

The image shows a wall densely packed with various electronic components and wires. Numerous small, square and rectangular components, some with visible pins or connections, are scattered across the surface. Several thin, light-colored wires run vertically and horizontally, creating a grid-like pattern. Interspersed among the components are several small, square and round analog clocks with white faces and black hands. The overall appearance is that of a complex, multi-layered circuit board or a prototype assembly, possibly representing a piece of art or a technical project. The lighting is somewhat dim, highlighting the textures and colors of the components.

Bill Will
Prototypes, 1980-2005
inventions, fabrications, plots, and subplots



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April 5-May 14, 2005

The Art Gym: Marylhurst University

Bill Will: Prototypes, 1980-2005
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Preface & Acknowledgments

Like many Oregonians, I have followed and delighted in Bill Will's artwork for more than 20 years, and have great respect for his contribution to an understanding of our society. The Art Gym has included Will's work in several exhibitions, including "Images," one of the first exhibitions and catalogues organized by the gallery during its 1980-1981 inaugural year. Will's exhibition history also includes presentations at the Portland Art Museum, Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Oregon College of Art & Craft, Northwest Artists Workshop, Nine Gallery, many college and university art galleries, and other exhibition venues around the region and nation.

Bill Will's work merits a good look for a number of reasons, but first and foremost he is one of the few artists both regionally and nationally, whose art is imbedded with a sense of humor. Most artists, like poets, are known for the seriousness of their creations. (In a recent lecture, poet Billy Collins called this "stand up tragedy.") Bill Will uses humor in sculpture after sculpture and installation after installation in order to hold up a comic's mirror to the perils of conformity, jingoism, simplistic remedies for complex societal problems, censorship, and the fixation on money. In all of these artworks, Bill Will makes his points by disarming us through humor, and by cutting to the quick of the matter through deceptively simple and tangible means. These are no small accomplishments.

We have many people to thank for helping make this project possible. Randy Gragg has written an excellent essay, placing Bill Will's work in its historic context; and Sasha Swetschinski has designed a catalogue that is both elegant and in synch with the artist's sense of humor. Once again, the Regional Arts & Culture Council provided the seed money; and many wonderful individuals and businesses came forward to finish the job. Mark and Melody Teppola were the first to make a gift to the project. Melody, a long-time and beloved supporter of the arts in this community, passed away this winter and we will miss her. We are also appreciative of the contributions of the following individuals and businesses, many of whom have provided support and encouragement for our endeavors for many years: Joan and John Shipley, Walla Walla Foundry, Elizabeth Will-Burrows, Elite Granite and Marble, Shannon Spence, Christine Bourdette and Ricardo Lovett, Paul and Caroline W., Harry and June Clark, Don Merkt and Melissa Stewart, Christopher Rauschenberg, Pamela Gibson, Jane Kyle Brumage, Abby and Alex Poust, Marilyn Bona Craig, Sean Elwood and Yvonne Puffer, Jack and Marjorie Butler, Hossein Rohhantalab and Tami Dean, Larry Kirkland, Kohel Haver, Bonnie Laing-Malcomson, Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership, Eloise Damrosch, and Gary Hartnett.

We also greatly appreciate the willingness of the following collectors to loan important works to the exhibition: Christine Bourdette and Ricardo Lovett, Tad Savinar, Eloise Damrosch and Gary Hartnett, Don Wallace and Judi Brandel, Allan Stone Gallery, Christine Clark, Mark Larson, Don Merkt and Melissa Stewart.

Finally, as you can imagine, it has been a pleasure and no small measure of fun to work on this project with Bill Will. I thank him for that, and, of course, for the art.

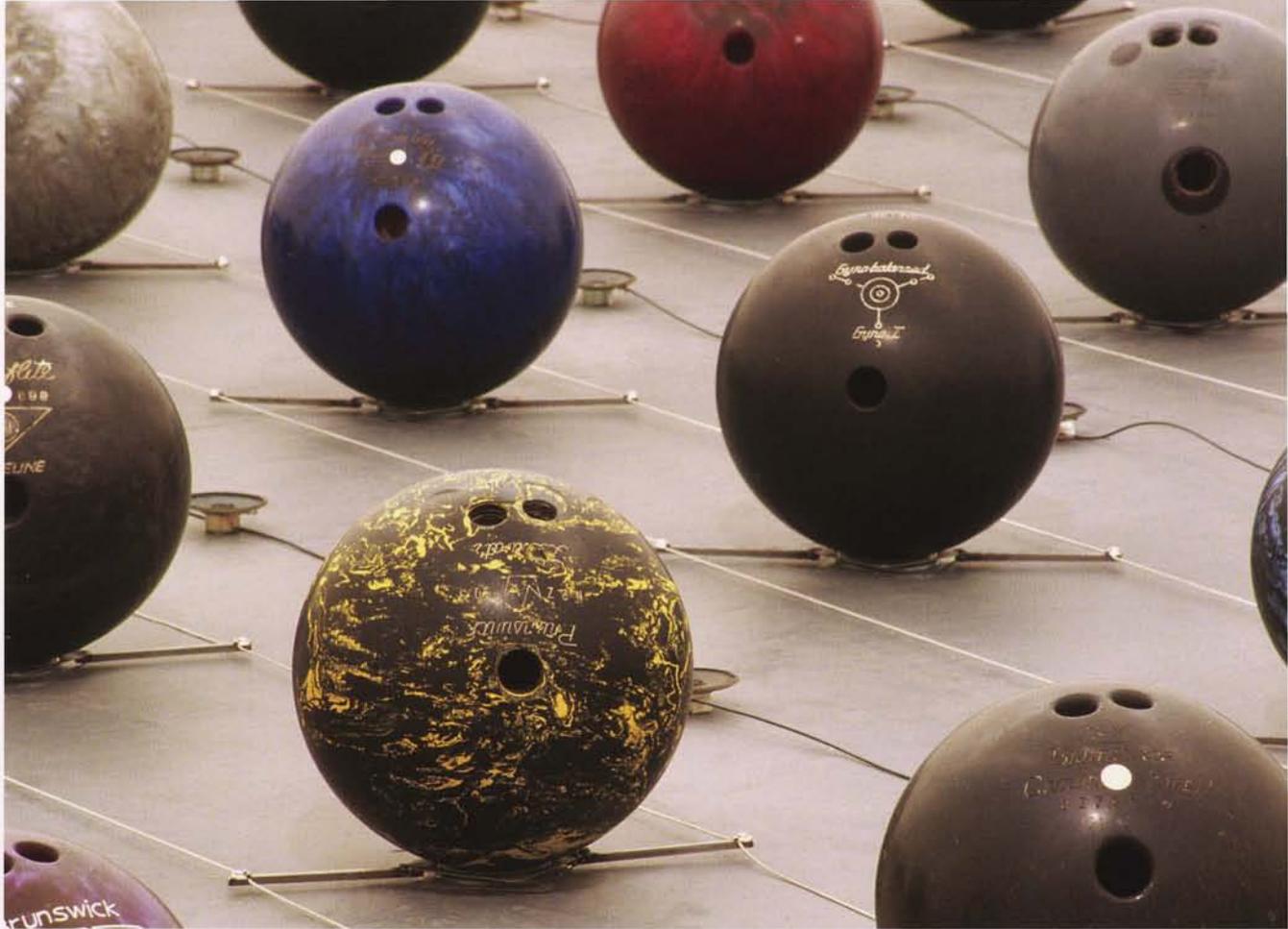
Terri M. Hopkins
Director and Curator
The Art Gym

The Well-Aimed Ambiguity

by Randy Gragg

93.4% un-American
2003





Tyranny of Conformity
1999

For me, art is more about the viewer than the object. Although I am interested in an object's physical characteristics, it is its ability to communicate or stimulate an interaction with the viewer that most fascinates me.ⁱ

The modern idea of the viewer completing an artwork dates to Marcel Duchamp "Readymades," in which he immortalized common objects like a urinal or bicycle wheel by simply playing off his audience's expectations of a gallery space. But a deeper, pan-historical form of employing the audience as media might be called the "well-aimed ambiguity." Think of Edouard Manet's riddles like *Olympia* or Frans Hals's subtle satires of the Dutch upper class. Or, as Duchamp also once so slyly pointed out, imagine how "L.H.O.O.Q." the Mona Lisa is below her enigmatic smile.

During 25 years of artmaking, Bill Will has routinely imbued common objects with a rich array of potential meaning, inviting the viewer to complete his artworks in all manner of ways. Employing everything from slices of toast and bowling balls to garage door openers and geologic core samples, Will's art is a living embodiment of Man Ray's dictum, "There isn't time in life to do the same thing twice."ⁱⁱ



With a mix of politics, humor, and more-than-occasional irony all communicated through acts of pure invention, Will has steered free of any recognizable style, identifiable genre, or narrow topicality to present, instead, a larger cultural critique. What's more, Will has pursued these ends not only in his studio work but with art in the public realm as well. Whether turning a tiny co-op gallery into an obstacle course of motion-sensing burglar alarms or using federal transportation dollars to build trophy-shaped topiary at a county fairgrounds, Will consistently seeks the idea that can chide without scorn, probe without intimidation, and critique without pedantry.

I intend for the work to attract one's attention by employing humor or by exploiting a phenomenon of science or technology to disarm them—to get their guard down. Once disarmed, the potential for dialog exists. My goal is to open up a subject for consideration.

Bill Will: Prototypes, 1980-2005 at The Art Gym at Marylhurst University is the first career-length overview of Will's work. Yet as much as the show charts one artist's path, it offers a look at the concerns shared by a wider group of Northwest artists who, like Will, opted to play on the fringes of the artworld's commercial and institutional support system. They came of age during a radical redefinition of artmaking best summed up in Rosalind Krause's 1979 essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." Krause enlarged sculpture's boundaries beyond mere three dimensions to the entire space of possibilities she succinctly described as "not landscape and not architecture."ⁱⁱⁱ It was a new artistic stage, and Will and his peers filled it with their manifold creative impulses, from Ken Butler's performances with wildly hybridized musical instruments to Buster Simpson's efforts to clean up acid rain by throwing giant Roloids into the region's rivers.

Yet, as much as it is informed by headier precedents of 1970s conceptualism, Will's artistic attitude is equally steeped in 1980s punk rebellion, particularly the use of dark humor as cultural critique. Poking a prickly brand of fun at Reagan-era social and economic policies, his work found a fitting context with the cadre of artists exhibiting at Seattle's quintessential '80s subculture space, Rosco Louie Gallery, among them Lynda Barry, Bill Whipple, George Chacona, and Clair Colquitt.

I never thought that what we were doing was "punk." But that's probably because I was so immersed in it. I think in the same way punk was, in some ways a reaction to disco, the work I was most interested in was reacting to the decorative arts and perhaps even to minimalism. It was the Northwest, after all. There was the whole emphasis on materiality and good craftsmanship.

In New York and Los Angeles, and regionally in Vancouver, B.C., artists such as Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Rodney Graham similarly rejected conventional media and institutional settings. But their respective contexts of arts institutions and collectors stretched to absorb the artists' pioneering ideas. By contrast, in Portland and Seattle, artistic conservatism and provincialism reigned. Largely ignored by the region's institutions and collectors, Will and his boundary-busting peers remain a largely unwritten chapter in the history of Northwest art. By bringing together more than 20 sculptures and four installations created by Will over the last 25 years, **Bill Will: Prototypes, 1980-2005** begins to tell this critically important story.

World's Greatest
1998



Will longed for a license to pursue the unconventional from an early age. He dreamed of becoming an inventor. But as an only child whose father died when Will was 14, what he ultimately learned was self-invention. Art was not a part of his upbringing or early education. Pivotal, his earliest first-hand experience with contemporary artworks would be in the festival setting of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. As an allegorical primer on his conceptual leanings, Will often cites an early memory:

When I was about 10 years old my uncle, a civil engineer, took me below a large suspension bridge to explain its structure. Attached to the bottom of the bridge span was a rolling scaffolding for painting. My uncle explained that it was a never-ending job. He said the painters started at one end and slowly painted until they reached the other side, at which point they came back and started over. I imagined those painters spending their whole lives under that bridge. Until they died of old age or fell off.

Will attended Washington State University from 1969 to 1973, intending to study architecture. After his first year, he switched to the art department, where he wound up under the influence of the so-called "Inland Empire School." Collected around the legendary painter Gaylen Hansen, the group included Robert Helm, Jack Dollhausen, and others. Will recalls that his biggest influence was Robert Sterling, a lesser-known member of the group, who became an important role model and life-long friend. "He was the first adult male to totally inspire me since the death of my father. He gave me the courage to pursue my ambition. Much of what I have accomplished has come from my attempts to be as much like him as possible."

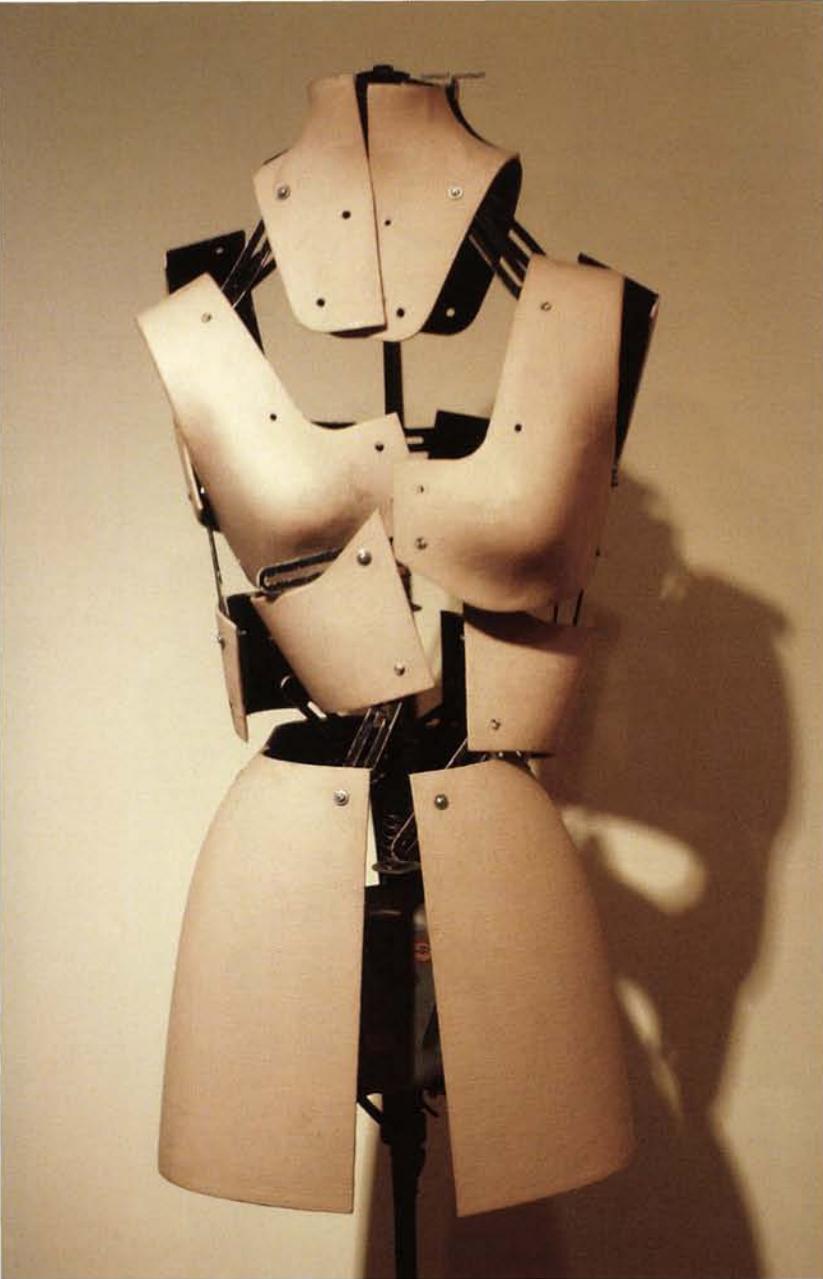


As a student, Will chiefly drew, painted, and made photographic prints, showing an early student's infatuation with figurative painters Francis Bacon and Willem De Kooning. But the highly independently minded "Inland Empire School" planted plenty of seeds for later bloom in Will's emerging artistic sensibilities. More than 40 years after arriving in the Northwest in the late '50s, Hansen remains the region's reigning humorist, creating surrealist juxtapositions of scale and animal/human relationships that can be seen in Will's often-adroitly absurdist anthropomorphism. Dollhausen's explorations of kitsch and low technologies clearly showed Will a wider conceptual and material palette. Even elements of Helm's sublimely crafted, intellectually chilly poetics can be seen in some of Will's recent small-scale sculptures using everyday materials.

Will's exposure to these wider artistic explorations continued in Tokyo, where he completed his final year of art school in 1973, and then stayed on an additional year working at a variety of jobs. He recalls the head-spinning experience of being dropped into a class of Japanese painting students who had spent the first three years of their education stretching linen on hickory to copy old and modern masters. "We mutually agreed," he says, "that I was in the wrong place." He quickly transferred to a more comfortable educational context: the school's fifth floor "conceptual art" program, where he recalls the students pouring tar on canvas and lighting it on fire.

Will moved to New York in 1975 with the usual young artist's aspirations. Despite the rising East Village and punk scenes, Manhattan—after two years of Tokyo—merely intensified Will's strong craving for the Northwest's natural landscape. Oregon's progressive political climate attracted Will to Portland.

left:
10¢ Invisible Talking Friend
1981



Having lived in the era's two most vibrant cultural capitols, he quickly navigated to successes in both the center and the fringe of Portland's then-tiny art scene. He showed paintings at the best galleries, but he also worked on far more offbeat projects, most importantly collaborating with Bill Thomas, a former member of Warhol's Factory, and Jack Eyerly, the founder of the Portland chapter of Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.).

Among Will's earliest Portland projects was the creation of a rear-projection stage set for a production of Thomas's original play *Burst*. More stage gigs followed, most pivotally working with another multimedia-inclined artist, Ken Butler, to create a series of mechanical marionettes for a production of Alfred Jarry's Dadaist drama *Ubu Roi*. What soon followed in the studio was Will's first fully realized kinetic sculpture: *Abnormal Device*, an adjustable dress form in which he loosened all the joints and ran a rod to the neck so that the body could be expanded and compressed by a barbecue motor activated by a foot pedal switch. More kinetic sculptures followed. *10¢ Invisible Talking Friend*, for instance, presented an empty cage, equipped with a coin-operated voice box that played phrases from a toy telephone. *Patriotic Device* was nothing more than a bass drum pedal to which Will attached an American flag that waved at the tap of a foot.

With his paintings enjoying enough success that he worried that his budding interest in sculpture might confuse or alienate patrons, Will showed the 3D work as "William Warren," his first and middle name. But soon he dropped the alias—and gradually, the painting.

Will's kinetic sculptures emerged from a fertile milieu. As the Seattle-based critic Matthew Kangas has documented, the Northwest spawned a particularly early fascination with kinetic and technological experimentation.^{iv} Shortly after Robert Rauschenberg and a Bell Laboratories scientist, Billy Kluver, founded E.A.T. in New York in 1966, Eyerly and a Boeing computer graphics expert, Bill Fetter, set up respective E.A.T. chapters in Portland and Seattle. Their efforts helped foster a welcoming atmosphere for blurring and breaking artistic boundaries, whether it was Dollhausen's blinking, circuit-encrusted wall reliefs or Butler's instruments, made by putting strings on and amplifying everything from tennis rackets to pieces of furniture.

above:
Abnormal Device
1978

right:
Patriotic Device
1980



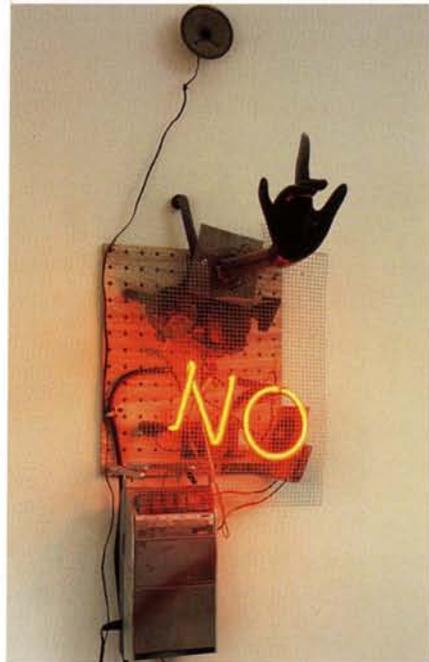
Will maintains that his kinetic work arose less from the context of artists working with movement than from the critically different viewing experiences he observed in his audience. He often recalls the epiphany of watching an eight-year-old girl leading her brother through a 1981 exhibition in which he presented some of his earliest kinetic sculptures along with his static work. Actively engaged by the moving sculptures, the girl bluntly dismissed the static work as "Oh, that's just decoration."

There's something about things that move. It brings you closer. You don't participate in the same way when it's static. It's so easy to make it move a little. And that helps people to start talking about other issues than the object.

Will's novel sculptures quickly gained a following in Portland, but more pivotally earned him a regular spot in Rosco Louie Gallery. Run by a local raconteur, Larry Reid, Rosco Louie became an important artistic hub for the Northwest. As it connected the percolating subcultures of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York to Seattle and Portland, it punctured the pretensions of both the tradition-bound, high-art museum society and the intellectually clubby alternative-art scenes. Showing artists ranging from cartoonist Lynda Barry to New York performance artist Eric Bogosian, it was the ideal context for Will's darkly offbeat sensibility.

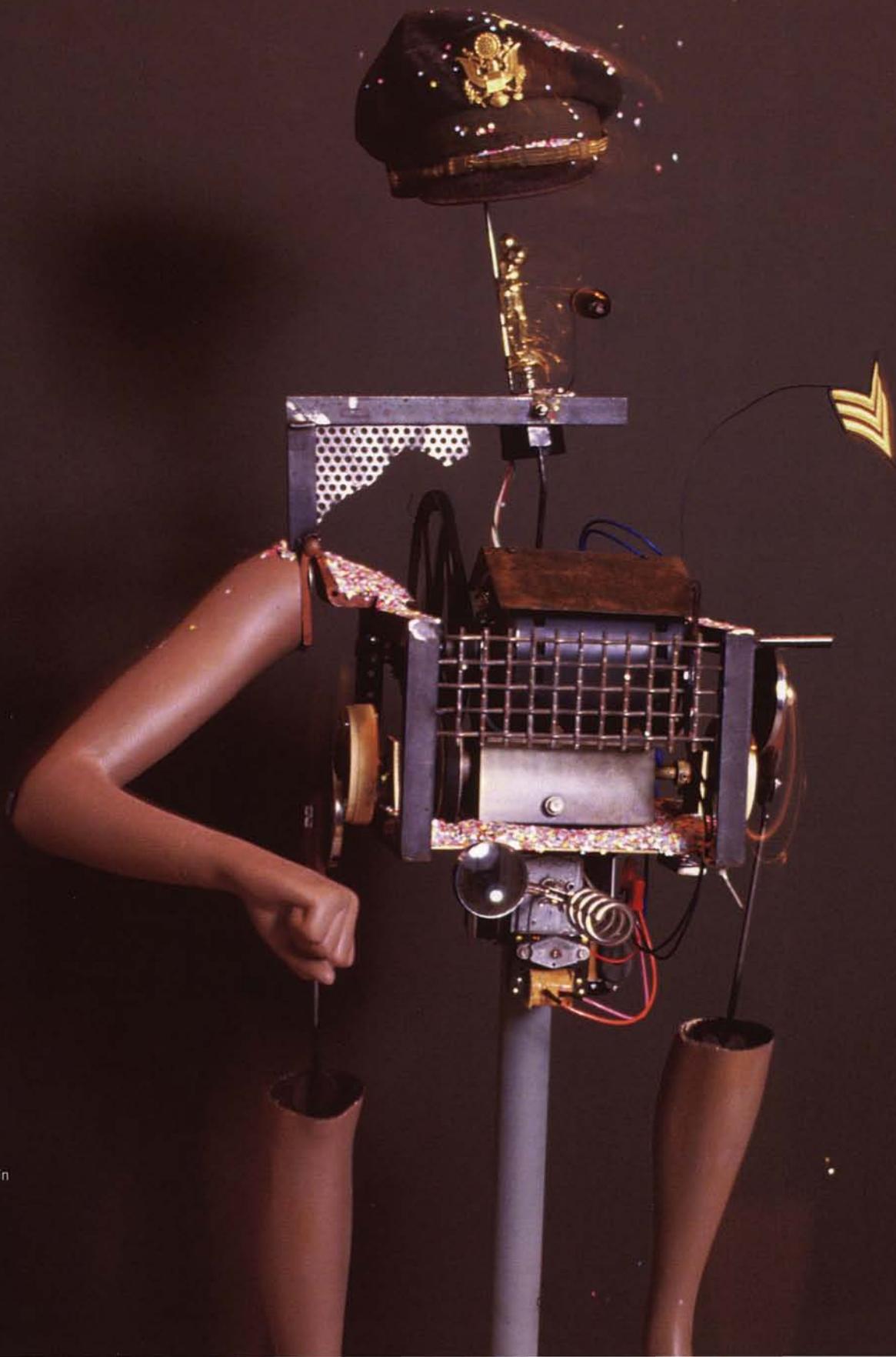
Yet Will also stood apart. Against a backdrop of often-spectacular machines such as Seattle artist Clair Colquitt's robotic techno-rock band and Dale Travous's two-million-volt, light-ening-shooting Tesla coil—not to mention the more extreme work by the likes of Survival Research Labs that Reid imported from San Francisco—Will kept his work as simple as a roadside restaurant sign. And as the Reagan-era '80s and the AIDS crisis spawned an increasingly direct, often bluntly literal form of political art, Will remained slyly (and somewhat fearlessly) committed to humor. Step on the foot pedal of Will's *Just Say No*, a 1988 satire of Nancy Reagan's anti-drug campaign, and a cast hand wagged its index finger, the neon "NO" from a "no vacancy" sign blinked, and Will's mother's voice, in metronomic cadences, repeated the command. Another work, an ode to Reagan's trickle-down economics, *Supply and Demand*, presented the wooden fork and spoon of a decorative wall hanging as flag-emblazoned hands on a face that repeatedly spews a slice of bread branded with a dollar sign. *When Generals Become Heroes Again*, made in response to the first Gulf War and shown at the 1991 Oregon Biennial, featured a mannequin's extremities, bowling trophy, and pelvic-level corkscrew all turning, churning, and running in place to the march popularized by John Philip Sousa, "When the Caissons Go Rolling Along."

left:
Just Say No
1988



Supply and Demand
1996





When Generals Become Heroes Again
1991



Time Exposure
1985

In other artworks, Will played the light-hearted absurdist. *Gastronomical Model* presented a collection of fruits orbiting a pear. *Personal Statement* perched a small, wooden house with a dog-bone chimney atop a mechanically wobbling set of PVC pipe legs. In an installation at Portland's Northwest Artist Workshop, an artist-run alternative space, Will created a bathroom that you had to unzip to enter. Most legendarily, for a 1985 exhibition, Will created a thrift-store crossbreed of Duchamp and Warhol, assembling 550 clocks in *Time Exposure* at the Northwest Artists Workshop in what was both an incredible visual and aural installation but also, at prices ranging from \$5 to \$10, a rapid sell.



left:
Personal Statement
1987

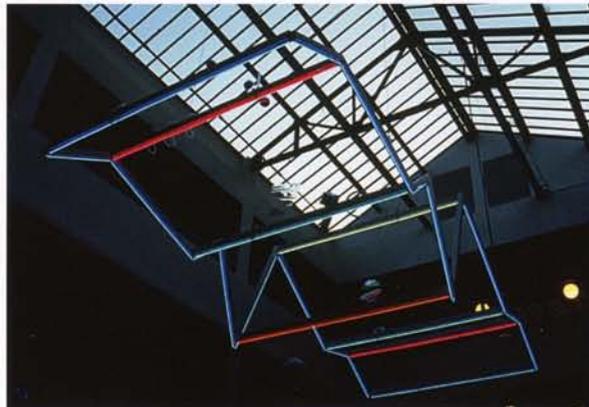
The combination of humor and movement proved to be excellent calling cards for the nation's rapidly expanding public art programs. Will's earliest forays working in the public realm were for the '80s Portland art festival Artquake, the largest of which was a city-block-size maze, complete with mannequins, peep shows, and PVC pipe towers. In another project, he and Portland artist Jerry Mayer and lighting designer Bill Boese created large-scale lighting effects for the top three stories of an unfinished downtown Portland office tower.

It was some kind of anti-aesthetic. The idea was to just do things that were unexpected.

Ostensibly made for fun and the broadest possible audiences, the projects nevertheless made Will a rare commodity: an artist with experience managing a budget and numerous workers. These early temporary pieces were also pivotal in allowing Will to begin implementing his ideas on a bigger, more public scale.

left:
Time Piece
1985

right:
High Lights
1987



Will created his first permanent public art commission in 1985. *Time Piece* was a computer-controlled light sculpture that abstractly measured time for the atrium of the downtown Portland shopping center the Galleria. Other commissions quickly followed: *(W)hole Paradox* in Mukilteo, Washington, a rotating kinetic sculpture; *Light Tunnel* in Bethesda, Maryland, a 165-foot-long transit pedestrian tunnel Will wired with 64



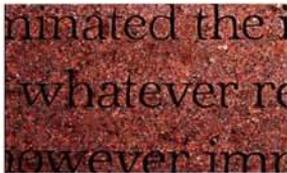
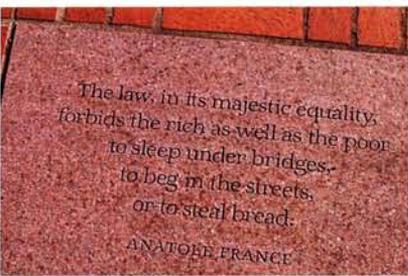
Light Tunnel
1987

theater lights and a computer to create the optical illusion of movement; and ten pieces made for a series of traveling shows for Washington State Arts Commission under the theme “The Sciences and Art.”

As with his early sculpture, Will’s first forays into public art can be seen as part of a larger regional tendency to wed technology, movement, and aesthetics, beginning with early Seattle E.A.T. member Jonn Geise’s 1973 *Neon Landscape* at the SeaTac Airport. Light, wind, and hand operation found their way into all manner of Northwest public artworks from Robert Teeple’s *Electric Lascaux*, a series of LED sculptures for Seattle’s underground Metro tunnel, to Buster Simpson’s self-pruning topiary for the Washington State Convention Center.

Rather than turn these early forays into a standardized style or set of themes, Will has increasingly shaped his work to foreground ideas. Indeed, he argues that one of his greatest successes in public art to date was *Street Wise*, a 1989 collaboration with writer Katherine Dunn in which they used money nominally intended to decorate a public parking garage to, instead, engrave notable quotes into the surrounding sidewalk. Created well before the use of quotes became one of the most ubiquitous forms of public art cliché, Will considers *Street Wise* to be “an artwork without substance or decorative material.” The artwork, he says, “was really only in the minds of its audience.”

left:
Street Wise
1989



Will’s largest public project to date was created collaboratively as one of five artists on the design of TriMet’s Westside MAX stations. Working directly with ZGF Partnership’s architects and Parsons Brinckerhoff engineering on this expansion of Portland’s light rail system, Will created more than 60 designs for paving, seating, and plazas. But most pivotally, for the MAX line’s Washington Park Station, Will conceived *Core Sample Time Line*—truly one of the great fusions of site and architecture detail ever to be produced by a percent-for-art design team. Near the middle of the transit line’s three-mile-long tunnel at the Washington Park Station, the deepest transit station in North America, *Core Sample* is just that: a 280-foot-long geologic boring sample taken near the station. Will preserved it in two lengths of cylindrical glass, and engraved the wall behind it with an annotated 15-million-year geologic and cultural history.

In all, Will has completed more than 30 public commissions and design team projects, ranging from a series of small, bronze briefcases at the entrance to Portland City Council chambers to the selection of colors for the Hawthorne Bridge. But in recent years, Will has been increasingly selective about choosing projects.

Will’s public works often offer a level of pathos and conceptual depth rare in public art, placing him among a select group of artists like Tom Otterness and Vito Acconci, for whom public space has become a playground for interacting with a wider audience. Will’s *World’s Greatest*, a 23-foot-high trophy along the Westside MAX adjacent to the Washington County Fairgrounds, recalls Otterness’s ambiguous satires, neatly balancing an easy, first hit of humor with slower-to-unfold ironies in the combination of heroic slogan, tomb-like landscaping, and empty isolation.

So much public art doesn’t seem to find an idea. It only applies an aesthetic or, like referring to local history, a technique. But if you find something at odds with perceptions, then it gets interesting. What I look for is not at all what is symbolic or representative of the place. I look for what’s quirky.

opposite page:
Core Sample Time Line
1998

Washington Park

← Elevators



Once common throughout the world, including Oregon, the dawn redwood was thought to have been extinct for millions of years.

In the 1940s, however, specimens of the "living fossil" were discovered in China, and the seeds were collected and distributed throughout the world.

Today this remarkable tree can be found in the Hoyt Arboretum.

120 FEET DEEP

SPRING LAKE PORTLAND
DE CORNELL MOUNTAIN HILLS
REVERSE POLARITY HILL

PHOTOMICROGRAPH
This layer of fossilized pollen is
accumulated by perhaps 100,000
Although the wax contained here came
between periods of catastrophic volcanic activity
it was clear enough to plants to establish themselves
and be similar to those of today.

Paralleling Will's public work has been his steady creation of installations. In these works, he finds the most penetrating fusion of his early kinetic sculpture's intensity, humor, and politics with the larger ambitions of his public work. In the installations, Will has had the freedom to indulge another favored tool, chance, in the serendipitous discoveries that happen when the artistic process is allowed to develop unfettered. Here, Will's relationship with the artistic currents well beyond the Northwest becomes clearer. Impossible to classify as either genre or style, Will's installations are better described as inquiries in the vein of, say, Vladimir Tatlin's dreamy inventiveness or Meret Oppenheim's transcendental juxtapositions of form and material, or as a kind of physical/conceptual gamesmanship, à la Tom Friedman's humorously prodding plays on scale or Damien Hirst's monumental psycho-cultural jibes.

One of Will's first fully realized installations was *Living Room Set*, exhibited in 1986 at the Portland Art Museum. Composed of a simple domestic furniture setting—but made entirely of outdoor landscape materials—it featured a redwood needle carpet; concrete chair; asphalt and grass tables; and a stone couch. An Oppenheim-like surrealist mix-up of materials writ large, it overturned domestic tranquilities in a manner reminiscent of the work of Vito Acconci and the architect/artist team of Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler, but with a particularly well-aimed shot at

Northwest sensibilities toward the outdoors. The piece foreshadowed the fine line between accessible humor and prodding satire that Will, at his best, would later assert in his public art, while anticipating the simplicity that has come to define his more recent studio work.

Critical to Will's explorations of the installation form has been the Nine Gallery, the tiny 13-by-26-foot white-box gallery co-op Will shares with nine other conceptually inclined Portland artists, among them Jerry Mayer, Kim Ray, Paul Sutinen, and Michael Bowley. Supported solely by the member artists, Nine Gallery has been Portland's chief venue for conceptual experimentation.

Some of Will's Nine Gallery installations have been simple, walk-in one-liners, such as *Yuletide Relief Chamber*, a room-size vacation with heat lamps, surf music, and a fan blowing over a salt block. But others have involved an equally playful but darker interface between viewer and artwork, such as *Impedimental Journey*, in which viewers had to negotiate a series of hurdles and limbo bars in the form of laser motion detectors. As Will's audience completed the work by contorting themselves to avoid breaking the beams of invisible light, the piece became equal parts choreography machine and metaphor for the larger cultural contortions enforced by an ever-expanding security infrastructure.

Initially, I was interested in using my artwork for persuasive purposes. Anymore I just want people to come to their own conclusions. And, of course, I like to call attention to things that disturb me. I am intrigued by the ways these things can be addressed or envisioned that are disarming, or humorous, and at the same time don't seem preachy or didactic.



left:
Living Room (Set)
1986

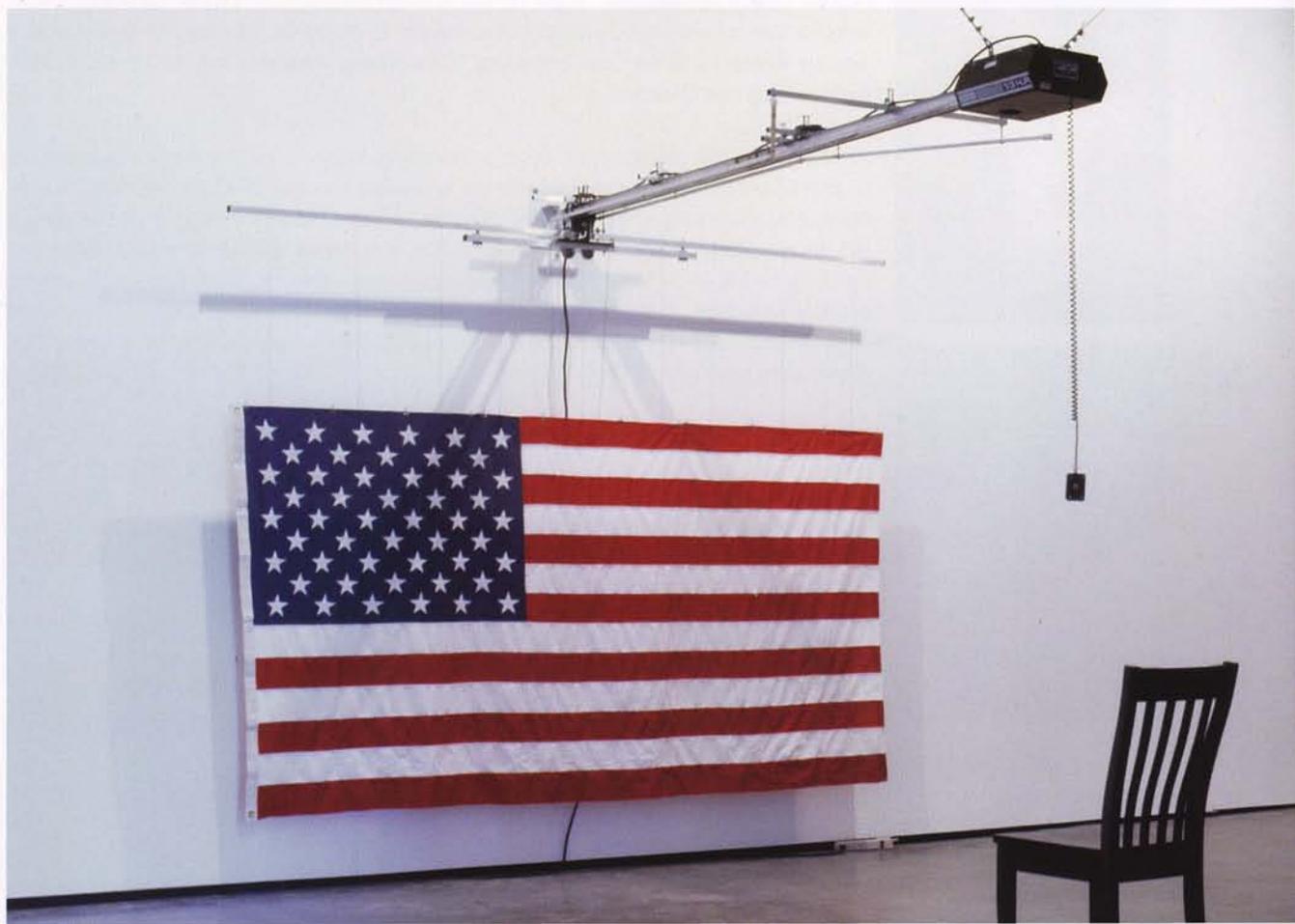


Chance often plays an important role in Will's installations, but less as strategy as in Duchampian gamesmanship or Cageian systems of inquiry. Instead, chance for Will is an iterative process of traveling accidental paths to barely understood problems through trial and error—with the final destination often being a complete surprise.

Value, for instance, an installation of 51 loaves of Wonder Bread and an equal value in pennies, began as a simple measurement piece, like Chris Burden's quantifications of U.S. and Soviet nuclear missile power. But over the course of the exhibit's run, the slices of bread shrunk ten percent, turning the artwork into both a pattern and process piece that humorously tapped an entire tradition of Minimalist concepts, while offering a beautiful inverted analogy for currency inflation. Similarly, *Guise*, a 2003 work, used a garage-door opener to move a seven-foot-wide American flag toward the viewer. Will's earliest intention was to simply wrap the viewer in the flag. But as Will gradually refined the mechanics, the piece's richness grew. The garage opener's clanging, metallic sound, he notes, is almost entirely unique to the American suburb. The flag's final, boxy shape surrounds the viewer like a curtained voting booth. Presto, a metaphor for the turn-of-a-new-century political geography.

Both the concept and the design evolve throughout the entire process. What's more, each piece is substantially different from the previous one, so I spend a lot of time just trying to figure out how to make the concept work. This is where my clunky inventiveness will frequently expose a slightly different point of view, or a gesture I instantly recognize as emblematic.

above:
Value
1997



right:
Guise
2003

In 2001, Will won a residency at Wyoming's Ucross Foundation, where he traveled with the vow of making objects only with materials he could find. His two art supply stores became a wrecking yard and a feed store. The resulting pieces emerged as some of his first discreet, static objects in years.

A series of crosses made out of nothing more than two pencils, two brushes, and two dog chew toys offer a nuanced series of evocations on Christian duty, conflict, and burden. *Butte*, made of an assembly of tilting pencils, and *Wyoming RV Steer*, made of hammered pieces of salvaged recreational vehicles, become rich metaphors for creativity's link to the landscape.



left top:
Pencil Cross
2001

The most recent of these new, more object-oriented and politically subtle explorations is *Reconstitution*. Exhibited for the first time at Nine Gallery during this retrospective, it is a simple reconstruction of a 20-foot tree made entirely from scrap lumber and millwork. Will says it grew out of the 2004 election year. He describes it as a "somewhat futile attempt to 'put back together' something I value" and a suggestion of "the value of the individual's potential to make a contribution, however small." Here, the directness first tested in the Ucross works gains the gravitas of commitment, time, and process. Standing as a grand analogy for the substance so often absent from the conservation rhetoric about the "Northwest forests," the piece also signals a growing willingness to expose the earnestness Will has so often covered in a veneer of irony and humor.

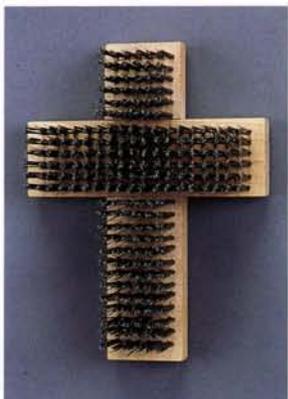
left middle:
Dog Chew Cross
2001



left bottom:
Brush type A
1999

These recent works reflect a growing synthesis of his studio and public works and his processes and politics as they demonstrate a willingness to embrace a new realm of artistic risk in their silence and stillness. While far less pointed, seen against a career of political fearlessness they have no less credibility as harbingers of the times. Like reading Shakespeare's sonnets after his tragedies and comedies, Will's newest work demands an appreciation of transparency and directness.

As children of '70s idealism and '80s rebelliousness, Will and his Northwest experimentalist peers have blithely operated outside the artworld's commercial and institutional framework. They have long understood the fringe to be, not a place of exile or marginalization, but the most fertile of Krause's expanded fields. Will stands apart, however, for how successfully he has turned the artworld's outer edges into the rich interface with the widest possible audience. Using the tools and techniques of the readymade with a Duchampian glee, Will has also tapped the longer tradition of the well-aimed ambiguity in a way that might make Leonardo smile.

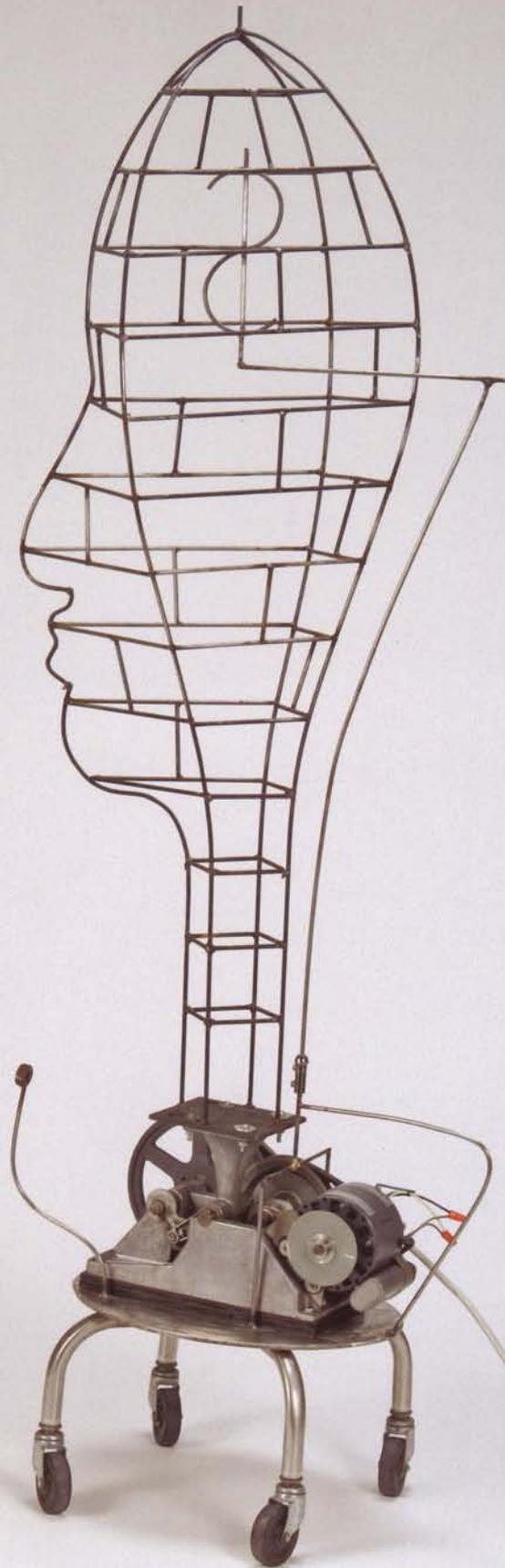


Randy Gragg is the architecture and urban design critic for *The Oregonian*.

- ⁱ From the artist's statement.
- ⁱⁱ Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from a series of interviews conducted with the artist in fall, 2004.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Rosalind Krause, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 5, Spring, 1975.
- ^{iv} Matthew Kangas, *Sculpture*, May—June, 1991



Wyoming RV Steer
2001



Bill Will

Born

1951 Tacoma, Washington

Education

1969-72 Washington State University

1972-73 Nihon University, Tokyo.

1974 BA in Fine Arts, Washington State University

Selected One-person Shows And Installations

- 2005 *Reconstitution*, installation, Nine Gallery, Portland, OR.
2003 *Guise*, installation, *Core Sample* exhibition of Portland Art.
2003 *93.4% un-American*, installation, Nine Gallery, Portland, OR.
2000 *Results of Questionable Experiments*, exhibition, Nine Gallery, Portland, OR.
1999 *Tyranny of Conformity*, installation, Nine Gallery, Portland, OR.
1997 *Value*, installation, Nine Gallery, Portland, OR.
1995 *Bull's-eye—Military Installation*, Nine Gallery, Portland, OR.
1992 *Impedimental Journey*, installation, Nine Gallery, Portland, OR.
1990 *Low Technology*, installation, Council on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA.
1989 *Positorium/Negatorium*, installation, The Art Gym, Marylhurst College.
1986 *Living Room (Set)*, installation, Oregon Art Institute, Portland, OR.
1985 *Time Exposure*, installation, Northwest Artists Workshop, Portland, OR.
1984 *Yuletide Relief Chamber*, installation, Contemporary Crafts Gallery, Portland, OR.
1982 *Abnormal Art and Borderline Cases*, exhibition, Rosco Louie Gallery, Seattle, WA.
1979 *Extensions*, installation, Northwest Artists Workshop, Portland, OR.

Selected Exhibitions

- 2001 *New Talent*, Alan Stone Gallery, New York City.
1999 *Sculpture: Praxis/Dynamics*, McAllen Museum, Texas, five person exhibition.
1996 *On the Waterfront*, Spaces gallery, Cleveland, OH.
1991 *Oregon Biennial*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR.
1988 *Fun Art/Moveable Parts*, The Hand Workshop, Virginia's Center for the Crafts.
1987 *Art is the Center*, Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, OR.
1981 *Oregon Biennial*, Oregon Art Institute, Portland, OR.
1978 *Artists of Oregon*, Oregon Art Institute, Portland, OR.

Selected Public Artworks

- 2006 *Sphere*, Tempe, AZ. Site specific plaza sculpture (in progress).
2005 *Dream Boat*, Tacoma, WA. Site specific lobby sculpture for Mary Bridge Children's Hospital.
2002 *Everyday Hero*, Portland, OR. Bronze sculpture for Fire Station and neighborhood offices.
2001 *Union Station Square*, Seattle, WA. Site specific artwork and public plaza design.
1998 *World's Greatest*, Hillsboro, OR. Site specific plaza sculpture.
1998 *Brief Cases*, Portland, OR. City Hall Council Chambers lobby. With Norie Sato and Tad Savinar.
1998 *Core Sample Time Line*, Portland, OR. 280-foot-long site specific artwork.
1997 *Transplant*, Hillsboro, OR. Seven artworks in collaboration with artist Don Merkt.
1991 *The Sciences and Art*, Olympia, WA. Washington State Schools Art Collection.
1989 *Street Wise*, Portland, OR. Text chosen in collaboration with novelist Katherine Dunn.
1987 *Light Tunnel*, Bethesda, MD. Kinetic electronic light sculpture.
1985 *Time Piece*, Portland, OR. Computer-controlled kinetic atrium light sculpture.

Selected Design Teams

- 2002-04 Valley Metro Rail, Phoenix/Tempe, AZ.
2000-01 Valley Transportation Authority, San Jose, CA.
1998-00 King Street Station Redevelopment, Seattle, WA. Lead artist.
1994-98 Hillsboro Extension, Westside Light Rail Project, Portland, OR.
1997 Hawthorne Bridge Repainting, Portland, OR.

- 1994-95 Waterfront Line Light Rail Transit Link, Cleveland, OH.
 1992-98 Westside Light Rail Project, Portland, OR.

Selected Commissions For Temporary Works

- 1992 *Clockworks*, Portland and Bend, OR. Sculpture for film *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*.
 1989 *Leave Me Alone*, Design animator for Michael Jackson music video and film.
 1987 *Waiting for Godot*, Portland, OR. Set design for Storefront Actors Theatre.
 1987 *High Lights*, Portland, OR. Kinetic light sculpture with Bill Boese and Jerry Mayer.
 1984 *No Categories*, Portland, OR. Set design for Portland State University resident dance company.
 1983 *Block*, Portland, OR. One-square park-block participatory installation for Artquake Festival.
 1982 *Dimensions*, Portland, OR. Set design for The Company We Keep, Portland State University.

Related Activities

- 2000-05 Board of Trustees, PICA (Portland Institute for Contemporary Art).
 1983-87 Board of Directors, Portland Center for the Visual Arts.
 1982- Faculty, Oregon College of Art & Craft.
 1980-82 Board of Directors, Northwest Artists Workshop.



Bill Will in his studio
2005

Exhibition Checklist

Dimensions are given in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.



- Patriotic Device, 1980**
 Bass drum pedal, flag
 33 x 7 x 14. Collection of the artist



- Personal Statement, 1987**
 Various materials, including electric motor, wood, Milk Bone™, tape player, light,
 75 x 14 x 18. Collection of the artist



- Just Say No, 1988**
 Various materials, including electric motor, neon, mannequin hand, and tape player
 36 x 13 x 16. Collection of the Artist



Burn This: Go to Jail, 1989

Toaster, wood, vinyl

10 x 7 x 12. Collection of Christine Bourdette and Ricardo Lovett



Machine that Draws on the Wall, 1990

Electric motor and mechanism, pencil

39 x 16 x 12. Courtesy of the artist



When Generals Become Heroes Again, 1991

Various materials, including electric motor, mannequin legs, tape player, confetti, cigar

Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist



Hair Time Line, 1994

Etched stainless steel, glass tube, hair

16 x 26 x 1. Courtesy of the artist



Supply and Demand, 1996

Various materials, including electric motor, giant fork and spoon, white bread

25 x 34 x 9. Courtesy of the artist



Value, 1997

White bread, pennies

Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist



Man, 1997

Electric motor and mechanism, steel

80 x 18 x 27. Courtesy of the artist



Tyranny of Conformity, 1999

Bowling balls, tape player and speakers, electric eyes

Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist



Presto log Jesus, 1999

Cast bronze, Presto log

14 x 4 x 4. Collection of Tad Savinar



Hook, 1999

Steel, 24-karat gold leaf

12 x 1 x 4. Collection of Eloise Damrosch and Gary Hartnett



Brush type A, 1999

Wire brushes

10 x 8 x 3. Collection of Don Wallace and Judi Brandel



Brush type B, 1999

Bristle brush

11 x 8 x 3. Courtesy of the artist



10 Loaves, 2000

White bread

10 x 10 x 10. Collection of Christine Bourdette and Ricardo Lovett



\$100, 2000

Materials: pennies, silicone

10 x 10 x 10. Collection of Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY



Studio Debris Sphere, 2000

162 layers of scrap materials (sheet rock, foam core, lumber, plywood, paper products)

24 inches in diameter. Collection of Christine Clark



Time Line of Age Appreciation, 2000

Graphite on paper

22 x 28. Collection of Mark Larson



Self Portrait Category 3, 2000

Graphite on paper

6 x 9. Collection of Don Merkt and Melissa Stewart



Wyoming RV Steer, 2001

Aluminum

17 x 29 x 9. Courtesy of the artist



Butte, 2001

A lot of pencils

13 x 8 x 8. Courtesy of the artist



Dog Chew Cross, 2001

Rawhide chew toys

9 x 7 x 2. Courtesy of the artist



Pencil Cross, 2001

Pencils

7 x 4 x 0.5. Courtesy of the artist



93.4% *un-American*, 2003

Clothing

Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist



Guise, 2003

Garage door opener, flag, chair, mechanical devices

Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist



\$100
2000

back cover:
10 Leaves
2000



The Art Gym: Marylhurst University