



JohnWatson | AndreaGreen

The Kranzberg Exhibition Series
Laumeier Sculpture Park 6.9.06 - 9.3.06

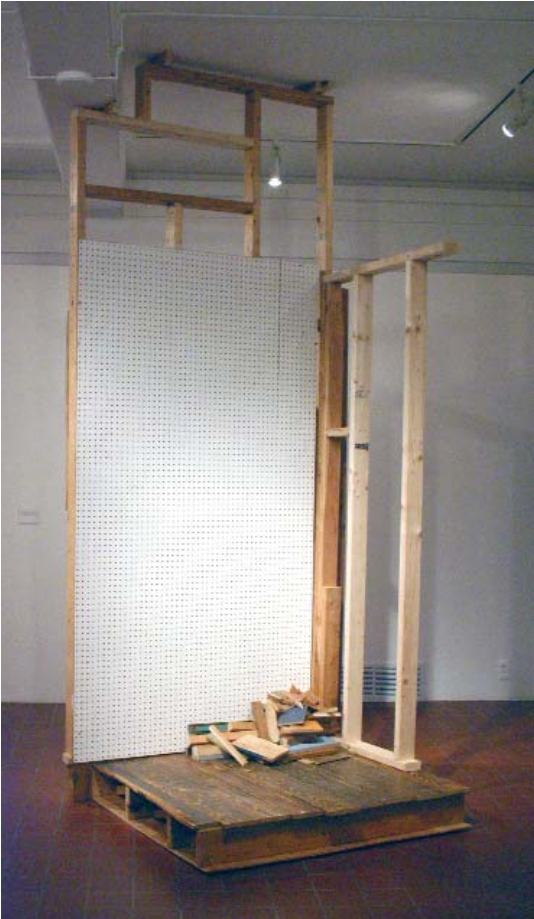


Andrea Green, *Untitled*, petroleum jelly,
2 x 72 x 108", 2006, courtesy of the artist.



John Watson, *She Said All It Needed Was A Little Baby Blue*, found wood and mixed media,
dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist, Philip Slein Gallery and Hemphill Fine Arts.

John Watson, *In My Dreams It Was Made Of Plastic*, found wood and mixed media, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist, Philip Slein Gallery and Hemphill Fine Arts.



Kranzberg Exhibition Series 2006: Order, Obsession and Wonder

essay by Kim Humphries

This fourth edition of the Kranzberg Exhibition Series pairs two St. Louis artists possessing exceptional vision and drive.

John Watson

John Watson's recent body of work is fraught with tension and filled with energy. Though he chooses to limit his practice to additive sculpture employing found and salvaged wood and simple fasteners, Watson employs a broad range of scale in this series of projects and deeply engages the space of the galleries and beyond. Watson's adept manipulations of diverse elements such as: construction and decay; the functional and the non-functional; and the serendipitous versus the formal bring increased layers of richness to the work. The elements of time and history that weave throughout the work push it theoretically beyond the galleries or the studio. The artist's reformed pseudo-historical detritus is particularly poignant considering recent disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 or the hurricane destruction in New Orleans in 2005. The frenetic making and reforming of the work becomes all the more affecting.

While there are thousands of detailed passages to explore in the galleries there is a key location, where viewers can face the title wall of the exhibition and experience the impact of the entire exhibition as it moves and swirls counterclockwise through space. From this vantage point the exhibition swells in scale as it moves through the galleries, returns back to the viewer then climbs upward to a unique small form on the ceiling. This piece, *Got No Reason (To Quit)*, strongly enforces the allusion to motion – it is as if it has broken free from the rest of the exhibition and has become lodged there. If you continue to turn, now beyond 360 degrees, you will find a large scale, free standing work outside on the terrace lawn – a playhouse-like form on stilts.

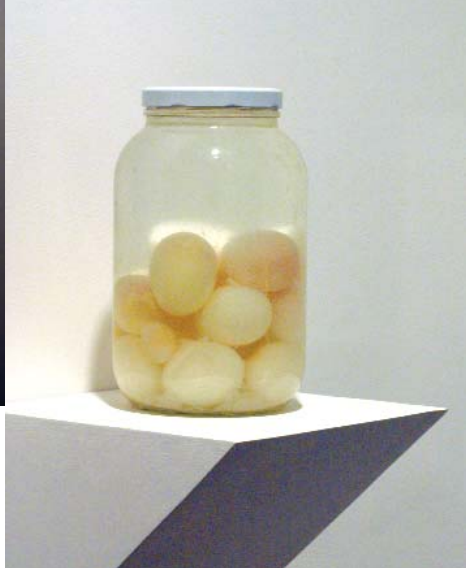
Viewers are easily immersed in the exhibition and a sense of chaos and disorder are often strongly at hand. The artist's systems become apparent once you connect with a broader perspective of the exhibition. *One Piece At A Time* is a large, low work. Modular in form, it hugs the floor as it occupies a large corner of the gallery. The scale of the modules in the work mimics that of an architectural model. The work is ripe with art and historical references. It is at once Bauhaus taken to mad excess and/or windowless, crude, postmodern communal cliff dwellings. Connecting with this piece reigns in some of the pandemonium of the exhibition, beautiful as it may be, and injects the notion that there are systems, classifications and structure at work here. One's eye flows naturally to the adjoining gallery and beginning of the hyper-construction, *She Said All It Needed Was A Little Baby Blue*, which actually occupies two adjoining galleries and extends into a third. Watson is completely confident and intensely at play with this massive piece. The dense network of interconnecting mid-sized modules (mailboxes, birdhouses), all on stilts, rises continuously as it moves completely through two galleries. It penetrates the wall that divides them and then juts through yet another wall with a distinctive final flourish. This protruding finial leads your eye directly to, *In My Dreams It Was Made Of Plastic*, a work at full architectural scale. It spans the gallery from floor to ceiling. Wedged in place, it challenges the boundaries of the physical space. Complex in nature, this work contains three scales of reference addressed throughout the exhibition. Attached to its large vertical element is one of Watson's mid-sized modules, like those in *Baby Blue*. The artist-fabricated floor joists, on which the piece stands bear a striking resemblance to the model scale of *One Piece At A Time*, linking it visually and psychologically to all the works in the exhibition including the freestanding sculpture on the terrace lawn, *Still Life With Addition*, which while pure fantasy is also highly (and solely) architectural in its form.

Watson's studio practice is a balance of methods and systems that allow for invention as he generates the work. His practice is currently limited to found or salvaged wood and he is constantly searching for new raw materials. Pieces that interest him are

John Watson, *Still Life With Addition*, found wood and mixed media, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist, Philip Slein Gallery and Hemphill Fine Arts.



Andrea Green, *Untitled*, polymer acrylic body casting, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist.
Andrea Green, *Untitled*, eggs, vinegar, glass jar, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist.



John Watson, *Got No Reason (To Quit)*, found wood and mixed media, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist, Philip Slein Gallery and Hemphill Fine Arts.

taken to his studio. When it is time to execute a project, large blocks of time are allocated for the intuitive and intense game that is to follow. Old wood, with lost purposes and forgotten histories, becomes sculpture. Though the wood is cut, it is lightly touched. The old paint, patina and wear are used chiefly as the pallet of the piece. Fresh cut edges are revealed, speaking to the new viability, purpose and life of the wood. Though much of Watson's project work is done in the studio, it is conceived for specific spaces and reworked and fine-tuned on site to create the final installation.

Adaptive reuse and recycle are first-world terms for activities deeply rooted in cultures throughout much of the world. Americans make up 5 percent of the world's population and consume a disproportionate quantity of the world's resources. Much of the material that goes to landfills here would build houses, fences or bridges in another context. Much of what we discard would remain in use; it would remain part of the economy. Beyond narrowly defined antiques anything old, used or broken is of little value in much of the western world. Two key works in the exhibition are built on stilts; a reference to building techniques used in other cultures and in the southern U.S. where water and flooding are a daily concern.

Watson's work speaks of deep, broad time – time beyond the extant moment in which the work now lives. The past history of the materials, minor as it may be, is engaged. The salvaged material now has a future time that can be referenced and a new function as well. By presenting the material in a fine art context Watson is bringing awareness to this created continuum. The purpose is not to save all the stray wood on the planet. The purpose is to create dialogue about related views and values.

Originally the piece, *In My Dreams It Was Made Of Plastic*, was created in the artist's studio as a mock up of a Laumeier gallery wall – the wall that, *She Said All It Needed Was A Little Baby Blue*, appears to penetrate in its final flourish. After the piece, *Baby Blue*, was mocked up in studio form the wall was moved and no longer needed. The materials and construction of this temporary wall were completely utilitarian and ad-hoc. Watson's keen eye recognized that it was constructed with a kind of unselfconscious, natural creative freedom that, for an artist, is a rare event. With a few minor intuitive changes the mock wall was then repurposed into the exhibition as one of the key works.

Watson often refers to his work as "cobbled together."

While this may be true it is abundantly clear that the work is the product of a complex strategic practice and that the artist is thoughtful, directed and informed before allowing his intuition, abundant energy and play to take command. After viewing this exhibition it is possible that viewers may never pass a dumpster or construction site again without a sense of renewed and intensified scrutiny and wonder.

AndreaGreen

Andrea Green directly confronts an issue that many people will skirt for much, if not all of their lives. As the artist states, "I have a fear of death and this work is one of my ways of dealing with that fear." Motivated by this key issue, Green's work in this exhibition poetically examines the finite and fragile nature of life – the processes, physical systems and elements that are part of human existence and the remnants that are left behind. The exhibition itself and the works in it are all untitled. This gesture reflects the gentle, pliable nature that Green uses in her approach as an artist. It also correlates to the mystery and unanswerable questions of existence. Most of the work is site specific, therefore temporal by nature. Some pieces will evolve and change during the course of the exhibition. This gallery performance, where it happens, will happen very slowly – somewhere close to the speed of life.

Green has a history of working with materials that are given to change, that relate to the body and to domestic notions. Wax is pliable. It can be a solid or a liquid. It was used to seal jars and preserve food. Clothing is created to protect the skin – to decorate the body. It ages and wears. It changes color and evolves. It stains and tears. In this exhibition Green expands her vocabulary and materials. In the process she asks the viewer to confront some challenging questions in the process.

One of the key materials in the exhibition is petroleum jelly. While often used in a medicinal fashion to moisturize or sooth the skin, some may take this substance for a less-than-natural product. Petroleum jelly is, however, completely natural. Petroleum products are ancient and completely organic in their origins – they are the animal and plant life carbons from milleniums past. They are life from long ago coming again to serve us in what is now their future – their reincarnation.

A five-by-nine foot slab of petroleum jelly two inches thick occupies the middle of the gallery floor. The shape and

location resonate with the room in a familiar way – a rug, a bed, a grave, a portal, a painting all easily spring to mind. The surface of this work is disorderly, worked and scarred. It contains a history of events. Some of the physical impressions in the material are left by bones or body parts no longer present. Others are marks from gripping, tearing hands. If this is a slippery portal to another place then, some that pass do not go through willingly. The opaque coloration of the petroleum jelly obscures what lies beyond.

Located in the same gallery are works that continue the dialogue about the nature of existence, time, and scale. Mounted on the wall is half an egg shell. If it were whole you could hold it in your hand. Here it is skillfully grafted onto the wall among a myriad of small bubbles of raised latex paint all slightly varied in scale. The tiny installation of common materials resembles a peculiar white celestial formation – a universe. The central orb is imperfect and cracked. Seeping from the crack is a small portion of petroleum jelly. Is this substance intended to heal the broken wound or simply to provide insight into its inner core? The question is proposed to the viewer, but it is frozen in time as a silent sculptural proposition. On an opposite wall is a pseudo-graft from the artist's arm – a feathery cast of reality. It resembles the skin of a snake but, is far more diaphanous. Green made this peculiar skin cast while working in this gallery. She coated a portion of her arm with glue. As she went about her business, the glue dried. On leaving the room she mounted the peeled specimen to the wall, a subtle relic marking her time in that space. Turn another corner and you will see an oval of petroleum jelly on the wall in a form that resembles a mirror or a picture frame. As you approach this subtle piece you may notice that you can see through the substance on the wall, however, no matter how intently you stare you will see no reflection or created image. This work is ethereal in comparison to the massive petroleum jelly slab on the floor. Having broken our traditional expectations, Green causes us to search for our own content and meaning in this slightly transgressive smearing on the wall.

Standing alone in another small gallery is a large jar of various sized eggs. They are quite solemnly presented on a well lit museum shelf. The first impression is that of the potential for life. This is not a symbol but, the real thing. Read the wall text and you will see that the eggs are preserved in vinegar. Look closer and you will see that like some preservatives this one is only mild and temporary. A preservative only slows decay, it does not stop it. The initially uplifting impression of the piece changes palpably as you realize the slow performance and transformation that sits before you. Life, stasis and decay swim together before our eyes.

A third gallery presents the viewer with four further ruminations on the nature of existence. Like the eggs in the jar, Green presents us with yet more jars on a shelf – thirteen jars, to be exact. Triskaidekaphobia or the fear of thirteen is an old and strong superstition and certainly one that Green was aware of when presenting these bottles. A dozen (as in eggs) is a very orderly number used in many cultures. Add one more and you create discord. The thirteen jars contain found fluids. Though the jars are sealed, the seals are not perfect and the found fluids, our fluids, slowly, imperceptibly drift away. Eventually a few solid molecules will be all that remains – dust – only dust. Further attempts at containment and preservation take form in the gallery. In a corner a long piece of pure white silk is strained and seems at odds, if not slightly violated by, a corporeal load of liquid that it strains to cradle. References to gravity, beauty and the water within our bodies are unavoidable. Nearby on a wall a small plastic container filled with petroleum jelly holds what could be a large finger or toenail. This relic appears prepared and ready for filing away at an historic archive or medical museum. Glancing across the gallery, medicine seems to be combined with science fiction as four fleshy latex tubes spring from the wall and drape to the floor in animated postures. Small amounts of petroleum jelly ooze onto the floor from their anatomical orifices. Is this a medical procedure gone bad or the solution to all our ills? The suggestion that there is more going on behind the wall is a strong one.

Green is adept at creating work that causes the viewer to seek answers – to probe deeper into their own thoughts and beliefs. The questions that lie before us in her exhibition are challenging, and engaging for anyone that is walking, breathing and able to wonder. Green openly and gently invites us to take our time in the galleries and wonder with her.

Andrea Green, *Untitled*, petroleum jelly on wall, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist.



Andrea Green, *Untitled*, calcium, latex paint petroleum jelly, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist.

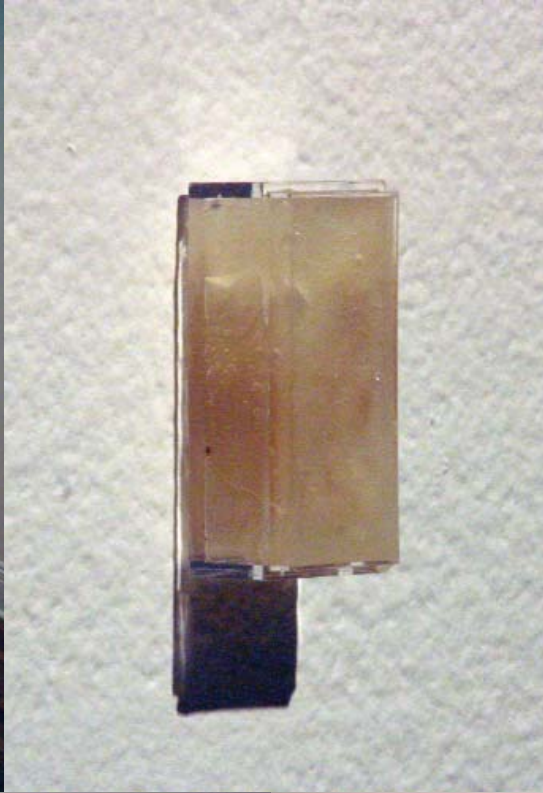
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Andrea Green, *Untitled*, latex, petroleum jelly, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist.



Andrea Green, *Untitled*, petroleum jelly, found object, 2 x 1 x ", 2006, courtesy of the artist.



Andrea Green, *Untitled*, silk, latex, water, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist.



John Watson, *She Said All It Needed Was A Little Baby Blue*, found wood and mixed media, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist, Philip Slein Gallery and Hemphill Fine Arts.



John Watson, *She Said All It Needed Was A Little Baby Blue*, found wood and mixed media, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist, Philip Slein Gallery and Hemphill Fine Arts.

On the cover:

John Watson, *One Piece At A Time*, found wood and mixed media, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist, Philip Slein Gallery and Hemphill Fine Arts.

Andrea Green, *Untitled*, 13 glass vials with found fluids, dimensions variable, 2006, courtesy of the artist.

Design and photography by Mike Venso



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