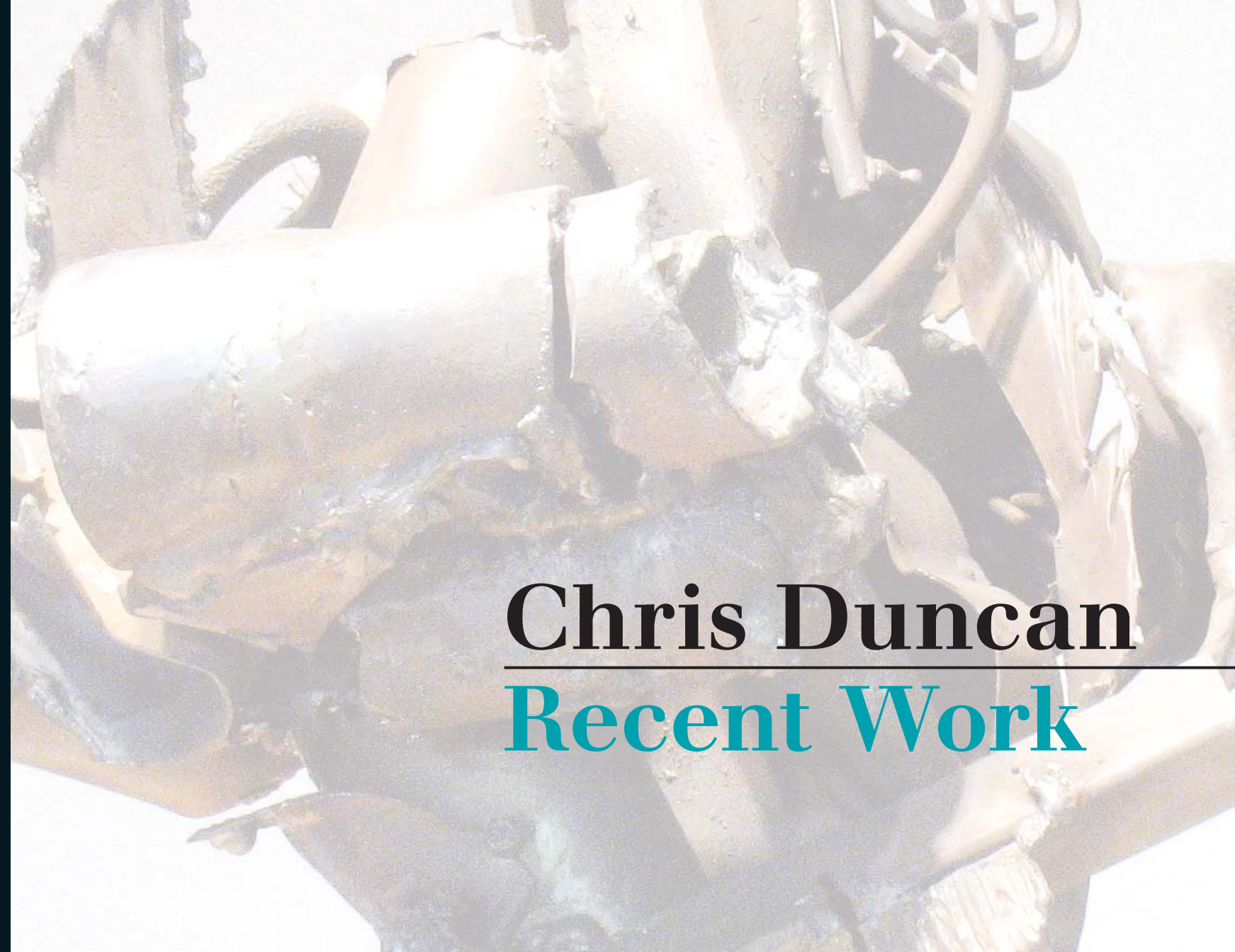




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Chris Duncan

Recent Work





MANDEVILLE GALLERY

Rachel Seligman – Director & Curator

Kara Jefts – Exhibitions Assistant

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Front and back cover: *Hard Bop*, 2010; above: *Mars*, 2010

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St. John the Baptist Day, 2009

Chris Duncan

Recent Work

Annual Faculty Exhibition

March 18 – May 9, 2010

Mandeville Gallery, Nott Memorial

Essay by Mario Naves



Firlefan, 2010

It's hard to believe that artists used to get into fistfights over representation – that is to say, over whether a work of art was sufficiently abstract.

In mid-twentieth-century New York, especially, there were furious debates about the viability of figurative art. Abstraction's most fervent advocates maintained that it led to art's ultimate stopping point. Upon encountering Willem de Kooning's slash-and-burn paintings of women, the art critic Clement Greenberg proclaimed, “you can't paint this way nowadays” – “this way” being the depiction of the human form.

The story is probably apocryphal, but the prohibitive opinion was – and, in some quarters, continues to be – the received wisdom. The thing is: Art is hugely mutable. Notwithstanding exigencies of context and the peculiarities of creative temperaments, art goes its own way; it takes on one guise or another with ferocious independence. Art doesn't progress; it evolves. If it progressed, the cave paintings at Altamira would be as relevant to the twenty-first century as the eight-track tape. That they thrive as pinnacles of human achievement puts to bed the notion that we're anywhere near reaching the culmination of this, that, or the other subject, motif, or art form.

These thoughts – about the role of representation and the reach of history, of how art gains strength and credence from an immersion in both – are brought to mind when looking at Chris Duncan's sculptures and drawings. You can peg them, if you'd like. Duncan's materials – scrapyard remnants and oddments of

printed materials – place the work in the traditions of welded steel sculpture and collage. His process recalls the improvisatory aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism. You can trot out as influences Julio Gonzalez, David Smith, Richard Stankiewicz and, if the flitting cadences and scrabbled marks of *Menhirs and Pineapples* (2009) are an indication, Jackson Pollock and Cy Twombly. In each case, you'd be right. Duncan is an abstract artist working in Modernist idioms.

But that's not to say Duncan spins the wheels of established canons or that he's a purist. Labels sell Duncan short. Like any artist of wide-ranging ambition, serious intent, and significant accomplishment, he knows that tradition is energized by how thoroughly it is honored and by how relentlessly it is questioned. What's remarkable about Duncan's work is that it simultaneously elides and welcomes a head-spinning array of associations.

Firlefan (2010), an ecstatic accumulation of what looks to be leftover plumbing supplies, has the declamatory presence of an African fetish figure and the uncompromising majesty of Easter Island's stone effigies. *Hard Bop* (2010) brings to mind the high drama and roiling torsion typical of Michelangelo. Like the Italian master, Duncan channels the art of antiquity, particularly that of Greece. Ignore at your own peril the heroic undercurrent and roughhewn sinew defining *For C.M.* (2010) or *Idle Idol* (2006); it's impossible. Elsewhere, Duncan evokes resources that are less noble though similarly energetic; in the works-on-paper, especially, he creates vortexes of rhythm as rambunctious as a prime Warner Brothers cartoon.



For C.M., 2010



Grand Canal, 2009

Given these comparisons, you might conclude that Duncan is a figurative artist dressed in abstract garb. All sculpture refers to the figure one way or another; the medium’s emphasis on mass, volume, and actual space guarantees a fairly direct analogue. Certainly, freestanding monoliths – a recurring characteristic of Duncan’s art – serve as ready-made symbols for the human form. But Duncan’s pieces, whether crafted from concrete, bronze, or steel, do more than glance off the body; they personify it with uncanny specificity and unmistakable gusto. Duncan re-imagines the figure – and, given the peacock-like strut of *Tattoo* (2009), animal life – with a profound understanding of its intricacies and, more important, its vitality.

Duncan’s art is peculiarly visceral in character. There’s an abiding sense that *Hard Bop*, say, or *Salem* (2008), with its lyrical unfurling of appendages, has been shaped from the inside out. Their growth and metamorphosis occur, as it were, right before our eyes. (*For C.M.* is particularly unsettling in how this transformation has been rendered in slow motion.) This “internal” quality is reinforced by the artist’s unfettered use of materials. Duncan is unapologetic about letting the nuts-and-bolts of his work retain their integrity – and often they literally are nuts-and-bolts.

Part of the pleasure we derive from *Grand Canal* (2009) stems from its piecemeal construction and recycling of mechanical fittings. Duncan’s ingenuity is, in this regard, inescapable, ingratiating, and fun. But ingenuity has to serve a higher purpose. Art is nothing if it doesn’t embrace life, and this is where Duncan proves himself a sculptor of no small gifts. What’s

remarkable about *Grand Canal* is less its crafting – though that is essential, of course, to the work’s realization – but the fact that it pirouettes. Here is a sculpture that moves. The visual arts are static only to the extent that an artist fails to animate his materials. Duncan brings to fruition this longstanding truth with consummate authority.

In important ways, then, each piece is a verb. Whether they do so with roughhewn calm (*Apsara* (2008)) or with supernatural menace (*Genie* (2008)), the sculptures assert themselves with palpable, if often understated, muscle. They flex, stretch, ascend, tilt, and in *Shaken Not Stirred* and *Scaffolding* (both 2009), storm with impatience. Living with a Duncan would, you feel, be a challenge – the things just don’t sit still. Then again, that’s the hallmark of significant art: a refusal to be cowed by permanence.

That’s why arguments pitting representation against abstraction are moot, if not altogether pointless. Slipping out from under dogma, art insists on opening up possibilities we’re unlikely to realize when left to our own devices. Suzanne Langer, a mid-twentieth-century philosopher fascinated by aesthetics, posited that a work of art encompasses more than the artist knows. Duncan understands this essential paradox. He’s attuned to prerogatives simultaneously of his own making and bigger than he can imagine. This goes some way in illuminating the invigorating nature of his unruly and magisterial art.

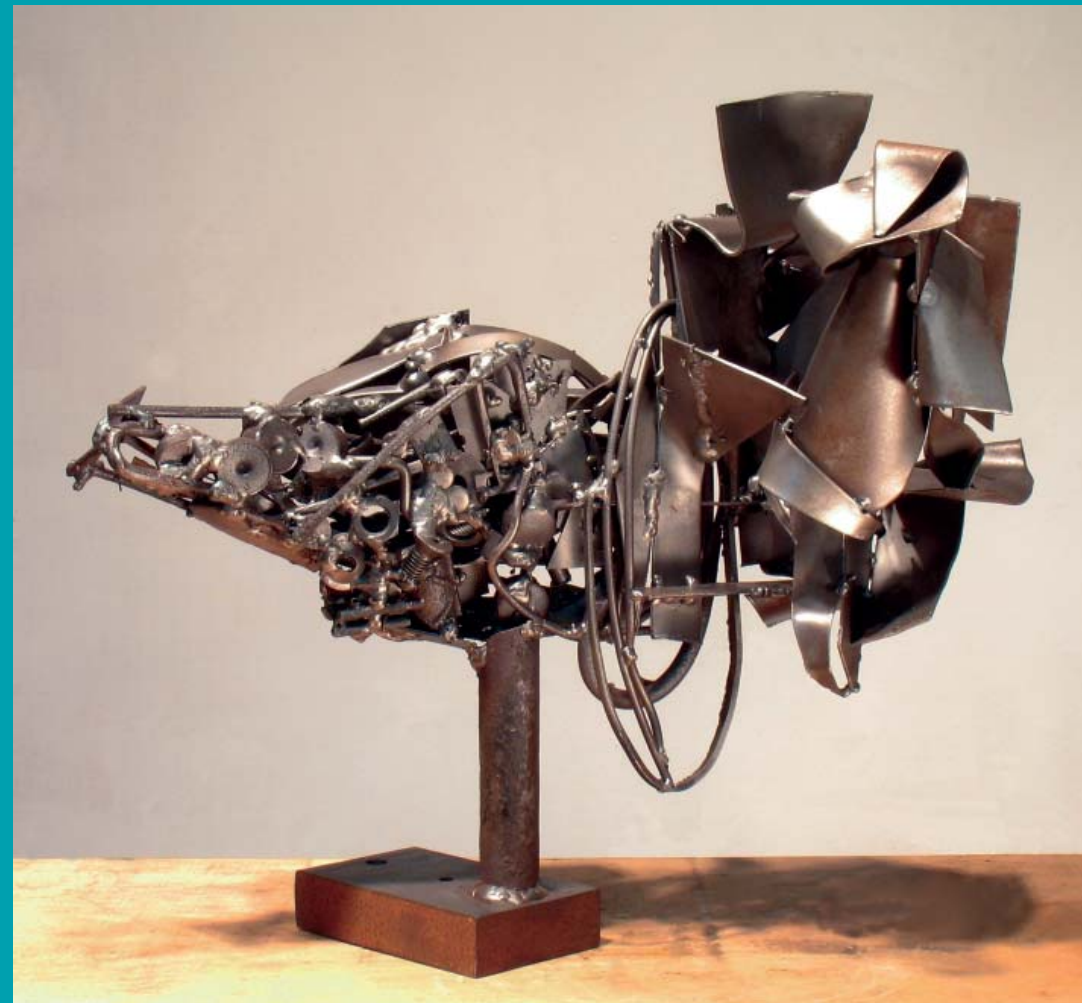
Mario Naves is an artist who writes about art. He lives and works in New York City.



Scaffolding, 2009



Arcade, 2009



Tattoo, 2009



Shaken Not Stirred, 2009



Salem, 2008

Chris Duncan

www.chrisduncansculpture.com

AWARDS

1998, 02, 05, 07	Union College Humanities Faculty Development Fund
1993,95,96,98,02	NYFA S.O.S. Grants
1996	Casting Institute Fellowship, SUNY Buffalo
1989	Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant
1989	Maine Percent for Art Commission
1986	John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2010	Teaching Gallery, Hudson Valley Community College, Troy, NY Mandeville Gallery, Union College, Schenectady, NY
2005	Gallery 100, Saratoga Springs, NY
2004	FirlefanZ Gallery, Albany, NY
2003	Bruno Marina Gallery, Brooklyn, NY Saratoga Arts Center, Saratoga Springs, NY
2002, 1998	Union College, Schenectady, NY
1997	Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China
1995	Kirkland Art Center, Clinton, NY
1991	NO B.I.A.S. Artists Space, North Bennington, VT
1990	RCCA Gallery, Troy, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2010	<u>185th Artists’ Invitational</u> The National Academy Museum, New York, NY
2009	<u>Art Basel/Miami</u> Allan Stone Gallery, Miami, FL

2009	<u>Iron Works</u> Rosefsky Gallery, SUNY Binghamton, Binghamton, NY <u>The Art Show</u> Art Dealers Association of America Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY <u>Secret Sale</u> Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, New York, NY <u>Sculptors’ Drawings from the Collection</u> Munson-William-Proctor Museum, Utica, NY
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2008	<u>Art Basel/Miami</u> Allan Stone Gallery, Miami, FL <u>Talent</u> Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY <u>Large Drawing Small Sculpture</u> Mullen Gallery, SUCO, Oneonta, NY <u>Cherry Valley Sculpture Trail</u> Cherry Valley, NY
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2007	<u>Sculpture Outside</u> Salem Art Works, Salem, NY
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2006	<u>Selections from the Cultural Corridor</u> Storefront Artists Project, Pittsfield, MA <u>Significantly Small</u> Gallery 100, Saratoga Springs, NY
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2005	<u>FOUR SCULPTORS</u> New York Studio School Gallery, New York, NY
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2004	<u>GROUP</u> Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY <u>Stepping Outdoors</u> SUNY Ulster, Stone Ridge, NY <u>Permanent Installation</u> , SUNY Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh, NY
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2003	<u>Gallery Artists</u> RICO, Brooklyn, NY
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SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS (continued)

2003	<u>Opened Spaces</u> Hudson Valley Community College, Troy, NY <u>ArtFest 2003</u> Baltimore, MD
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2002	<u>8th International Shoebox Sculpture Exhibition</u> University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI, (and traveling) <u>North Shore Sculpture Park</u> Skokie, IL <u>Drawings by Sculptors</u> College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA
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2001	<u>New Acquisitions</u> Munson-Williams-Proctor Museum, Utica, NY <u>Contemporary Sculpture at Chesterwood 2001</u> Stockbridge, MA
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2000	<u>Inaugural Exhibition</u> Myers Sculpture Court SUNY Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh, NY <u>Pierwalk 2000</u> Navy Pier, Chicago, IL
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RESIDENCIES

Salem Art Works, Salem, NY; Vermont Studio Center; Franconia Sculpture Park, Shafer, MN; Casting Institute, SUNY Buffalo; Contemporary Artists’ Center, North Adams, MA; Sculpture Space, Utica, NY; Triangle Artist’s Workshop, Pine Plains, NY

VISITING ARTIST

Virginia Commonwealth University; University of North Carolina, Greensboro; Colby College; Visiting Critic, Vermont Studio Center; Nanjing Art Institute, Nanjing, China; Dartmouth College; Portland School of Art; New York Studio School; University of Maine

TEACHING

Fall 2008	Mellon Faculty Exchange Fellow, Skidmore College
2005-present	Professor of Visual Arts, Union College
2001-2005, 2007	Chair, Department of Visual Arts, Union College
1988-2008	Visual Arts Faculty, Union College
1983-86	Teaching Assistant/Studio Manager, Bennington College

EDUCATION

1983	Assistant to William Tucker, London, UK
1978	Certificate, New York Studio School of Painting and Sculpture, NY, NY
1975	Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME
1975	B.A. English cum laude, Colby College, Waterville, ME

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Grace Knowlton
Drs. Lois and Morton Marcus
Mr. and Mrs. Norton Reamer
Barbara Schiffrin
Hudson Valley Community College
The Hyde Collection
Munson–Williams–Proctor Museum
SUNY Plattsburgh
Union College
University of Maine System
Virginia Commonwealth University
Wright State University

REPRESENTATION

Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY
RICO, Brooklyn, NY



Lake Tehri, 2007

Checklist

SCULPTURE

Apsara, 2008, cast iron, 7" x 7" x 2"

Big Hair, 2009, plaster and aluminum leaf, 12" x 9" x 9"

Firlefanz, 2010, steel, 25" x 26" x 19"

For C.M., 2010, steel, 12" x 10" x 6 ½"

Genie, 2008, steel, 40" x 12" x 12"

Grand Canal, 2009, steel, 16" x 11 ½" x 8"

Hard Bop, 2010, steel, 11 ½" x 11 ½" x 9"

Idlewild South, 2006, steel and concrete, 12" x 9" x 6"

In Ladakh, 2008-2010, steel, wood, plaster, aluminum leaf, 64" x 42" x 78"

Lake Frame, 2009, steel and wood, 76" x 24" x 55"

Library, 2007, bronze, 14" x 6" x 6"

Mars, 2010, steel, 26" x 42" x 53"

Miles, 2006, steel and concrete, 12" x 6" x 5"

Morandi, 2006, bronze, 11" x 5" x 5"

Pressure Drop, 2006, steel and concrete, 11" x 7" x 6"

Pushback, 2008, cast iron, 8 ½" x 9" x 4"

Roebing, 2009, steel, 20" x 20" x 20"

Salem, 2008, steel, 18" x 14" x 8"

Tattoo, 2009, steel, 14" x 18" x 14"

Tutto Campato Per Aria, 2009, steel, 16" x 17" x 14"

WORKS ON PAPER

Arcade, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 51 ½" x 37 ¾"

August, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 54" x 58"

Gunpowder Tea, 2009, ink, leaf, and collage on paper, 31" x 23"

Hotel Supreme, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 41 ½" x 50"

In Camera, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 22" x 50"

Lake Tehri, 2007, gouache on paper, 30" x 22"

Lunette, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 30" x 22"

Menhirs and Pineapples, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 29" x 58"

Mubarik's Bounce, 2007, gouache on paper, 30" x 22"

Mussoorie, 2007, gouache on paper, 30" x 22"

Scaffolding, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 45" x 54"

Shaken Not Stirred, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 31" x 23"

St. John the Baptist Day, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 34" x 50"

Sultan, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 35 ½" x 27"

The Florentines, 2009, acrylic and collage on paper, 38" x 42"

Untitled I-IV, 2009, gouache on paper, 12" x 12" each

Urge, 2007, gouache on paper, 30" x 22"



Genie, 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend thanks to my family, especially my wife Alice, for their ongoing enthusiasm, encouragement, and good advice; to friends and colleagues at the college for their continued support; to Rachel Seligman for her eagle eye and unflagging energy; and to Claire Hendry and Kara Jefts for their invaluable assistance in preparing and installing this exhibit. Lastly I would like to thank my students, whose engagement with and excitement about sculpture are a tonic.