The background of the entire page is a light beige color with a subtle, repeating pattern of stylized flowers and leaves in a slightly darker shade of beige. The pattern is centered and covers the entire area.

TAD SAVINAR

Excerpts from a Conversation
1976-1999

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April 11 through May 20, 1999

The Art Gym

Marylhurst University

Tad Savinar: Excerpts from a Conversation, 1976-1999

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The Art Gym is a program of the Art Department of Marylhurst University

Paul Sutinen, Art Department, Assistant Chair

Terri M. Hopkins, Director and Curator of The Art Gym

The Art Gym

Marylhurst University

17600 Pacific Highway

Post Office Box 261

Marylhurst, Oregon 97036

(503) 636-8141

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Preface

For the past two decades Tad Savinar has functioned much as a state delegate to a national conversation on art and society. His primary concern has been to make art that reports and comments on political and social dysfunction in America as evidenced in the media, popular music, architecture, and urban design. He has also been persistent in seeking to shine some light on contemporary masculinity.

Savinar has exhibited nationally and has been the recipient of grants and fellowships at the national, state, and local levels. He has served on and chaired funding panels for the National Endowment for the Arts and been tapped as an advocate in the national debate on the role of the arts and government.

When Savinar began to be noticed by curators at the national level, he weighed the pros and cons of moving to New York. The artist chose to remain in Portland, and Oregon has now been the beneficiary of his creative drive for more than twenty-five years. He has added a unique and committed voice to the state's cultural chorus, and in 1998 he was honored with a State of Oregon Governor's Arts Award.

The Art Gym organizes an exhibition of this scope every one or two years to celebrate the work of artists who have made significant contributions to the art of this state. We wish to thank the following people for making this project possible. We are particularly indebted to the Jordan and Mina Schnitzer Foundation for their major gift to the catalogue. The Regional Arts and Culture Council provided

early support to the project as a whole. Philip Morris Companies, Inc. made it possible for us to exhibit an important painting from their collection in New York. Additional gifts came from George R. Stroemple, the Harold and Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation, Paul Schneider and Lauren Eulau, John and Joan Shipley, James Winkler, Jack and Marjorie Butler, Cynthia Hampton, and Tracy Savage of Savage Fine Art. Many individuals and corporations have shared work from their collections. The Oregon Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts helped fund The Art Gym's 1998–1999 full season of exhibitions, including this one. We are grateful for each and every contribution.

We also thank curator Chris Bruce for moderating the conversation excerpted in this catalogue, and Jack Butler, Dennis Bigelow, and Paul Sutinen for their insightful remarks.

Finally, it has been a pleasure to work with Tad Savinar once again. Savinar figured prominently in the early history of The Art Gym. His 1983 exhibition, "Talk Radio," set the standard for ambitious solo installations; his work as our exhibition designer from 1981 to 1985 raised the bar for presentation; and his contacts with other artists became the impetus for many shows. As we approach the twentieth anniversary of the gallery in the year 2000 it is an honor to present Tad Savinar's art.

—Terri M. Hopkins
Director and Curator

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Observations of a Curator

I always say, if you want to understand America, listen to talk radio, talk to a twelve-year-old, watch a soap opera, and listen to country music.

—Tad Savinar

The Art World and the Real World 1976–1979

In August 1976, Tad Savinar mounted a solo show at the Northwest Artists Workshop in Portland, Oregon. Although not his first exhibition after returning home from college, it was Savinar’s first in an “alternative space.”¹ The Workshop, an artist-run gallery founded in 1976, provided artists with an opportunity to present, test, and develop ideas outside of the commercial gallery context until it closed in 1989. The show was critical to Savinar as he continued to make the transition from student to professional artist. He was beginning to map out many of the themes and art-making strategies that would engage him for the next twenty-three years.

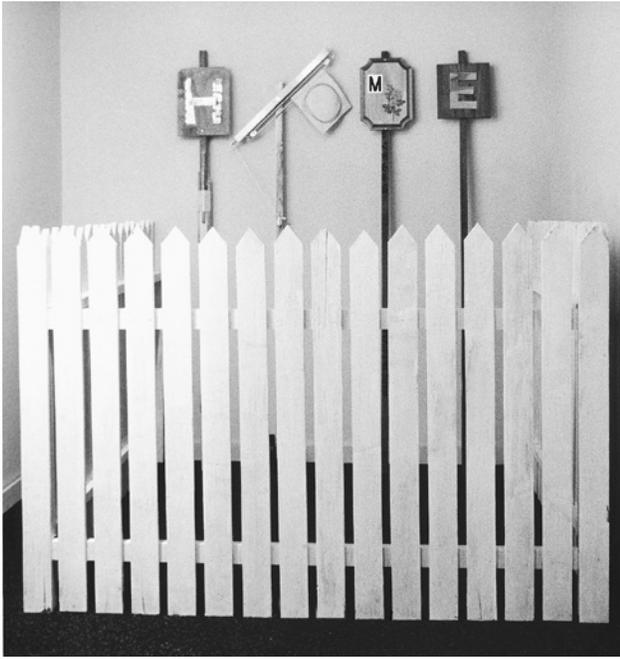
Savinar had been building temporary installations in his studio, then photographing them, drawing them, and building scale replicas that he enclosed in plexiglas boxes. At the Workshop he presented photographs, drawings, and replicas, and exhibited a full-scale installation for the first time.

Three works—*Home*, *Captured in the Abstract / Drawing for Scott Sonniksen*, and *Coffin Series*—were discussed in critical reviews by Roger Hull, professor of art at Willamette

University in Salem, Oregon, and occasional reviewer for *The Oregonian*, and Paul Sutinen, critic for Portland’s *Willamette Week*. Both critics commented on the exhibition’s links to both art and life.

Home is a small, pun-filled enclosure, awaiting a drama or implying one. Savinar leaned four poles up against the wall inside a white picket fence. On top of each pole is a panel with one of the letters from the word “home.” Sutinen wrote, “Each letter reflects a different socio-economic background from kitsch to class. The H is made from tin can scraps. It’s the band-aid junkyard approach to decorating. The O is a flag on a pulley arrangement. It’s from the contrived erector-set school. The M is from decoupage art classes. And the E is brass on mahogany. But to each of the groups that Savinar represents home is still home.”²

This was one of the first times Savinar had experimented not only with words and images but with the implications of different letter styles and a palette of domestic materials to imply different characters. Savinar’s placards, or “standards,” as Sutinen refers to these letters mounted on poles, could easily be held up as standards of American design by their advocates. Savinar has fenced them in with the



Installation of *Home* in the artist's studio, 1976.

proverbial white picket fence, thus “picketing” them all.

Roger Hull was interested in “the subtle, sparse way Savinar takes hold of a wide gamut of American pretensions and masks and holds them up for inspection. On this level, this creation is as literal as, say, Grant Wood’s ‘American Gothic,’ as biting, or more so, in its comment. The mockery of individuality in America comes up for scrutiny, and having been lured into this place by artistic wit we are hit on the head with social commentary.”³

An interest in drama is inherent in other works in the show. In the replica and drawing *Captured in the Abstract / Drawing for Scott Sonniksen*, a small wooden everyman is dwarfed by the word “ABSTRACT.” These oversized letters form the “set” that surrounds the character as he submits to his fate.

Abstraction, a mode of art-making practiced by his friend, the painter Sonniksen,

clearly did *not* capture Savinar’s imagination as he began to chart his course in the art world. He employed its strategies of color theory and graphic design, but always accompanied them with some reference to the world at large. The word “abstraction,” however, has implications beyond the art context. Ridiculous as it may seem to be caught up in or to be bound by an abstraction, our lives and decisions are indeed shaped by abstract ideas, whether they be beliefs about art, religion, or economics.

A third work, *Coffin Series*, is also a small drama. It consists of three color photographs of Savinar interacting with a makeshift coffin. In the first, the artist stands blindfolded, with hands bound, next to a coffin shot full of arrows. He is smoking a cigarette. In the second, he grieves over the coffin. In the third he lies next to it, as Sutinen writes, “à la box-and-contents illustration.”⁴ These three photographs function much like film stills, or perhaps excerpts from, or sketches for, a play.

Hull was also intrigued by the spin-off of related art works that the artist’s full-size constructions “spawned.” He wrote, “The result is that a showing of his works is a presentation of objects and reflections of objects that also are objects themselves. Constructions, photographs, drawings, and models reflect and interact—fueling each other with ‘content’ and meaning of an aesthetic kind. On one important level this show is about art, where it comes from and how it’s made. The synthetic nature of the creative process is nicely, quietly set forth here.”⁵

The drawings and replicas functioned as a documentation of the temporary installations. They were also more easily shipped and exhibited, and were marketable. By 1976 Savinar’s work had already been included in museum,

college, and commercial gallery exhibitions in Oregon, Washington, and California.

In July 1977, Savinar presented a show at Portland's Blue Sky Gallery, an alternative space devoted to photography. Savinar's exhibition included a storefront window installation, photographic records of the temporary studio constructions, and a limited-edition handmade book titled *Artists I Have Known – Old Dreams, Old Romances*.

The book is an important record of the concerns of the young artist. Mounted on its heavy cardboard pages were small photographs of Savinar's studio installations, which included tributes to contemporary American artists and rock and country musicians, and a number of installations with a more personal focus. One work devoted to the minimalist sculptor Carl Andre was an installation titled *Christmas with Carl, or I Read About Him in The His Tree Books*. It included a silhouette of Andre and objects symbolic of his art and life. A miniature of Andre's 1973 installation at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts (PCVA) mingled with a model train set, a reference to Andre's work as a brakeman. Another construction used large-scale text to quote a song that asked if Merle Haggard and Ferlin Husky were the Bach and Tchaikovsky of country-western music. In the process of charting his own course, Savinar was asking questions about the relationship of high art and popular culture to each other, and to his own life.

That fall he was invited by guest curator and artist Bill Hoppe to exhibit several of the scale replicas in a group show of Portland artists at PCVA, then the city's primary venue for contemporary American art.

In the process of selecting artists for the show, Hoppe visited studios and recorded

many interviews with Portland artists, and he eventually invited twelve to participate.⁶ In his catalogue essay, Hoppe made two important comments about Savinar, noting that he "begins the work with a single idea: an observation of social situations or human relationships," and going on to say, "If Rauschenberg wanted to act in the space between art and life, perhaps it can be said of Savinar's work, that it questions the boundaries between the art world and the real world."⁷

The show included a new work titled *Dual Signal Construction Construction*. It was a piece with origins in a road trip Savinar had made with Hoppe to Idaho to visit the artist Ed Kienholz. *Dual Signal Construction Construction* became part of a larger exploration of the layers of meaning implicit in the term



Studio installation of *Christmas with Carl, or I Read About Him in The His Tree Books*, 1976.

“construction,” explorations that culminated in 1978 with a one-person exhibition at the Seattle alternative space and/or.

At and/or Savinar pursued two interlocking themes. Perhaps because many artists work as carpenters, painters, and sheetrockers for their “day” jobs, he was clearly interested in the relationship between blue-collar construction and art constructions. The exhibition also examined power and sex in the relationships of men and women. It included constructions, photographs, drawings, “sets” (the artist’s term for scale replicas that he later called “boxes”), printed matter, and one found object. Except for the printed matter, all of the objects and drawings functioned without words.

The one found object in the exhibition was a crushed aluminum lunch pail that Savinar came upon late one night in 1975 while driving along Front Avenue in Portland. “It had fallen out of someone’s car and been run over. But still intact was a tuna sandwich and a thermos of coffee. I thought how some wife had slaved at some odd hour to make that lunch, and now her work had gone to waste.”⁸

The object had a story to tell. It also led the artist to an examination of work, class, and the relationships between men and women. Some of these explorations became constructions; others were articulated in the catalogue.

The project as a whole included significant text, not in the work or on the wall, but in a catalogue that accompanied the exhibition. Designed by Savinar, the publication provided a map of the territory he had staked out for the project, both visual and verbal. In content and presentation this document lies somewhere between a catalogue and an artist’s book. It was commercially printed on glossy stock, with a brown “construction” paper cover, pub-

lished in a numbered limited edition of four hundred, and packaged in a cardboard box hand-painted with three stripes of pink, blue, and black. The booklet opened to a floor plan of the and/or gallery space, and a title page on which four lists of job titles rolled down the sheet in columns like film credits. There were photographs of the four constructions in the exhibition, each accompanied by statements written by the artist and quotes from friends. Rather than didactic explanations, these small paragraphs acted as factual and fictional sidebars to the illustrations.

The jobs listed on the title page were mostly blue-collar occupations, all of them ending in “boy,” “man,” “girl,” or “woman.” There were sixteen listings for boy (Cowboy, Schoolboy, Flyboy, Doughboy, Tomboy), twenty-six for man—so many that this column continued onto the next page (Policeman, Chairman, Adman, Salesman, Con man, Foreman, Yes man, Weatherman), nine for girl (Cowgirl, Schoolgirl, Call girl, Flowergirl, Tomboy), and finally just four for woman (Washerwoman, Policewoman, Charwoman, Scrubwoman).

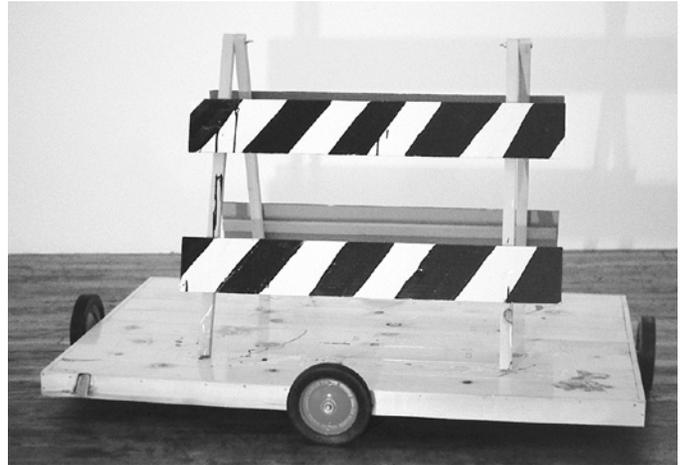
Savinar made these simple lists a telling form of social comment, and he would continue to use lists throughout his career as a way to articulate the many facets of an idea or theme. In the and/or catalogue the lists commented on class and gender. They made the reader aware of how many trade names ended in “man” but how few of the “professions” followed suit (doctor, lawyer, engineer). They pointed out how subservient job labels often ended in “boy” or “girl” (Bellboy, Kelly girl). Finally, the relative length of each list was revealing in its implied comment on the relationship between jobs and gender, this at a time when the women’s movement was just begin-

ning to affect opportunities for women in the workplace.

Twenty years later, it is apparent that although most of these jobs still exist, there has been a sea change in the language used to describe them. Savinar's 1978 lists marked a specific point in America's social history. They presented a nomenclature that has in the intervening years become nearly obsolete.

Homage To A Construction Worker's Wife was the art work most directly triggered by the lunch pail. It consisted of a construction barricade on top of a platform with wheels positioned to suggest that the platform can only move in circles. In the catalogue Savinar annotated the photograph of the construction with quotes, including, "There is a scene in Robert Altman's film '3 Women' where one of the female characters peers out the back window of a tavern to watch some men riding motorcycles around in a circle in the dirt. After the film Anna told me that so much of what men do appears pointless to women."⁹

A second construction, *I'm A Liberated Woman, I Do Stud Work*, explored links among construction work, country music, and swinging couples. Next to a wall of exposed two-by-four studs, Savinar roped off an area as if he were making a small boxing ring. Inside the ropes, he nailed a piece of sheetrock to the floor and tossed a pillow at one end, thus creating a bed for his female lead carpenter. Savinar had mailed a questionnaire to women who had placed personal ads for sexual encounters in swingers' magazines. He asked if they drove pickup trucks, if they listened to country music, whether or not they felt superior to their mates, and if they used sex to get other favors. The catalogue included some of their responses.



Homage To A Construction Worker's Wife, exhibited at and/or in Seattle in 1978.

The theme of sexual combat continued in *Bound And Determined, or Every Bodys Into S and M These Days*. In this construction, Savinar's harnessed stick-figure everyman had butted his head through a sheetrock wall in spite of his restraints. While the work was purportedly about sadomasochism and bondage, one has the impression that this particular "everyman" was "every artist" and that the wall he was up against was the wall of the art establishment. Perhaps the young artist was wondering if art itself was as much sadomasochistic exercise as high endeavor.

Dual Signal Construction Construction—a scale replica of which had been in the Hoppe show at PCVA—was also about human sexual behavior. Like *Homage To A Construction Worker's Wife*, it sprang from an object encountered in the world. "On the road to Hope, Idaho, with Bill, I saw a highway sign that had a stairway leading up to it on both sides. The sign was covered with canvas and had no message."¹⁰

Savinar's *Dual Signal Construction Construction* had stairs in front of a wall. A center



The artist in the studio with *Dual Signal Construction Construction*, 1977.

post with crossbars emerged from the top of the stairs to support two pails filled with blue and pink “paint,” and paint brushes. Above hung two squares of cloth—one painted pink, the other blue. These elements implied that a visitor had climbed the stairs, chosen a color, painted a small flag, and thus wordlessly signaled his or her sexuality. On another level, these small painted squares were an irreverent nod to the history of abstract art—the white-on-black and black-on-white paintings of Malevich come to mind—and served as a reminder that even colors are laden with code.

Dual Signal Construction Construction entered a territory of philosophically complex ideas—ideas about signs and signifiers that were to be the subject of much postmodern theorizing in the years to follow. Savinar, however, was not looking to art theorists as much as he was taking his cues from popular culture as found on the street and heard on the airwaves.

Following the and/or exhibition, the artist stopped making art for about a year and took Polaroid photographs with an SX-70 camera. These pictures of signs, barricades, and obscure but provocative objects encountered on the street were the inspiration for his next body of work.

Signs and Messages 1980–1982

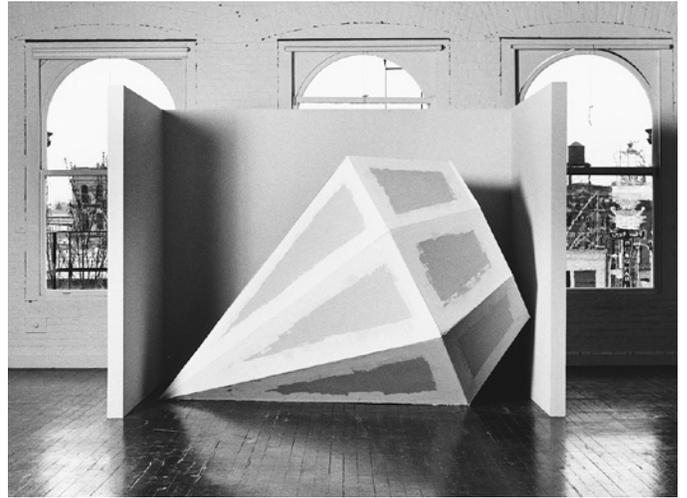
The ideas of signs and the messages they conveyed—or failed to convey—occupied much of Savinar’s interest in the first years of the 1980s. A group show at the Portland Art Museum in 1980 provided him with an opportunity to make several large new works and explore this territory further.

The museum, most likely responding to contemporary interest in site-specific art installations, invited Savinar, Christine Bourdette, and Peter Teneau to create work for a show

titled “Spatial Exercises.” Savinar made three new constructions, none of which was particularly site-specific, though the artist built new walls altering the shape of the museum space allotted to him and sited one work in a corner.

Two of the three constructions, *Platform* and *Blackboard*, continued his interest in the relationship between art and non-art constructions. *Platform*, like *Dual Signal Construction Construction*, had stairs, this time leading up to a railed landing and an empty blackboard. *Blackboard* was a two-part piece in which a bright yellow podium faced a portable yellow and green “black” board. On the blackboard Savinar had written the words, “Learn to move,” and on the podium, “Turn to Louvre,” thereby setting into play an odd dialogue between the objects. The choice of a blackboard and a podium underscored the idea of an interchange, albeit one in which both parties lecture and neither appears to be listening.

In 1981 Savinar was once again included in a group show at PCVA. This time he built an immense cut-diamond gem shape out of



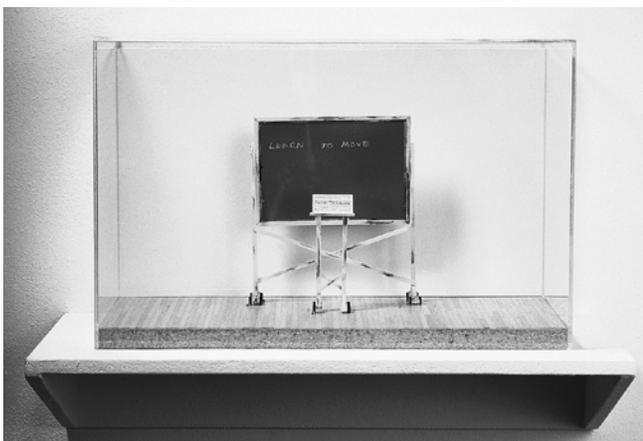
Rock installed at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, 1981.

sheetrock and called it *Rock*, a triple pun on diamonds, sheetrock, and rock-and-roll. In 1982, with Ronald Reagan firmly in the White House, *Rock* was shown at Artists Space in New York City. The money mania of the 1980s had begun, both within and outside of the art world. An oversized diamond made of gypsum was an apt metaphor for the times.

“Talk Radio” and “A Few Good Men” 1982–1985

The year 1982 was a turning point for Savinar. He was tuning in to talk radio and listening to callers on Portland’s KKEY express their concerns and opinions. In response, he created a large new series of work titled “Talk Radio,” which he exhibited in The Art Gym at Marylhurst College.¹¹ At the same time he was organizing an exhibition of emerging New York artists for PCVA.

Savinar’s 1983 “Talk Radio” exhibition addressed many of the topics filling the airwaves—war, the media, violence, America, sex, religion, and missing children. Some of



Blackboard scale replica in plexiglas box, exhibited along with the full-size construction in the “Spatial Exercises” exhibition at the Portland Art Museum, 1980.

these art works, like *Champ* and *Eve*, were painted with house paints directly on the gallery walls. Others, such as *The New Religion* and *Enfant Perdu*, combined wall painting and objects. The wall paintings were painted over at the close of the exhibition, but, like Sol LeWitt's wall drawings, could be duplicated at other locations.

In his catalogue essay for the Marylhurst exhibition, Roger Hull compared these bold graphic works to "media messages" that could be "flashed at us again, and somewhere else, again, later on." He continued, "in between flashes, Savinar's works exist in the artistic equivalent of a memory bank." He compared the process to "media storage and retrieval," and noted that unlike traditional wall paintings, Savinar's art works "relied for their meaning on no specific context (such as a church,

city hall, or post office lobby). They are made to make sense anywhere, just as media messages are. Their only 'context' is the awareness we bring to them, wherever we might encounter them, of modern times."¹²

Ron Glown, writing in *Vanguard*, suggested that "Talk Video" might be a more accurate title, as the work was "more readily located within the medium of television than as constructs of language."¹³ The observation was apt, for even though Savinar was working with terse words and phrases, he was not employing sound. More important, several of the works dealt with television directly in their content and indirectly in their use of simple messages and bold graphics.

Eve was a twenty-foot-wide wall painting in which white dotted outlines of a battleship and a television floated alongside each other



Untitled (coffin and crosses), *Untitled* ("dead bomb"), *False Future*, and *Champ* in the "Talk Radio" exhibition at The Art Gym at Marylhurst College, 1983.

on a black background. It had been inspired by the flickering of television sets and video games in the windows of many homes in the artist's neighborhood on Christmas Eve, 1982, during the war between Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands. *Eve* highlighted the manner in which war, both real and imaginary, had entered American living rooms via the television set.

Savinar's *Champ* (page 21), a pale lilac map of the United States on a bold, vertically bisected black and red field, could be seen as a tongue-in-cheek comment on American bravado. In retrospect it reads as an ironic precursor to the computer animated graphics and special sound tracks that have marked news coverage for more recent wars with such catchy titles as "Desert Storm."

With the help of an Oregon Arts Commission fellowship, Savinar began working with printmaker Steven Nance Sasser to make small screenprints of the wall images, including *Champ* and *Eve*. Like the three-dimensional replicas, the prints were commercially viable.

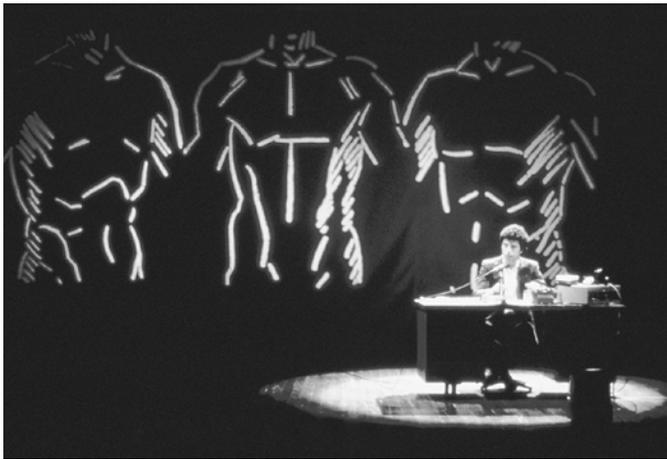
A National Endowment for the Arts individual fellowship in sculpture fueled Savinar's studio work and brought additional attention from regional and national venues. From 1983 to 1985 he was invited to exhibit installation pieces around the country at venues including Artists Space and the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, New Langton Arts in San Francisco, the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, and Pennsylvania State University. Regionally, he presented topical new work at Portland's Reed College and Seattle's Center on Contemporary Art.

Ned Rifkin, acting as a guest curator for the New Museum, included two works by



The artist installing *Vet* at the Center on Contemporary Art in Seattle, 1984.

Savinar in his exhibition "Signs." *Champ* and *Pursuit* were both exhibited as full-scale paintings on the wall. In his catalogue essay for the exhibition, Rifkin wrote that the artists in his show — which in addition to Savinar included Gary Falk, Ken Feingold, Marian Galczenki, Jenny Holzer, John Knight, Manual, Matt Mullican, and Al Souza — shared "a certain muteness, neutrality, and reluctance to signature." He further observed, "Yet this work is not styleless. On the contrary, there is a distinctive look — that of the anonymous designer. The cool hand of the minimal art of the '60s and early '70s has resurfaced now, reharnessed to a decidedly purposeful end. Historically this work springs from the ironic and cynical distance that was characteristic of pop and the social and often programmatic inclinations of conceptual art, in addition to drawing upon the reductive tendencies of minimalism. Nevertheless, as with all art of our century, the measure of success is not simply resourceful-



Eric Bogosian performing in front of Savinar's rear-screen projections, in *Talk Radio* at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts,

ness, but rather the depth of the artist's synthesis and ability to yield greater insight into the world in which we live."¹⁴

According to Rifkin, Savinar's "encoded reportage and oblique social commentary" shared with others in the exhibition "the artists' need to eschew the centuries-old traditions of touch, gesture, and the hand in favor of a more generic sign. . . . The modesty in this work speaks quite clearly to the priority given to authority of content over the cult of authorship."¹⁵

Savinar continued to report on the culture with minimal editorializing. In the predominantly personal, high-touch environment of the Pacific Northwest art world, Savinar's cool, minimal "signs" proved enigmatic for the public and critics alike.

In 1983 Savinar also completed a curatorial project for PCVA that brought him into contact with a number of young male artists on the verge of making it big in New York. In the context of continuing feminist rhetoric, Savinar proposed an all-male review. He titled his exhibition "A Few Good Men." It opened in the fall of the year and featured work by

performance artist Eric Bogosian, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, and visual artists Robert Longo, Mike Glier, and Richard Prince. All of these artists were making work about the contemporary male psyche.

Savinar's contact with Bogosian proved particularly fruitful. The two went on to develop a stage play titled *Talk Radio* in which Bogosian played a talk-show host. Savinar proposed the idea, Bogosian wrote the script, and together they created the performance. A National Endowment for the Arts inter-arts project grant in performance and a local Metropolitan Arts Commission award supported this work with Bogosian. The play premiered at PCVA in 1985. Savinar's set included projections of colorful graphic images similar in their bold use of color, simple graphics, and schematics to the work he had presented at Marylhurst. Two years later a further refined *Talk Radio* played at Joseph Papp's Public Theater in New York for thirty-nine weeks to rave reviews. Since then it has continued to be produced regularly by theaters around the world. The film rights were eventually purchased, and Oliver Stone directed a movie based on the play.

From *Autoflex* to *Cover Shot*
1986–1990

The play *Talk Radio* made it clear to Savinar that he could not say what he needed to express with a few spare words in a visual art work. He once again stopped making art. This time he began to write plays full time. In 1986 he wrote *Autoflex*, *Re-wired*, and *Brushfires: A Biased View of Power in the West*. Remarkably, all three were promptly staged by Portland Civic Theatre.¹⁶

Autoflex was a string of thirteen monologues, not surprising given Savinar's close work with Bogosian, a master of the form. *Oregonian* critic Bob Hicks wrote, "Savinar takes the single idea of aloneness and worries it from a baker's dozen angles: painfully, comically, sometimes with bemused satisfaction, sometimes with the shattering sense that it's wrong."¹⁷ The theme of aloneness is something Savinar had also explored in his earlier visual work—as the solo everyman in *Captured in the Abstract / Drawing for Scott Sonniksen* and *Bound And Determined, or Every Bodys Into S and M These Days* attest—and it is a theme he continues to articulate.

Re-wired tackled another persistent concern in Savinar's work—the often miswired relationships between men and women. In its abandonment of monologue for dialogue, *Re-wired* also marked a maturation in Savinar's writing for the stage. The one-act play was commissioned by Portland Civic Theatre as a companion piece to August Strindberg's *The Stronger*, in which a man's wife and mistress compete to possess him. Unlike the Strindberg play, in which the man is the prize, in *Re-wired* the man is more of a booby prize. The wife comes to realize that she stands to gain

by passing him off on the mistress. The play reinforces the view, also present in Savinar's 1978 construction *I'm a Liberated Woman, I Do Stud Work*, that the woman is the stronger in these intimate male/female relationships.

Savinar's third play of 1986, *Brushfires: A Biased View of Power in the West*, mixed monologue and dialogue, and explored issues of masculinity and maleness. Quoted in a preview article by Hicks, Savinar explained that he saw a move by men his age (in their mid-thirties) "toward traditional masculine images—at least to add to their bag of tricks if not to replace the vaunted sensitivity of the the '60s and '70s. . . . A lot of it has to do with just buying things. Buying a Gore-Tex jacket. Buying a Jeep. Buying a gun."¹⁸

But Savinar's focus was shifting once again. By the mid-1980s he had married, bought a home, and become a father. Looking forward, he also began to look back, to take stock. He



Bob McGranahan in a promotional photograph for *Autoflex* at Portland Civic Theatre, 1986.

began testing these ideas with a series of works on wallpaper and a few paintings. They played with notions of dreams, sex, nostalgia, and the past. He said at the time, “Originally my visual work was very hard-edged, very socio-political, almost screaming at people. When I started writing I discovered that’s where that ought to be. Now my paintings are softer, more of a one-on-one experience with the viewer. I’d like my paintings to become even more romantic. When I say romantic I mean the romance of memory. Sight, smells, color. . . .”¹⁹

Two more plays were launched at the end of the decade. *The 4 Mickies*, a drama about artists at mid-career, was completed and produced by Artists Repertory Theatre in 1988. *Cover Shot*, a work that skewers postmodern architects and urban developers, was commissioned in 1990 by director Dennis Bigelow for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Portland. These two works continued Savinar’s earlier interests in the dilemmas facing artists, while expanding the net of his social criticism to include urban design.²⁰

Civic and Private Personae

1990–1999

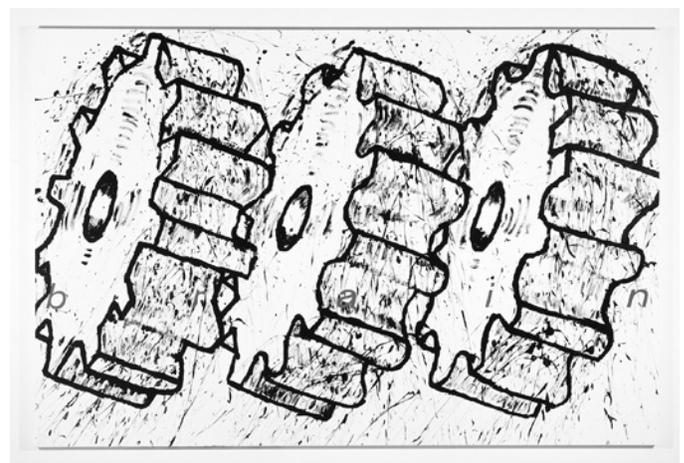
In the 1990s Savinar has once again concentrated his energies in the visual arts. Since 1991 he has mounted six solo exhibitions of art works in many media on a series of topics. His studio work has come to mix introspection with social comment. He continues to examine the society we live in, the art world, and the male psyche (now that of a middle-aged man).

A 1991 public art commission for a new State Lands building in Salem, Oregon, fostered the transition. Savinar worked with technicians to sandblast images of industry, technology,

and agriculture onto the building’s two-story lobby windows. He also developed a translucent color stain that sign painters used to apply his images to the building’s wood paneling. In the work for the interior, he returned to the idea of home and tested the more nostalgic imagery of the recent wallpaper pieces and paintings on a larger scale.

In 1991, at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, he presented his first major exhibition since choosing to focus on drama in 1986. Speaking with Bob Hicks, Savinar said, “I’m doing pieces about society and advertising. Money and politics. Media. These are certainly the greatest forces in our lives. My ideas come straight out of this time. And I see this time as a very manufactured thing.”²¹ The show, titled “Conceived in the ’80s, Produced in the ’90s,” included an eclectic range of works in many media, most of them fabricated by others.

Image and text play off one another to pointed, often humorous effect. In Savinar’s large painting on canvas, *Juggernaut (Action Painting)*, giant gears roll forward over finger-painted smudges and come close to obliterating the word “brain.” As L. J. Whittemore



Juggernaut (Action Painting) at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 1991.



Religion and Training, Race and Gender, and Scripts and Genes, prints produced during Savinar's residency at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia, exhibited at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 1992.

pointed out in a review of the show, “Thick splatters and the title pay homage to Jackson Pollock’s ‘drip paintings’ of the late ’40s. But the ‘action’ implied by the disembodied cogs or the fingerprints also pokes fun at Pollock’s nigh-mystical seriousness and his status as modernist art-hero.”²²

Savinar’s titles often enter the fray, functioning like captions or punchlines. An image of a television tuned to a multicolored test pattern is titled *The Supreme Court*. A stainless-steel work, *The Whole Ball of Wax*, jabbed at broadcasters for becoming lackeys of commerce by pointing out that the word “television” had the word “levis” embedded in its core.

But there were other works indicating a new introspection. In the screenprint on wood, *Our Daily Choice*, a jester is poised between a plus sign and a minus sign.

Later in 1991 Savinar completed several works during a residency at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In each, the

screenprinted image of a four-by-eight sheet of plywood was overlaid with words or images or both. *Oregonian* critic Randy Gragg compared them to “a series of flags,” that “wave over the touchy terrain of cherished American values.”²³

But traditional American values don’t fare so badly. In *Scripts and Genes*, the word “predetermination” spans the breadth of the linen banner. Flanked by two ordinary water glasses is an image of a man swan-diving from a cliff into the unknown. One is led to consider just what is predetermined. The decision to leap? To risk all? The landing place? Is this bravery or foolhardiness? It may also remind the viewer of that old parental saw, “Just because your friends jump off a cliff. . . .”

Nor is the art world let off the hook. Describing one of the wittiest of the series, Kathy Curtis wrote, in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Tad Savinar deflates lofty concepts in *Race and Gender*, a goofy screenprinted image of a horse and cow embracing on a fake wood-

grain background. By reducing two of the killer topics of contemporary art to the banalities of commercial playroom decor, Savinar skewers the sound-bite rhetoric that often takes the place of serious discourse.”²⁴ Savinar’s work *Race and Gender* is to the 1990s what *Captured in the Abstract / Drawing for Scott Sonniksen* was to the 1970s, a questioning of the dominant attitude toward art-making.

In his 1992 show at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Savinar exhibited a series of works, again in many different media, that were primarily text driven. In most of the art works, text was presented without images. Much of the work also revealed a shift in emphasis to an examination of self and family. *The First 40 Years of Life* pronounced, “We are all self-proclaimed nice people.” Its companion piece, *The First 4 Years of Life*, was a list of names the artist’s daughter had given to her toys. A type of “the culture strikes back” inventory of the artifacts of a late-twentieth-century childhood, it was a humorous reminder of how little influence parents have.

Lois Allan summarized the work’s shift of bearings in a review for *Reflex*: “Here’s a guy whose cryptic words, whether placed on a wall as art objects or spoken in full-length plays, have probed the ills and foibles of society. Consumerism, phony relationships, materialism, bad art and architecture are just a few of his subjects, but this time around the subject is (surprise!) love . . . and we’re talking family values here. . . . Though intimate and unassuming [this show] carries Savinar’s unique blend of opposites: craftsmanship with disdain for the hand-made, elegance with a nonchalant attitude toward aesthetics, and where materials are concerned, adventurous openness and rigorous control.”²⁵

Two years later, in 1994, Savinar presented the exhibition “Life and Death” at Savage Fine Art in Portland. It was a study of opposites and continued mid-life introspection. *All the 25 Year Olds* was a reminder to all the forty-five-year-olds that “They don’t even know you exist.” *Daytimer* was a detailed chart of how a man spends his day (“doing good for others 2%, letting cat out 72%, panicking about prostate cancer 31%, wishing for great sex 34%, worrying about actually getting great sex 39%, wondering if anyone will remember you after you’re dead 14%”). *Our Lives* (pages 28–29) itemized fifty-two affections from the significant to the silly: “I love my life, I love my team, my schedule, my class, my grocer” and finally, “I love my shoes.” This take-off on the “I ♥ MY” bumper stickers is registered on top of a contemplative blue landscape with a bridge in the foreground. This may be the proverbial bridge, and by mid-life we have surely come to it.

In the 1990s Savinar also began to engage full-force as an artist in the civic and political life of the community and the nation. He participated in numerous public art projects, design teams, art selection committees, and urban planning projects. He served on funding panels for the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller and Warhol Foundations, the Oregon Arts Commission, and Portland’s Metropolitan Arts Commission (now the Regional Arts and Culture Council). He was a vocal participant in the national debate on the future of the NEA and its relationship to individual artists.

A number of public commissions provided him with new opportunities to create large-scale work, an interest he had previously addressed in the wall paintings and theatre



I Want, public art commission for the University of Texas at San Antonio, 1996.

sets.²⁶ Perhaps the most ambitious of these was a three-part screenprint on canvas.²⁷ Twenty-seven feet high and ninety feet long, it was commissioned by the University of Texas at San Antonio. Completed in 1996, *I Want* is about choices, desires, and second thoughts. In this work the artist's recent public and private themes come together. On a screenprinted wood-grain background, Savinar layered images alluding to time, light, and space—a clock, the night sky, a chandelier, soaring birds, and a pair of locomotives diverging on a split track. Spiraling over these visual cues are multiple resolutions and desires: “I want to shout less. I want to sing more.” Through a combination of words and images Savinar once again tells us something about ourselves and places the choices we make in perspective.

In 1997 and 1998 Savinar prepared two exhibitions jointly sponsored by Savage Fine Art and the S. K. Josefsberg Studio in Portland. The first was titled “ordering the universe,” the second “fools and mortals.” Savinar con-

tinued to pursue three main themes: a man's desire to get a handle on the big, big topics such as the order of the universe and the meaning of life and death; the often inept quality of communication and expectations between men and women; and the interactions of parents with their children.

God's First Schematic Design for the Universe (pages 40–41) is a tongue-in-cheek spin-off of Savinar's design-team work. He speculates about preparations prior to that first day described in Genesis by inventing a set of post-it notes. There is a brainstorming quality in the order of the list and its leaps of free association within topics. “Significant ideas to date” lists things necessary not just to the physical functioning of the universe, but to its aesthetic and romantic potential as well: “stars, fur, knees, tides, granite, gravity, Paris, red hair, the moon, and the aspen tree.” A reminder to create different time zones follows a note about small animal ears and big mouths. Under loud things, Ford V-8s are mentioned in the same breath

with the Big Bang. In the time category are reminders to consider the relative duration of phenomena such as the time it might take light to travel from the sun “to the surface of this paper: 7 million years, 7 minutes,” or the “average length of the male orgasm: 2.4 seconds.”

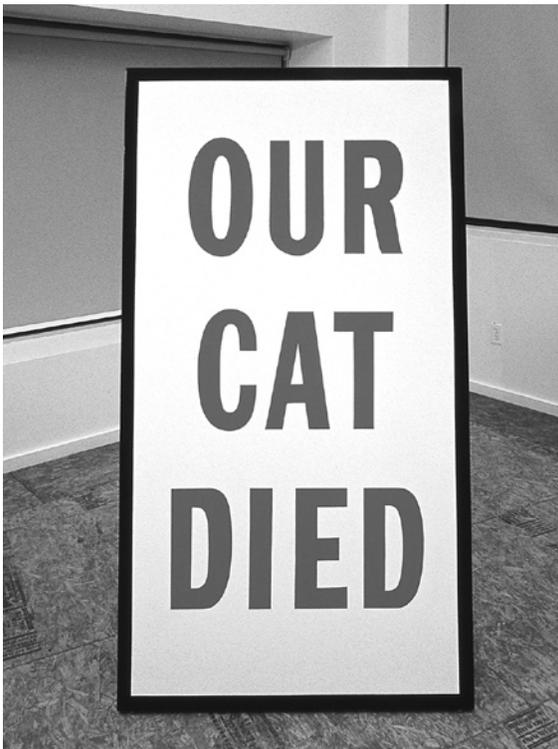
Clearly, it was not to be a perfect world. Some concepts that “still need a little work” include “car alarms, flocked wallpaper, and the Great Salt Lake.” The notes also set the stage for difficult relationships between men and women on the one hand and among whole societies on the other. Women will seek mates “who will cry at movies,” while men will look for “someone who has great legs.” Not everyone will speak the same language.

The list also reminds us that much has changed since the writing of Genesis (there are

no more dinosaurs, but we do have Paris) and how much remains the same (gravity, the desires of women and men). It seems that the big picture, the small picture, nature, and culture were laid out from the get-go, but in hindsight, Savinar seems to be asking, “What was God thinking?”

In Savinar’s fall 1998 exhibition, “fools and mortals,” solitude, intimacy, and expectations among men, women, and children were the central themes. At the same time, he had not lost sight of the larger world and art world around him. One piece, *Mother’s Pride* (page 45), sums up many of his current concerns. It is a painting of Dolly and Bonnie, “the world’s first cloned sheep and her first natural born offspring.” As noted on the copper tag that hangs from the painting, the artist commissioned another artist, Sean Cain, to paint a portrait of the two sheep from a black-and-white photocopy of a copyrighted Associated Press wire photo. Although Dolly was cloned, Bonnie was not, and the tag further notes that neither Bonnie’s father nor the photographer who captured the sheep on film for the wire service was acknowledged in the Associated Press story. Much like work done early in Savinar’s career about real world and art world constructions, this piece references a complex web of overlapping social issues and art issues. These include cloning, surrogate mothers, fathers’ rights, and copyright to genetic material on the one hand, and authorship, appropriation, attribution, and copyright in the making of art on the other.

As he approaches fifty, Savinar’s work continues to comment on the overlapping worlds of art and life, and to address art’s role in public and private arenas. In his public art works he is concerned with art’s role in giving voice



A Sign, shown in the “fools and mortals” exhibition at S. K. Josefsberg Studio in 1998.

to individuals within their communities. In his studio work he addresses private life—self and family. His everyman is no longer a wooden stick figure who alternately trumpets his opinions with bravado or bangs his head against the wall of art and convention in frustration. Instead, he is an unseen note-

taker who wants to make sense of himself and his surroundings. Diligent in his graphing and listing and charting, he wants to get things right. At this point in life, although still frustrated, he is now both conscious of and amused by his shortcomings.

—Terri M. Hopkins

Notes

1. Savinar had his first exhibition at the Fountain Gallery of Art in Portland in 1973.
2. Paul Sutinen, "Savinar: a tad funny-sad," *Willamette Week*, August 30, 1976.
3. Roger Hull, "Art Views: From one idea an entire show grew," *Northwest Magazine, The Oregonian*, Sunday, August 22, 1976.
4. Paul Sutinen, *Willamette Week*, August 30, 1976.
5. Roger Hull, *The Oregonian*, Sunday, August 22, 1976.
6. The list included ten men—Portland patriarchs and Museum Art School professors Michele Russo and Louis Bunce, Portland State University professor Mel Katz, photographers Robert Di Franco and Terry Toedtemeier, conceptual artist Dick Lodwig, printmaker Lou Ocepek, then-painter Orleonok Pitkin, sculptor Richard Rezac, and Savinar; and two women—painters Anne Griffin Johnson and Lucinda Parker.
7. Bill Hoppe, *An Exhibition Organized By Bill Hoppe*, exhibition catalogue, Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon, 1977.
8. Tad Savinar, *Tad Savinar*, exhibition catalogue, and/or, Seattle, Washington, 1978.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Marylhurst College became Marylhurst University in 1998.
12. Roger Hull, "Notes on the Exhibition," *Tad Savinar: Talk Radio*, exhibition catalogue, The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon, 1983.
13. Ron Glowen, "Tad Savinar," *Vanguard*, Spring 1983, p. 46.
14. Ned Rifkin, *Signs*, exhibition catalogue, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, New York, 1985, p. 5.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
16. *Autoflex* premiered at PCVA before its run at Portland Civic Theatre.
17. Bob Hicks, "Speedy 'Autoflex' almost ferocious," *The Oregonian*, 1986.
18. Bob Hicks, "'Brushfires' explores masculinity, maleness," *The Oregonian*, 1986.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Cover Shot* was later rewritten and finally staged in 1994.
21. Bob Hicks, "Blackout Bingo and other fine arts: Tad Savinar plays the fame game," *The Oregonian*, April 21, 1991.
22. L. J. Whittemore, "Packing a punch, Artist Savinar proves provocative with visual one-liners and in-jokes," *The Oregonian*, April 12, 1991.
23. Randy Gragg, "Irony Coast: Two Northwest artists color wry works with sarcasm," *The Oregonian*, November 29, 1991.
24. Cathy Curtis, "Weaving New Life Into Everyday Objects," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1995. *Race and Gender* was included in an exhibition at the Guggenheim Gallery at Chapman University in Orange County in April 1995.
25. Lois Allan, "Tad Savinar at Elizabeth Leach Gallery," *Reflex*, November/December, 1992.
26. Since 1990, Savinar has worked on twenty design teams, nine urban master plans, and ten public art projects. For six years he was an artist member of Portland's Westside Light Rail project, the largest public works and public art project in Oregon's history.
27. *I Want* was fabricated in Philadelphia by the Fabric Workshop, and in Portland by William Park, with typography by John Laursen.

An Illustrated Conversation with Tad Savinar

The Art Gym invited Seattle curator Chris Bruce to moderate a discussion with the artist and a group of men familiar with various aspects of his work. Participants were Tad Savinar, theatrical director Dennis Bigelow, psychiatrist Jack Butler, and artist and arts writer Paul Sutinen. Excerpts from their conversation, on January 9, 1999, are presented below, accompanied by color plates of relevant works from the exhibition.

CHRIS: Based on the work, if you did not know Tad Savinar, who would you think he was?

DENNIS: It is difficult to divorce the two. For me the Tad I know permeates the work.

PAUL: In the 1970s when I started looking at the work, I saw that little stick figure you used as a surrogate for the artist. Now days there is not so much a figure, but a person's voice posing questions: What has affected my life? Who am I now? The stick figure doesn't just try to stick his head through a wall anymore — he is poking around trying to figure things out.

TAD: The public Tad and the private Tad perhaps. The stick figures were the public person, and the work has moved on to allow the private person to become part of it.

JACK: I think work of this nature comes closest to being an expression of the inner person.

TAD: I often ask myself: Would I like my work if I came across it at an exhibition? For me it is a record of my thinking and investigation, whereas for the viewer it is about responding to the art. Those are two very different activities.

CHRIS: Do you think if someone doesn't laugh or find humor in the work they can get it, get something out of it? My best response to your work is always pleasure, laughter. It's a very disarming response.

DENNIS: Do you think this is because you know the artist?

CHRIS: No, I think it is because the work knows me.

DENNIS: Getting back to your original question, dealing solely with the images — who is the person in the work? It is a character. A character that comes with contradictions. A character that is yearning not merely for himself, but for others as well. That is the impression I get from the images.

CHRIS: Do you think that is influenced by the theatrical experience? That's very much a theatrical kind of projection.

DENNIS: *Everything* I say comes from a theatrical perspective. So much of what Tad deals with in his visual or theatrical work is essential language, is dialogue. Even if it is purely visual there is a dialogue between a high chair and a classical chair in juxtaposition. That's how I see it. I see it as a dialogue.

PAUL: For me, in looking at my mental catalogue of your work, the strongest pieces are those where I see a personality in the work — whether I see that person as Tad, or as a person who thinks like this. In contrast, in a work like *Champ* there is no person implied. It talks about something larger, some other set of ideas.

TAD: I think it's fascinating that you say that *Champ* does not imply a person, because that was a very specific exercise in trying to turn a nation into a persona. Taking a strongly recognizable, psychologically charged image that represents something different to all people, painting it directly on a wall at a size that is larger than something we might see in the newspaper or on TV, but smaller than three thousand miles across. You can't grapple with the persona of an image when it's three thousand miles across.

PAUL: Your work over the last decade more regularly gets me at a gut level, instead of intellectualizing. *Champ* doesn't get me at the gut level the way that "My daddy reads to me at night" [*Heavens*, page 37] does.

JACK: It's interesting to me that the work triggers, in each of us, a very individual, almost idiosyncratic reaction.

TAD: That has been a conscious effort throughout my career. I remember in the '70s when I was making the room constructions, I was using the phrase "I make my work to remind myself that I felt like that." Then in the '80s I referred to



Champ
1983, screenprint on paper, 17 x 20

myself as a reporter—a reporter of issues rather than events. I wanted to get away from the object and concentrate solely on the idea. It was a very different approach from that of artists who were concerned with recording a moment in the studio. The work was not like a painter who was involved in the activity of standing in front of a canvas: the bounce of the canvas against the brush, the smell of the paint, the seduction of color. I was not interested in capturing that specific moment in a physical form and then hanging it on a wall for others to look at. I wanted to pose a question or report on a feeling. The intent was to get completely away from the sacred art object by just painting these things directly on the wall.

I wanted to have a dialogue directly with the viewer about some specific experience that we both may have had previously. I used colors that one might find in advertising or on TV. *I Am Life* is a direct lifting of the Federal Express colors. I was trading on our collective visual memories of day-to-day life and posing questions to the viewer about our lives. I was hyper-interested in the viewer's response to the works. I wanted to deal with the ideas—not just a painting of a tree, but the idea of the tree. The wall paintings had no trace of the artist's touch, only his thinking; and no object, only an image. One of the fascinating things I found was that people were still just as interested in how they were executed, *because* there was no object. It was an exercise in futility or an exercise that took me down another road—to theatre.

PAUL: It seems to me that one of the reasons you might have gone into the theatre is that art that hangs on the wall or sits on the floor is not a big enough container for the ideas that you want to do. You have to do something that's theatrical, write something that's bigger than a text that hangs on a wall, or exists in time in a different way. There are issues that you want to explore more broadly than is possible in a container the size of a visual art work.

TAD: Because of the way I work I have the luxury when I come up with a notion I want to pursue to ask myself: Is this a good idea for a sculpture? Would this make a good painting? Should it be a play? The idea drives the choice.

One has to look at the progression in which I've made the work. It's an adventure, a journey I've taken. The initial rooms through the 1970s were based on conversations I'd heard in public places like bars and state fairs and rodeos. I would hear a snippet of language and then create it in a physical form, literally building that found phrase out of cardboard and peanuts and rope. These



Early Morning Realization
1984, screenprint on paper, 9 x 8

constructions included lists and words and puns and signs among the objects. So the work, even in the early '70s, sprang from language.

In the '80s the work moved on to deal with media, psychology, and social issues on a grand scale that really negated the individual's presence. I was working with an authoritarian voice that screamed at the public—the wall paintings like *Champ* or *Eve* were sixteen by twenty-two feet.

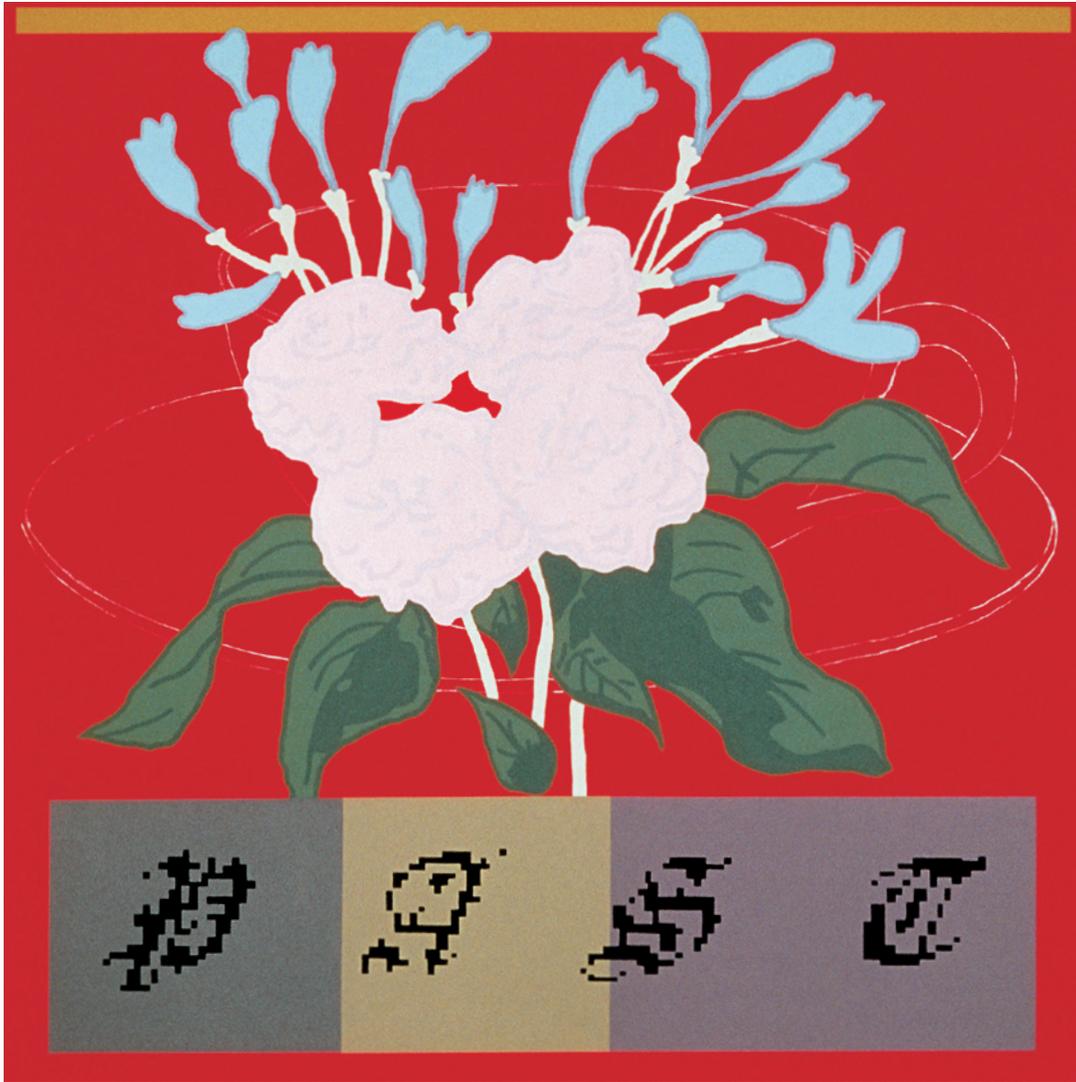
In the mid-1980s, when I began to write for the theatre, I discovered that I wanted to infuse my visual work with that same range of emotions that one experiences watching a play. I made a dramatic shift in the work. I reduced the scale of the pieces and used an artist friend of mine, Dick Lodwig, as a model for works like *Early Morning Realization* and *I Am Life*. People seemed to identify with the figure. Many people responded to *Realization* [page 23], a print in which the image of a blindfolded guy putting a gun to his head is superimposed over a clown face. It clearly touched a common chord.

DENNIS: What's interesting to me is that the process you are describing is the natural progression of theatre, which moved historically from monologue to dialogue.

CHRIS: It's also a progression in another way. I've noticed younger artists want to take on those big things in the early portion of their careers. Then as they—or even people in general—mature, they accept personal responsibility. To me the experience of being a parent is part of that. In your work there is a constant awareness of being a child. To me it is a wise parent who can see from the child's point of view.

JACK: Art gives each viewer an opportunity to re-ignite an experience. For example, several years ago I encountered a red and yellow Hans Hofmann painting at the Chicago Art Institute that triggered a dream and powerful memory of holding a marble up to the light as a child. That's when art works. When you stand in front of Tad's work, there is an ambiguity that allows a wide range of interpretation.

CHRIS: Tad, I have always imagined that your art was about someone who had been a stockbroker, was successful, and was now going through a mid-life crisis. He is divorced and has a new wife and family and is exploring what that means.



Past
1986, latex on canvas, 65 x 65

TAD: From 1984 to 1987 I banged my head against the wall in a very futile attempt to try and infuse the pieces with emotional content. I painted portraits, I drew figure studies, I spent days at the library looking at images of flower arrangements. I had this notion I was calling “the romance of memory” that was driving the work, or at least what I wanted the work to become. I was searching for a way to evoke a romantic notion of family and memory and things in the past. I was searching for the trigger points that would connect me with my viewers. At one point I seized on the idea of old wallpaper patterns as being one of those triggers. That sense of an old musty floral pattern that might be in your grandmother’s guest room where you slept overnight when you were a child. In 1986 I completed a few of these as traditional paintings on canvas, such as *Past*. I did a lot of drawings on wallpaper, saved a few, but in the end it became the last point on the journey where, in 1987, I gave up art altogether for three years.

In hindsight, quitting visual art for a few years may have been the best thing I ever did for my work. It was the focused experience of writing for the theatre that allowed me to get to the next phase—to talk to people directly in the first person.

When I came back to the visual arts, I started to develop the texts for my work beyond the single words present in pieces like *Champ* and *Past*, and started employing sentences and phrases. I explored some of these ideas with texts for a piece called *A Man’s List* (“I love my car,” “I love my wife,” “I love my computer”). This led to what I consider the most important piece in my career—*Our Lives* [pages 28–29], the big blue painting that I showed at Tracy’s [Tracy Savage’s gallery, Savage Fine Art] in 1994.

I realized that if I used the word “I,” it became a personal phrase, and when the viewers read those phrases on the painting they owned the words because they were reading “I love this, I love that.” It was a very sneaky way of getting the viewer to join in my experience. I found that if I made the subjects personal to me, but also universal to others, I could hit a very special place. I was banking on the aspect that if I had this experience, you might have had the same experience as well. And if I (the painting) said “I had that experience” rather than just saying “Champ,” which is so open-ended—too open-ended—then chances are the viewer would own some of it. Maybe some of the subjects that viewers didn’t accept at first might later begin to ring true. I was saying look, “I love my shoes, I love my car.” And if you did indeed love your shoes, and realized that I knew that you loved your shoes, then maybe you better examine whether you might also love your car.

This is a vein that I have been working in for the last seven years. It has allowed me to rope in the viewer while also presenting a body of work that ultimately makes me pretty vulnerable, like Jack is talking about, being more honest, and revealing the kind of dilemmas we all face every day. Once I discovered that I could talk directly to the viewers about my own life and include them in that conversation, I lost a lot of the “me versus the viewer” equation that so many artists get stuck in.

CHRIS: It seems to me that when the word “I” is encountered in a visual art work, it is different than reading it in a book. In books, journalism, and poetry, I look for the author in a different way than I do with a visual art work. I would be interested in exploring this, because I do want to talk about formal issues.

DENNIS: While I understand the intellectual distinctions of what you have just described, I look at art because: I see a tree. You see a tree; you teach me how to see a tree differently; I see it through your eyes. You see yellow; I see yellow; you see a greater depth of yellow. What you have just described about introducing the “I” is to me exactly the same thing. I see the world; I see a tree; I love my shoes. I offer it to you, and yet you teach me how to “love my shoes” even better. I learn how to see differently.

PAUL: I see an analogy to the landscape painter and the street photographer, who change how we see the land. “I love my shoes” brings up a question for us that I never thought about: Do I love my shoes? I *have* shoes. Do I *love* my shoes? How important are my shoes to me? Is it odd to love your shoes? Is this guy weird because he loves his shoes? Am I weird, because, I now realize, that I love my shoes, too?

PAUL: I think that another aspect of the work that we have not really talked about is that it’s not just the word but the way that the word is presented. I think that it is fascinating how you make choices about how certain text will be presented, whether it’s very soft on paper or etched into stainless steel. There is a real difference of tangibility in the words, whereas in a book words can be printed by a computer or by a fine letterpress, but the meaning doesn’t really change that much.

TAD: The ability to access, or the amount of time that the viewer is willing to spend on a certain phrase or certain body of text, will depend on how I represent it in the art work.

The background is a monochromatic blue-toned illustration. It depicts a dense forest with various trees and foliage. In the center, there is a small cabin or house with a chimney. Several birds are scattered throughout the scene, some perched on branches and others in flight. The overall style is that of a detailed line drawing or sketch, rendered in shades of blue.

I love my life

I love my car

I love my home

I love my computer

I love my destiny

I love my personality

I love my grocer

I love my television

I love my team

I love my coffee

I love my opinion

I love my pet

I love my circumstances

I love my vacations

I love my purpose

I love my bed

I love my wit

I love my VCR

I love my boss

I love my dentist

I love my parents

I love my phone

I love my freedom

I love my work

I love my suit

I love my mechanic



I love my friends

I love my privacy

I love my hair

I love my dreams

I love my country

I love my money

I love my calling

I love my music

I love my ambition

I love my body

I love my age

I love my style

I love my skills

I love my act

I love my race

I love my power

I love my arrangement

I love my thoughts

I love my medicine

I love my moods

I love my city

I love my generation

I love my pursuits

I love my schedule

I love my class

I love my shoes

Our Lives

1994, mixed media on canvas, 72 x 144

CHRIS: Because as a viewer you have to make a different kind of decision, a different kind of effort to go look at an art show. It's closer to what people going to the theatre invest, as opposed to turning on the TV.

TAD: But also, on top of that, people don't like to go into galleries or museums to read.

PAUL: That's why you are not just presenting text. When you see a sign that is five or six feet tall and red and white and it says, "OUR CAT DIED" [*A Sign*], it's different than reading that on a three-by-five index card. There is a presentation, a whole embodiment of either screaming it out or saying it in a way that you think, "That's ridiculous, that it's presented like this." I suppose, how you feel about cats also determines how you respond to that particular art work.

TAD: That recent show was an exercise in magnification. The fact that our cat died is, granted, a somewhat insignificant experience, although it was amazing how significant it became once it happened. As Paul suggests, the decisions about presentation of the words are particular to each piece. "My daddy reads to me" would not have worked on a six-foot sign. It's too intimate for that.

In Pursuit of Joy actually grew out of a conversation I had over lunch with a dear friend. We were talking and he was wondering where the passion, where the joy in life was, and if it could be shared with another person. I said to him that it was impossible to share joy with another person. True joy is only experienced in solitude. After lunch I went back to the studio and started to draw up a list of the things we all do to bring us joy. I looked at the list and realized that this wasn't just a list, it was a "piece." It was born out of a discussion rather than an attempt to make an art work.

I began to see this piece as a handwritten—rather than a typeset—list. My father has great handwriting, so I composed the phrases and asked him to write them down. I figured this was a big subject, a human subject, so that the piece needed to be bigger than a shopping list and perhaps as big as a person. A plain background seemed too cold, so I went searching for fabric to print on. I selected a pattern that was on our couch when I was a child. I made a work about the inability to share joy, had my father write it, and then had it printed on a fabric from my childhood. This is a different process from that of a painter who goes into the studio to paint an abstract painting every day. Different in its materials, its execution, and its partnership.



In Pursuit of Joy
1998, screenprint on fabric, 81 x 47½

CHRIS: I'd like to talk about the process of giving the work to others to fabricate. How do you respond to the fact that the artist's hand has not made all of the work?

TAD: The pieces I create do not rely upon the expression of the hand. They are not gestured. They are not made from a long connection to the materials. They are clearly cool. I am making this loaded and personally introspective work, but it's presented in a very cool fashion. If it were too fussy, it would let the viewer get off the hook by avoiding the content and wallowing in the handiwork. With this approach there's no way to get around the subject matter.

CHRIS: As an audience member does it allow me to see myself more than I might with a more overtly artistic and expressive approach?

TAD: It isolates the message for you . . . brings it into focus in a very expedient manner.

DENNIS: I don't think the fact that it is fabricated has ever crossed my mind. I always assumed that if it wasn't the way you wanted it—no matter who fabricated it, no matter who put it together, as it were—if it wasn't the way you wanted it, it wouldn't be.

PAUL: For a long time artists have used found objects and discussed at what level the artist has to have a hand in the work. Now it seems to me that we have gone past that point. I feel that I philosophically stopped worrying about that about 1970, when I accepted the idea that Don Judd gave directions to the sheet-metal guy.

TAD: Still, a lot has been written about that issue, and I think it's interesting. It is in no way the driver of the work. I merely have other people make some of the work because they are better craftsmen than I am. The beauty of the process is that I'm no longer hindered by my own skills. If I can draw it or explain it, someone else can build it. I can make anything I can conceive. Now that's what I call artistic freedom. However, having said that, working with fabricators is not a collaboration. Dennis is right. I come to them with a very specific image, colors, types, layout, and materials. All the mechanicals are done by me. The work is fabricated under my direction.

The exception to that was *Mother's Pride* [page 45], which was, of course, an exploration of the very idea of an "original." I pretty much created it over the phone with Sean Cain. I just asked him to paint the image in his usual artistic style. He didn't want to cash my checks because he was nervous that he had not painted what I wanted. But he had painted exactly what I wanted.

It's a beautiful painting and one of my favorite pieces in years. The concepts of origin and reality, science and nature, the pride of family, and the beauty of objects, and the fact that the viewer is encouraged to touch the tag. It's really a milestone work for me.

CHRIS: Let's move on to the male aspect of the work. When I read "How a woman spends her day" [*Family Portrait*, pages 34-35], I think people could interpret it as some sort of sexist list. What is the difference in being sexist or dealing with gender? What kind of license do you think artists have in discussing these things?

TAD: If you just view that one panel in the piece it probably would seem sexist, but when you look at the companion male panel and you see how self-indulgent and myopically void of any ethical concerns *it is*, I think my point of view becomes pretty clear. Although I've been making obsessive lists for years, that was one of the first "big lists," and I think it is worthwhile to understand the history or generation of that piece. When I exhibited *Daytimer*, which is the precursor to *Family Portrait*, a woman said to me, "You know, you ought to do one of these about a woman." I said, "I can't make one about a woman, because I'm not a woman." Of course, the next day I went to work on it. I started on the woman's list and realized that the male and female are not independent entities—they orbit each other. They impact one another, colliding and spinning off, then coming back and making another pass at it. Then I realized that a family would have a child and cat, too.

If you look at the work, the man's the one who is worried the most, and he's worrying about insignificant things like flossing his teeth. Whereas although the woman may be going off on an ice cream binge or a shopping tangent, she also spends, according to the list, a lot of time trying to communicate with her husband and her child. I realized that once I had made myself—or all men—vulnerable in the first piece [*Daytimer*], I had license to do whatever I wanted with the woman's list. So I felt pretty comfortable going out on that edge and making these kinds of "highly scientific" speculations based on years of data collection.

HOW A MAN SPENDS HIS DAY

worrying about first mortgage 19%	working 14% not working 14%	watching, reading, or discussing sports 22%	wishing for great sex 34% worrying about actually getting great sex 39%	thinking about food 6%	trying to remember the name of 4%	playing Barbies with daughter 2%
worrying about death by: car accident 8% heart attack 10% plane crash 2% choking on food 2%	reading about stereos, cars, and computers you'll never buy 17%	worrying about the 25-year-olds 11%	trying to figure out what that humming noise is 4%	worrying about losing more hair 7%	avoiding dentist 4%	working with calculator to compute possible taxes owed 16%
dwelling on the dwindling amount of peanuts to be found in any given box of Cracker Jacks 8%	feeding cat 21%	wondering if anyone will remember you after you're dead 14%	checking yourself for bad breath 39%	worrying if daughter will become bad driver 14%	worrying about having to do yard work 72% doing yard work 8%	worrying about not sleeping 5%
not listening or being silent when you should be complimentary, supportive, hugging, or keeping your mouth shut with wife 56%	thinking about flossing 13% flossing 1%	telling truth at work 4%	arguing with wife 12% admitting to wife that you're wrong 0.71% being right and making wife know it 18%	worrying about how to lie to therapist 17%	listening for intruders 7%	feeling good about self 9%
calculating and realizing that 1.9% of net annual household income goes to pay for cat food 2%	worrying if you'll get caught 6%	wondering if anyone would miss the cat if she disappeared 3%	doing good for others 2%	looking for keys 9% looking for wife's keys 10%	doing something just for the money 8%	wondering if you could survive in jail 6%
wondering if black people are really equal 3%	fantasizing about sex with wife 12% fantasizing about sex with other women 12%	letting cat in 74% letting cat out 72%	avoiding cleaning toilet, doing laundry, vacuuming, emptying kitty litter box 29%	standing in shower in athletic club comparing penis size to others' 9%	thinking about great works of literature 1.4%	wishing things were different 26%
realizing your life is over 4%	waiting for service in restaurant 9%	harboring old grudges 4%	being jealous of other men's success 12%	thinking about suing someone 1.9%	having a political thought 4% expressing a political opinion 19%	being confused, feeling left behind, or feeling out of it 17%

Family Portrait (detail)
1997, screenprint on paper, 16 x 62

HOW A WOMAN SPENDS HER DAY

worrying that breasts, thighs, hair, hands, feet, nose, ears, mouth, behind, hips are too small 74%	of shoes owned, number that hurt feet 86%	fantasizing about having a quiet moment to yourself 68%	shopping 56%	dealing with unwanted comments, gazes, encounters 49%	fulfilling romantic notions through books, films, and greeting cards 37%
purchasing fabulous shoes in wrong size 92%	worrying about fresh vegetables 34%	number of evenings spent "having a headache" 47%	worrying that breasts, thighs, hair, hands, feet, nose, ears, mouth, behind, hips are too large 74%	time spent faking it 71%	asking child to put on coat 86%
remembering recipes 16%	taking cat to vet 96%	worrying about maybe having to explain sex to child 7%	thinking about shopping 96%	wishing he would just learn to do it right . . . at least once 19%	time spent repeating what you just said to men 66% to your husband 78% to your child 56%
planning for meals 40% preparing them 43% eating them 6% enjoying the meals you've planned and prepared 2.4%	amount of day spent doing laundry 16%	time spent saying "it was on sale" 34%	percentage of day spent saying no to child 22% number of times per day saying no to child and then changing mind 38%	still resenting actions of old boyfriends 24%	feeling sorry for women with abusive partners 37%
trying new house cleaning products 21%	worrying about osteoporosis 12%	saying no to husband 34% saying no to husband and then realizing it's not worth it and giving in 76%	being abused by partner 15%	doing something because it's the right thing to do 79%	wishing things were different 26%
thinking about going on diet 84% on diet 7.4% thinking about going off diet 73% going off diet with a quart of Ben and Jerry's 42%	worrying about dust 23%	wishing / planning for vacations 54% amount of year spent on vacation 2.6%	worrying about breast cancer 57% cellulite 43% where you parked the car 17%	asking husband to do something 82% re-asking 44% just doing it yourself 43%	listening to voice mail 67%

Family Portrait (detail)
1997, screenprint on paper, 16 x 62

CHRIS: *All the 25 Year Olds* [“They don’t even know you exist”] seems to be about mid-life.

TAD: That kind of investigation occurred in 1993, when I started to show with Tracy. I was in my forties and had a daughter who was no longer a toddler. A collector offered me a stipend to focus on a body of work. I produced a series of five prints that I loosely called “close to the ground.” To me this phrase implied holding a child’s hand, the hand of someone who is close to the ground and growing up. I even enlisted my daughter to do the writing on one of those prints [*Heavens*], and I used her drawing of our family as one of the images in *4 Attempts to Order Chaos*. “Close to the ground” also implied growing old, and ultimately finding oneself in a grave. That work was followed in 1994 by my first one-person show with Tracy.

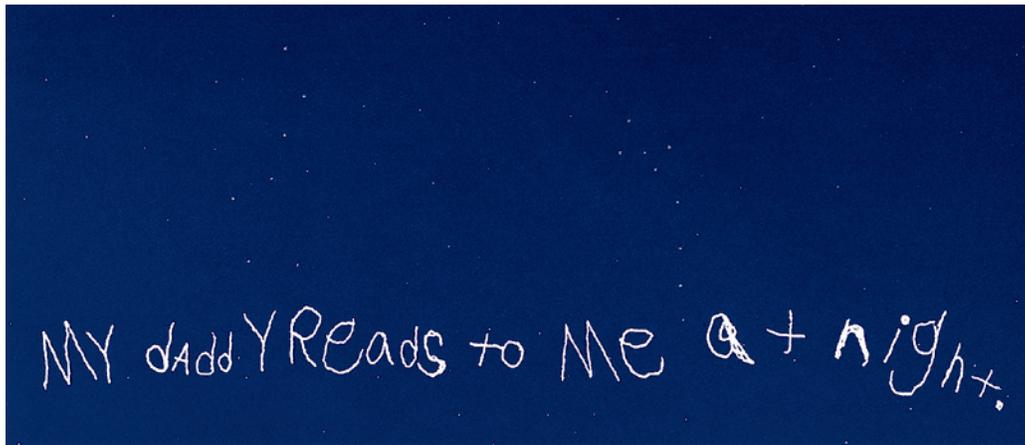
CHRIS: Is that the “Life and Death” show?

TAD: Yes. I was thinking about what it means to have lived one-half of one’s life. It was work about being in the middle and it was formally structured that way. All of the works were diptychs or had Rorschach images that mirror one another. I look at that exhibition as the highest level of work I’ve done. I don’t know if it was her beautiful gallery space, or the point in my life, but there was a resolve and a calmness about all of that work. There are many issues that I first mined for that show that have formed all of the work I’m doing today—the lists with men and women, the romantic beauty. It was a very good balance of everything.

TAD: The next show, “ordering the universe,” continued those themes. It was at S. K. Josefberg in 1997 and included *Family Portrait*, *The History of Sex*, *God’s First Schematic Design for the Universe*, and *Isolated Molecule Responsible for Happiness in Mammals*.

CHRIS: *The History of Sex*. What I find interesting about that work is that it takes a broad history and finds points in it that are clearly personal.

TAD: I actually started *The History of Sex* as a history of rock-and-roll. Once I got into it I couldn’t exclude things like cars, clothes, hormones, and food. It became clear that there might be a better organizing element instead of music. Sex seemed to be more universal.



Heavens

1993, screenprint on paper, 22 x 39

PAUL: The truly personal elements make the ones that are more general seem personal.

DENNIS: That is what creates the spirit of whimsy in your work. A spirit of whimsy and a history of sex seem to be, well, ok, that's not right. But that's exactly what it is. You can make a list of things and you can say "the Bible," and you can say "Romeo and Juliet," you can say all of this seemingly impersonal stuff. Yet on the same list in the same image, when you say something deeply personal it makes us think how those things could also be personal.

PAUL: Sex seems potentially more ridiculous now than it did when I was in my twenties and thirties.

JACK: Wait till you're seventy-five!

TAD: In 1997 I made a drive to Wyoming, and while going through Yellowstone I started to wonder about the order of things. And I started to think about my work in a much broader context than just worrying about dust, or whether I loved my shoes or not. I started to think about time in terms of millions of years rather than time between commercials on TV. It struck me that maybe there was no hierarchy, no one thing more important than another. That big drawing, *God's First Schematic Design for the Universe* [pages 40-41], placed a lot of the male/female questions next to issues like the age of granite, or the invention of flocked wallpaper. There were planets and stars and satellites. It was a very fun drawing to make.

PAUL: One of my responses to your work is that it makes me realize what ridiculous things I waste my time worrying about.

TAD: But the question is, is it a waste?

DENNIS: I have a theory that the older we get, the closer we get to the microscope. We see life in greater and greater detail.

CHRIS: I would like to touch on the subject of public art. Not only does it pay the freight for many artists, but it informs what we are looking at today in other ways.

TAD: I used to believe that public art was how you educated the public as to what contemporary art was.

I distinctly remember watching the LA riots on the TV and seeing people burn their own neighborhoods. There was a disenfranchisement about how people led their daily lives. I thought, I don't know that I can make things better, but at least anything that I build that goes into the public environment shouldn't make things worse. I felt that part of what I wanted to do was try and give meaning to place and engage people as participants in the story.

The last few public pieces I've done involve a concentrated amount of one-on-one interviews with people who are connected to a given facility. I've been taking their words from the interviews and distilling them down to two or three sentences. Sometimes I combine the words of several people. Then I configure them into the first-person voice ("I") and that becomes the art work. Harborview Hospital in Seattle, the Oregon Holocaust Memorial, and a fire station in San Jose, those are all places where I interviewed people about intensely personal events, victories, or tragedies. I'm trying to get their message to the viewer. I'm using somebody else's voice in the art works, but I'm doing for them in the civic landscape what I'm doing for myself in the studio work.

DENNIS: It's creating characters. When you interview firemen and it is their thoughts and their language, that is the creation of character. It is public art, of course, but it's personalized.

JACK: It's the integration of that person to the site.

TAD: But I'm getting something from doing it.

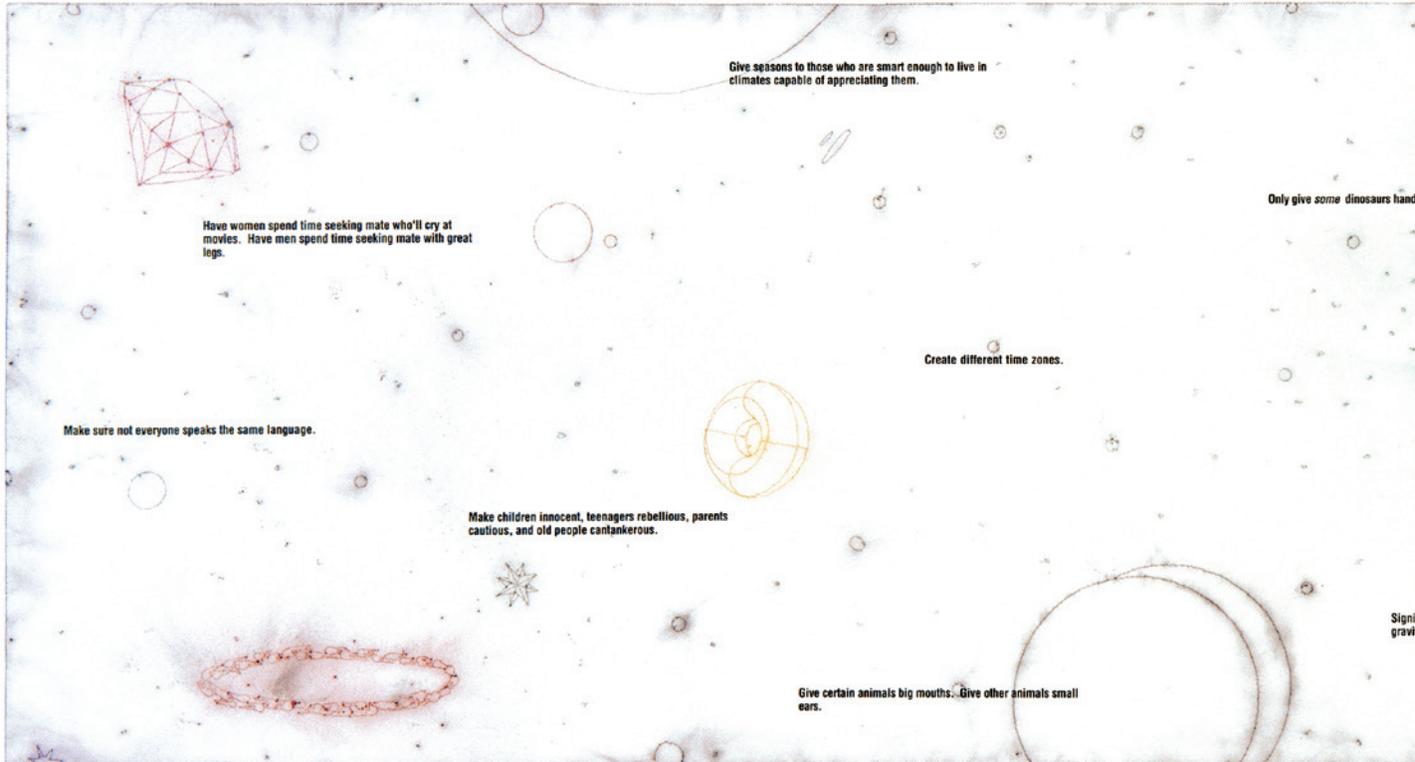
JACK: It's reciprocal. It's a form of involvement with other people—a shared contract without imposing on them.

PAUL: You have quit worrying about making a Tad Savinar.

TAD: Right. I'm coming up with a construct that will allow other people to be part of the process and part of the dialogue, rather than just merely observers.

CHRIS: From each of your perspectives, what other artists come to mind when you see Tad's work?

JACK: All of the visual artists who use words to intensify experience.



Give seasons to those who are smart enough to live in climates capable of appreciating them.

Have women spend time seeking male who'll cry at movies. Have men spend time seeking male with great legs.

Only give some dinosaurs hands.

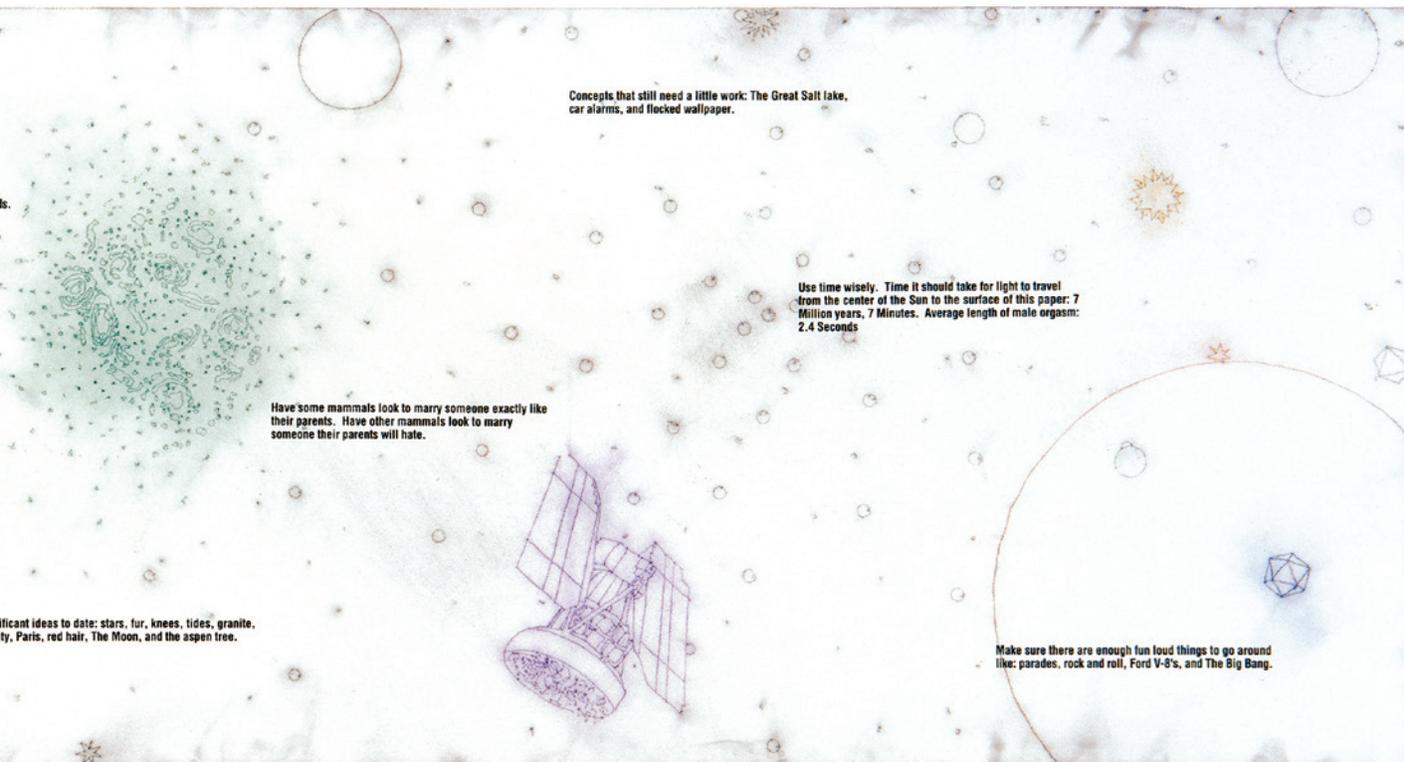
Create different time zones.

Make sure not everyone speaks the same language.

Make children innocent, teenagers rebellious, parents cautious, and old people cantankerous.

Give certain animals big mouths. Give other animals small ears.

Sign
grav



God's First Schematic Design for the Universe
1997, screenprint and charcoal on paper, 24 x 84

CHRIS: Many of the artists one might consider—Picasso, Schwitters, for example—have used words as formal properties. But your work comes out of a different arena.

TAD: Other artists may use words or a phrase as an icon or a graphic; I am using text to have a conversation with the viewer. If you look at *50 Year Old Chant*, there are birds and trees and flowers in the background. The painting's imagery is a vehicle for me to be able to put the language in front of the viewer—much like a scenery backdrop for a play. That backdrop, that imagery, sets the place and atmospheric tone for the emotional qualities of the scene. The language becomes the message.

DENNIS: Some of Tad's work reminds me of the young Chekhov. Chekhov wrote short stories which were whimsical and beginning to understand the human condition. He was a man and a physician who understood the value of family, and so much of that is present in your work. The *Family Tree* piece—great-grandma, wood grain. There's pathos, empathy. There is a wry sense of humor that is sometimes so oblique that people don't understand it. And there's tension. Art doesn't exist without tension.

PAUL: Ed Ruscha comes to my mind. Usually I find it very difficult to read an art work that has words in it, because the words become a distraction to looking at it or looking at it becomes a distraction from reading the words. A lot of postmodern artists tend to utilize the words in pretty much the same way over and over and over—Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, for example. But Tad, you are making subtle choices about what kind of visual content to put into each piece. You do not repeat the same device. The difference between "OUR CAT DIED" and a graph of how somebody spends their day is very important. The artist Bridget Riley said that good paintings reveal themselves to you like a personality—over time. I think that is operating in your work. What I feel is compelling about your works is that they reveal themselves slowly over time. They don't just become a one-line slogan.

TAD: The last thing I want to do is create static work that has only one meaning. If these pieces have a goal at all, it is that their readings and meanings can change with one's mood or daily experiences. I want my viewers to "own" these works. I'm done yelling at them. I think that for each work there is indeed the dilemma of trying to find the best vehicle for each message—what looks good cast in bronze is not going to be as good screenprinted on fabric.



50 Year Old Chant
1996, acrylic on canvas, 65 x 91

CHRIS: Is being in Portland important to you?

TAD: During the first half of the 1980s I spent about half of my time in New York City. I saw a lot of art and what I saw encouraged me to be part of a national dialogue about contemporary art. My work seemed to be much more in keeping with contemporary art centers across the country than with the regional aesthetics of the Northwest. I saw my work as fitting into that national dialogue. I didn't really care about positioning or placing myself in the context of Portland work. I think that was good and bad. Bad because I was not really a member of the art community here and I showed so little in town that people didn't really understand what the work was getting at. But good because I was not bound by any local commercial venue. I was free to push and investigate the art ideas I wanted to pursue.

When I came back into the visual arts from theatre, I eliminated all concern with career. I made the work almost as a statement against the notion of career. It had no specific media, scale, or form; it was made predominantly by others; and each show began to look like a group theme show rather than the "one-person show" that every artist is supposed to covet. I essentially removed myself from the game. Lo and behold, the less I worried about exhibition schedules and a résumé, the more personal and successful the work got. Did I say honest? The work got more honest, more me. But it also found a fuller audience.

When I was a freshman at college, an artist, James Hockenull, came to my class to give a talk about his work. I had never really heard any artists talk about their own work in real depth and until that moment I had never even considered the thought of a through-line in an artist's work. Well, Jim's talk had a real effect on me. He had a long-term perspective on his work and showed us how it changed and ebbed through the years. He said that it takes every artist ten years after they graduate to stop making the teacher's work and find their own voice. I remember to this day how in that dark quonset hut that served as the art department I said to myself, "God damn it, it's not going to take me ten years—I'm going to do it in two!" Do you know how long it took? It took eighteen years. Eighteen years until I finally brought my work into focus.

Portland is a great place to practice. In Portland I've had the luxury of producing a work and having it sit in the studio for six months before I even think of letting it go out. As I look back I see the great ability to live and work at my own rate rather than at a speed determined by fashion, art bars, and magazines. I don't produce many finished pieces throughout the year. I do a lot of pre-editing, which cuts back on production. I think this works to my advantage. I think that Portland is the kind of community that allows that kind of time and reflection. It's the gift this place gives to an artist.



Mother's Pride
1998, acrylic on canvas, with copper tag, 22⁵/₈ x 14³/₄

Exhibition Checklist

All works exhibited courtesy of the artist and Savage Fine Art, unless otherwise noted. Dimensions given are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

Early Studio Installations

Photographs by Mark Gardner, various sizes
1975-1977

Experimental Jumping Platform

1975
Pencil on paper, 18½ x 16½

Christmas with Carl, or I Read About Him in The His Tree Books

1975
Pencil on paper, 21½ x 19

Again and Again

1975
Hand-colored diazo print on paper, 16½ x 16½

Hat for Paul

1976-1981
Pencil on paper, 21½ x 27½

Coffin Series

1976
Three photographs, 9 x 12, 9 x 12, 12 x 9

Home

1976
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
9 x 12 x 11

Artists I Have Known – Old Dreams, Old Romances

1977
Cardboard book with photographs and nail,
9 x 10½ x 2½

Homage To A Construction Worker's Wife

1977
Hand-colored diazo print on paper, 18¼ x 21¼

Bound And Determined, or Every Bodys Into S and M These Days

1977-1978
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
10 x 23 x 14
Collection of Donna Milrany

Tad Savinar

Catalogue of and/or exhibition
1978
Book, hand-painted box, plastic “pillows” filled with
sawdust, Frederick’s of Hollywood catalog pages

Dual Signal Construction Construction

1979
Hand-colored diazo print on paper, 18¾ x 21¾

Urban Planning

1979
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
10 x 18¾ x 18¾
Collection of Arlene and Harold Schnitzer

Light

1980
Colored pencil on paper, 21½ x 27½

Restoration

1980
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
12 x 19 x 9

Blackboard

1980
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
10 x 15 x 9
Private collection

Vet

1981
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
8 x 4 x 8

Rock

1981
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
12 x 18 x 15
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer

Industry

1982
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover
10 x 16 x 5

The New Religion

1982
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
10 x 16 x 5

Enfant Perdu

1981
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
12 x 22 x 10
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer

Untitled

1981
Balsa wood and mixed media box with plexiglas cover,
12 x 14 x 11

Champ

1983
Screenprint on paper (edition of 37), 17 x 20
Private collection
Illustrated on page 21

Eve

1983
Screenprint on paper (edition of 33), 16 x 20
Collection of Donna Milrany

I Am Life

1983
Screenprint on paper (edition of 36), 11 x 13
Collection of Jeffrey Alden and Donna Drummond

Sony Street Children

1984
Screenprint on paper (edition of 51), 6½ x 13
Collection of Paul Sutinen

Early Morning Realization

1984
Screenprint on paper (edition of 43), 9 x 8
Collection of Jeffrey Alden and Donna Drummond
Illustrated on page 23

Day of Loss

1985
Screenprint on paper (edition of 33), 15 x 15
Collection of William Park

Culture

1985
Screenprint on paper (edition of 35), 17 x 15
Private collection

Lien

1985
Screenprint on paper (edition of 33), 21 x 29
Collection of Alice Karlin Powell

Neighbors

1985
Screenprint on paper (edition of 33), 28 x 19
Collection of Dennis Cunningham

Past

1986
Latex on canvas, 65 x 65
Illustrated on page 25

Train Train

1986
Ink on wallpaper, 11 x 16

Wild Sex

1986
Latex on wallpaper, 15 x 18
Collection of Miriam Resnick

Einstein's Dream

1986
Ink on wallpaper, 9 x 15
Collection of Fred and Amelia Hard

Chair's Dream

1986
Ink on wallpaper, 11 x 17

The Supreme Court

1990
Ink and pencil on paper, 25 x 23
Collection of Dale and Linda Farr

Juggernaut (Action Painting)

1990
Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 84
Collection of James Winkler

Our Daily Choice

1991
Screenprint on stained wood, 16 x 40
Collection of Byron Beck

Race and Gender

1991
Screenprint on linen (edition of 4), 101 x 51
Private collection

The First 40 Years of Life

1992
Etched glass, 10 x 40
Collection of the Portland Art Museum

The First 4 Years of Life

1992
Etched and enameled copper, 39 x 5
Collection of the Savinar family

An Artist's Portrait

1992
Etched and enameled stainless steel, 11 x 17
Collection of Susan Harlan

Our Century

1992
Screenprint on paper (edition of 7), 24 x 36

4 Attempts to Order Chaos

1993
Screenprint on paper (edition of 25), 10 x 25
Collection of Jack and Marjorie Butler

Heavens

1993
Screenprint on paper (edition of 30), 22 x 39
Collection of Paul Schneider and Lauren Eulau
Illustrated on page 37

Study for a Painting (Thinking of You)

1994
Ink and pencil on paper, 19 x 16

Family Tree

1994
Embroidery, screenprint on linen, 32 x 33

Our Lives

1994
Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 144
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer
Illustrated on pages 28–29

Lifeline

1994
Eight wall lamps with text, 72 x 144

Daytimer

1994
Mixed media on paper, 35 x 34
Collection of Gordon Thompson III

Heaven and Earth

1994
Screenprint on stained wood, 21 x 36¾
Collection of Tracy Savage

All the 25 Year Olds

1994
Etched stainless steel, 20 x 20
Private collection

Gem

1995
Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48

50 Year Old Chant

1996
Acrylic on canvas, 65 x 91
Collection of the Philip Morris Companies,
Inc.
Illustrated on page 43

Little Lies

1996
Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 48
Collection of Cynthia Hampton

The History of Sex

1996
Screenprint on paper, 19 x 40

Family Portrait

1997
Screenprint on paper (edition of 12), 16 x 62
Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer
Illustrated on pages 34–35

***Isolated Molecule Responsible for Happiness
in Mammals***

1997
Wood and paint, 12 x 11 x 6

God's First Schematic Design for the Universe

1997
Screenprint and charcoal on paper (edition of
2), 24 x 84
Private collection
Illustrated on pages 40–41

Quench

1998
Cast bronze, 25 x 8 x 5

In Pursuit of Joy

1998
Screenprint on fabric (edition of 2), 81 x 47½
Illustrated on page 31

Parents' Dreams

1998
Screenprint on silk, 62¼ (height only)

The Unfolding Conversation

1998
Xerox print, 24½ x 34⅜

Mother's Pride

1998
Acrylic on canvas, with copper tag, 22⅝ x 14¾
Illustrated on page 45

A Sign

1998
Enamel on wood, 66 x 36½

Rich Man

1998
Formica, contact paper, screenprint on linen,
cast aluminum, 15 x 45

Alone

1998
Cast bronze (edition of 2), size variable

***New Isolated Molecule for Fruit Salad
(Study for a Bronze)***

1999
Wood, size variable

Professional History

Born 1950

Portland, Oregon

Education

1973

Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art, Colorado College,
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Fellowships, Grants, and Awards

1983

Individual fellowship, sculpture, Oregon Arts
Commission

1984

Inter-arts project grant, performance, National
Endowment for the Arts (with Eric Bogosian)

Individual fellowship, sculpture, National Endowment
for the Arts

Project grant, Metropolitan Arts Commission, Portland

1986

Project grant, Metropolitan Arts Commission, Portland

1987

Project grant, Metropolitan Arts Commission, Portland

1991

Project grant, Metropolitan Arts Commission, Portland
Residency, Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia

1995

Individual fellowship, painting, National Endowment
for the Arts

1997

Residency, Ucross Foundation, Wyoming

1998

Residency, A.S.A.P., Northeast Harbor, Maine
Governor's Arts Award, Oregon

Museum Collections

The Fabric Workshop Archives, Philadelphia

Museum of Modern Art, New York City

National Archives, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, D.C.

Norton Museum, Miami Beach

Portland Art Museum, Portland

University of California Art Museum, Santa Barbara

Private Collections

Aratex, Burbank, California

John Berggruen, San Francisco

Chase Manhattan Bank, New York

Linda Farris, Seattle

Stephanie French, New York

Oregon Health Sciences University, Portland

Philip Morris Companies, Inc., New York

George Stroemple, Portland

Arlene and Harold Schnitzer, Portland

Jordan Schnitzer, Portland

Tonkin, Torp, Galen, Portland

James Winkler, Portland

Howard Wright, Seattle

Selected Site Installations and Solo Exhibitions

1976

Polly Friedlander Gallery, Seattle

Wentz Gallery, Museum Art School, Portland

Northwest Artists Workshop, Portland

1977

Blue Sky Gallery, Portland

1978

and/or, Seattle

1979

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington

1980

Portland Art Museum, Portland

1981

Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland

1982

Artists Space, New York

- 1983
 Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
 Pennsylvania State University, College Station, Pennsylvania
 The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon
- 1984
 Reed College, Portland
 Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle
- 1985
 The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
- 1988
 Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland
- 1989
 Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland
- 1991
 Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland
- 1992
 Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland
 The Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia
- 1994
 Savage Fine Art, Portland
- 1997
 S. K. Josefsberg Studio in partnership with Savage Fine Art, Portland
- 1998
 S. K. Josefsberg Studio in partnership with Savage Fine Art, Portland
- 1999
 The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon

Selected Two-Person and Group Exhibitions

- 1973
 Fountain Gallery, Portland
- 1974
 University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, Colorado
 Coos Bay Art Museum, Coos Bay, Oregon
 Corvallis Art Museum, Corvallis, Oregon
 John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
 Seattle Art Museum, Seattle
 Portland Art Museum, Portland
 Fountain Gallery, Portland
 Polly Friedlander Gallery, Seattle

- 1975
 John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
 Polly Friedlander Gallery, Seattle
 Fountain Gallery, Portland
- 1976
 Cheney Cowles Art Museum, Spokane, Washington
- 1977
 Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland
- 1978
 Portland State University, Portland
 Portland Art Museum, Portland
 San Diego Art Museum, San Diego
 John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
- 1979
 Blue Sky Gallery, Portland
- 1980
 Blue Sky Gallery, Portland
 The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon
- 1984
 Guggenheim Gallery, Chapman University, Orange, California
 Artists Space, New York
- 1985
 New Langton Arts, San Francisco
 Whatcom Museum of Art, Bellingham, Washington
 MO David Gallery, New York
 Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle
- 1986
 CEPA, Buffalo, New York
 Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland
- 1987
 Baskerville-Watson Gallery, New York
- 1991
 The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon
 Portland Art Museum, Portland
- 1993
 Savage Fine Art, Portland
 Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland
 Portland Art Museum, Portland
- 1994
 The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon

1995

Savage Fine Art, Portland
Portland Art Museum, Portland
Guggenheim Gallery, Chapman University, Orange,
California
University of Oregon Art Museum, Eugene

1996

Meyerson and Nowinski, Seattle

1997

Meyerson and Nowinski, Seattle
Portland Art Museum, Portland
The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Or-
egon

1998

Meyerson and Nowinski, Seattle

1999

Meyerson and Nowinski, Seattle

Selected Public Art Commissions

1980

Installation work, City of Eugene, Oregon
Suite of prints, City of Portland

1985

Suite of prints, City of Seattle

1990

State Lands Building, Salem, Oregon
Mentor Graphics Headquarters, Portland
U.S. Customs Office, Sumas, Washington

1992-1998

Harborview Medical Center, Seattle

1994

Temple Beth Israel, Portland

1995-1996

University of Texas at San Antonio

1995-1998

City Hall Renovation Commission, Portland (with
Norie Sato and Bill Will)

1997-1999

Harborside Light Rail Station, Jersey City, New Jersey

1998-1999

San Jose Fire Station No. 1, San Jose

Design Team Projects

1992-1998

Tri Met Light Rail, Portland

1995-1996

River District Right of Way, Portland
Transit Center, Eugene, Oregon

1996

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, San Jose
LINK Public Transit, Chelan and Douglas Counties,
Washington

1996-1997

PED to MAX Station Area, Gresham, Oregon
Main Street Re-Design, Salt Lake City

1996-

Oregon Holocaust Memorial, Portland
Oregon Garden Project, Silverton, Oregon

1997-

Lincoln Street Bridge Design Team, Spokane,
Washington

1998

Forest Park Light Rail Station Area Plan, St. Louis
Community Building Design, Montalvo Center for
the Arts, Saratoga, California (with Don Stastny)

1998-

Multi Modal Transit Station, Everett, Washington

1999

Pacific Avenue Overpass, Everett, Washington
LINK Light Rail, Seattle

Planning Projects

1991-1992

Future Focus, Portland (volunteer)

1992-1993

Arts Plan 2000 Plus, Portland (volunteer)

1992-1994

Rio Salado Public Art Master Plan, Tempe, Arizona

1995-1997

Southwest Community Plan Task Force, Portland
(volunteer)

1996-1997

Light Rail Public Art Master Plan, Salt Lake City

1998

Dome Area Master Plan, Tacoma, Washington
405 Lid Study, Portland (volunteer)
Street Scape Standards Design Project, Anchorage
Eagle River Downtown Circulation Master Plan, Eagle
River, Alaska

Theatre Works

1982–1985

Talk Radio conceived, designed, and created in collaboration with Eric Bogosian; premiered at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts (PCVA) in 1985

1986

Autoflex written, directed, produced, and designed at PCVA and Portland Civic Theatre

Re-wired written; commissioned and produced by Portland Civic Theatre

Brushfires: A Biased View of Power in the West written, designed, and directed at Portland Civic Theatre

1987

Talk Radio produced by Joseph Papp's Public Theater, and placed in the Archive of Theater on Film

1988

The 4 Mickies written and designed; produced by Artists Repertory Theatre, Portland

Talk Radio feature film directed by Oliver Stone and released by Universal Pictures

1990

Cover Shot commissioned by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival

1994

Cover Shot produced by Portland Repertory Theatre

Professional Activities

1977–1982

Member, PCVA Board of Directors, Portland

1979–1980

Chair, PCVA Exhibition Committee, Portland

1979–1986

Instructor of Art, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon

1987

Member, Inter-Arts Grants Funding Panel, NEA/Rockefeller Foundation

1989

Member, Visual Arts Organizations Funding Panel, National Endowment for the Arts

1990

Chair, Visual Arts Organizations Funding Panel, National Endowment for the Arts

Funding Consultant, Meyer Memorial Trust, Portland

1991

Member, Artists Projects Funding Panel, Oregon Arts Commission

1992

Co-Chair, Autumn Harvest AIDS/Hospice Event, Portland

1993

Member, Artists Projects Funding Panel, Oregon Arts Commission

Member, Regional Initiative Funding Panel, Warhol Foundation/Rockefeller Foundation

1993–1994

Member, Artists Projects Funding Panel, Metropolitan Arts Commission, Portland

1995

Member, Visual Arts Organizations Funding Panel, National Endowment for the Arts

1997

Member, Museum Planning and Stabilization Funding Panel, National Endowment for the Arts

1998

Member, Selection Panel, Ucross Residency Program

Books and Exhibition Catalogues

Allan, Lois, *Contemporary Printmaking in the Northwest*, Craftsman House G&B Arts International, Roseville East, New South Wales, Australia, 1997.

———, *Contemporary Art in the Northwest*, Craftsman House G&B Arts International, Roseville East, New South Wales, Australia, 1995.

Banyas, Rebecca and Mary Priester, *Westside Light Rail Public Art Guide: A Guide to Integrated Artwork on Westside MAX*, Portland, Oregon, 1998.

Cathcart, Linda L., *A Director's Choice*, Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon, 1981.

Hoppe, Bill, *An Exhibition Organized by Bill Hoppe*, Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon, 1977.

Hull, Roger, "Notes on the Exhibition," *Tad Savinar: Talk Radio*, The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon, 1983.

Kanjo, Kathryn, *Oregon Biennial '97*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, 1997.

Lafo, Rachel Rosenfield, *Spatial Exercises*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, 1980.

Rifkin, Ned, *Signs*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, New York, 1985.

Savinar, Tad, *Tad Savinar*, and/or, Seattle, Washington, 1978.

- Sutinen, Paul, "Some Figures in Contemporary Prints and Other Ideas About Looking at a Collection," *Figuration in the Jordan D. Schnitzer Collection of Prints*, The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon, 1997.
- Watten, Barrett, *Image/Word: The Art of Reading*, New Langton Arts, San Francisco, California, 1985.
- Articles and Reviews**
- Allan, Lois, "Tad Savinar at Elizabeth Leach Gallery (Portland)," *Reflex*, November/December 1992.
- , "Tad Savinar at S. K. Josefsberg Studio," *Artweek*, August 1997.
- Barnes, Clive, "Long night's radio journey into hell," *New York Post Weekend*, May 29, 1987.
- Berkson, Bill, "San Francisco: 'Image/Word: The Art of Reading,' New Langton Arts," *Artforum*, February 1986.
- Brenson, Michael, "Art: Exhibit of 'Signs' At the New Museum," *New York Times*, May 18, 1988.
- Curtis, Cathy, "Weaving New Life Into Everyday Objects," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1995.
- Ellison, Victoria, "Midlife Musings," *The Oregonian*, June 6, 1997.
- Failing, Patricia, "The Pacific Northwest: Sex, Landscape, and Videotapes," *ARTnews*, December 1991.
- Glowen, Ron, "Spatial Challenges," *Artweek*, December 13, 1980.
- , "Tad Savinar," *Vanguard*, Spring 1983.
- Gragg, Randy, "Irony Coast: Two Northwest artists color wry works with sarcasm," *The Oregonian*, November 29, 1991.
- Hayakawa, Alan, "'Quick read' collection uses art tools for fast propaganda pitch," *The Oregonian*, April 12, 1984.
- Hicks, Bob, "Blackout Bingo and other fine arts: Tad Savinar plays the fame game," *The Oregonian*, April 21, 1991.
- , "'Brushfires' explores masculinity, maleness," *The Oregonian*, 1986.
- , "'Brushfires' leaves glowing embers," *The Oregonian*, 1986.
- , "Savinar's 'Re-wired' one-ups Strindberg work," *The Oregonian*, 1986.
- , "Speedy 'Autoflex' almost ferocious," *The Oregonian*, 1986.
- , "'The 4 Mickies' treats obsessive artists," *The Oregonian*, July 9, 1988.
- Holden, Stephen, "Bogosian's Voices," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 24, 1987.
- Hull, Roger, "Art Views: From one idea an entire show grew," *Northwest Magazine*, *The Oregonian*, August 22, 1976.
- Johnson, Barry, "Laughs lurk in 'Cover Shot,'" *The Oregonian*, April 12, 1994.
- Kangas, Matthew, "Public Comments: Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, December 3 to February 18," *Vanguard*, Summer 1984.
- Kelley, Jeff, "'Since Vietnam: The War and Its Aftermath,' Guggenheim Gallery, Chapman University," *Artforum*, April 1985.
- O'Connor, Michael J., "An Orchard for Artists: Villa Montalvo, Saratoga, California," *Architecture*, December 1998.
- Ross, Terry, "The latest word on T. Savinar: cool, calm and collected," *The Oregonian*, October 16, 1994.
- Row, D. K., "Savinar's midlife crisis: It's only skin-deep in the multifaceted artist's new work," *The Oregonian*, October 30, 1998.
- Savinar, Tad, "Cover Shot," *Zyzyva*, Fall 1991.
- Sozanski, Edward J., "On galleries: Fabric Workshop," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 13, 1992.
- Paul Sutinen, "PCVA: A Man's World," *Willamette Week*, February 9-15, 1982.
- , "PCVA: Visions of Twelve," *Willamette Week*, October 17, 1977.
- , "Savinar: a tad funny-sad," *Willamette Week*, August 30, 1976.
- , "Savinar installations excite," *Willamette Week*, July 4, 1977.
- Updike, Robin, "Artists add human touch to halls of Harborview: Pieces aim to help staff, patients cope," *The Seattle Times*, August 31, 1997.
- Weber, John S., "Now and Then: Revisiting and Revising Conceptual and Minimal Art," statements from Northwest Artists Workshop, May 8-11, 1986.
- Whittemore, L. J., "Packing a punch: Artist Savinar proves provocative with visual one-liners and in-jokes," *The Oregonian*, April 12, 1991.

