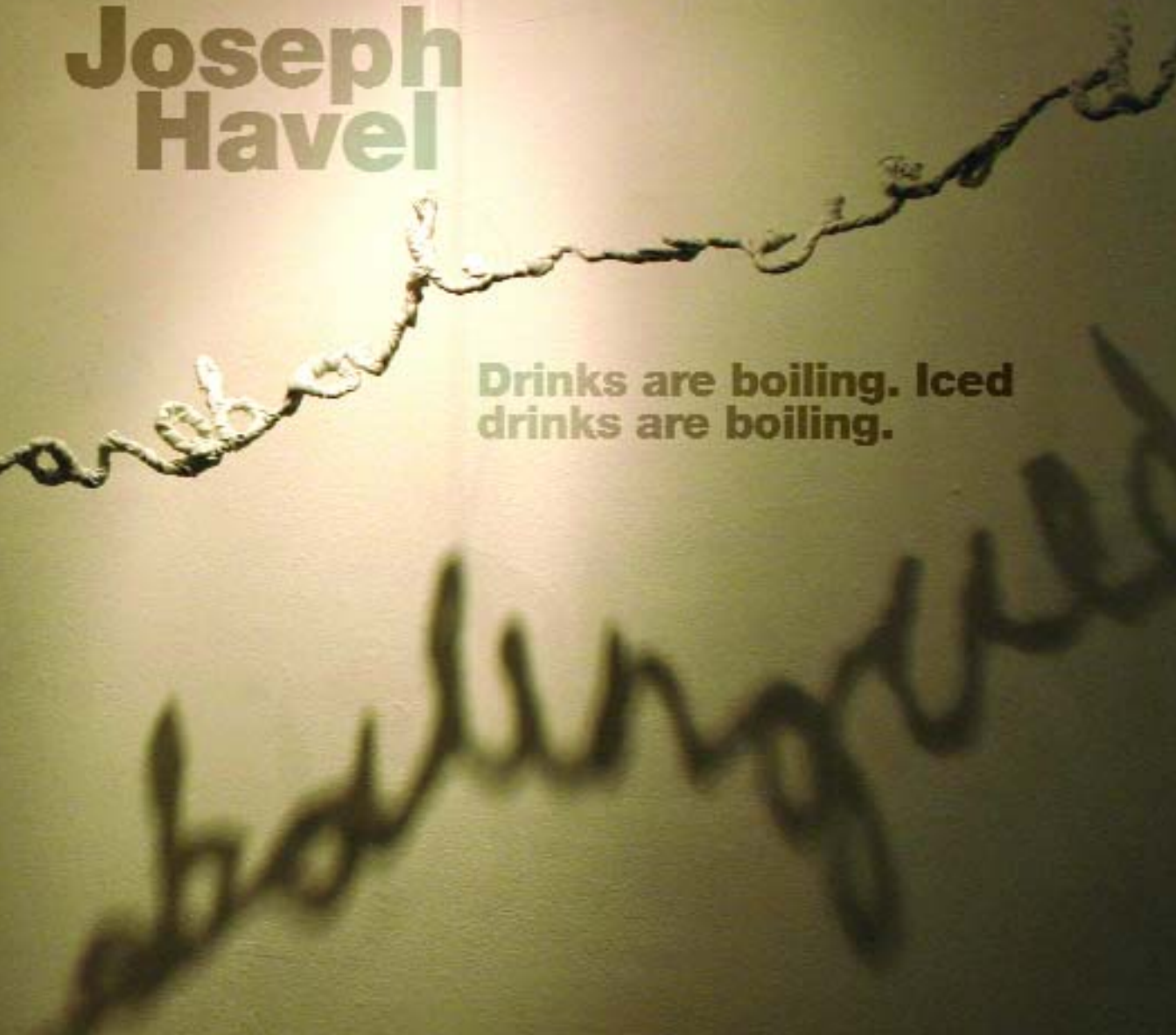


# Joseph Havel

**Drinks are boiling. Iced  
drinks are boiling.**



# Joseph Havel | Drinks are boiling. Iced drinks are boiling.

Organized by **Laumeier Sculpture Park**

**Support for this exhibition provided by:** Regional Arts Commission, Arts & Education Council, Missouri Arts Council, Mark Twain Laumeier Fund, Cowles Charitable Trust, Jordan Charitable Foundation, Friends of Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis County Parks, and by the Aronson Endowed Chair for Modern + Contemporary Art, UM-St. Louis.

This publication was produced on the occasion of the exhibition *Drinks are boiling. Iced drinks are boiling*. Essay by Mary Leclere. Cover photo: Joseph Havel, *Drinks are boiling. Iced drinks are boiling*, 2006

## **acknowledgements**

It is with great pleasure that Laumeier Sculpture Park presents *Joseph Havel, Drinks are boiling. Iced drinks are boiling*, the first solo exhibition by the artist in St. Louis.

Working with Joseph Havel on this exhibition has been a most rewarding experience for me personally and professionally. He created an amazing and poetic installation at Laumeier while also completing a major survey exhibition titled *A Decade of Sculpture: 1996 – 2006* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

As Havel has stated, *Drinks are boiling. Iced drinks are boiling* is actually a quotation from a John Berryman poem *Dream Song 46*. The installation at Laumeier was conceptualized as a dialogue unfolding within the context of a domestic setting; the indoor galleries were once the residence of Matilda and Henry Laumeier who generously bequeathed their estate to the people of St. Louis County for the good of the larger metropolitan area and beyond.

There is a timeless quality expressed so elegantly and hauntingly in Havel's sculpture. The work speaks of the body and the absence of it; physical memory merged with the elusive energy of ideas; feelings of comfort; the distance of dreams; persistence of language; loss and beauty. Havel's sculpture engages the very nature of things and transforms them into complex visions presented as objects close, ordinary and familiar yet that simultaneously seem to belong entirely to someone else, or somewhere else.

I am grateful to our generous Board Members for their continued support of Laumeier Sculpture Park. Their contributions of time, expertise, personal resources and more make the institution what it is today; an amazing organization in the cultural landscape of the region with national and international reach. Special thanks goes to the galleries who generously worked with us on the production of the exhibition; Lisa Brown and Talley Dunn of Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, Texas; Hiram Butler and Devin Borden of Hiram Butler Devin Borden Gallery, Houston, Texas. As always my thanks go to the Regional Arts Commission, the Arts and Education Council of St. Louis, Missouri Arts Council, the Mark Twain Laumeier Fund, Jordan Charitable Trust, Met Life Foundation and to our partner Saint Louis County Parks. To our docent corps and to our volunteers, FANs and friends, thank you for your continuing support. We are so fortunate to have so many great friends with us every step of the way.

**Glen Gentele, Director and Aronson Endowed Professor  
for Modern + Contemporary Art, UM-St. Louis**



*Thirty Sheets with Stain, 2004-05*

**Dream Song 46**

by John Berryman

I am, outside. Incredible panic rules.  
People are blowing and beating each other without mercy.  
Drinks are boiling. Iced  
drinks are boiling. The worse anyone feels, the worse  
treated he is. Fools elect fools.  
A harmless man at an intersection said, under his breath: "Christ!"

That word, so spoken, affected the vision  
of, when they trod to work next day, shopkeepers  
who went & were fitted for glasses.  
Enjoyed they then an appearance of love & law.  
Millenia whift & waft—one, one—er, er...  
Their glasses were taken from them, & they saw.

Man has undertaken the top job of all,  
son fin. Good luck.  
I myself walked at the funeral of tenderness.  
Followed other deaths. Among the last,  
like the memory of a lovely fuck,  
was: Do, ut des.

essay | Mary Leclere

Language has played a significant, though not always conspicuous, role in Joseph Havel's work for more than a decade. In a body of work that Havel began in 1993, single words like "lost" or "enough" displace the manufacturer's name in custom-made shirt labels that are pinned to the wall like entomological specimens in large grid formations. The almost uninflected whiteness of the shimmering labels makes these gridded fields somewhat ethereal. At the same time, defying their two-dimensionality by floating free on the pins, the labels take on an unexpected, if understated, physicality. In spite of their large scale, the grids are unassuming—the result not only of their material diffidence but of the inscrutability of the words, whose reticence sometimes borders on abjection: bruised, coward, common, lust. The grid's flatness and geometric ordering, as Rosalind Krauss has written, emphasize "not only its anti-referential character, but... its hostility to narrative." Text is literally part of the fabric of this work in which the woven labels have replaced the warp and weft of canvas (Havel calls these paintings), but here, too, narrative is banished by the work's serial composition. No matter how evocative the words, their repetition acts to bar reference or representation. Sometimes the grid is made up of boxes of labels, which, because of the labels' compression and the fact that we're seeing them from the side, foregrounds formal elements—line and color—rather than text. Sometimes the labels are sewn loosely together and suspended from the ceiling, depriving the grid of its rectilinearity and allowing the soft, malleable material to determine the work's form. Regardless how it's manifested, the grid frustrates narrative in these works.

Havel's recent text pieces not only take a different form but a different approach to language. In the label pieces textual parsimony is paired with material opulence to create a kind of tension—both formal and conceptual—that keeps the work tightly focused while opening it up to different interpretations. Meaning cannot, finally, be pinned down in spite (or perhaps because) of the words' repetition. In the text-based work included in this exhibition, language has an expansive, even confessional quality but is, if anything, more elusive. Although a narrative function is restored in these texts, the work reflects the way in which language acts to distance us from both the object and the object of thought. What remains latent in the label pieces are the sources of the citations, which is what the words turn out to be. Appropriated from the poems of John Berryman or the short prose of Samuel Beckett, the isolated words give no hint as to their original context—or even to the fact that there is one. In *Drinks are boiling*. *Iced drinks are boiling.*, a work based on Berryman's "Dream Song #46," reference is explicit even if the source isn't. Instead of the kind of centrifugal movement that characterizes the associations suggested by the words in the label pieces, the Berryman citation doubles back on itself, unable to escape the conundrum it presents. Not coincidentally, doubling and inversion are leitmotifs of the exhibition, from the mirroring of *Black Curtains*, which greets the viewer in the foyer, to the double-sidedness of *Twin* (a cast twin bed sheet), to the pair of "bad reviews" cited in two works with that title.



*Black Curtains*,  
2004



*Bed Sheet*, 2005

Drinks are boiling. Iced drinks are boiling. is composed of a long, sturdy wire that has been shaped to form the words (punctuation has been omitted) of Berryman's text. The wire is wrapped in a combination of white bed sheets and men's shirts, two of Havel's signature materials, and the phrase is repeated a number of times. Suspended a couple of feet from the ceiling, the piece snakes through the gallery in a sinuous line. Havel has altered the passage in a fundamental way, however, by recontextualizing it: in the poem the lines read, "Drinks are boiling. Iced/Drinks are boiling." With the removal of all graphic cues—punctuation, capitalization, spacing—the two sentences appear to fuse into a continuous loop. Except that they don't. Like a traditional narrative, the text starts in one place and ends in another (and, significantly, in mid-phrase). But the text's linearity calls attention to its internal inconsistency, shifting the focus from narrative to language itself—arguably the only place where iced drinks might be boiling. It's not that simple, though, since "iced" maintains an ambiguous position in both the poem and the sculpture. In the poem, the line break and punctuation seem to suspend the word between the sentence that precedes it and the one it belongs to. By contrast, it's precisely the lack of pauses or breaks that allows the relationship between "iced" and the iterations of "drinks are boiling" that bracket it to remain ambiguous in the sculpture. It's not just the breakdown of logic, then, but the aporia in the text itself that is revealed in the poem and the sculpture.

In some places the text is illuminated in such a way that the shadow of a single word is cast on the wall. The groundless white text of the sculpture reverts to black lettering on a white ground, paradoxically reminding us through its dematerialization that, to borrow Mel Bochner's phrase, "language is not transparent." Of course absurdity is a form of opacity, but the shadows introduce another kind of resistance: as the solid, material text (the wrapped wire) becomes fragmented and dematerialized (the shadow), its impossible logic dissipates. However, the inversely proportional relationship between materiality and meaning only serves to reinforce the formal and conceptual intangibility of the text. Permeated by language, these works don't really say anything; they merely speak, like disembodied voices that make the words present but leave the text impenetrable, recalling nothing so much as Beckett's narrators. In Havel's work the voice materializes in various ways: in the rhythmic cadence of a repeated phrase (Drinks are boiling), or the resounding echo of a scathing critique (Bad Review 1 and Bad Review 2), or the low-level drone of ceaseless reproach (Complaining Parents). The texts themselves remain indecipherable either because they're not altogether legible or because they're physically or logically knotted. Berryman writes in a prefatory note to *The Dream Songs* that the poem is about an imaginary character—"not the poet, not me"—named Henry who "talks about himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, sometimes even in the second." We might think of the disembodied voice in Havel's work as a character ("not the

artist...”) that talks about itself, but not always as the same person. Although one could argue that Havel’s sculptures don’t “speak” with one voice, their material uniformity and the reiteration of the poem’s binary terms—boiling and iced—in two of the other text pieces argue for this possibility. Not just an object in the work but perhaps the object of the work, language is estranged from itself as much as its referent. In the guise of an absurd interlocutor, complaining parents, or a pair of reviewers, the voice speaks to the impenetrability of objects by language (or thought) in the same way that the pronominal inconsistency of Berryman’s narrator points up the instability of his identity. Lacking a body, the “self” the voice is talking about is unidentifiable, not only as an entity but as a source. Writing about Beckett’s narrators, one observer commented, “The voice creates the narrator, who in turn embodies that voice or, as the narrator says, ‘I personify it it personifies itself.’” The disembodied voice doesn’t represent the narrator; it is the narrator, with all the ontological questions this raises. Language is, somehow, the “body” of the text.

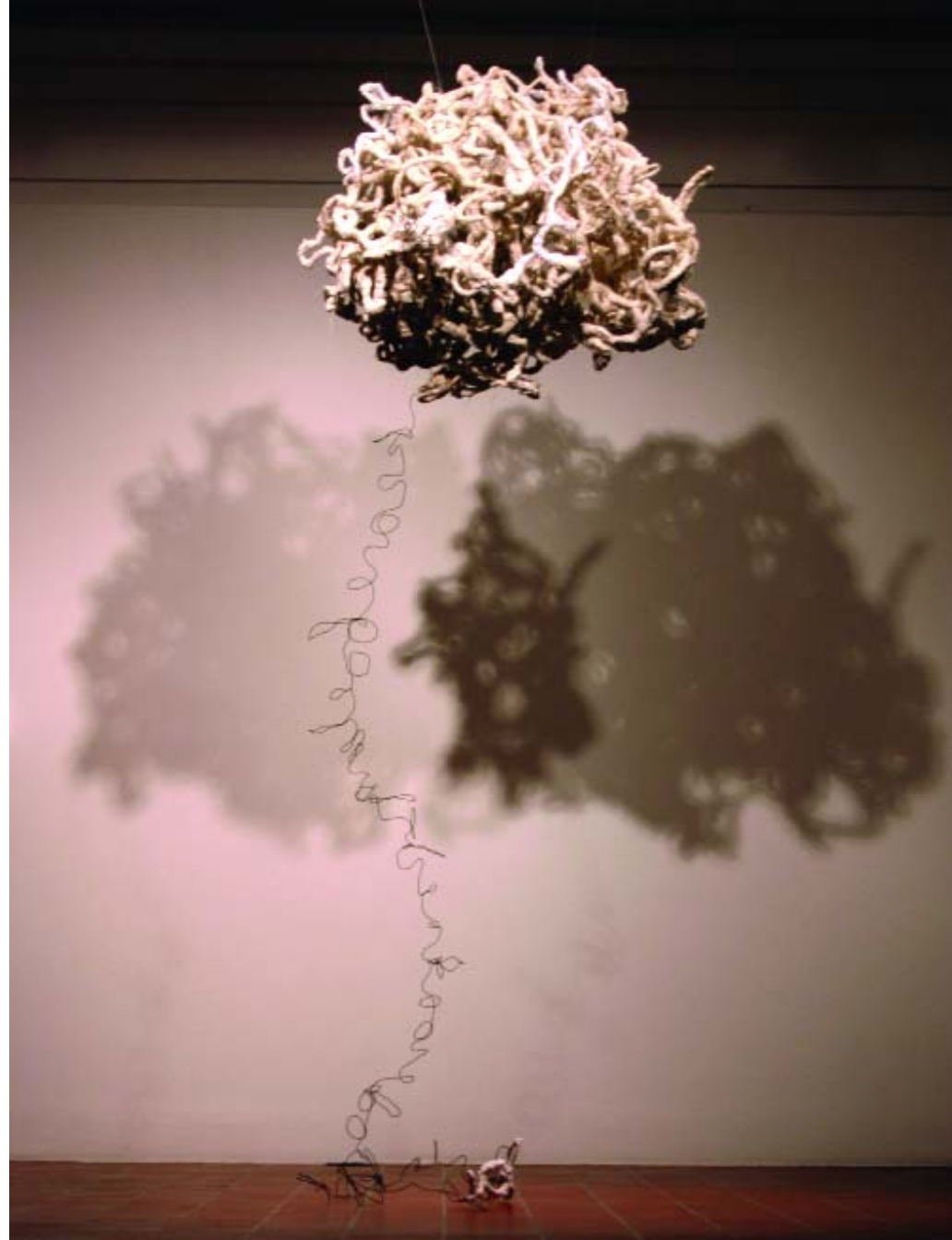
We might see *Drinks are boiling*, then, as a kind of spine that moves us through the space like a text, substituting a syntax of objects for the dysfunctional self-reflexivity of Berryman’s lines. In contrast to the mute, solid objects with which they share the space, the text pieces are excessively garrulous—particularly since, in another inversion, the figurative character of *Bed Sheet* and *Black Curtains* makes them seem more likely to possess a voice. Linking the text pieces and the cast objects is *Thirty Sheets with Stain* in which the flat bed sheets allude to the surface of writing. Moreover, the bronze sheet that sits on top of the unaltered white sheets doesn’t resonate formally with *Bed Sheet* but with the tangled and shape of *Iced*. The interconnection between text and object is figured in their interweaving in the space, the material impenetrability of the cast objects complementing the failure of verbalization to coincide with articulation in the text pieces. The texts don’t lack coherence or legibility, they just can’t be fully grasped, and language is revealed to be opaque and impenetrable—even to itself. “Where nothing is certain, language itself begins to dissolve. Not only does the voice begin to contradict itself, but it also rejects its words as too strong.” Rejected as too strong, Berryman’s words hang in the air. The voice can’t cease contradicting itself but perhaps it’s enough for it to have spoken.

*Mary Leclère is Associate Director of the Core Program, a residency program for artists and writers affiliated with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and a Ph.D. candidate in art history at the University of Virginia. Recent publications include an essay on art criticism published in the journal Afterall and a catalog essay for Andrea Bowers: Letters to an Army of Three, an exhibition she curated at the MFAH.*

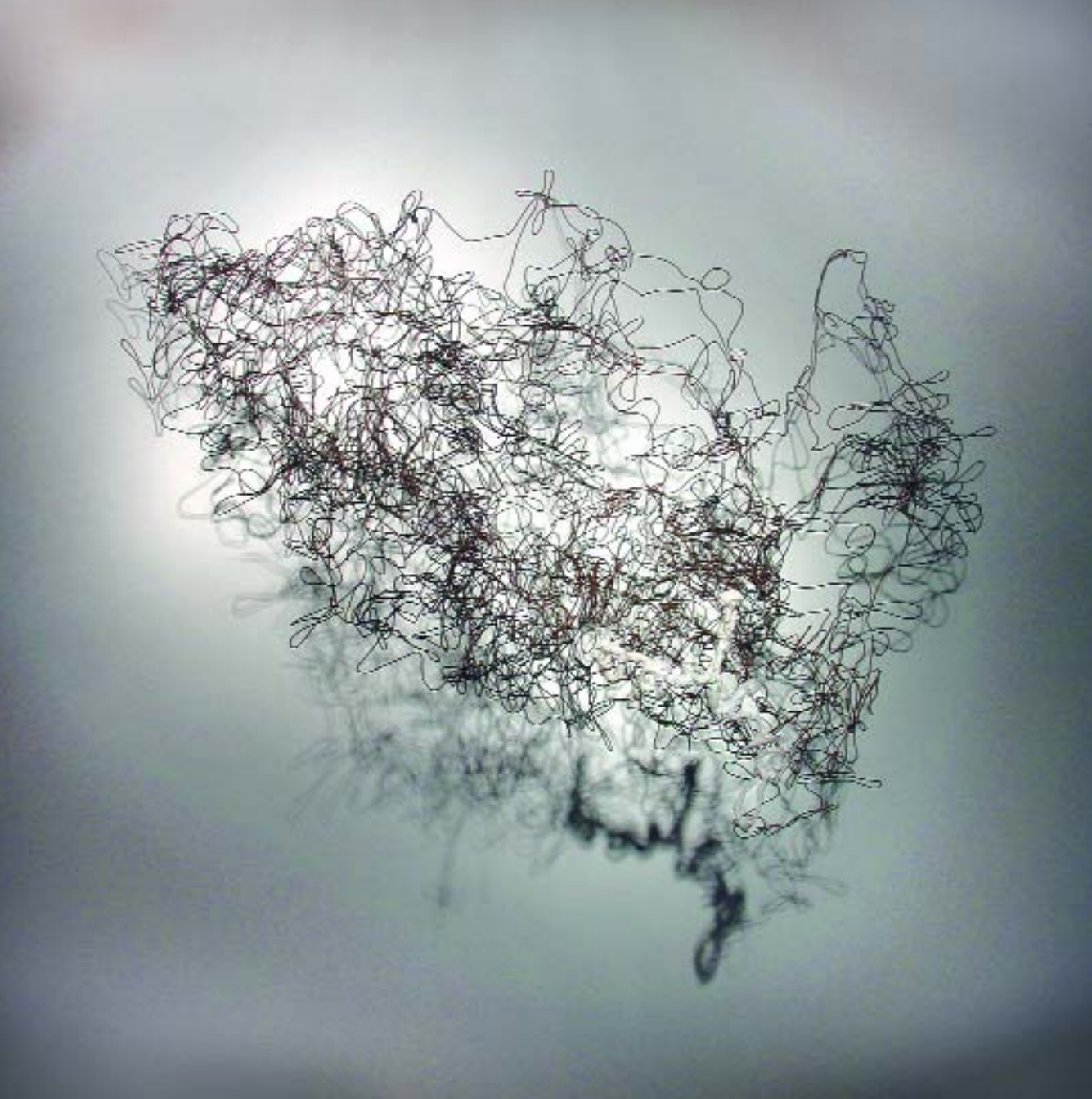




*Complaining  
Parents, 2005*



*Iced, 2005*



*Bad Review (1)*, 2006



*Bad Review (2)*, 2006

Left: *Boiling*, 2005

## exhibition list

### gallery 1

*Black Curtains*, 2004. Bronze with patina, 97" × 53" × 32" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH01a-b

*Bad Review (1)*, 2006. Wire, fabric, needles, and thread, 42" × 21" × 16" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH09

*Drinks are boiling. Iced drinks are boiling.*, 2005. Fabric and wire, 6" × 840" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH02

### gallery 2

*Thirty Sheets with Stain*, 2004 – 05. Bronze with patina, fabric, 16" × 132" × 132" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH03a-b

### gallery 3

*Twin*, 2006. Bronze with patina, 84" × 44" × 44" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH04

### gallery 4

*Complaining Parents*, 2005. Fabric and wire, 120" × 75" × 75" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH06

*Iced*, 2005. Fabric and wire, 101" × 34" × 34" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH08a-b

### gallery 5

*Bad Review (2)*, 2006. Wire, fabric, needles, and thread, 18" × 24" × 16" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH10

*Boiling*, 2005. Fabric and wire, 32" × 50" × 24" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH07

*Bed Sheet*, 2005. Polyurethane resin and fabric, 90" × 12" × 12" Loan courtesy of the artist, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, and Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston. L06.JH05

## artist bio

### education

M.F.A. Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

B.F.A. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

### selected solo exhibitions

2006 *Joseph Havel: A Decade of Sculpture 1996-2006*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
*Drinks are boiling. Iced drinks are boiling.*, Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, MO

2005 *The Arrival of the Bee Box*, David Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX

2004 *To Bring To Take*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX

*Lost/Lust*, Arco, with Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Madrid, Spain

2003 *Le Jeu Du Travailleur*, Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie, Paris, France

*Desire with Lumps*, Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX

*Toy, Dream, Rest*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX

2002 *Desire*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France

2001 *Daydream Nation*, Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie, Paris, France

*One Dozen Veils*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX

*Joseph Havel*, Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX

### selected group exhibitions

2005 *Artadia*, DiverseWorks, Houston, TX

2004 *5 Years of S.M.A.K.*, Stedelijk Musaeum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, Belgium

*Objects of Desire*, Sheldon Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE

*Whiteness, A Wayward Construction*, University of Virginia Museum

25th Anniversary of the Museum Collectors, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX

Sculpture from the *Art in Embassies* Program, Department of State, Washington, DC

*Fight the Power*, Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie, Paris, France

2003 Gallery Artists, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX (Sept.)

*White Hot*, Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX (July)

Basel Art Fair, Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie, Paris, France (June)

*Art in Embassies* Program, U.S. Embassy, Paris, France

*Whiteness: A Wayward Construction*, Laguna Museum, Laguna Beach, CA

*100 Years: The Collection of the Modern Museum of Fort Worth*, The Modern, Fort Worth, TX

2002 *Burning Desires*, El Paso Museum of Art, El Paso, TX

*New Directions in Contemporary Art*, Sheldon Memorial Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE

*From the Vault*, Contemporary Art Museum, Honolulu, HI

*Space: Sculptor's Drawings*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX 2001

*The Draughtsman's Colors*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

*Inside Outside*, Bass Museum of Art, Miami, FL

2000 *Black and White and a Little Color*, Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, HI  
*Phoenix Triennial*, Phoenix Museum of American Art, Phoenix, AZ  
*Eight from Texas*, Arthur Rogers Gallery, New Orleans, LA  
*Crossing State Lines: Texas Art from the Museum of Fine Arts*, Houston, TX  
*Whitney Biennial of American Art*, Whitney Museum, New York, NY  
Old Jail House Museum, Albany, TX

#### awards and grants

2004 Artadia Fund for Art and Dialogue, Artist's Grant  
1999 Cultural Arts Council of Houston, Artist's Award  
1998 American Institute of Architects, Houston, Artist of the Year  
1995 Louis Comfort Tiffany, Artist's Grant  
1994 Cultural Arts Council of Houston, Artist's Award  
1991 The Dozier Travel Award, Dallas Museum of Art  
1987 National Endowment for the Arts, Artist's Fellowship

#### selected collections

Blanton Museum, Austin, Texas  
Musée Arte, Roubaix, France  
Ministry of Culture, France  
Pace Foundation, San Antonio, Texas  
Sheldon Memorial Gallery, University of Nebraska  
S.M.A.K., Ghent, Belgium  
The Contemporary Art Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii  
The Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas  
The El Paso Museum of Art, El Paso, Texas  
The Federal Reserve Bank, Dallas, Texas  
The Modern Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, Texas  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas  
The Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, Texas  
The New York Public Library  
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

# Joseph Havel

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