

ART

A Tinkerer's Damnedest

Tim Hawkinson's inventive, labor-intensive works have won rave reviews and a summer exhibition at the Armory Center.

By Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

As we wrap up the 20th century, in contemporary art the subject of "the body" begins to seem like the genre painting of earlier centuries—nearly every artist explores it, but only a few contribute insight or originality. Tim Hawkinson is among the latter group.

In Hawkinson's wildly unpredictable art, the body is both metaphor and machine, mirror and mystery. His varied self-portraits include an inflated latex head-to-toe balloon of himself and a series of belts that once were wrapped around his torso and now hang at one-inch intervals in a column that is a memory of his presence.

"I think of my use of the body as 'self-portrait as crash test dummy,'" he says.

Hawkinson's exhibitions over the past decade at ACE Gallery in Los Angeles have received largely glowing reviews, while his debut at ACE's New York venue last fall met with unusually high praise and an award from the International Assn. of Art Critics for best show by an emerging artist. Lilly Wei wrote in *Art in America*, "This was as impressive a [New York] debut as I can remember." Kim Levin of the *Village Voice* opined, "By means of sheer prolific nerve, it defies the precariousness of life and attempts to collapse time."

Much of the work from his New York show will be on view at the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena today through Sept. 1. The show was organized by Armory Gallery Director Jay Belloli.

Hawkinson, 35, has titled the Pasadena exhibition by rearranging the letters of his first and last name in alphabetical order: "AHI IKMNOSTW." Rearrangement is the simple but effective essence of his work. At the Armory, Hawkinson is literally turning the space inside out by making an inflated latex balloon out of the building's former ammunition vault. He will also fill galleries with wonky home-made machines that make sound. Various moving and floating sculptures will be linked by tubes filled with oxygen or by electrical cords acting as figurative respiratory and nervous systems. There will be faux holograms and castings of space marking his absence. Often, Hawkinson's absence becomes his

figurative presence.

"I don't think there are many people who would sit through these invasive and irritating processes," Hawkinson says, explaining why he acts as his own model. Sitting naked in a tub of rising black paint, he was photographed to document the slow disappearance of his white body under the dark liquid. He used these pictures to produce a lacy contour drawing that looks as though it was generated on a computer. He purposely employs such low-tech methods to demystify high-tech production.

Hawkinson seems bemused, if pleased, by the recent critical attention his work has received. An artist who rarely socializes, glad-hands or participates in the extracurricular activities of the art world, the introspective Hawkinson is known for the labor-intensive nature of his production. For example, he once covered every inch of his bathroom in latex to make an inflated, inside-out model of the room titled, wryly, "Head."

Hawkinson's loft, stranded on an industrial street between the garment district and the wholesale produce markets of downtown Los Angeles, is reminiscent of a small-town hardware store, a thrift shop and a trip through the Ripley's Believe It or Not museum. Shelves of tools crowd walls hung with naive paintings by unknown artists. His favorite? An awkward picture of a cat being attacked by little lobsters.

Such an image seems perfectly sensible in Hawkinson's world. Against one wall of his studio leans a flesh-colored painting imprinted with the pattern of his nostrils. "Looking down my nose at art," Hawkinson jokes in his characteristically dry humor. He shows a visitor a snapshot of the companion piece, a great big nose with shoes upended behind the nostrils, laces dangling down: "Nose hairs," he calls it.

Perched like a stork on a chair, his skinny frame twisted at angles, Hawkinson is manifestly uncomfortable discussing his work. His hair is buzz-cut short, and wire-rim spectacles veil large blue eyes that blink with anxiety as he tries to explain certain aspects of his art. This may be the secret of his success. His work is not rhetorical. Evading easy, verbal answers is

"Dead on the Wall: Grateful Dead and Deadhead Iconography," opening Saturday at the Huntington Beach Art Center, examines the sociological phenomenon of the group and its fans through original art, tour memorabilia and music.



KEN HIVELEY / Los Angeles Times

STANDING ART ON ITS HEAD: Hawkinson shows off a suit of armor made from tinfoil. He creates some of his work in an unlikely place: the bathroom of his downtown loft.

one source of its appeal. Hawkinson simply says, "I think with my hands."

A suit of armor made of tinfoil and filled with inflatable foam stands lopsided in the corner. A contraption linked by oxygen tubes to an air pump made of old Evian bottles and strapped to a rusted dolly wheezes "yooo-waa-wee." The primitive plastic bellows, the carved reed that makes the sounds, all of this was made from

scratch by Hawkinson.

"There is this artist-stranded-on-a-desert-island quality to the machine pieces, where I am just using whatever materials are available," Hawkinson says. "I'm always looking for something that sustains my attention."

Hawkinson considers it dishonest and boring to resort to convenient solutions. He

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"AHI IKMNOSTW," Armory Center for the Arts, 145 N. Raymond Ave., Pasadena. Dates: Opens today. Wednesdays to Sundays, noon to 5 p.m.; Thursdays and Fridays, 6:30 to 9 p.m. Closed Mondays, Tuesdays and holidays. Ends Sept. 1. Prices: free. Phone: (818) 792-5101.



'Recycled'

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Viven las Fiestas" and "Swedish Folk Art: All Tradition Is Change," the latter of which is coming to Los Angeles' Craft and Folk Art Museum in November. Nevertheless, her concept of a show about art from recycling didn't make sense to a lot of people. Still, Cerny persevered, dedicated to the idea of showing work by folk artists who use castoffs.

As opening day approached, despite \$700,000 in grants from such major foundations as the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as a companion book published by Harry N. Abrams Inc., Cerny was still hearing the same question: Why should an institution, especially an American institution, spend this much time on trash? Critics apparently see Cerny's concept as straying too far from the stereotype of the rural folk artist who works with so-called "authentic" materials, means and methods—the traditional hand-carved and hand-painted furniture, figures, and toys, or charming paintings on tin or cardboard.

At first, Cerny couldn't find any published research that related to her ideas; terminology was a special problem. Several words apply: garbage, trash, refuse, rubbish. While books have been written about the intricacies of landfills and disputes about recycling, even among the dozen curators, folklorists, anthropologists and ethnographers who eventually contributed to the publication, none had previously concentrated on artists and the art they made from recycled materials.

By February 1994, Cerny and colleague Allen F. Roberts traveled to West Africa in search of junkyard innovators and artists. Roberts, a professor of anthropology and director of the African Studies Program at the University of Iowa and specialist on the Benin culture, served as a consultant for the show.

The port city of Dakar, Senegal, known as the "African Marseilles," stands out as a special center for such creative activity. In a "junkyard" sprawl under a highway bridge that is known as Colbane, they met Bubakar Fané, who prefers to be called Carlos. He is a blacksmith who makes trunks from flattened oil barrels, corrugated roofing, and other scrap metal. Of all the places Cerny traveled, Colbane remains her most vivid memory. Roberts writes evocatively of Colbane in his accompanying essay: "It possesses astounding tactility—an explosion of shreds, shards, and shrapnel. It is everything sharp all in one place, glinting under the fierce sun. Rust reigns. Tetanus lurks. . . . Its visual overload is matched by clanging and banging. . . ." Cerny and Roberts both stressed the improbable hopefulness and almost absurd industriousness of the grimy workers they met. Carlos told them: "I

make do in this way. I make do so that I will not steal and thereby defile the names of my mother and father."

While the sensory overload of Colbane still looms large in Cerny's recollections, the workshop of second-generation recycler Assane Faye ultimately became a more pressing concern. Faye makes briefcases, jewelry cases, lunch boxes and toys from misprinted metal sheeting and beverage cans. He prefers the red of tomato paste cans and the blue of the local tuna fish cans. Faye, who claims to have been the first to make European-style briefcases, lines his goods with scavenged

'Recycled works are compelling because they suggest the triumph of human creativity over circumstance, and divergent thinking at its best.'

Charlene Cerny
Director, Museum of International Folk Art

magazines and newspapers, with inside and out carefully selected for ironic appeal to his tourist and expatriate customers. After a full afternoon of negotiating, Cerny purchased Assane Faye's entire workshop, including a pair of mismatched doors that are an assemblage of recycled materials begun by Faye's father. Faye is quoted in Roberts' catalog essay, "It is our duty to collect little things and try to make something out of them." But Cerny said in an interview that she was not quite prepared for just how much she had acquired. The workshop which Faye sold for \$400 required a crate far more sturdily built than the doors themselves, and to reach landlocked New Mexico by show time, it had to be shipped by air. The final tally was \$3,000.

In contrast, Cerny's negotiations with pop-top artist Ray Cyrek at first seemed a wild goose chase. Her introduction to Cyrek came via a couple from Michigan who visited the folk art museum. They told Cerny about Cyrek's double-wide trailer festooned with thousands of pop-top chains. Cerny describes it as "Glittering in the sun, the 4 million pop tops were, well, dazzling. Lit at Christmas with 16,000 hand-colored lights, Ray's place was simply magic." Cerny was fascinated by the artist, a retired machinist, whom she described as a "gruff and crusty, hard-working Polish-American." In April 1993, with \$1,000 from the Folk Art Foundation in her pocket, Cerny asked Cyrek to sell an 8 foot by 30 foot curtain that adorned his patio. Cyrek shrugged: "What would I do with \$1,000?" Two years later Cyrek called Cerny back, asked her to come and be prepared to take it away . . . soon, that is, if she still wanted it. When she arrived, he also donated 30 other pieces. A few months later, Cyrek died.

Barbara Mauldin, the museum's curator of Latin American folk art,

is a scholar of festivals. For this exhibition, she concentrated on Trinidad and the highlands of Ecuador. In fact, recycling and improvisation in the steel-drum bands of Trinidad and Tobago proved both obvious and already heavily documented. Ecuador was a much different situation. Mauldin went in search of a more elusive artist, eventually involving three arduous trips, including a high-jacking at gunpoint. In 1991, she had been startled by a photo of a Corpus Christi ceremonial head-dress decorated with light bulbs and crowned with a baby doll. After finding very little information, Mauldin went to Quito in 1992 and followed a rutted dirt road to the remote mountain village of San Rafael (near Pujilí) and the home of José Ignacio Criollo. He was shocked; he had never been approached by an outsider, and most problematic for Mauldin and her consultant, he didn't speak Spanish; he spoke only Quichua. By local standards, Criollo was clearly a man of elevated status. His home was cinder block—not adobe—and, it was filled with costumes that the villagers rented from him for their many different festivals.

In 1993, Mauldin returned with a suitcase full of peacock feathers, an essential crowning flourish attached to a Corpus Christi head-dress when it is worn by a dancer. She negotiated a contract for a specific piece that would be picked up the next year. Criollo asked for \$30 and Mauldin finalized the agreement for \$400 in consideration of the artist's consent to an interview. Criollo signed with a thumbprint. In 1994, Mauldin returned with a video crew and Amado Ruiz, an Ecuadoran activist whose mother was a known native leader. In a videotaping, Criollo blossomed, telling how he "dresses" the edges of the head-dresses in mirrors and lightbulbs. He said he began using the bulbs in the early 1970s, long before electricity was delivered to his home.

When Cerny and Mauldin speak of their experiences, it is clear that they were captivated and enchanted by the artists and their work. This raw exuberance is reflected in the installation, a blend of tumult and triumph. Cerny concludes in her text: "For me, the power of recycled arts lies in their ability to make manifest the power of transformation and of personal transcendence, meanings that are rooted in the very process itself. Some would say that is a romantic notion. But could it be that the very concept of metamorphosis is inherently interesting to the human intellect? . . . Recycled works are compelling because they suggest the triumph of human creativity over circumstance, and divergent thinking at its best."

With this exhibition, the field of folk art feels more vital and urgent, and a lot less quaint. □

■ "Recycled, Re-seen: Folk Art From the Global Scrap Heap," Museum of International Folk Art/Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe. Through Aug. 22, 1997.

MaLin Wilson is an art writer based in Santa Fe, N.M.

Hawkinson

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obsessively takes on new challenges in the appearance and technique behind his work and evades the very characteristic sought by most artists: an identifiable style. To address this issue, Hawkinson built a machine that signs his name, a personal joke on the fact that he refuses to develop a signature style.

One example of his recent fascination with machines that make sounds is an 8-foot-tall bagpipe made from glued tarpaulins. "It's a traditional bagpipe with a chanter which plays the melody and drones, made of cardboard carpet roll tubes, which give it that wavering sound. I guess it's an extension of my interest in speech and the body, in the way it sucks and exhales air." The bagpipe plays 10 songs, including "A Bicycle Built for Two" and the Olympic theme. There is no computer chip or tape loop involved.

"It's playing it right before your eyes," Hawkinson explains. "It's an aspect of sculpted sound that interests me; that is, the sound actually being made."

The notion of building sound recalls Hawkinson's high school years in Los Altos in the Bay Area's Silicon Valley, when he repaired and built musical instruments. After completing a banjo and a mandolin, he contemplated becoming a lutier but was dissuaded by his art teacher who already saw his promise.

With little affinity for the business of his optician father, Hawkinson enrolled at San Jose State, where he earned a bachelor's degree in fine art in 1985. There he met painter Patty Wickman, whom he later married. She was offered a job teaching painting at UCLA that brought the couple here the same year. "The saddest thing is we moved directly into this space and haven't moved since," Hawkinson says.

Hawkinson's earliest work was indebted to the Dadaist and Surrealist artists in their intimate scale and manipulation of common objects. Hawkinson now feels, "Those early pieces were so small and precious. I started loosening up and using larger scale. The next step was life-size form and the body seemed the obvious connection."

Artists Bruce Nauman and Lucas Samaras are influences that Hawkinson readily admits to today, but there is a salient difference between them. They all share an interest in psychological and physical self-exploration, but Hawkinson is also an old-fashioned inventor. His work stems in part from a need to spend hours tinkering.

"A lot of times, with the machine pieces, I stick myself in a situation where I have no idea where I'm going or how to go about finding the solution," he says. "Putting myself in a lost position is important." □

Hunter Drohojowska-Philp is a frequent contributor to Calendar.

■ Compiled by Lisa Boone. Announcements must be received at least three weeks in advance. Because of space limitations, not all submissions will be listed. Send to Art Listings, Calendar, Los Angeles Times, Times Mirror Square, Los Angeles, CA 90053. Accessibility for disabled people is indicated by the wheelchair symbol: ♿

OPENINGS

TODAY

AHI IKMNSTW—Tim Hawkinson: *Recent Work* (The Armory Center for the Arts, 145 N. Raymond Ave., Pasadena, [818] 792-5101). A survey of sculpture, two-dimensional wall pieces and drawings by the artist. Ends Sept. 1.

Lari Pittman (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., [213] 857-6000). A mid-career survey of work by the L.A. painter features around 35 seminal works including new paintings created especially for this exhibition. Ends Sept. 8.

Self-Help Graphics Annual Print Exhibition (Self-Help Graphics/Galeria Otra Vez, 3802 Cesar Chavez Ave., East Los Angeles, [213] 881-6444). An exhibition of new print works by more than 45 artists. Also, a fund-raiser will be held from 1-5 today with new prints, etchings, woodcuts and mono-silkscreens available. Ends July 13.

TUESDAY

Seiji Kunishima (Merging One Gallery, 1547 Sixth St., Santa Monica, [310] 395-0033). Granite and bronze sculpture and paper drawings by the artist. Ends Aug. 3.

FRIDAY

All Work No Play (AMCE, 1800-P Berkeley St., Santa Monica, [310] 264-5818). A group show of works by European artists Dagmar Demming, Milo Kopp, Susanne Weirich, Oliver Zabat and others. Ends July 27.

Barry X Ball and Anish Kapoor (Angles Gallery, 2230 Main St., Santa Monica, [310] 396-5019). Ends Aug. 24.

First Person (Marc Foxx, 3026 Nebraska Ave., Santa Monica, [310] 315-2841). Works by Robert Bianchon, Joseph Griegley, Tim Hawkinson, Robin Lowe, Monica Majoli, Mark Morrisroe, Joe Mama-Nitzberg and Frances Stark. Ends Aug. 2.

Lenin Marquez and Self Portraits (Iturraide Gallery, 154 N. La Brea Ave., [213] 937-4267). Two separate exhibitions include a one-man show by Marquez and a group show of works by Marcelo Aguirre, Carlos Arias, Lucia Maya, Gustavo Monroy and others. Ends Aug. 10.

Past, Present: Brad Burkhart and Nancy Turner-Smith (Mythos Gallery, 1009 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, [818] 843-3686). Ceramic relief sculpture by Burkhart and mixed-media works by Turner-Smith. Ends Aug. 10.

Stanley Stellar and Ross Watson (Couturier Gallery, 166 N. La Brea Ave., [213] 933-5557). An exhibition of homoerotic photographs and paintings. Ends Aug. 10.

SATURDAY

Dead on the Wall: Grateful Dead and Deadhead Iconography and Fred Tomaselli: The Urge to be Transported (Huntington Beach Art Center, 538 Main St., Huntington Beach, [714] 374-1650). Three separate exhibitions include art, memorabilia and music relating to the Grateful Dead, a survey of Tomaselli's work from 1988 to 1995 and "Bloody Entrances and Inky Exits," a site-specific outdoor installation by Laurel Beckman. Ends Sept. 1.

Lawrence Gipe: Works on Paper (Hunsaker/Schlesinger, 2525 Michigan Ave., T-3, Santa Monica, [310] 828-1133). Ends Aug. 17.

The Image is Woman (Remba Gallery, 464 N. Robertson Blvd., West Hollywood, [310] 657-1101). A group show of collaborative works between several artists and the Mixografía Workshop. Ends Sept. 14.

Kaleidoscope of Art (Heritage Gallery, 718 N. La Cienega Blvd., [310] 652-7738). Paintings, drawings, prints and ceramics. Please see Page 56