



Steve Linn

Some
People
I Admire

September 11 - November 28
2021

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MUSEUM OF ART

Some People I Admire

Steve Linn's Documentary Sculpture

Fort Wayne Museum of Art

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Photo: Kaitlin Binkley

Cover: Rodia's Tower
Photo: Lauren Wolfer
Collection: Fort Wayne Museum of Art

Introduction

A sculptor faces all the basic aesthetic challenges that every artist wrestles with. On top of those, the sculptor has to master the unique spatial relationships inherent to three dimensions and the engineering problems that have to be solved as each work begins to take shape. In my 40-year career as a museum director/curator, I have had the opportunity to exhibit some of the most historically significant sculptors of the 20th and 21st century: Alexander Calder, George Rickey, Louise Nevelson, Louise Bourgeois, Paul Manship, Darrell Petit, and Dale Enochs among them.

Steve Linn fits comfortably into this cohort of accomplished artists. His work is as aesthetically robust and artistically groundbreaking as any I have ever seen, and his mastery of the multiple materials that he is apt to use in each single piece – glass, metal, wood, stone, and the occasional hologram – puts him in a league of his own in both historic and contemporary art. One must also consider that the subject of Steve’s art is another brilliant and accomplished individual whose work, in some special way, has had an impact on Steve’s mind and soul. Before addressing the aesthetic and engineering issues in each of his compelling sculptures, Steve must first identify who he will focus on and then “channel” the relationship he has developed with their work, whether it be their art, their writing, their music, or their life. That is no mean feat and, yet, his celebration of each of these people is nothing short of masterful.

Steve Linn is a virtuoso, and the Fort Wayne Museum of Art is very proud to present this dazzling exhibition of his work. We curate solo exhibitions such as this when we identify very high-quality work that we feel our audience would benefit from seeing as a body of work, rather than as one or two individual pieces in an exhibition of a group of artists. From the very start of the discussions about curating an exhibition devoted entirely to Steve Linn’s work, we felt strongly that the spacious Dr. Calvin H. and Mary Tower English Gallery, our largest, would offer our visitors the most meaningful experience of Steve’s work. The exhibition has been a marvelous experience for our visitors, both local and national, and judging from their comments, they have been as moved as I have been by Steve’s work.

Charles A. Shepard III
President & CEO
Fort Wayne Museum of Art



Four Sketches on Dances by Alvin Ailey

For many years I have had an interest in modern and classical dance stemming back to my university days performing as a member of the dance chorus in musical comedies. I subsequently worked as a scenic artist, costume and lighting designer for several dance companies including the Deborah Zall/June Lewis Dance company and the Arthur Hall Afro-American Dance Ensemble.

The idea of transforming dance into abstract but semi-literal gestural forms was inspired by the dancer, Karen Carlson. These four dances that I have chosen are from one of my favorite choreographers, Alvin Ailey. The dances are titled "Cry", "Pas de Duke", "Jazz Suite", and "Revelations". The Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre, an all-black company, was formed in 1958. In 1962 he made the company multiracial. Ailey died in 1989 and the company has succeeded through a series of artistic directors, beginning with Judith Jamison his featured dancer for the previous 28 years.

Dimensions : 115 cm x 152 cm x 10.5 cm

Materials: Sandblasted glass and painted aluminum



Chaplin

Charlie Chaplin was a British actor, filmmaker, and composer. He began as a stage actor and came to America with a theater company in 1908 at the age of 19. At this time, he discovered the earliest silent films and was swept into the excitement of this era. Ten years later he founded United Artists Studio and distribution company with Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and D.W. Griffith offering him complete autonomy with his projects.

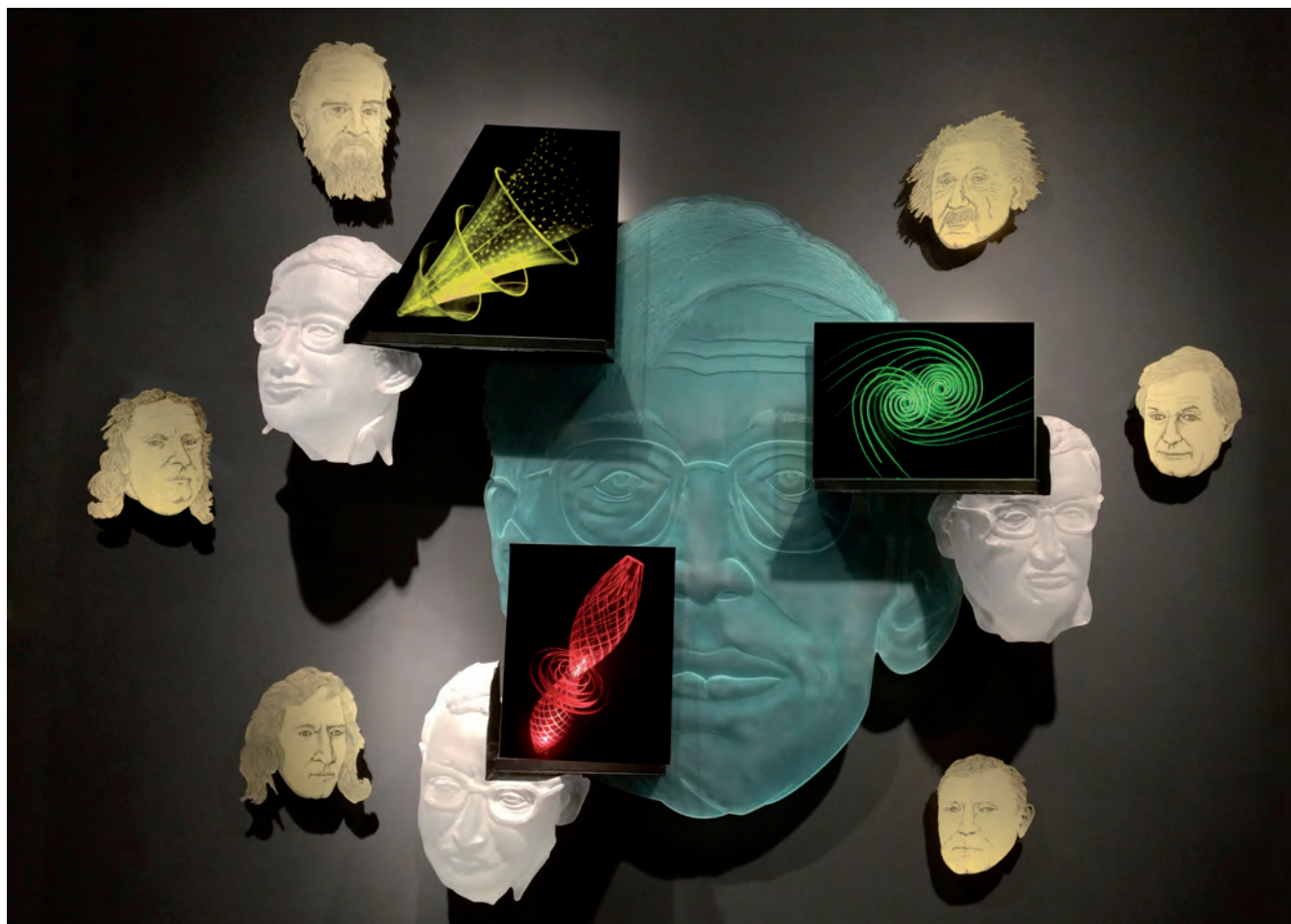
Several of Chaplin's films, "The Gold Rush", "City Lights", "Modern Times", and "The Great Dictator", are considered some of the greatest films of all times.

In my sculpture the images in each frame are from some of these iconic films and the images of Chaplin himself are as the Little Tramp and as he appeared off screen. The music is the theme from the song "Smile", written for the film "Modern Times" and made famous by Nat King Cole. Chaplin was a prodigious composer and wrote the scores of all of his films even the piano scores to be played with the silent films.

Dimensions: 161 cm x 115 cm x 20 cm

Materials: Resin painted cut-out aluminum, sandblasted glass, and cast glass

Photo: Nicolas Tremelet



Hawking

Stephen Hawking was a British Cosmologist recognized for his theoretical resolution concerning the origin of the universe known as the big bang. He has also did extensive work on the circumstances surrounding black holes. When he passed away in 2018 at the age of 76 he had been afflicted with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) a debilitating neuromuscular disease for more than 50 years. His life was a true miracle in that regard given that the normal life span for someone with ALS is only a few years from the time of diagnosis.

For this sculpture I have chosen to portray Professor Hawking in four different stages of his life from his youth when he had his eureka moment after discovering the work of Ralph Penrose on singularity through the progression of his ALS.

Because so much of what we perceive of the universe is mysterious I decided to continue my work with holograms in this piece. I feel that holograms in themselves have the qualities that best evoke a visual representation of the Hawking studies.

Hawking's work did not come without the groundwork provided by scientists that came before him. Surrounding the central section of the sculpture are six of these most important historical figures. They are Galileo Galilei, Nicolaus Copernicus, Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Roger Penrose, and Edwin Hubble. These six heads surrounding the cast and carved glass heads refer to the planets.

Dimensions: 235 cm x 175 cm x 35 cm

Materials: Cast glass, sandblasted glass, holograms and brass

Photo: Eric Hilton



Artemesia

Artemisia Gentileschi was one of the most important painters of the Baroque period and the first woman ever to be admitted to the Florentine Academy of Design. She was trained as a youngster by her father Orazio an important painter, whose work, along with that of Artemisia, has withstood the test of time. They were both vastly influenced by Caravaggio, the painter of light and shadow (chiaroscuro). It is important when understanding her intellectual life that in her later life she had an extensive exchange of letters with Galileo.

Two paintings that are most recognizable in the œuvre of Artemisia are “Judith Slaying Holofernes”, in the collection of the Uffizi in Florence and the British Royal Collection’s, “Self Portrait as the Allegory of Painting”, which is the basis of this sculpture. A third painting emblematic of her style, “Judith and her Handmaiden”, is in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Art.

My sculpture not only tells the story of this remarkable artist, but it bridges the gap from the historical to the contemporary periods in art. It further reflects the continuing disparity between the attention given to men and women in the art world.

The four heads on the painter’s palette are Artemisia, Orazio, Caravaggio, and Galileo.

Dimensions: 172 cm x 142 cm x 35 cm

Materials: Sanblasted colored glass, cast glass, bronze, and wood

Collection: Cheryl Lapin



I Dreamt I was a Model for George Segal

I hadn't done a self-portrait in almost twenty years. When thinking about it, however, I did not want to do a piece specifically about me, so I put it in the context of posing for one of my earliest art heroes.

In the 1960's when I was in college at the University of Illinois George Segal came and gave a lecture. At the time although I was a student in the Agriculture school, my interests were in theatre design and sculpture.

During the talk I vividly remember a slide of a guy hanging letters on a marquee at a movie theatre, this sculpture, "Cinema", from 1963 was a revelation because it bridged the gap, at least for me, between my two interests. From that time on my two biggest contemporary sculptural influences were Segal and Ed Keinholz.

We skip now to 1975, I am in Rome as a recipient of the Prix de Rome in sculpture. I get a call from the cultural attaché at the American Embassy asking me if I would I accompany George Segal for a number of days while he worked on a series of "blue jean prints". My task was to help navigate Rome and to aid with the language. We do not often get to spend time with our heroes.

For the next twenty-five years Segal continued to make his full body and bas-relief plaster bandage wrapped figurative sculptures. He passed away in 2000.

Dimensions: 70 cm x 65 cm x 24 cm

Materials: Sandblasted glass, cast glass, and bronze

Collection: Drs. Nancy and Marshall Levine



Poet, Painter, Publisher (Lawrence Ferlinghetti)

As a person who bridges the gap between the beatnik generation and the hippies, I visited City Lights Bookstore (named after the 1931 Charlie Chaplin film) frequently while living in San Francisco in 1969. My friend Phil Watts turned me on to the beat poets while I was living and working in Washington DC in 1965, so I was eager to absorb the atmosphere of this shrine to their writings. Lawrence Ferlinghetti is a triple threat mostly known as a poet; however, he was also the proprietor of the bookshop and the publisher of virtually every well-known member of this group of poetry superstars. What is least known about him is his more than 60-year career as a painter.

In order to tell the story of this remarkable man who marked his 100th birthday in 2019, I have chosen some specific references. The image of Ferlinghetti is from Christopher Felver's iconic photo. The overall format is from his painting "Unfinished Flag of the United States". The three poetry chap books are from the Pocket Poet Series. The first ones published were Ferlinghetti's own "Pictures from a Gone World" as well as "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg, and "Gasoline" by Gregory Corso. The address is that of the Bookstore, and the text is from his poem, "I am Waiting", from the collection Coney Island of the Mind. Ferlinghetti died earlier this year, 2021, at the age of 101.

Dimensions: 57 cm x 107 cm x 20 cm

Materials: Sandblasted glass, cast glass, bronze, wood, and printed steel



Tectonic Shift (Peter Voulkos)

As a result of the exhibition, “Clay’s Tectonic Shift” by John Mason, Ken Price, and Peter Voulkos at Scripps College in Claremont, California, Voulkos and his friends began to move ceramics from the craft world into fine arts based on scale, surface textures, color, and volume.

I met Voulkos several times when I was a technical instructor in sculpture at the University of California at Santa Cruz from 1970 to 1973 and he was a professor at U C Berkeley. At that time, I was young and just finding my way as an artist. Each year, there was a sculpture symposium at one of the campuses where ideas were exchanged and Voulkos was one of the influences that got me to think big and find my own voice. Even though one’s visual language can be completely different, there can be a significant influence.

When he began to be recognized, Voulkos made wheel-thrown large vessels. In the 1950s he started to deform these shapes and assemble them into larger sculptures. This eventually led to very large-scale hand-built sculptures. In this piece I have attempted to show that transition. The shape of the glass is based on a piece called “Flying Black Work” from 1958 and the wood, from one titled “Josephine” from 1961. Voulkos never lost his love for wheel-thrown work even after his success with the major large-scale installations; he went back and forth between the two throughout his career.

Dimensions: 165 cm with base (height) x 125 cm x 61 cm

Materials: Sandblasted glass, bronze, and wood



Maxwell Street

I was born and raised in Chicago and in 1956 when I was approaching my 13th birthday my father took me to Maxwell Street to buy me my first suit. This was a momentous occasion not because I was getting a suit, but it was my introduction to the blues. Maxwell street was the center of Jewish pushcart commerce and haberdashery emporiums, it was also where black blues musicians congregated, played, and thrived in harmony with their neighbors. My dad let me stay and listen that day and I became a life-long fan.

The merchants provided electrical extension cords from their establishments to power the amplifiers of the musicians and in return the musicians were an attraction to lure customers into the shops.

Against a background of food signs and clothing shops, I chose to paint the story of this lively hub through the images of five of the musicians who played for tips and stayed on that street throughout their careers, Stovepipe Daddy, Arvella Grey, Hound Dog Taylor, Carey Bell, and Blind Jim Brewer.

In the early 1990's began the demise of Maxwell Street with the expansion of the University of Illinois Chicago campus into the area. Merchants were forced to move and the last music was heard as 1999 passed into 2000 on a bandstand on the northeast corner of Maxwell and Halstead. The campus construction crews were ordered to block off the area and the music ceased.

Dimensions: 150 cm x 150 cm x 60 cm

Materials: Sandblasted glass, steel, wood, and brass

Photo: Jason Swisher



Me in my Maxwell Street suit, 1956



Gesamkunstwerk* (Joseph Beuys)

Joseph Beuys, a German artist associated with the Fluxus group was born in 1921. He was a performance and happening artist as well as a painter, sculptor, and installation artist who probed and poked the art establishment. Hard to define, he was a prolific public speaker and teacher that created a personality cult around himself. He spoke out on humanist, political, environmental, social, and cultural issues. Throughout his discourse he was forever trying to get everyone to see themselves as artists and promote participation in artistic projects.

The materials and symbols I have used to tell his story stem from his personal myth. I portrayed him as a character which was reinvented for the moment and therefore ghostlike. This was the reverse embodiment of his famous felt suit sculpture, felt being an important material in his sculptural iconography. One cannot measure his colossal importance on the post WWII art world shown through the works he produced and the influence he had on succeeding generations.

Other elements I incorporated into my homage include a luge which references his invented personal history, his iconic hat, and an oak seedling which refers to his participatory environmental project of planting 7000 Oak Trees, begun as part of Documenta 7 (one of the world's most important art fairs). Beuys died in 1986.

Dimensions: 240 cm x 100 cm x 72 cm

Materials: Sandblasted glass, industrial felt, aluminum, and wood

Photo: Jason Swisher

*Gesamkunstwerk, a work of art that makes use of all or many forms of art



Over the River: Cancelled 1/20/2017

Christo and Jeanne-Claude began researching the project "Over the River" in 1992. In 1996 they chose a 42-mile section of the Arkansas River in Colorado. Their object was to cover eight distinct areas in that stretch of the river from Canon City to Salida with a silver-colored luminous fabric which would be suspended high enough so as not to cause any environmental issues. It took until 2011 for Christo to receive the necessary permits. Sadly, in 2009 during the late preparation for this project Jeanne-Claude passed away.

Once the environmental impact study was completed a local group filed suit against The Colorado State Parks in State Court and the Bureau of Land Management in US Federal Court. Christo fought the suits, and the project was due to begin construction in March of 2017.

On January 20, 2017 in a statement to the New York Times, Christo decided to stop the project which was on federal land because he did not want it to benefit its new "landlord".

This piece rends homage to these two masterful artist/collaborators and their vast vision which over the years had produced such projects as "Wrapped Pont Neuf" (Paris), "The Gates of Central Park" (New York City), "Running Fence" (California), "Valley Curtain" (Colorado), "Surrounded Islands" (Miami), and "Floating Piers" (Brescia, Italy) as well as the recently completed "Wrapped Arc de Triumph" (Paris). Christo died in May 2020.

Dimensions: 30 cm x 100 cm x 109 cm

Materials: Sandblasted glass, cast aluminum, wood



Il se jette dans le vide (Yves Klein)

Yves Klein a French painter and performance artist born in 1928 was an artist of legends. "Painter of Blue", "Creator of Emptiness", "Manipulator of Energy", and "Cosmic Architect of Air" were some of his self-described titles. He was a leader of the New Realism and the thread that continued the work of Marcel Duchamp. He is known for his sponge paintings as well as the very particular almost iridescent blue invented in 1957 that was his secret. This color, International Klein Blue (IKB), became his signature.

Throughout his later life Klein made claims of levitation and on November 27, 1960 he said that from 0 to 24 hours the planet Earth became the theatre of emptiness and he flew into that empty space from a wall at 5 rue Gentil Bernard in Fontenay aux Roses, France. A photo by Harry Shunk and Janos Kender was taken of him as he sailed through the air. Klein was a world class Judoka with a black belt holding the highest rank of 4th dan. According to his friend Jean Varielles, the pose Klein was assuming when he leapt was influenced by the Kata of Birds.

For the sculpture, the bold yet fragile glass figure is soaring from the wall out of the iridescent blue with the prospect of landing on his sponges and one of his "Anthropométries". These were paintings that were created by nude models covered in IKB paint that were directed by Klein dressed in a tuxedo to roll around on blank canvases in front of an audience. Yves Klein died at 34 years old at the height of his powers as a visionary artist.

Dimensions: 350 cm x 125 cm x 250 cm

Materials: Sandblasted glass, brick, stone, painted aluminum, and wood

Photo: Jason Swisher



N'oubliez Pas (Anselm Kiefer)

Anselm Kiefer is a German Painter and sculptor born in 1945. He is of the generation influenced by the artistic approach of Joseph Beuys who he encountered as a professor while a student at the Art Academy of Dusseldorf.

Kiefer has made it a point to remind his viewers to never forget the terrible acts of Germany's recent past and to make people aware that the awful plague of neo-Nazism continues not only in Germany but many other societies throughout the world.

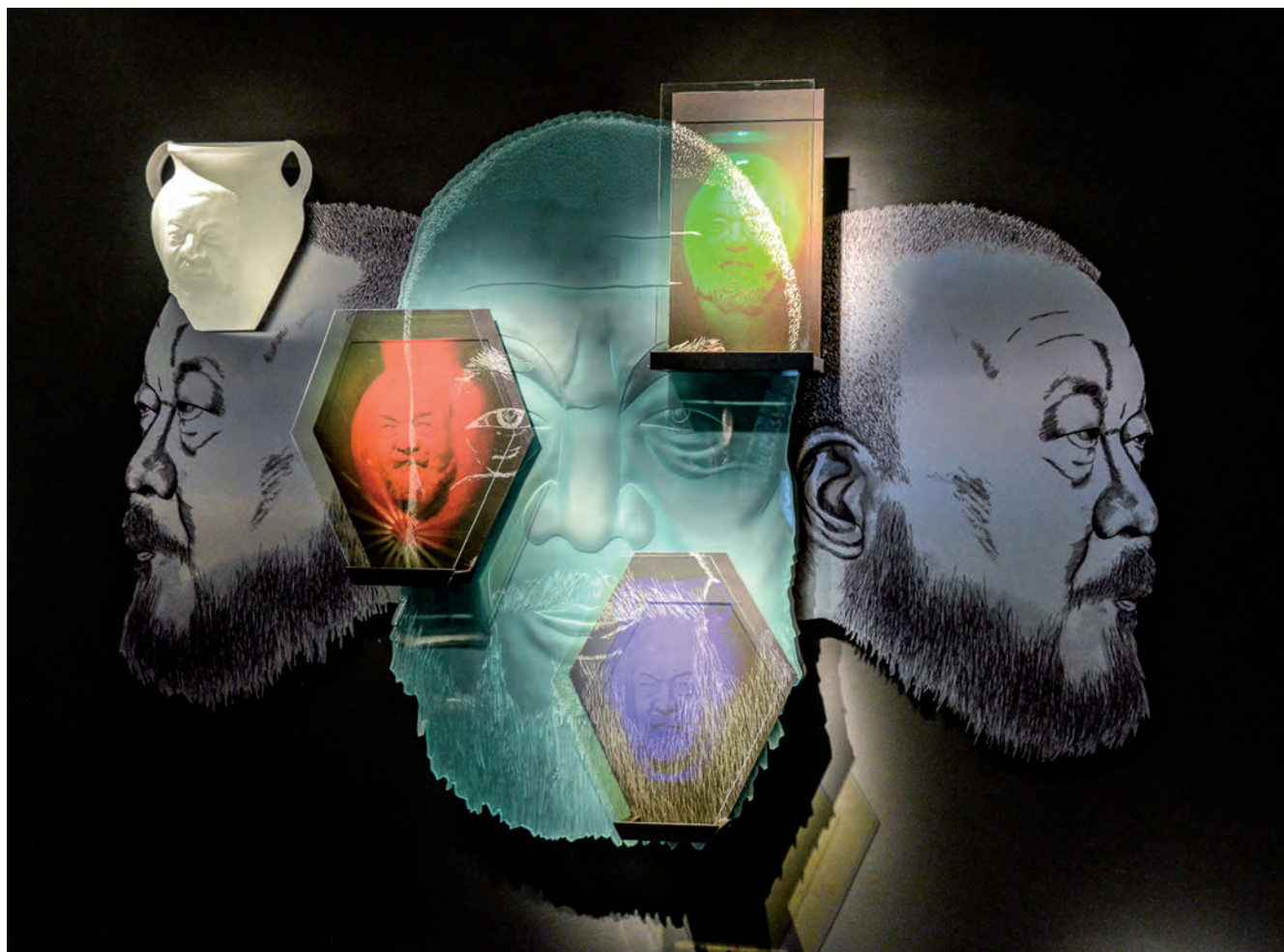
Kiefer's somber and often morbid paintings and sculptures make very powerful statements and help to communicate his moral center referencing Germany's past so that it will never happen again. Some of these reoccurring themes such as train tracks disappearing into a vanishing point, a door through which one passes never to return, and the empty dresses women left behind once they entered the chambers of death are at the center of a large body of his work. On the other hand, wings and books appear in many of the large-scale sculptures. For me the wings represent the mythical phoenix rising up from the ashes and the books evoke a metaphor for the communication of collective knowledge and the redemptive power of Art.

In the early 2000's he purchased a large 80-acre tract in Barjac, France where he constructed towers using the steel bodies of shipping containers. The piece is called "Seven Heavenly Palaces" and references the desire to ascend to the Divine.

Dimensions: 490 cm x 300 cm x 152 cm

Materials: Cast glass, cast bronze, cast aluminum, wood, and sandblasted glass

Photo: Karen Lehrer



In the Air (Ai Weiwei)

In the past few years, Ai Weiwei has become the most widely seen and exhibited artist on the planet. He has explored all areas of the arts with amazing success. There are works based on ancient ideas, as well as very contemporary conceptual pieces. There are works based on both Asian and occidental traditions. There is flat art and sculpture. There is video and photography. His sculpture touches virtually every material. Each piece stands on its own as a formidable work. At this point in his life, he has the resources to go wherever his mind chooses. I am enamored of his ability to think outside the box and continually come up with something new and important to say.

One of his better-known conceptual pieces is the triptych photo that documents him dropping a 6th century Han Dynasty vase. In my sculpture the falling vase moves from the cast glass version in the upper left tumbling through the air-like holograms to the broken shards in bronze at the bottom right. Since Ai Weiwei is a “brand”, I have chosen to put his face on everything in the piece. I have used holograms to indicate his presence on the world stage even when he was not able to be present due to the removal of his passport for a period of four or five years. He was there without ever being there. The two profile photos of my drawings of Ai Weiwei symbolize his facing toward his Chinese culture and toward the culture of the rest of the world for his inspiration. In the middle is the man behind the work looking out to see what’s next.

Dimensions: 135 cm x 180 cm x 28 cm

Materials: Sandblasted glass, cast glass, printed drawing on aluminum and holograms

Photo: Eric Hilton



An Ecstatic Life of the Spirit (Marc Di Suevero)

An exploration of Mark di Suvero's Helmholtz Sculpture.

I have considered the idea of doing a sculpture about Mark DiSuvero for many years, but nothing gelled. When the exhibition at the Fort Wayne Museum of Art became a reality, the door was opened. I thought it would be perfect to bring his sculpture Helmholtz indoors in a sense and pay homage to the artist at the same time.

While doing research I noticed that many of his sculptures began as India ink brush drawings. Although I did not find one for "Helmholtz", I created one in his style and then reproduced it in a larger scale in the sandblasted and painted glass.

Why glass? When a drunk driver ploughed into the Helmholtz sculpture virtually destroying it, I was reminded of the fragility of any material and glass becomes a symbol of the acknowledgement of that principal. I have portrayed the artist welding the reconstructed work. He is made of steel like his sculptures and his spirit cannot be broken. This was proven earlier in his career when he came back from a terrible accident where his legs were crushed, and it was thought he would never walk again.

The several quotes stenciled on the floor give a glimpse into his philosophical approach to art and life.

Dimensions: 325 cm x 3060 cm x 450 cm

Materials: Wood, glass, and steel

Photos: Jason Swisher



Kara Walker

Kara Walker was born in California in 1969. When she was a young adolescent the family moved to Stone Mountain, Georgia. Up until that time race was not a big issue in her life having lived in a progressive, integrated community in California. In Stone Mountain, they still held KKK rallies and in high school she was called the "N" word and was told that she looked like a monkey.

She studied art at the Atlanta College of Art and went on to graduate school at the Rhode Island School of Design. In her early work she was afraid to use race as a subject matter because she was concerned it would be perceived as "obvious". As her self-confidence grew, she produced "Gone, An Historical Romance of a Civil War as it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of a Young Negress and her Heart". This cut black paper silhouette mural told a tale of forced sex and slavery in the civil war south. She went on to address issues of race and gender equality using silhouetted stereo typed historical references to confront persistent modern-day concerns. The "So Called Queen" reference relates to the fact that even though she is well known in the art world, to those that don't know her she is an anonymous black woman subject to the same prejudices that pervade in our society.

Among her many honors, Kara Walker was the second youngest recipient, at the age of 27, of the MacArthur Foundation "genius" Grant.

Dimensions: 150 cm x 150 cm x 40 cm

Materials: Cast glass with graphite and resin-painted aluminum



Photos: Jason Swisher





Some People I Admire

The origins of this exhibition and indeed my career go back to two circumstances of my youth. The first, making things and using my hands to create stems from my father, Max Linn, who taught me to use the tools from his wood shop at a very early age. The second, was a series of 50 small orange biographies that I discovered in my elementary school library. I read every one and from that point on I was moved to discover more about the lives of people who have done wonderful things.

Some of my early pieces such as "The Bridgemen", "High Iron", "Gandydancer", and "Six Days on the Road" were generic in nature and delved into the idiosyncrasies of the professional aspects of their subjects. Beginning in the late 1970's and early 1980's I began to add the lives of real people into the mix, inspired by the amazing career of the photographer, Imogen Cunningham and the sudden death of the New York Yankees catcher, Thurman Munson.

Wood was my first sculptural material and in the late 1960's while teaching theatre design at Smith College I met Mike Brenneman who was running the foundry program at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. He gave me the opportunity to try some bronze casting and I found that the bronze, because of the detail that could be incised in the wax original gave me an added dimension that when combined with the wood enhanced my pieces which by now had become much more narrative.

The sculpture about Imogen Cunningham from 1982, was the first piece that I made that incorporated glass as one of the sculptural elements. Cunningham's use of an 8 X 10 view camera, where the negatives were made on glass plates, triggered the idea of putting her life-size image on a sheet of glass and I discovered sandblasting for this purpose. A few years later I connected with the Experimental Glass Workshop in New York where I started casting glass. For the past thirty or more years my sculptures have been a mix of many materials, including some recent experiments with holograms that are incorporated into the pieces, "In the Air" (Ai Weiwei) and "Hawking" (Stephen Hawking).

The works in this show were created since 2015 and with the exception of "Hawking", are concerned with artists in various disciplines: painters, sculptors, writers, choreographers, and musicians. However, one might consider that Stephen Hawking was indeed an artist in his approach to the cosmos. One piece in particular was created expressly for this exhibition "An Ecstatic Life of the Spirit" An exploration of Mark DiSuvero's Helmholtz sculpture. I had thought for years about doing a piece in homage to this artist and thus the presence of this particular sculpture by DiSuvero outside of the Fort Wayne Museum of Art presented the perfect opportunity.

Steve Linn



Photo: Nicolas Tremelet