my preconceptions. What I want of my art I can eventually find. The work must go beyond this. It is my main concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know. The formal principles are understandable and understood. It is the unknown quantity from which and where I want to go. As a thing, an object, it accedes to its non-logical self. It is something, it is nothing."¹³ Hesse's thoughts about her relationship to her methodology of making art, as well as Rauschenberg's, parallel my own, and my intentions to try to get outside my own mind, to go where I'd never been, to surprise myself.

¹² From an interview between Rauschenberg and Calvin Tomkins in *Bride and the Bachelors* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), p. 204.

¹³ Quoted in Lucy R. Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), p. 131.

On some panels, drawing with graphite pencils, charcoal or conte crayon was interspersed with applying paint. When working on paper or chromed steel sheeting, creasing and folding were also introduced into the process. Alternately painting, drawing and folding kept the process active and added greatly to the interest, variety and power of the painting.

Both sides of the panel needed to be successful paintings. Many times a mediocre panel was painted over, and a fresh start made. Changes almost always made the work better. Knowing that they would eventually be cut apart, I was tempted to not be overly concerned with composition, balance, etc. But I dismissed this urge, feeling that the purity of the concept demanded that the quality be as good as it could be, at each step of the process. The fact that these were successful paintings caused a moment of hesitation as I was poised, ready to cut. But it was important to push on, to test my hypothesis, my theory. Gradually this hesitancy diminished as my faith and confidence in the technique grew.

I started to cut following suggestions from the painted images on one side, then turned the painting over and continued, following information on the second side. As the cutting progressed, I would continuously monitor the reverse side to determine when to switch sides. During this process I tried to let the imagery, texture and contours of the painting be the primary determinate of the path of the cut, without too much concern for the developing shape. Having said that, I must admit that I was not always completely successful in ignoring the size of the piece, the possible look of adjacent pieces, or where the cut might complete the shape.

Following features on both sides of the painting ensured that the resulting shapes were fresh, not predetermined, and unique to my form vocabulary. It also guaranteed that the painting would eventually dictate the form of the sculpture, rather than vice versa.

Once the painting was completely dissected I was faced with a rather chaotic array of very strange painted shapes that I never could have consciously designed. Instantaneously the original painting had disappeared, replaced by a collection of very disparate pieces. A considerable amount of time needed to be spent with these new entities, to understand their strange shapes and to get to know the now unfamiliar painted imagery that covered both their sides. I'm reminded of John Chamberlain speaking about his process: "There is material to be seen around you every day. But one day something - some one thing - pops out at you, and you pick it up, and you take it over, and you put it somewhere else, and it fits; it's just the right thing at the right moment".¹⁴

As the process of reassembling the pieces three dimensionally began, I first tried to find two pieces, not originally adjacent, whose shapes, surface imagery and colors had similarities that were capable of being attached. Decisions on how to fasten them together, and at what spatial orientation, were made. Once attached, a third piece was selected with these criteria, and so forth. Gradually a sculptural concept began to emerge; successive additions had to contribute to that sculptural scheme. Thus the finished work was a painting that had become a three dimensional sculpture, rather than a sculpture that had been painted.

¹⁴ John Yau, "It All Fits", in John Chamberlain, Current Works and Fond Memories, R.H. Fuchs and G.A. van Tuyl (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1996), p.17.

The First Medium Density Fiberboard (MDF) Series

The painting for this series began as a ¼" thick MDF panel, 48"x 60", reinforced with 1"x 2" maple strips around the perimeter and at the horizontal and vertical mid-points. These reinforcements posed a challenge in the painting stage, tending to interrupt the flow of the composition. But they later would aid in the assembly, providing places of attachment, and eventually contributed visually by affording dimensional contrast with the thin MDF. The painting technique was very successful. Large painterly passages of under painting peak from beneath transparent topcoats, and atmospheric areas are effectively contrasted by hard edged swathes of primaries.

The two sides of the painting are shown (Fig. 41 and Fig. 42). A computer manipulated "transparency" (Fig. 43) superimposes both sides, as if looking through the translucent front side. The actual cuts, referenced to the information on both sides, are shown (Fig. 44).

Although *Promises* (Fig. 45) was the first piece executed, I believe it is one of the most successful. I believe those aspects which made the original painting successful, and which influenced the cutting, are what now gives the sculpture its life and vitality. There is a wide variety in the size and shape of the composite pieces, and large open areas contrast with small, intimate spaces. Poised at one place delicately on its toe, and at another on a curved edge which tangentially meets the ground, the piece has a very light stance. Space flows freely in, around and under the sculpture. Every view is interesting; everywhere the eye stops is exciting! .

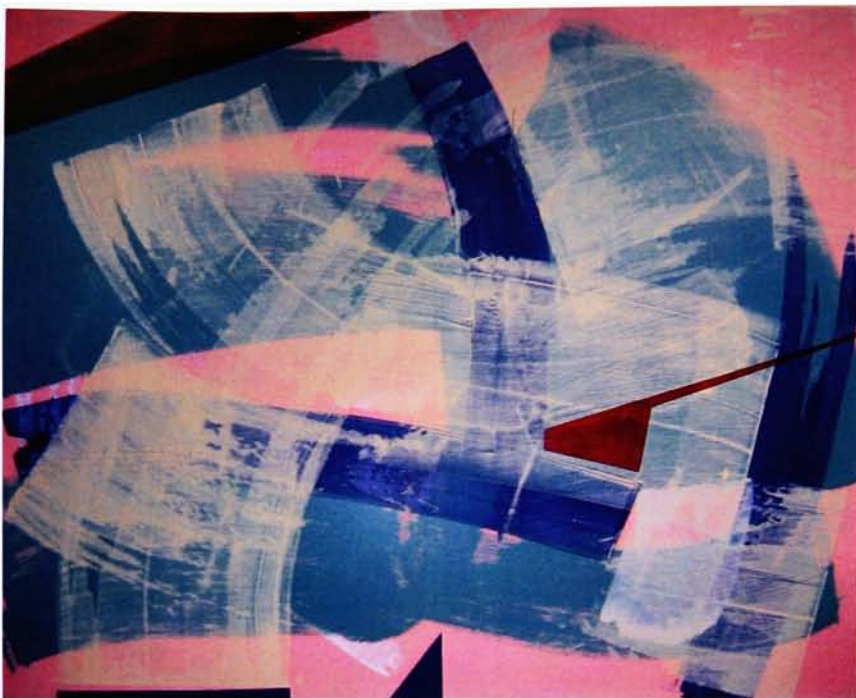


Figure 41: Painting, 2004, latex on MDF and wood, 48 x 60 x 2-1/4.



Figure 42: Other side of Figure 41.

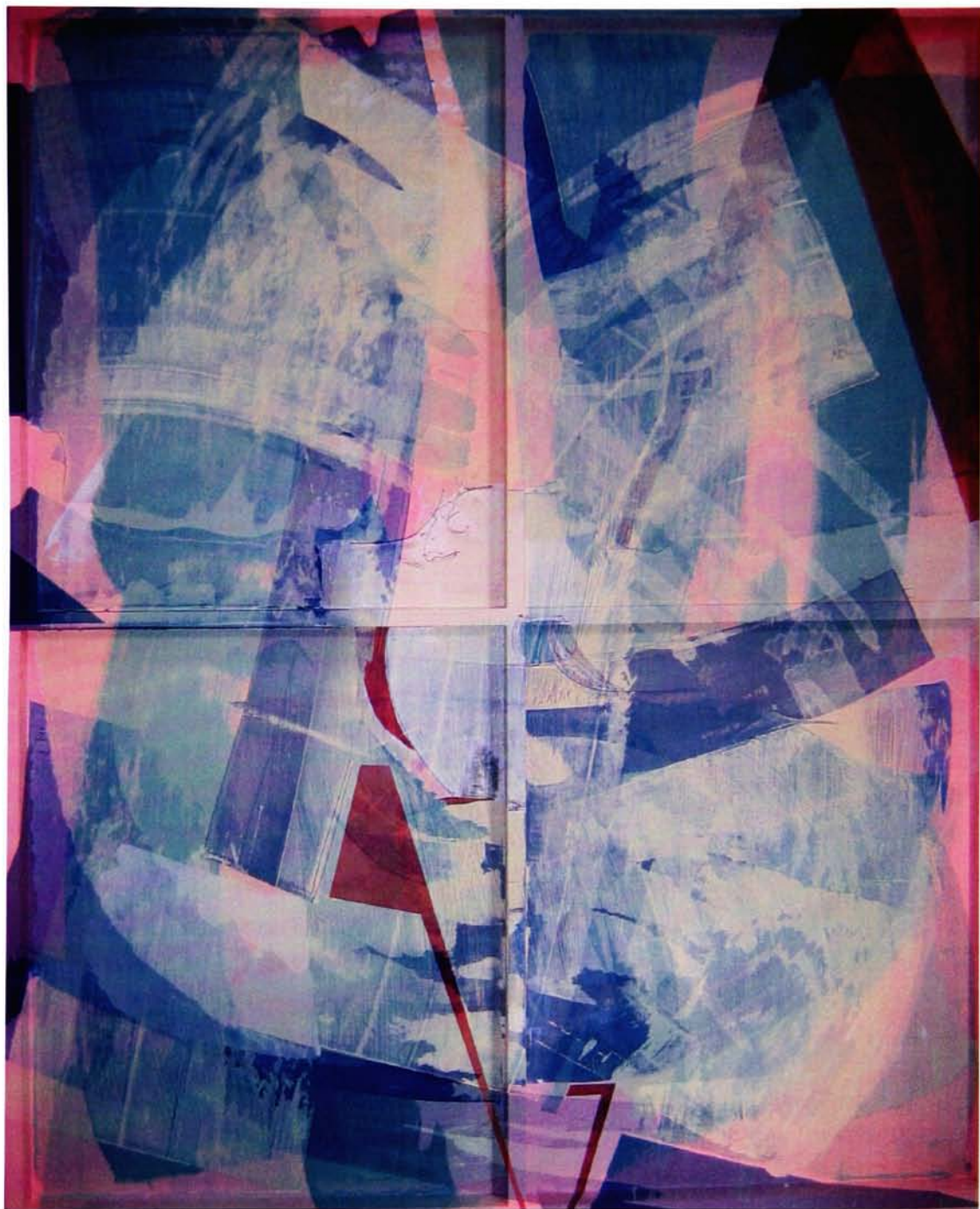


Figure 43: Figure 41, digitally superimposed on Figure 42.

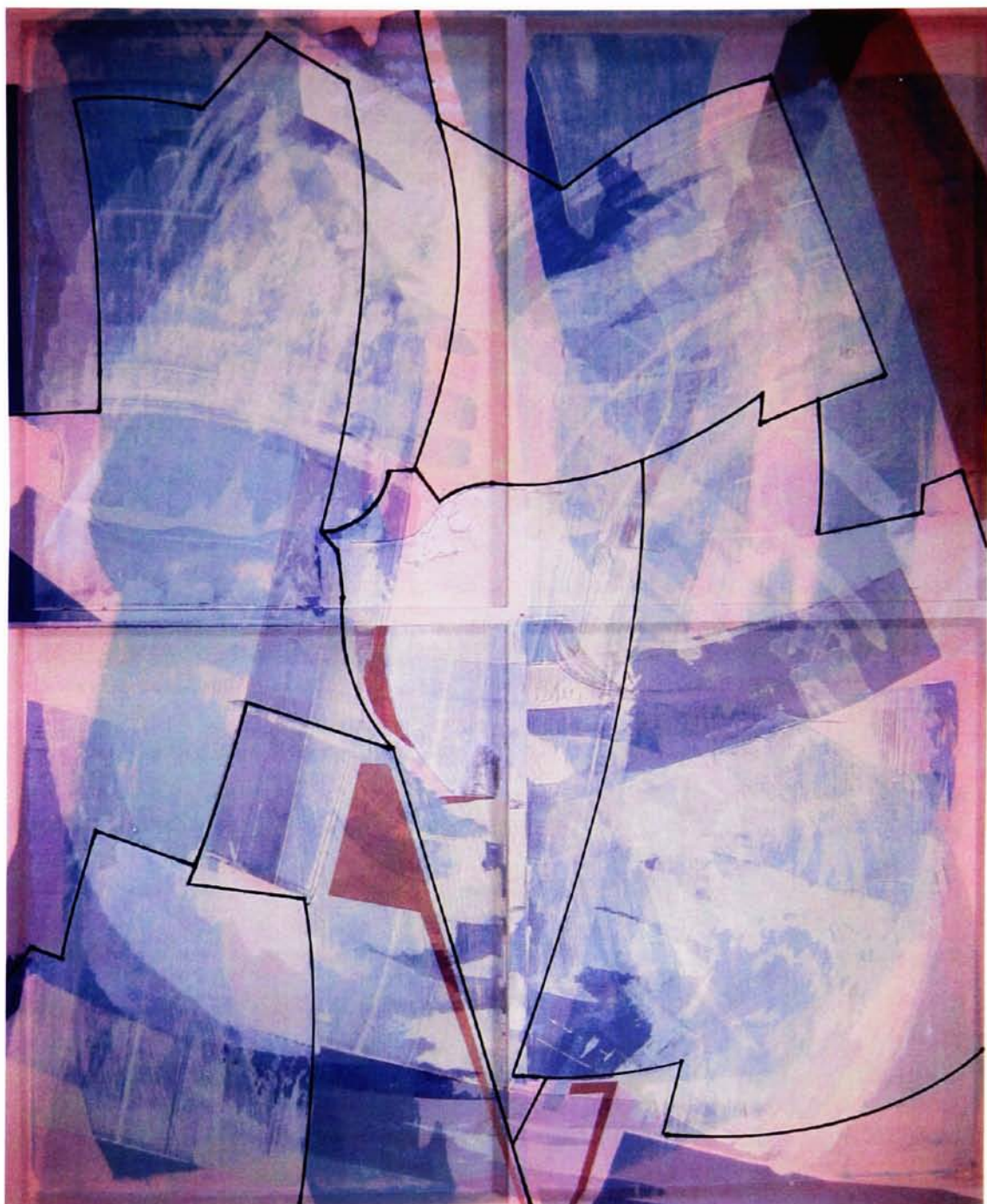


Figure 44: Cut shapes, drawn on Figure 43.



Figure 45: *Promises*, 2004, latex on MDF and wood, 38 x 47 x 41.

Once assembled, very little additional painting was done. The raw edges of the MDF were painted to blend with their adjacent planes. The reinforcing strips were, in some areas, tapered and shaped to make them more harmonious with their surroundings, and these resulting bare edges were likewise painted.

There were two large pieces of the original painting left after *Promises* had been done, and it seemed straightforward to slot (half lap) them together at strategic points on each piece. There also remained three smaller pieces, a small triangle of $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick MDF, a short piece of 1" x 2" reinforcement bar, and a small right angle elbow of the reinforcement bar. These were affixed to the two larger pieces at appropriate locations to add dimensional interest. The resolution of the sculpture came very quickly; hence the title, *Easy Street* (Fig. 46).

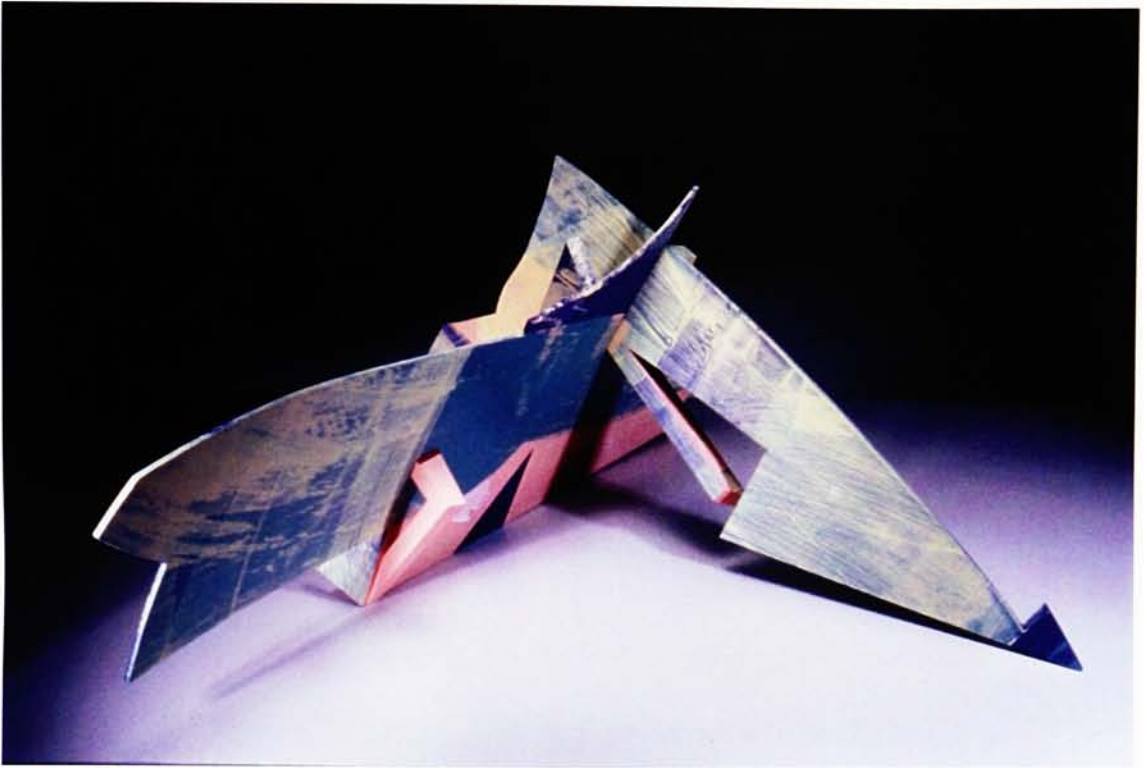


Figure 46: *Easy Street*, 2004, latex on MDF and wood, 19 x 45 x 34-1/2.

The Paper Series

Taps (Fig. 47), originally composed as a three part sculpture, was found to be too complex, so one free standing part was removed and renamed *Shield* (Fig. 48). Some wooden strips were incorporated into *Taps* for reinforcement and to delineate space at the base of the sculpture. The separate paper shapes were tied together with upholstery thread and the seams sealed with acrylic molding paste (clear).

Taps was so named because it reminded me of activity around a flag pole when taps is played. *Shield* resembled a piece of armor. Both these pieces served to provide valuable practice in the process of transforming paintings into sculpture, but their value was eclipsed by other works and so they were not included in the Thesis Exhibition.



Figure 47: *Taps*, 204, acrylic on paper, thread, 38 x 36-1/2 x 26.

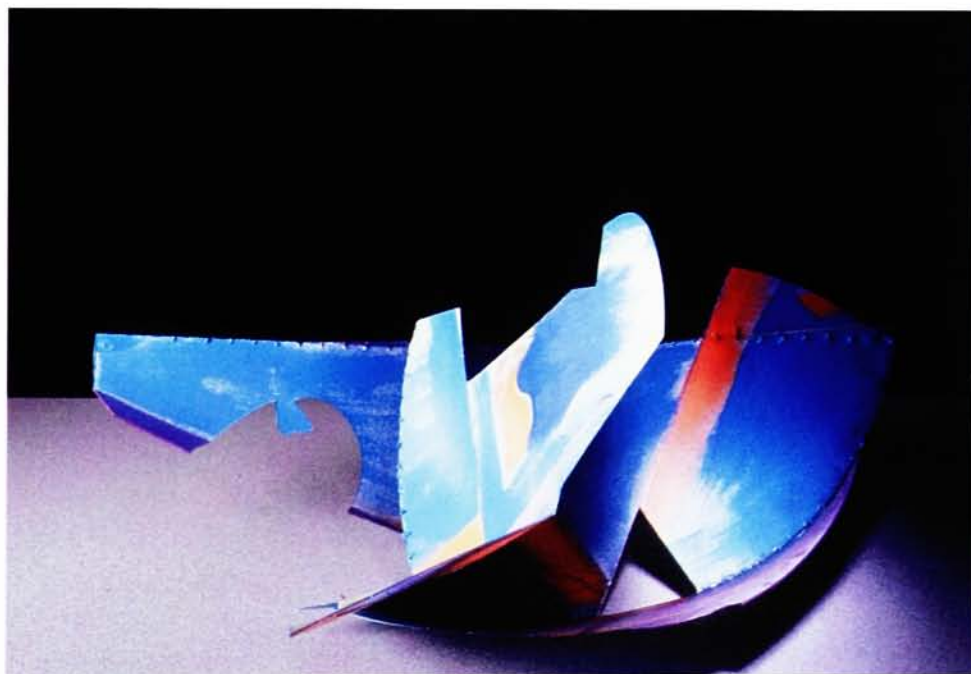


Figure 48: *Shield*, 2004, acrylic on paper, thread, 10 x 21 x 16.

The Copper Screening Series

Copper window screen was laid onto polyethylene sheeting and then colored acrylic molding paste was squeegeed into the mesh from both sides. The color on one side is decidedly more subdued, darker in value, than the other side. The color impregnated screening remained flexible, which enabled it to be easily folded, bent and shaped. After dissecting the painting, the pieces of copper screening were tied together with copper wire.

Early Bloomer (Fig. 49) was the first piece in the series to be resolved. Suggested, perhaps, by the distinct value change on the two sides of the painting, the piece quickly evolved into a volumetric configuration, with an inside and an outside. As I worked, I found myself thinking vessel and, in the end, lead shot was poured inside to lower the

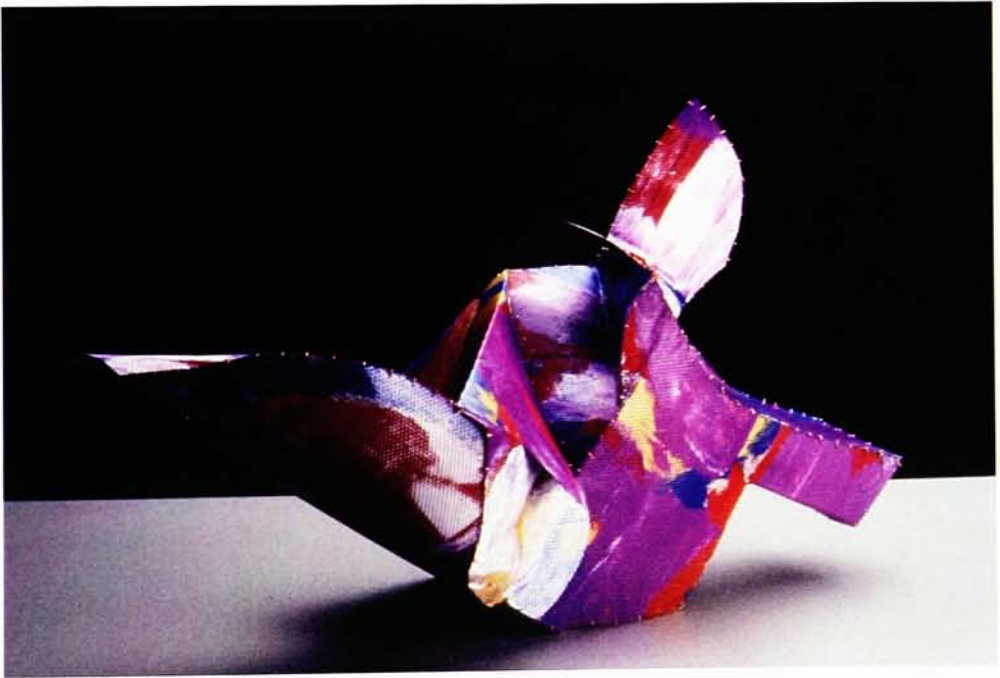


Figure 49: *Early Bloomer*, 2004, acrylic on copper screen, copper wire, 13 x 8 x 22.

center of gravity and stabilize its stance. The form is obviously cubist inspired. The way colors transition across the many plane changes on the piece is quite successful. Light in weight, the piece is delicate and I find it very appealing. And I value the fact that it departs from the planar nature of previous work.

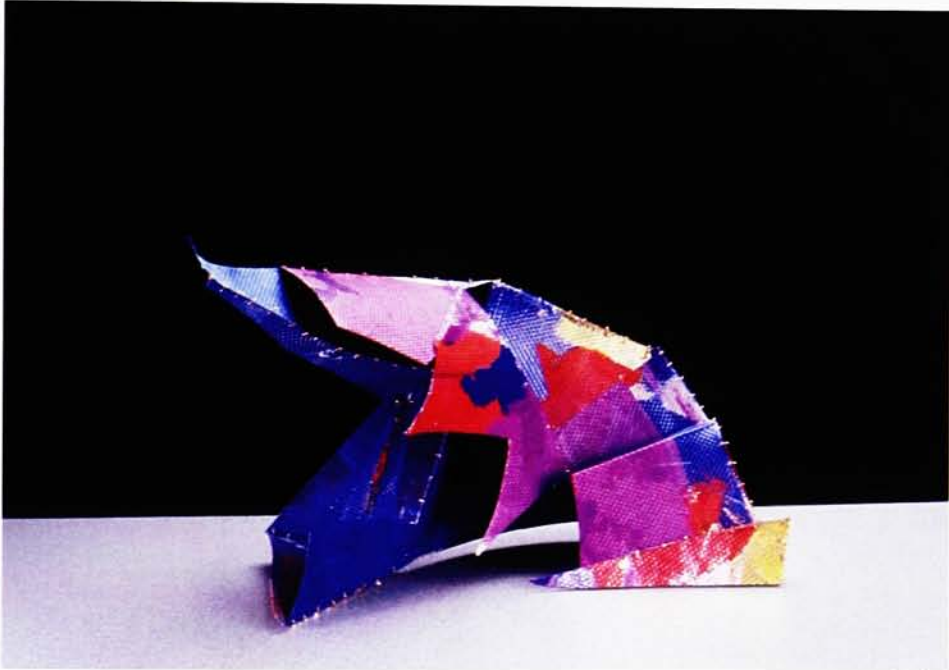


Figure 50: *Prey*, 2004, acrylic on copper screen, copper wire, 8-1/2 x 14 x 7.

Prey (Fig. 50) began to open up, to reveal the inside of the form, to show more clearly the color distinction between inside and outside. The darker interior, as well as the jutting, thrusting tip of the antenna-like element give the piece an ominous, threatening feeling; hence the title *Prey*.

Gatherer (Fig. 51) completely opens up, emphasizing the darker interior, becoming a type of receptacle, a place for collecting. It carries on an interesting dialogue with *Early Bloomer*. *Early Bloomer* is an inward directed, protective form, wrapped into itself, while *Gatherer* is a completely open, receptive, even welcoming form. In this

series, after the initial dissection of the painting, further tailoring of the pieces was necessary to make them fit and to compose the color transitions.

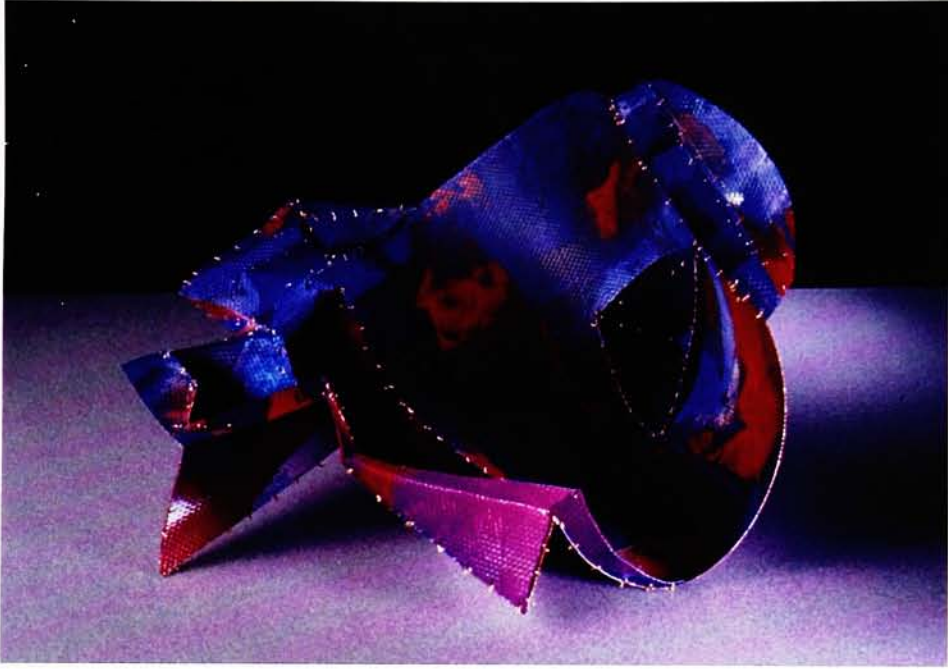


Figure 51: *Gatherer*, acrylic on copper screen, copper wire, 7-1/4 x 13 x 12.

The Second MFD Series

Chick (Fig. 52) was the first in this series to be resolved. The color and image relationships at the straight edges of the two vertical planes coordinated nicely, and their acute angular orientation to one another was suggested by the shape of the third, top piece. The resultant sharp, slightly off-vertical edge was appealing. A straight edge of the top piece was mitered to one of the vertical planes. The opposite tips of the top plane were folded 90 degrees to attach to the other vertical piece, forming a strong and rigid structure, and causing a negative opening between these two pieces to flow gracefully from the top to the side plane. The wedge form is poised lightly on three points and the

openings around the piece afford satisfying views of the interior volume. The slightly

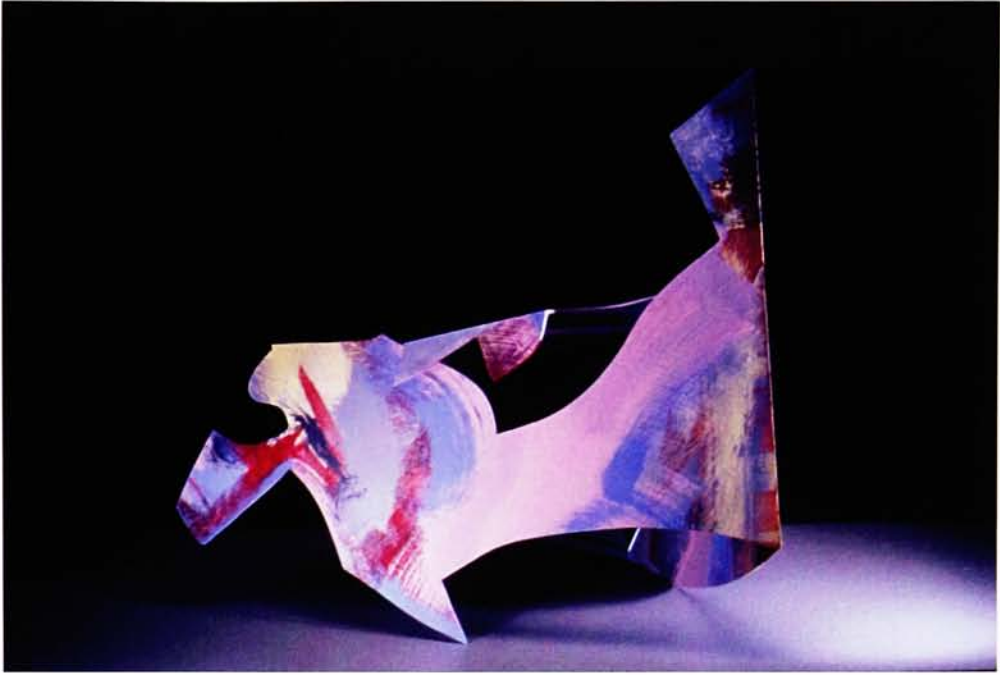


Figure 52: *Chick*, 2004, acrylic on MDF, 22 x 26 x 18.

askew stance of the sculpture, the prominent inverted triangular head form, the feathery outline at the opposite end and the swirling painted imagery suggested a fowl of some species. The name *Chick* seemed appropriate.

The long, narrow, sloping leg of *Milo* (Fig. 53) was reminiscent of *Easy Street*. This was notched at a right angle into the broad, very painterly colored vertical plane, and a third, tall, nearly vertical plane triangulated between the two. A curving appendage on the perimeter of this third member hooked over the leg, contrasting nicely with the absolutely straight upper edge of that member. The form reminded me of the starting position in amateur wrestling where one wrestler is on all fours while the opponent kneels beside with an arm draped over the midsection of the other. *Milo* is named after Milo of Croton,

the most famous wrestler (ca. 520 BC) in Greece. Unlike *Chick*, *Milo* does not



Figure 53: *Milo*, 2004, acrylic on MDF and hardware, 22 x 31 x 27-1/2.

capture or envelope space, rather it is open, exposed and outward reaching. The three planes, all nearly vertical, effectively and dramatically display their painterly passages and spatial relationships.

Tag (Fig. 54) was the last piece in the series to be executed. A long narrow piece was cut lengthwise, folded and then mitered to a third piece, forming an inverted trough-like form. This assembly then intersected, at a shallow obtuse angle, another vertical plane whose perimeter “grasped” the trough element. Additional small pieces attached to each end capped off and terminated the length of the sculpture.



Figure 54: *Tag*, 2004, acrylic on MDF and hardware, 15 x 41 x 12-1/2.

Tag is a much more complicated three dimensional form than *Chick* or *Milo*. It encourages one to walk around it to examine both the orientation of the planes and created volumes, and the color/image relationships between the parts. I believe this piece to be very successful. The horizontal orientation (new for my work), the transverse interlocking of the two major elements (seen from the top view) and the syncopation of colors and painted imagery with the three dimensional forms combine to create a very unified statement. The work is titled *Tag* because the side views reminded me of spray painting by graffiti artists along railroad right of ways.

The Chromed Sheet Steel Series

The chrome plated steel sheets came with protective Kraft paper securely adhered to one side. I drew on the exposed chrome side using a scratch awl. The panels were then folded to varying degrees using a sheet metal brake, following suggestions from the drawing. I then painted directly onto the Kraft paper side. A scroll saw equipped with a fine jeweler's blade produced a finished edge when cutting apart the panels. It was cumbersome and awkward to continually flip the metal panels, so the majority of the cutting was done following information provided on the painted side, only occasionally referring to the drawing on the chrome side. Nevertheless, the drawing information scratched into the chrome side did add considerably to the completed sculptures. The scored lines provided substance and materiality to an otherwise illusive reflective surface.

The cut pieces were fastened together using fine galvanized steel wire. In assembling the sculptures the challenge was to balance the reflective chrome areas with the painted areas in the three dimensional composition. It is most successful when a chrome area reflects a colorful painted area, producing the juxtaposition of real color with reflected, or virtual color. Here a Rorschach like mirror image is produced. Also, when three planes, one of which is painted, come together in a corner, a kaleidoscopic effect is created. Intermittently, in certain areas, the viewer, as well as the architectural surrounding, is also reflected in the piece. These reflections, along with the reality of the painted surfaces, causes the viewer to question their own process of spatial perception, and alternately materializes and dematerializes the sculpture.

Low Rider (Fig. 55) consists of three intersecting planes and suggests references to a landscape or a reclining figure. An undulating, painted horizontal plane, reflected in the

adjacent, nearly vertical plane, is supported at either end, spans the distance between, and at one point almost touches the pedestal, but hovers just short of making contact. On the reverse side of the vertical plane, the graphite, charcoal and paint imagery predominates, is carried around the corner to a third end plane which maintains the angular relationship between the other two planes. At strategic points, small shapes are cut from the painted Kraft paper, removed, and placed elsewhere on chromed surfaces. These cutouts in the painting reveal the reflective surfaces underneath, but from certain angles they appear to be “windows” cut right through the metal. The title makes reference to the sensuous nature of the popular Low Rider jeans.



Figure 55: *Low Rider*, 2004, acrylic, graphite and charcoal on Kraft paper on chromed steel, galvanized wire and hardware, 13 x 26 x 15.

Giza (Fig. 56) is the most complicated piece in the series. The side that is pictured shows a combination of planes that together form the largest painted area in the piece. The opposite side features internal volumes, jutting and folding planes, and kaleidoscopic corners reflecting a rainbow of colors. I believe this piece is noteworthy specifically because of the inconsistencies of its contradicting views and the complex orientation of its shapes and volumes. Because of its resemblance to an Egyptian sphinx, the piece was titled *Giza*.



Figure 56: *Giza*, 2004, acrylic and charcoal on Kraft paper on chromed steel, galvanized wire and hardware, 29 x 23 x 20.

Bart (Fig. 57) was assembled from the few remaining pieces after *Giza* and *Low Rider* were completed. It is, I believe, the most successful sculpture of the series, and illustrates that restrictions in choice often lead to wonderful results. In the photo, a portion of the diagonal, unpainted, Kraft paper plane has been cut and peeled away to reveal a reflective shape that wonderfully compliments the thrust of the adjacent planes and the painted images on them. The jagged edge at the top of the sculpture was suggestive of Bart Simpson's haircut; hence the title.

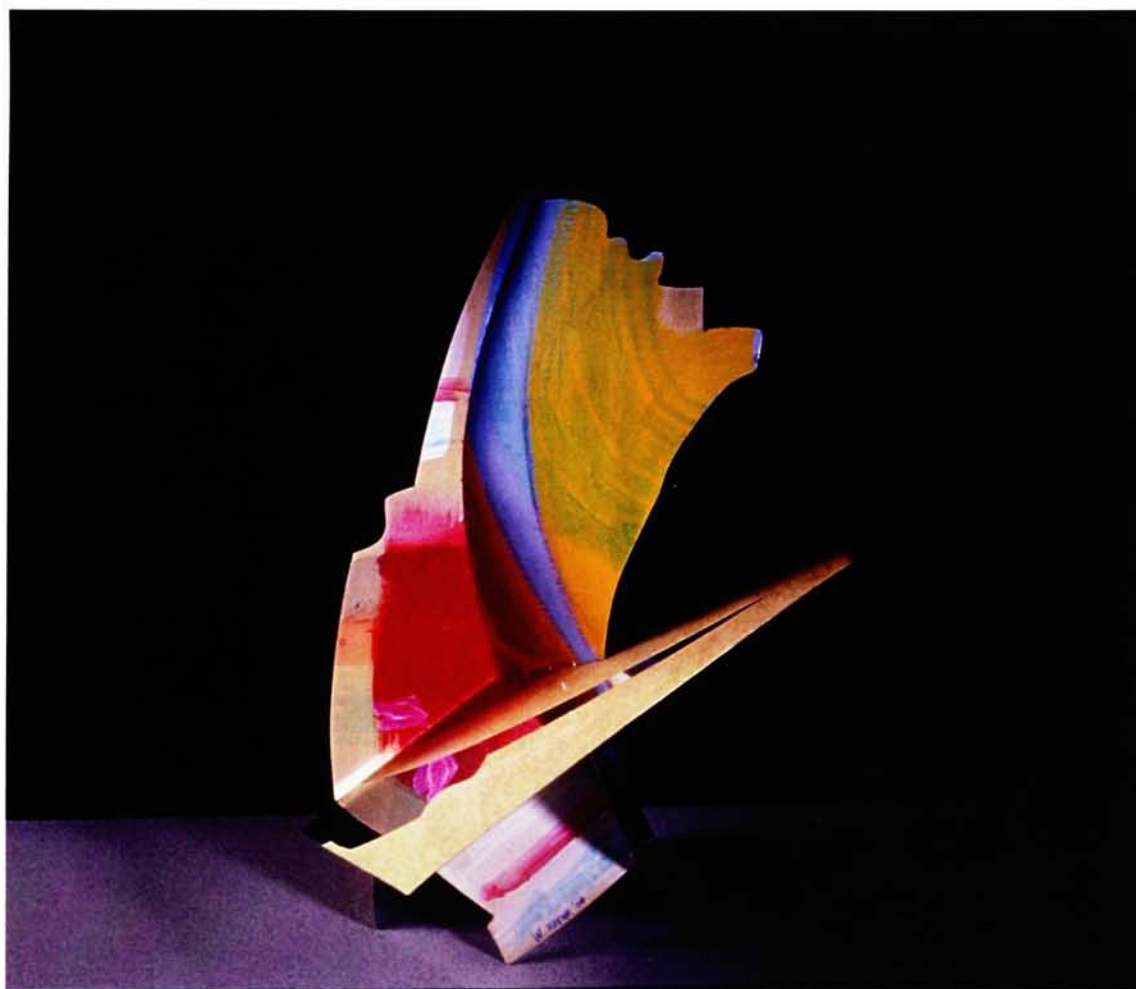


Figure 57: *Bart*, 2004, graphite and charcoal on Kraft paper on chromed steel, galvanized wire and hardware, 15 x 10-1/2 x 7.

Zip (Fig. 58) was the only sculpture completed to date, using parts from four new chromed steel panels. The painting of these panels was among the best I've done. There was a lot of graphite and charcoal drawing woven into the composition; more than on prior works. Composing these drawing elements became a priority as I was assembling the individual parts, and became a major factor in the success of this sculpture. My original intention was to create a tall, life size piece in order to increase the variety of sizes in the Graduate Exhibition. After cutting the panels apart, I had great difficulty evolving a vertical format with sufficient structural stability and rigidity.



Figure 58: *Zip*, 2005, graphite and charcoal on Kraft paper on chromed steel, galvanized wire, plywood and hardware, 13 x 14 x 63.

Instead, a horizontal piece began to emerge. As I worked, it became very much an enclosed form with the painted sides out and the reflective surfaces to the inside. I began seeing distorted dragsters or Bonneville land speed challenger cars in the piece. It began to have a front, and eventually a rear, complete with tail fin.

I believe the basic form of the piece and the way the colors and drawing passages work on the piece is very successful. A shortcoming of the piece results from the bottom being fundamentally flat and horizontal. It would benefit tremendously if there was some undulation to the underside, allowing some space to flow under the piece and giving it a more dynamic stance. The suggestion of speed prompted the title, *Zip*.

Third MDF Series

I approached the cutting of the panel from which *This ... and ... And That* were made with a pre-conceived concept for the format. I definitely intended to do a combination wall/floor piece, with a remnant of the panel hung on the wall and the remainder pieces assembled into a nearby floor sculpture. I started cutting near the middle of the panel, as opposed to the edge. I removed pieces, gradually working toward the lower right hand corner where I cut through to the outside, trying to retain an interesting portion of the perimeter of the panel. Once the frame-like perimeter was hung on the wall, the painted information suggested that it be folded at strategic spots so it angled out from the wall in places. Likewise, I decided to cut additional areas on the interior of the frame, and to fold and miter them back in place, changing their angular orientation.

A free-standing sculpture was assembled from the remaining pieces of the original panel. I intended to hang the frame against the wall and to position this sculpture in front of, and to the right of, the wall hung piece. But it seemed better if positioned some distance away, so there was still a dialogue between the two elements, but eliminating the

tendency for the viewer to identify the exact origin of the pieces forming the free-standing sculpture.

In a review with my committee, it was suggested hanging the frame, titled *This...*, perpendicular to the wall (Fig. 59, Fig. 60). The result was much more dynamic, a sort of open window, and allowed views of both sides of the frame. With the frame in this orientation, the free-standing piece, ... *And That*, was better independent and standing alone, (Fig. 61).



Figure 59: *This...* , 2005, acrylic on MDF, wood and plywood, 60 x 48 x 7.

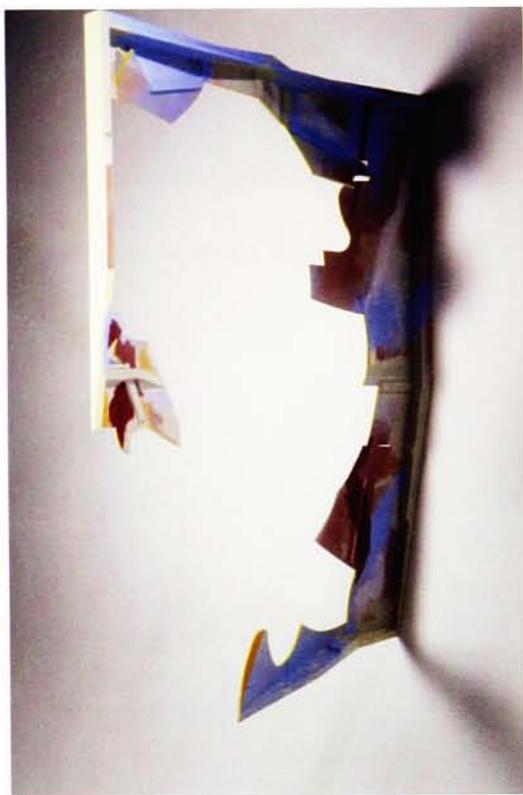


Figure 60: *This...* , opposite side.



Figure 61: ... *And That*, 2005, acrylic on MDF, wood and plywood, 45-1/2 x 36 x 41.

CONCLUSION

Comparing my early pieces, described in the Introduction, with this Thesis work reveals an evolution in working methodologies, in the nature of the correlation among the genres, and in the resultant forms. The following contrasts the current work with the former:

- The role of process has become crucial to the work. Whereas before, a left over part, a woodworking technique or an appropriated form idea sometimes was a point of departure, now the process of always forcing the painting to determine the sculpture becomes the essence of the art. Furthermore, as the nature of my painting evolves over time, so too will the resultant sculpture. It promises to be a renewable, sustainable process.
- The correlation between genres has been altered. In my early work, sometimes the three dimensional disciplines dictated the two dimensional ones; sometimes, vice versa. In this Thesis work, the two dimensional imagery always determines the three dimensional work; the painting drives the sculpture. The correlation is unique, very direct, and of the highest order.
- Formerly, color was the last thing to be applied to a completed piece. Here painting (applying color) is the very first thing done, and drives everything else.
- The predetermination of the form of my furniture, sculpture, prints and paintings has been completely replaced by a methodology which

maximizes spontaneity during the painting, dissecting and reassembly stages. This process has eliminated the pre-conceived form, promoted the surprise element, allowed me to go beyond my prior concepts and encouraged the work to evolve more freely.

- Here, the pieces of the dissected painting are, in a sense, the equivalent of the left over parts used in some of the earlier furniture and sculpture. That former experience of selecting and assembling unpainted wooden residue into finished pieces was valuable preparation for the much more complicated task of creating sculpture with parts containing painted imagery on both their sides.
- Contrary to my early work, there has been no attempt in this Thesis work to integrate furniture with the painting and sculpture. The pieces are hybrid art forms involving only painting and sculpture.

While very aware of what was happening in the contemporary art scene, I began this journey not intending the work to fit into any specific niche; rather trying to just create work that was personally meaningful and unique. But at this point in the trip, it is valid to ask the question: How do these works fit into the context of today's art scene? This contemporary art world is interpreted by the three co-curators of the *Whitney Biennial 2004*, in their introduction to the show's catalogue:

“Conducting our research separately, we discovered that we all noticed several of the same overlapping tendencies – diverse approaches to process, narrative, materiality, abstraction, conceptual strategies, technology, and history – stretched across three generations, creating the foundation for an exhibition that reflects this

synergy. ... An engagement with process and a desire for immediacy and intimate communication are present throughout the show, in work that is by turns fantastical, political, obsessive, formal, abstract, and narrative.”¹⁵

Likewise, Linda Yablonsky, in an April 2005 *Art News* article titled What Makes a Painting a Painting? wrote:

“Having absorbed high culture and low, painting has turned itself out in mixed-media assemblages that include both organic and synthetic materials and occasionally involve photography and digital printing. It has borrowed from commercial illustration and architectural, tattoo, and textile design, and exhibited itself as sculpture or in various combinations of all the above, in both abstraction and representation. ... Ours is the age of the hybrid, the crossover, the many-splendored thing, a time when the combined force of new media, postmodern thought, and human history has made it impossible for artists to worship a single god of painting. Indeed, the practice of this ancient art may owe its continued health to its amazingly elastic nature.”¹⁶

These two quotes describe the current art scene as an umbrella broad enough to encompass a hodgepodge of approaches to making art. It was enlightening to examine the work in the *Whitney Biennial 2004*, as well as in other major survey and thematic exhibitions such as *Extreme Abstraction* (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, 2005), the 54th *Carnegie International* (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, 2005), *Painting at the Edge of the World* (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, 2001) and *As Painting: Division and Displacement* (Wexler Center for the Arts, The Ohio State

¹⁵ Chrissie Iles, Shamim M. Momin, and Debra Singer, Introduction to whitney biennial 2004, Whitney Museum of American Art (New York: 2004), pp. 14 -15.

¹⁶ Linda Yablonsky, “What Makes a Painting a Painting?”, Art News, April 2005, p. 96.

University, Columbus, OH, 2001). Combined with extensive reading in current art publications, these exhibitions confirmed, for me, the conclusion reached by the above quoted author and curators. But it also became obvious to me just how small a segment of the work currently highlighted on the radar screen is actually relevant to my investigation. My work bears no relationship with the myriad of video, digital, photographic or new media art, nor with the narrative, historical or socio/economic/political commentary art being produced today. But this Thesis work certainly falls within the “diverse approaches to process ...abstraction...and conceptual strategies”. And my “hybrid ...crossover” technique exemplifies that “painting has ...exhibited itself as sculpture”.

A small, visible group of artists are working at this interface between painting and sculpture. Among them are Polly Apfelbaum, Linda Besemer, Angela de la Cruz, Lecia Dole-Recio, Jim Lambie, Fabian Marcaccio, Roxie Paine, Adrian Schiess, Lisa Sigal and Linda Stark. My art relates best to the work of these artists.

Most of them have been trained as painters, they refer to their work as paintings and the mind-set of a painter is prominent in their work. Some build up thick paint as wall reliefs. Others remove the work from the wall and either distribute it on the floor, drape it over horizontal bars, stretch it on tubular metal structures in space, or mutilate it by cutting, tearing or crushing. There is seldom any direct, causative relationship between the painted imagery and the final form; most of it remains essentially two dimensional painting. Moreover, it appears that much of the work, including the painted imagery, originates as a preconceived idea which is then executed according to plan.

So what is it that differentiates and distinguishes my Thesis work from the rest? I truly believe it is the validity and uniqueness of my process that sets my art apart. The interaction of two paintings, each as good as I can make, on opposite sides of a single surface, guarantees the unpredictability, and therefore the uniqueness, of the resultant dissected shapes. These shapes, along with their painted imagery, then suggest, in fact strongly dictate, the three dimensional re-configuration. What results is not simply a painting that has been re-formatted, nor a sculpture that has been painted, but rather a painting that has truly been transformed and evolved into a sculpture. When doing the initial painting, I'm thinking as a painter. When re-configuring the dissected pieces, I'm thinking as a sculptor. It is this very close, intimate correlation between my painting and sculpture that drives the whole process.

I've not found one artist whose work even remotely resembles mine, which is a testimony to its uniqueness, and to the success of this Thesis. Nonetheless, my art certainly falls within what has been described as the contemporary, and holds its own very well along side comparable work. This unique, abstract, closely correlated, hybrid art, resulting from a valid process, is relevant and timely, and is at the cutting edge of what is happening in at least one segment of the contemporary art world. My confidence in this is bolstered by a deep belief in the value of my ideas, in the nature of my skills, and above all, in the gut feeling that what I'm doing is good work!

EPILOGUE

My years of experience executing large amounts of furniture, most often within the parameters of commissions, were extremely valuable, but eventually became a familiar, comfortable, albeit somewhat confining and unchallenging *modus operandi*. My creative life needed a transfusion! This exposure to Fine Art faculty, the new activity of painting, and in particular this Thesis work, has enabled me to break that pattern of working. I've begun to look at the commonplace and more clearly see uncommon possibilities, to ignore my inner critic, to dispense with the fear of failure and just forge ahead, to trust my intuition when I have no proof it is right, and to go where I've never been before. Perhaps these are the most important things I've learned from this Thesis!

I believe any MFA Thesis, and this one is no exception, is only a point in time, an in-progress status report. I feel at this juncture I am much closer to the beginning, than to the end, of this exploration. I have just scratched the surface, both in this tangent I've taken, and in the much larger, and continually ongoing, investigation of the correlation between my painting and sculpture.

But what's next? I believe the strategy of constructing sculpture from the parts of dissected, two-sided paintings on various materials remains worthy of further exploration. Since painting is the beginning of the process, and directly affects all succeeding operations, this is where immediate attention should be focused. The very nature of the painting could be re-considered. My approach to date has utilized non-objective imagery closely allied with an Abstract Expressionist aesthetic. While I don't think I've even come close to exhausting the potential in this idiom, exploring non-objective imagery that

is less expressionistic in nature, yet still personal, unique and fresh could lead to sculpture with a quite different look. The use of collage, texture and alternative tools for, and methods of, applying the paint could be productive. Different methods for dissecting (cutting, tearing, breaking) the paintings need to be explored. And finally, strategies need to be developed for expanding the forms, which are now mostly planar, into more volumetric sculptures.

The investigation of various formats, described in the Introduction, using drawings and maquettes, was definitely not a false start. It was a valuable exercise in yet another direction in the exploration of the correlation between my painting and sculpture. While I believe I chose a very direct, unique, and more promising approach, some of those schemes could also produce inventive and exciting work.

The journey continues. As Le Corbusier once wrote, "Creation is a patient search"¹⁷.

¹⁷ Le Corbusier, *Creation is a Patient Search* (New York: Praeger, 1960), title page.

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