

John Salvest: TEXTure



April 26 - June 9, 2002

A r k a n s a s A r t s C e n t e r



Medicine Cabinet (1999)

As professor of sculpture, John Salvest has been teaching at Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, since 1989. He received his artistic education from the University of Iowa, Iowa City, where he received his MFA in sculpture. Prior to that he received an MA in English from the University of Iowa and a BA in English from Duke University. With his two degrees in English, Salvest's background may explain the frequent references to the written word within his work.

The title of the exhibition, suggested by the artist, "...overlays 'text' referring to language and thought and 'texture' referring to sensory delight, which to a great extent is found readymade in the ordinary materials used in the work" (Salvest to author, April 2002). Salvest also recognizes that both "text" and "texture" have their roots in the Latin *texere* meaning to weave. In a sense, Salvest's work intertwines different concepts and materials, that when applied effectively, can expose timeless dichotomies. One might think of the sacred and profane that are referenced in *Reliquary* (1991-). In a traditional sense, reliquaries were used by the church to house sacred artifacts such as the bone fragment of a deceased saint. Clearly the intention in Salvest's version, to save fingernails, is a modern twist.

A chief component of John Salvest's work is the retention of the tactile quality of the materials that he employs. Who has not touched a newspaper, an

ibuprofen tablet, or one's own fingernail? By emphasizing textures and juxtaposing different objects, Salvest's work invokes humor, irony, surprise and social commentary.

While museums typically forbid touching the objects on display, viewers of Salvest's work can easily recall, for example, the cold, antiseptic nature of Salvest's *Medicine Cabinet* (1999)—a typical bathroom fixture commonplace in American homes. Salvest often utilizes manufactured or *found objects* and then transforms them into a work of art. In *Medicine Cabinet*, we see that the inside of this piece is now filled with aspirin and ibuprofen tablets arranged to spell the phrase *believe your pain*. The smoothness of the machine-made pills complements the vessel's surface. Salvest relayed the following general observation, "My use of color and texture is intended to appeal to the viewer's senses and to counterbalance the coolness of order, categorization and system found in my work."

In *Smoke-Free* (1996) we see the now ubiquitous image of the American flag created from the most unlikely of materials—cigarette butts. Salvest juxtaposes the brown part of some of the butts with the white cigarette paper to make an orderly arrangement of stars and stripes. There is irony in creating the likeness of an enduring symbol from the most worthless refuse. The original source of the image remains unmistakable. His approach to this arrangement separates Salvest from more traditional additive sculptors. Though Salvest builds up form, the essence of this work is another dichotomy, that of refuse and art. As such, Salvest's work reveals the conceptual nature of his work.

Returning to *Medicine Cabinet*, we may note that Salvest's work often references the literary world. Through excerpts of C.S. Lewis, Goethe, Camus, W.H. Auden and numerous others, we see another layer of his art.¹ In addition to referencing great authors, other literary connections (often not as weighty) are made to newsprint, advertising, the interjection of ordinary words, etc. Throughout centuries of art history, going back to medieval manuscripts, text has often accompanied imagery. With Salvest, we see a much more modern concept where the text becomes the imagery. Ed Ruscha and Barbara Kruger are two contemporary artists who have created similar work employing text. With a work like Ruscha's drawing entitled *Quit*, the directive implied in the title is ambiguous. Contrary to that, Kruger's works

has a commercial slickness as if they were sarcastic ad campaigns. Salvest's work might fall somewhere in between. He shares affinities with Ruscha's obscure meanings while alluding to consumption.

Taken as a whole, Salvest's work also comments on the redundancy of much of our daily activity. *Newspaper Columns* (1997), *Coffee Calendar* (1998), *Smoke-Free* and *Reliquary* all point to common habitual practices: reading, drinking coffee, smoking and clipping one's fingernails. For Salvest the by-product of our habits becomes the materials that he transforms into a cohesive, often pleasing, visual image. He references a particular time and place. While *Coffee Calendar* is arranged from the coffee filters he used for 1997, one can imagine that coffee filters from a different year would be unpredictably different. One might begin to think what would happen if he switched to another blend of coffee? Would Salvest's artistic output decrease if he stopped drinking coffee and reading the paper? Would the work of art be less personal if he purchased someone else's coffee filters on eBay? As for *Reliquary*, will the artist finish the work when the vessel is full? These are ridiculous questions, but humorous still. They help us reconsider the seriousness of art.

The Arkansas Arts Center is pleased to exhibit *John Salvest: TEXTure*. The staff is grateful for the assistance that the artist, Les Christensen and Brian Wasson have given during the installation.

Brian Young
Curator of Art

¹ Levin, Kim. *John Salvest: Time on His Hands*. Phoenix, Arizona: Phoenix Art Museum, 1999, pp. 5 and 13.

Pincushion (1999)

Reliquary (1991-)



works in the exhibition

- 1 **Pincushion** (1999)
Dress Form, Straight Pins
31 1/2" x 13" x 16"
- 2 **Stalactite** (2000)
Wood, Chewing Gum
34" x 22" x 24"
- 3 **Stamper** (1999)
Cancelled Postage Stamps, Glass, Paper, Wood
64" x 120"
- 4 **Medicine Cabinet** (1999)
Metal, Mirror, Aspirin, Ibuprofen
17" x 22" x 4"
- 5 **Double Desk** (2000)
Wooden School Desk and Chairs, Pencils, Erasers
38" x 39" x 26"
- 6 **Strike Anywhere** (2000)
Leather Case, Red and White-Tipped Matches
23" x 24" x 8" open
- 7 **Newspaper Columns** (1997)
Yearly editions of various U.S. newspapers
stacked in chronological order
Heights variable x 14 1/2" x 12"
- 8 **Reliquary** (1991-)
Glass, Plastic, Fingernail Clippings
8 1/2" x 5" x 2 1/2"
- 9 **Household Fetish (White Version)** 2001
Wood, Hardware, Rubber Bands
79" x 6" x 4 1/2"
- 10 **Coffee Calendar** (1998)
365 Used Coffee Filters, Paper, Glass,
Rubber Stamp
Arrangement Variable, Approx. 320 Sq. Ft.
- 11 **Flag** (1999)
Wood, Pencils, Erasers
19" x 30 1/2" x 3 1/2"
- 12 **Wasps' Nest** (1993)
Wood, Glass, Wasps, Cork
12 1/2" x 15" x 10"
- 13 **Smoke-Free** (1996)
Wood, Cigarette Butts
33" x 48" x 1/2"
- 14 **FLY** (2002)
Mounted Sparrows, Cable, Hardware
4' x 32' x 6"

John Salvest

Born in 1955 in Kearny, NJ ■ Resides in Jonesboro, AR

EDUCATION

MFA, University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1983

MA, English, University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1979

BA, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 1977

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS AND INSTALLATIONS

John Salvest: New Work, Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville, TN, 2002

Undercurrent, Rudolph Projects, New York, NY, 2000

John Salvest: Time on His Hands, Phoenix Art Museum, 1999

Words to Live By, Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, 1999

Nothing Endures, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY, 1998

Meditation 7.21, Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, MO, 1997

Inventory, City Gallery at Chastain, Atlanta, GA, 1996

John Salvest: Sculpture, Salina Art Center, Salina, KS, 1995

Black River, University of Arkansas – Little Rock, 1993

John Salvest: New Work, I Space, Chicago, IL, 1993

John Salvest: Recent Work, Memphis Center for Contemporary Art, Memphis, TN, 1989

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Perspectives, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN, 2001

Annual Delta Exhibition, Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, 2001 (also 1999, 97, 96, 95, 94, 92)

New American Talent, Jones Center for Contemporary Art, Austin, TX, 2001 (also 1997, 96)

Red Clay Survey of Contemporary Southern Art, Huntsville Museum of Art, Huntsville, AL, 2000

Snapshot, Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, MD, 2000

The Other Book, Cleveland State University Art Gallery, Cleveland, OH, 1999

New Orleans Triennial, New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA, 1998

Max:98, University of Memphis Art Museum, Memphis, TN, 1998

Obsessions, SPACES Contemporary Art Center, Cleveland, OH, 1997

Southeastern Triennial, Mobile Museum of Art, Mobile, AL, 1996

Tijd Tekens (Marking Time), Gallery Quartair, The Hague, Netherlands, 1995

Self-Possessed, Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX, 1994

Little Things, Art in General, New York, NY, 1994

National Showcase Exhibition, Alternative Museum, New York, NY, 1993

Brooks Biennial, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN 1992

Assemblage, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC, 1992

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

City of Atlanta/Hartsfield International Airport, Atlanta, GA

DePauw University Art Collection, Greencastle, IN

Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, NJ

New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ

Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ

University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, IA

SELECTED GRANTS AND AWARDS

Pollock-Krasner Grant, Pollock-Krasner Foundation, New York, NY, 1998.

Mid-America Arts Alliance – National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Award in Sculpture, 1993.

Arkansas Arts Council Fellowship Award in Sculpture, 1992.

National Endowment for the Arts – Regional Artists Project Grant, Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans, LA, 1991.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Connors, Thomas. Review, *Sculpture*, January/February 1994, p. 54.

Duffy, Robert. Review, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 9, 1997, pp. C4 & 7.

Falkowski, Andrew. "Big Muddy: Too Thick to Drink, Too Thin to Plow." *New Art Examiner*, October 1999, p. 44.

Feaster, Felicia. *Inventory: Selections & Evaluations by John Salvest & Michael Banicki*. Atlanta, GA: City Gallery at Chastain, 1996.

French, Christopher. "John Salvest: Undercurrent." *ArtLies*, Summer 2000, p. 74.

Hall, David. "Brooks Perspectives." *Art Papers*, January/February 2002, pp. 39-40.

Johnson, Patricia. "Emotion, Hidden Issues Come Forward in Show," *Houston Chronicle*, June 6, 2000, p. D1.

Levin, Kim. *John Salvest: Time on His Hands*. Phoenix, Arizona: Phoenix Art Museum, 1999.

McCarthy, David. "John Salvest," *The New Art Examiner*, May 1994, pp. 50-51.

McGowan, Robert. Review, *Art Papers*, May/June 1994, pp. 62-63.

Plante, Michael. "Southern Discomfort," *Art in America*, March 1999, pp. 67-69.

Wilbur, Debra. "Studio View: John Salvest," *The New Art Examiner*, March 1998, p. 47.



Newspaper Columns (1997)



Smoke-Free (1996)

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on the front Stalactite (2000)