

# THE SEMI-FINALIST

2/25/2023

*THE SEMI-FINALISTS ARE:  
MARIA T.D. INOCENCIO AND MARK R. SMITH*



**Maria T.D. Inocencio and Mark R. Smith in their shared studio space (Portland, OR).**

In the work of both Maria T.D. Inocencio and Mark R. Smith, beauty and visual delight never exist for their own sake. They are always present, but as pathways to a better understanding of the human condition, doors that open up and reveal something about our manners, habits and ways of being. Both artists have strong formal sensibilities that I immediately respond to – they each play with geometry, symmetry, bold and undifferentiated blocks of color, and unexpected material choices (discarded clothing, hair on rocks). And they each have an ability to navigate both representational and abstract impulses. Found photographs, for example, are as much a mainstay of their finished artworks as painted shapes or squares of fabric. Their comfort and confidence in both worlds is inspiring and a reminder that they each build their work on solid conceptual foundations. Their starting points – filled with essential questions about people and the world we inhabit – allow their work to take shape in ways that best suit the subject. Rigidly adhering to a medium or aesthetic gives way to simply bringing ideas to life. The way the artists describe their processes, it's almost as if their materials and techniques at times rise up with agency and announce themselves as obvious choices for illustrating a given concept. In these moments, it is the job of the artist to listen, and both Inocencio and Smith are able to hear what few others can.

For over two decades I have both admired and been fascinated by Mark R. Smith's and Maria T.D. Inocencio's careers in art. They have individually developed strong and personal voices as artists. Each is also able to occasionally set a healthy portion of their independent vision aside in order to work together as a team. Collaboration in the visual arts usually appears risky to me, maybe even unpleasant. I'm fond of long hours alone in the studio, and the thought of sharing that space with someone else immediately takes me to a place where I imagine the pitfalls – clashing egos and dampened creativity – much more easily than the benefits – the amplification of ideas and the ability to scale up that comes with shared passion and shared labor. Maria and Mark land squarely on the latter, and spending time with them makes it clear that part of the reason for their success is that they truly like working with each other. It might also help that each artist creates work that is linked to process oriented art, a strategy that lets them side-step a bit of themselves and arrive at something that can only be achieved by letting go of hubris and vanity. They'll be the first to admit that compromise is a well known traveling companion on any shared journey and that their occasional joint efforts are not without their struggles. For them, however, the joy that comes with a common sense of purpose is more buoyant and uplifting than any baggage that might otherwise slow them down.

I'm so pleased to be able to share my interview with Maria T. D. Inocencio and Mark R. Smith. In it they talk about their individual inspirations and processes as well as their collaborative projects.

- David Schell

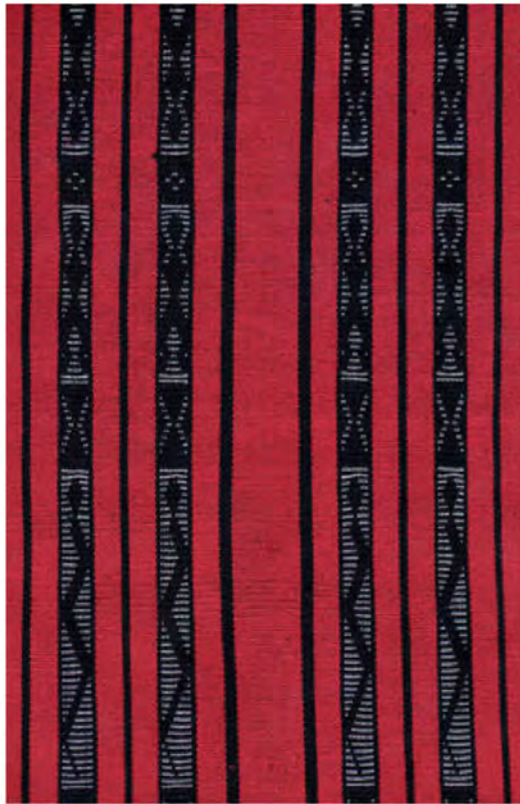
**The Semi-Finalist:** Maria and Mark, what were your formative years like? I'm curious about teachers, classes or experiences that influenced you.

**Maria T.D. Inocencio:** Art school in New York in the early 1980's was amazing. Everyone was talented, rents were cheap, there was so much going on, so much diversity and it felt like anything was possible and you could do whatever you wanted and call it art.

The teachers that influenced me the most were Niki Logis and Reuben Kadish. Niki was no nonsense and had a great sense of humor; she taught me how to build smart and how to persevere. Reuben was solid and steady; he taught me to see better and to look beyond the western tradition for artistic predecessors and for inspiration.

The thing that had the most influence on me was my independent study in the Philippines. While there I spent time with the Bontoc, an indigenous people who live in the mountains of Luzon. The Bontoc women use backstrap looms to weave clothing that is worn on special occasions or in ceremonial settings. These fabrics have various symbols woven into them. The women also have tattoos on their arms. They explained that the symbols and tattoos represent important things in their lives and in their environment; chevrons, dashes and zigzags are mountains, rice crops or water. That principle of how imagery works – that it can be integrated into everyday life, as well as at

significant moments, that it can hold meaning that is specific yet universal – and that how an image is made is as important as what it depicts, is a principle that guides how I make art.



Above: examples of Bontoc weaving in the Philippines.

Below: Symbolic tattoos on the arm of a Bontoc woman.

(photos courtesy of Maria T.D. Inocencio)



**Mark R. Smith:** I had two types of formative experiences in education, originally studying at Western Oregon University in the town where I grew up and then at The Cooper Union in NYC (1980), where I met Maria and lived for fifteen years. My first group of professors at WOU were all military vets and had gone to school on the GI bill in the 1950s. They had been shaped by Abstract Expressionism and SF Bay area Funk. A lot of that rubbed off on me in terms of making one's own work both friendly and eccentric. My professors James Kirk, Larry Stobie, James Mattingly and John Casey were all wonderful and supportive people living quiet lives as makers who helped their students believe that it was possible to call oneself an artist.

At Cooper Union, my big regret was to never have found a true mentor, since I was only there a couple of years before graduating. I doubt he would have remembered me, but I did feel I had a real connection with Jack Whitten, who at the time was a figure in the margins of the art community. He was one of the few (very kind) teachers I've had, who seemed to want to see through your eyes as an individual and help you get to a place where you could best express your ideas. And he supported the notion of making formally abstract, process-based work that could convey personal as well as cultural and political experiences. I hardly knew or understood his work back then (there was no internet and unless someone had an exhibition, it was hard to see the work) but now it's amazing to me how closely I align with his micro-collage assemblage methodology. It's great to see his work being celebrated now, even if he isn't around to enjoy the accolades.



Maria T.D. Inocencio and Mark R. Smith, *Significant Movements*

1985, Enamel paint, wood, copper tubing, vines

Mural with trellis 49' x 60'

Sculpture 14' x 30' x 4"

Mural by Smith and trellis and vine installation by Inocencio.

**S-F:** And I know that you two did at least one project together early in your art careers. Can you talk about that experience?

**Maria:** Our first project, *Significant Movements*, at the Pleasant Village Community Garden was a wonderful experience. New York City had a program, Operation Greenthumb, where they leased empty lots – in economically challenged areas to neighborhood groups for \$1 a year – to create community gardens. The Artists in the Gardens program paid artists a small stipend to make art in those gardens. I don't remember why we decided to apply as a team, but it was a great idea because the space was so big.

**Mark:** We met with the residents and went to work on a mural and sculptural installation that incorporated climbing vines. It was a life-changing experience and we made life-long friends there--our daughter is named after the garden's principle organizer and beloved neighborhood activist, Rose Gardella. We even got married immediately afterward because the experience gave us confidence that we could get through anything together. It was a perfect moment and it didn't seem to matter much then who had the agency to be there, it was such a mix of collaborators.

**Maria:** Mark painted a mural, and I built a sculpture of trellises and vines. So, while we collaborated on ideas, we were still working on separate pieces. The artworks were pretty good for a couple of first timers, but for me the best take away was the engagement with the people living in the East Harlem neighborhood. We worked closely with the gardeners and got to know about their lives. One gardener, Manuel, helped me a lot with digging holes and pouring concrete, but I could only speak high school Spanish and he had limited English. Mark worked with a Vietnam vet who helped him with scaffolding for the mural. After the piece was installed, I taught summer art classes to some local kids.

**Mark:** And as far as our collaborations are concerned, I think Maria and I just liked connecting with people. We met and fell in love in art school and we were living in these vibrant but infrastructurally challenged neighborhoods, the East Village, Long Island City, and Greenpoint, which were full of a cultural mix. In the early 80s New York City was just emerging from the urban collapse of the prior decade and artists were doing all kinds of improvisational things in taking over abandoned spaces and creating place. When we do work together, it is a challenge to sync up our creative ambitions, but we manage all right-- one of us usually speaks up if the other seems to be going off the rails. We're both hard workers and are each very process-oriented. Process is how we imprint ourselves on the work. As a result, our projects usually end up involving a ton of labor, but hopefully there is a sense of love and commitment that emerges as a result.

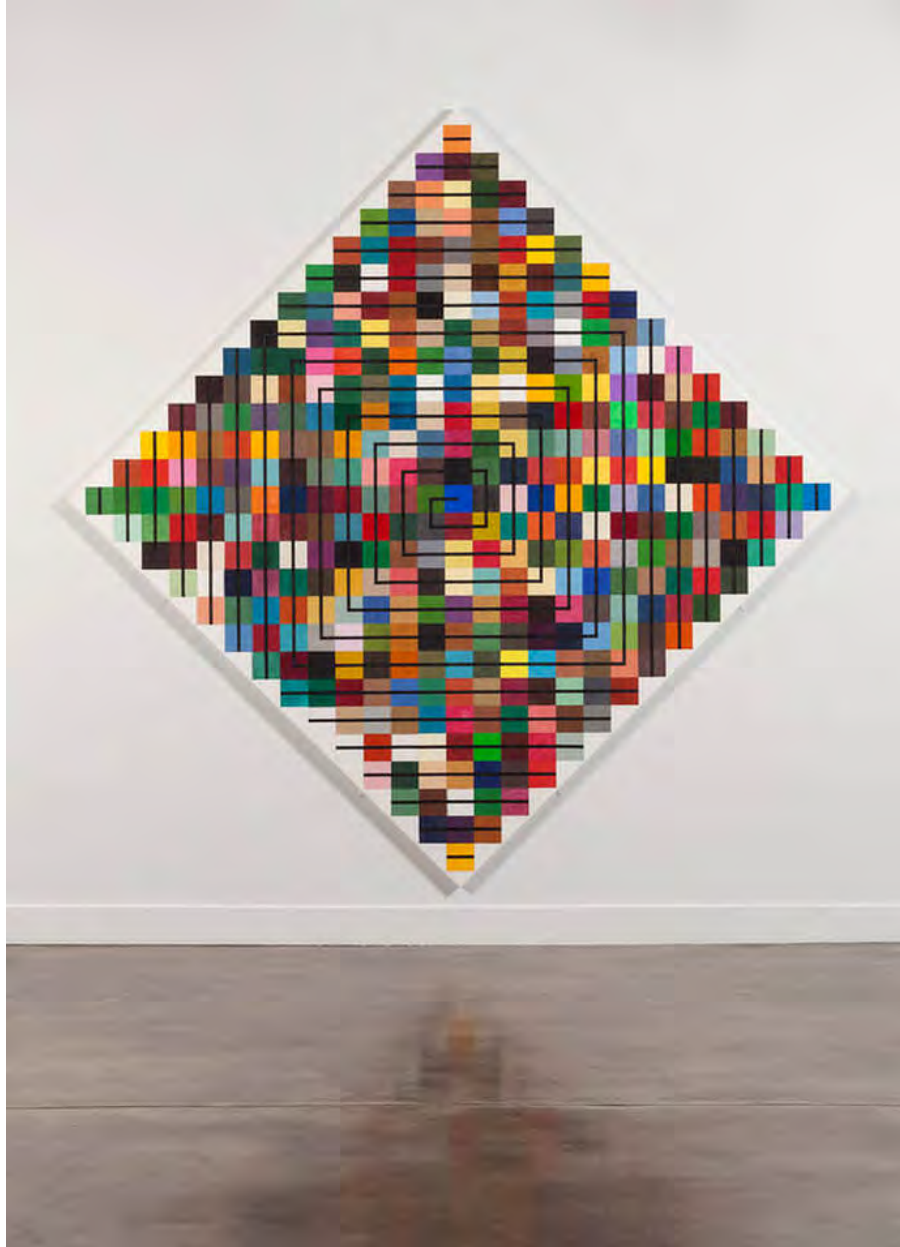


Maria T.D. Inocencio and Mark R. Smith  
*Significant Movements, 1985*

**S-F:** Maria, over the years you have employed a variety of creative strategies and materials to make work that incorporates geometry, abstraction, representation, radial symmetry, collage, text and more. I'm always surprised by each new direction and in awe of how your results are without exception so formally striking. Can you talk about your various approaches and how they developed?

**Maria:** At Cooper (Union), we were required to take foundation courses in every medium and a shop techniques class that introduced us to various materials - wood, metal, plastic, etc. As a result, I feel a flexibility to use whatever means is appropriate to get my message across. When I make something, I come up with the message first, then decide what method and materials to use.

For example, in *Remembering Every Day*, I wanted to express my feeling of loss when my mother-in-law, Jean, passed away. So, I created a process: every day for a year I tried to remember something about her, then make a color association, and paint the color in gouache on a square of paper. I chose gouache because it is easy to use in a daily exercise, and because it is so warm and velvety. Using that material made the experience of recording my memory pleasant, and the experience for the viewer more inviting. I used the geometric forms of a grid and a spiral because they are familiar and common; the spiral in particular is meant to draw the viewer into the piece.



Maria T. D. Inocencio, *Remembering Every Day*  
2018, paper, gouache, Flashe, glue, colored pencil on wood panel  
113" x 113"  
(Photo: Stephen Funk)

**Maria (continued):** In *Come Together as Light* I wanted to create a feeling of shelter and comfort, while talking about time, and the idea of reflecting on one's daily experience. The audience for the piece would be workers in an office and I hoped that the art could function as a way to take a break, while continuing to engage after many viewings.

I chose photography because it is a literal representation of a moment, and as a medium, it is easily manipulated in designing for symmetry. The trees convey shelter, nature and comfort; the symmetry represents reflection. Collage makes sense here for the ease of installation in a large space, but also because of the idea that time is made up of parts, equal and unequal, similar and different. I used stitching as a reminder of the hand, the individual, and the quirkiness and unpredictability of each step as we move forward each day.



Above: Maria T. D. Inocencio, *Come Together as Light*  
2022, digital prints, wood panels, paper, paint, glue, thread, 10' x 20' x 7'  
(Photo: Dominic Nieri)

Below: detail of *Come Together as Light*





**S-F:** Mark, one of the distinctive elements of your work is how you often transform something so ordinary (fabric swatches, a zipper, etc.) into completed objects of monumental beauty. Can you talk a bit about your relationship to repurposing materials in a world that is so full of discarded objects?

**Mark:** I've always been drawn to taxonomy and collections of sorts. I've gathered things forever and really started thinking about it as an aesthetic after visiting the bird and insect collections at the NYC Museum of Natural History. When I returned to Oregon, I got busy collecting artifacts and little bits of decaying debris from a farmstead that was still in our family's possession. There were some old quilts and clothing there too. That process somehow evolved into what I'm doing today, in going to the Goodwill bins and digging out discarded clothes to make into art. I like the idea of fixing or rescuing these items and having the opportunity to respond to a pre-existing palette of colors, textures and patterns to work from. It seems like less of a responsibility than starting from scratch. There's always some kind of history embedded in these things which is powerful whether it visibly surfaces in the art I make or not. I'm not a hoarder, but I have lots of stuff at home that is invested with so many histories and residual content. It's an overwhelming sensation at times but very potent and worth exploring as art.



Mark Smith, *Stress Formations (Pyramid Assembly)*

2023, Laser engraving, acrylic paint, laminated papers, 13" x 13"

Hand-cut paper figure cutouts and crocheted doily. These items are directly scanned and assembled into an image file for engraving.

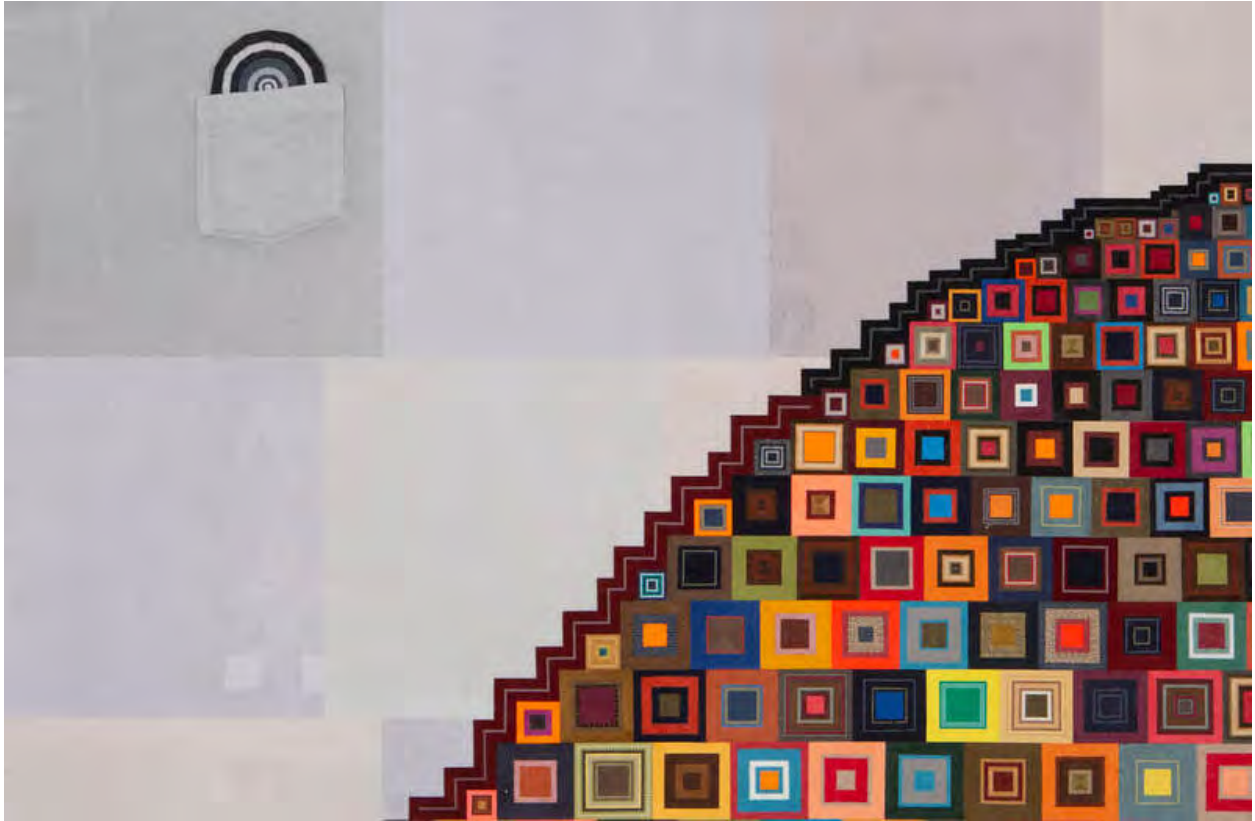
(photo by Stephen Funk)

**Mark (continued):** Another part of me is drawn to sports and its ritualized conflict. In another life I would have enjoyed designing athletic uniforms. When I look for clothing, I'm always after the perfect stripe and for the past few years I've worked almost exclusively with striped fabrics, cutting and reorganizing them into segmented, interlocking forms. Thinking about the collective history of all these materials, I've been organizing my forms based on communal dwellings and gatherings, Fourier's visionary phalansteries and sports arenas, also beehives and termite mounds from the natural world. These are spaces where conflict and cooperation play out. I'm really bothered by all our cultural rifts. This is how this concern manifests in my work I suppose.



Mark Smith, *Large Tent with Lanterns at Half-light*  
2023, repurposed textile construction, 94 x 96 in.

(Below: detail of *Large Tent with Lanterns at Half-light*.  
Note: the concentric moon design in the upper left can be removed from its pocket.)  
(photos by Stephen Funk)



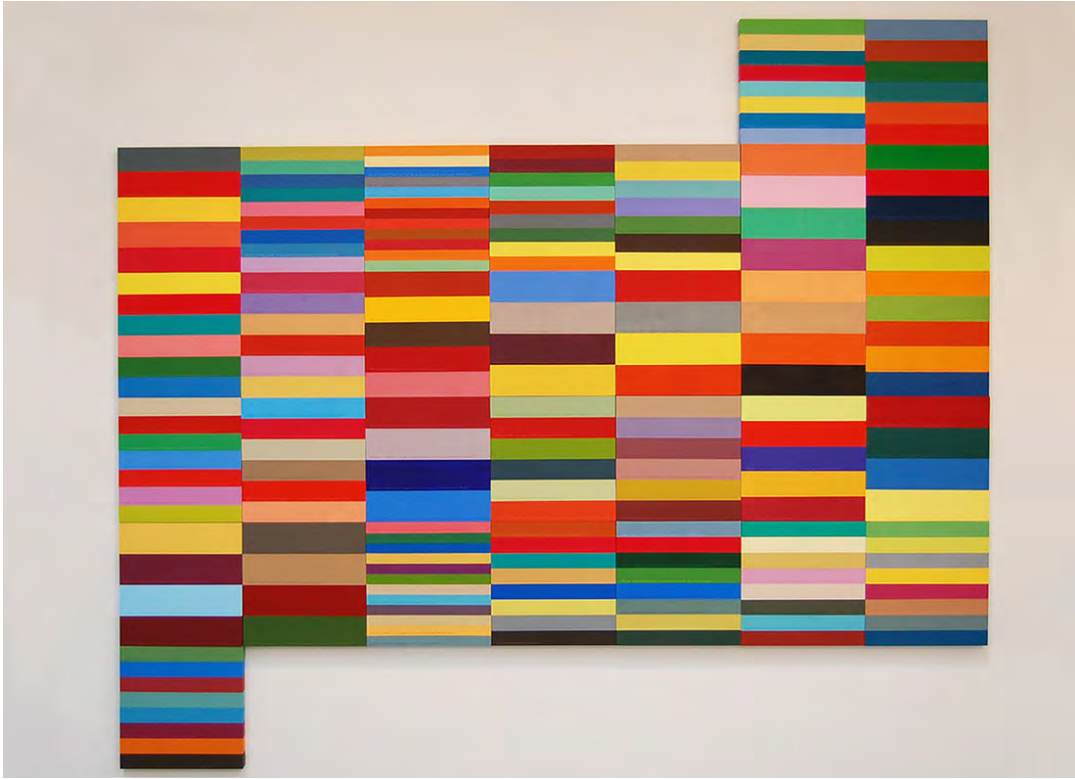
**S-F:** Mark and Maria: It looks like you both use a lot of systems, math and planning to engineer your finished pieces. I'm so curious about how you each balance organization and improvisation.

**Mark:** I use very minimal math in organizing my work--only to the extent that I need to plan out the scale progressions of shapes. Ultimately, I tend to work very intuitively, based on structural relationships and color interactions, already having that social collectivism content as a driver. The recent large fabric collage work you saw in our studio resembles the shape of a beehive, but more specifically, an enormous tent. The neighborhood where we live has a large concentration of urban campers. It has prompted me to remember the Democratic "Big Tent" philosophy from the Clinton years, where social priorities were all about inclusivity and making all voices matter. Obviously, we've failed miserably in meeting that mark. But as a meditative rumination on that ideal, I designed this work by stacking mitered fabric squares, large to small in progressively diminutive rows until the tiniest square of all, at 1/4 in. scale, rests by itself on top. I had to figure out the math of making the squares in each row smaller, while still conforming to the overall shape. I used a calculator to figure it out, but it was still a somewhat comical process. And certainly there is no perfect symmetry in the piece, intentionally so.



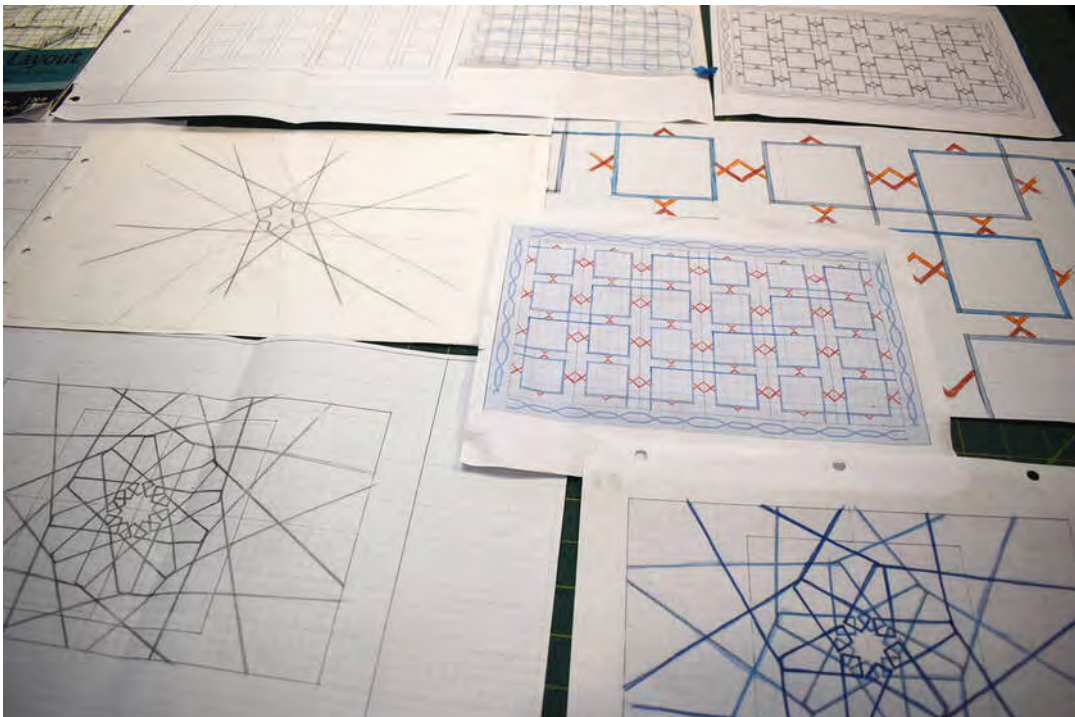
**Mark Smith mapping out one of his fabric constructions.**  
(photo by Dominic Nieri)

**Maria:** I love math! My dad was an engineer, and I was a good math student. In the past, making work while raising children, and now, while taking care of my mom, requires planning because there is no time to waste. So, my strategy is to create a process and then follow through. The process may be "sew for 100 days" or "take a photo while you walk" or "record how long it takes to do a task." But within each process there is variability built in. In *Thirty-One Days* I took a walk or drive every day for a month, found a color that caught my eye, took a picture and recorded the time and place. I painted the colors and arranged them on a square panel, one per day, in the order that they happened. Then I put the squares together as a calendar of days. That is the organizational part. The improvisational part is that I didn't control what I saw on my walks, I didn't control how they were arranged on the squares or how the colors interact when put together. The planning made the painting without me making design decisions, which can be stressful and take up a lot of time.



Above: Maria T.D. Inocencio, *Thirty-One Days*  
2011, wood, acrylic paint, paper, glue  
72" x 84" x 1.25"  
(Photo: Maria T.D. Inocencio)

Below: A glimpse of Maria's process for a project she is currently working on.



**S-F:** Neither of you shy away from incorporating overt beauty into your work. Can you each talk about your relationship to this elusive, subjective and at times fraught subject matter?

**Maria:** I was always concerned about making something beautiful; as if it is a dangerous thing to pursue, that maybe by trying too hard for beauty you might create something empty or cloying. I try to set up situations that sidetrack my ability to make the artwork beautiful. Following a predetermined process helps with that.

I am often inspired by a beautiful idea and want to make art about it. So, I make a plan and trust that the result will succeed in conveying that beauty. For example, *Where We Touch* is based on my volunteer work at the two schools my children attended. Teachers, students, parents, neighbors all worked together to build large projects - one for each school. I was struck by the cooperation, accomplishment and enjoyment among the wide variety of people. They were different in every way - culture, politics, colors, ages, but were able to work together towards a common goal. That was beautiful, and I wanted to share that beauty through an artwork.



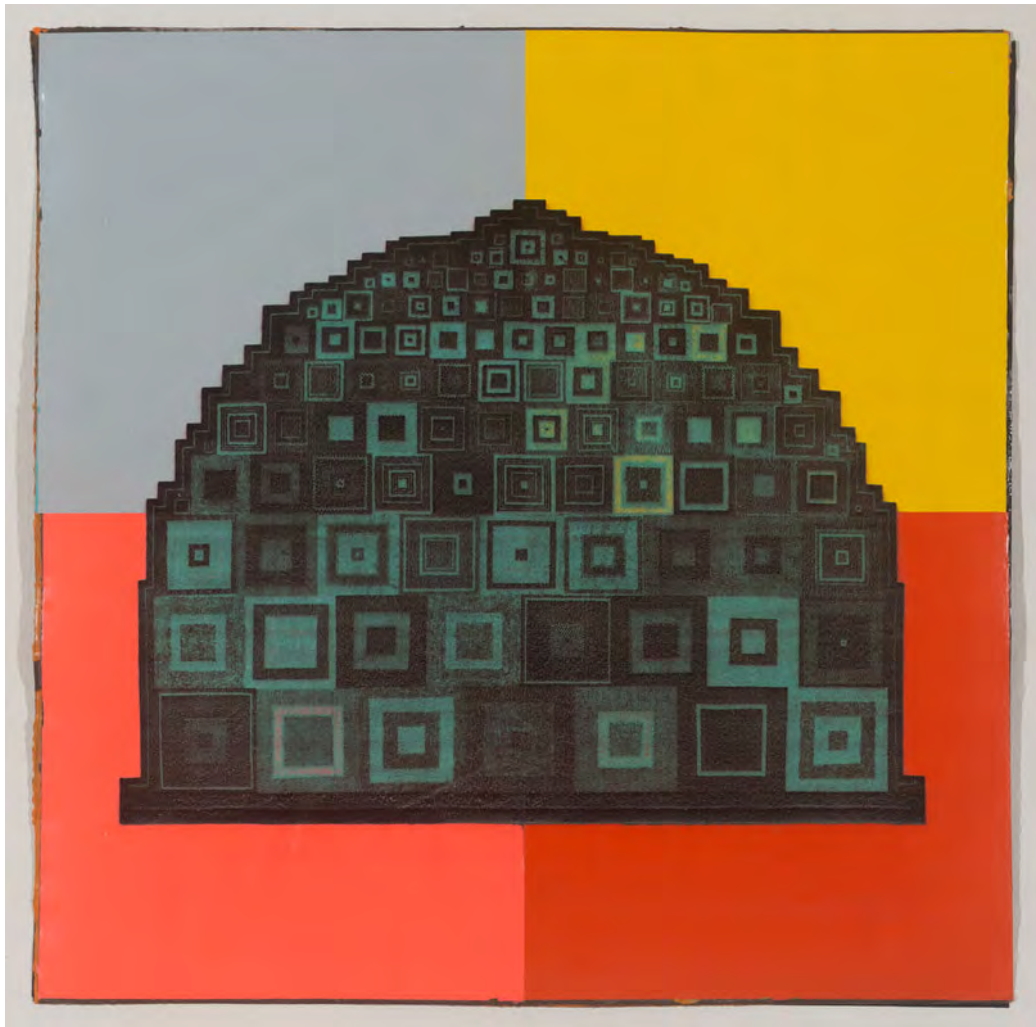
**Maria T. D. Inocencio, *Where We Touch***  
2006, string, paper, thread, 93" x 100"  
(Photo: Aaron Johanson)

At the time my daughter and her friends were middle schoolers making friendship bracelets for each other, which seemed like a lovely gesture. So, I decided to make the artwork with friendship bracelets. Each bracelet would represent an individual in the community. My process started by asking each person to measure their wrist and choose their favorite colors. Then in the studio, I hosted bracelet making parties and people came, had cookies and

coffee, and sat side by side helping each other make bracelets. It was so much fun. I sewed the bracelets together (in a grid) so that each person's bracelet was connected to the bracelet of a friend or family member. The elegant result was reminiscent of a safety net. It was a nice metaphor for the community of relationships that we create around us.

In *Heirloom Waterfall* I wanted to honor the women who came before me – the tradition of weaving, stitching, sewing and everything that is called "women's work", their earnest labor, their knowledge – all handed down for us to appreciate. It made sense to place the handmade linens and dresses in layers and descending from the oldest on top to the most recent at bottom, flowing like a waterfall. (By the way, none of the pieces was damaged by the installation.) It's hard not to find beauty in the detail, the intricacies, and the material delicacy of the heirlooms, each containing a story and asking the viewer to connect it to their own.

**Mark:** When I engage with art, I tend to enter through its physicality, looking at and thinking about how something is made. I like to be affected viscerally. There's so much information embedded in the physical manifestation of a work and that point of entry leads me to the content. It's just how I make sense of things. So beauty tends to be synthesized with the process of making and if I can demonstrate some kind of deep commitment to realizing a visual form, I feel like it's my most potent tool. I wouldn't want to deny or withhold anything from someone who's willing to consider my work.



**Mark R. Smith, *Stress Formations (Small Tent Beating Heart)***  
2023, laser engraving, acrylic paint, laminated papers, 13 x 13 in. each  
(photo by Stephen Funk)

**S-F:** As an occasional creative team, you both seem capable of setting your egos (at least partially) aside and working on a project together. How did you get started collaborating and what's it like to go through that process as artists that each have such strong, independent and well developed voices?

**Maria:** We've been making art and have been together for over 30 years and have evolved as artists together and honed our communication skills. We respect and admire each other's work. I think we have complimentary skills; I can do some things he can't and vice versa. We are mindful of celebrating each other's ideas and talents. Most importantly, we want the piece to work, so every element that goes into the artwork has to contribute to its success.

Typically, the reason we collaborate is to accomplish a particular project with a specific purpose. We approach the project from the same starting point, so there isn't one lead and we are equal contributors. The great thing is that his strengths and perspective are different enough from mine that the process is additive, and we often get more than if either of us worked alone. It gets layered, more complex and hopefully more effective.



Above: Mark R. Smith and Maria T.D. Inocencio, *I Used to Think I Knew Everyone*  
2017, muslin, paper, newsprint cutouts, thread, glue, 84" x 83.5"

Below: *I Used to Think I Knew Everone (detail)*





**S-F:** Both of you do work that is so engaged with notions of human connection and relationships at a time when a lot of people appear to be giving up on humanity in general. Talk about where that comes from.

**Mark:** Maria and I are both very empathetic people and that condition just seems to be getting more acute as we age. I can't speak for Maria, but I am most comfortable straddling the art community and culture at large. I think I'm good at being a bridge. While I have so much appreciation for my artist colleagues, gallerists, writers, arts activists and patrons who drive this whole enterprise, I've never been wholly relaxed as an inside participant. I'm always concerned about the person who doesn't get it and needs to be brought into the fold. I've served as a community college art instructor for twenty five years and I've realized over time my real function there is to be a facilitator. I work with a lot of people who feel like they're on the outside and might not be deserving of or just don't know how to get access to this broader world of information and education and ultimately empowerment. So I try to help them build their confidence and find their voice and it doesn't matter so much in that context if I'm making work of my own, beyond providing the vocabulary. I love these students I work with and I think I'm effectively functioning as an art regular guy.

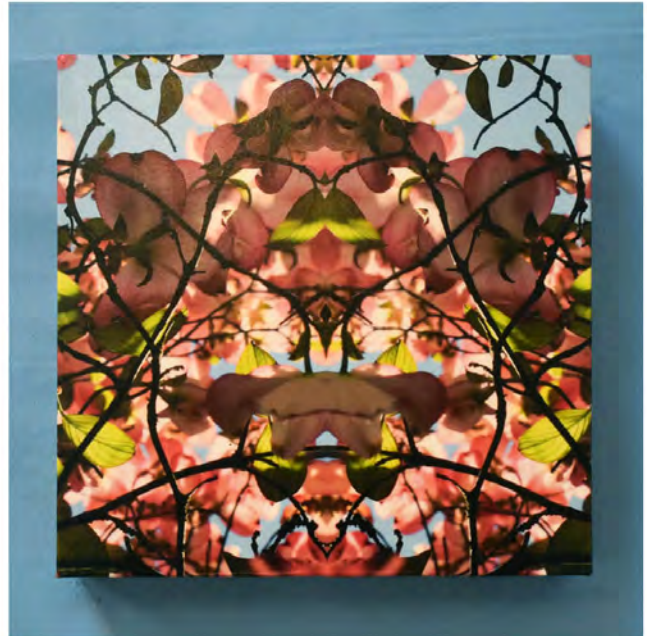


Above: Mark R. Smith, *Stress Formations ( Circle Meet-up)*  
2023, laser engraving, acrylic paint, laminated papers, 13" x 13"

Below: Mark R. Smith, *Stress Formations ( Ornate Tower)*  
2023, laser engraving, acrylic paint, laminated papers, 13" x 13"  
(photos by Stephen Funk)



**Maria:** I was born in Manila, lived in Nigeria, then came to the states and, as a child, lived in 3 vastly different neighborhoods in different parts of New York. I have met so many different kinds of people from a variety of cultures, and each time lived within their worlds and adapted. There is always commonality to be found, always a friend to make. The work at Pleasant Village and then my volunteer work at my children's schools were experiences that deepened my belief that people are a lot more alike than they are different, and that they want to work together and can accomplish great things. Cooperation and accomplishment can encourage more of the same. Meanwhile, people have a good time and build goodwill and trust. I've done work that literally engages many individuals, and work that just presents the things we have in common. It's fascinating for me and I hope what I do is helpful. I'm happy if my work can connect, even if it is just one person at a time.



Maria T. D. Inocencio: projects underway in the studio.  
(photos by Maria T. D. Inocencio)



**S-F:** Who are you looking at (alive or dead)? Who is inspiring you in early 2023?

**Maria:** In my job, I get a chance to look at a lot of local artists and it's especially good to see the work of people who are younger than I am. Zeinab Saab (@zeinab.saab on ig), makes thought provoking pieces on paper and she manages to talk about important ideas like identity, in such an elegant way. David Torres (@djtorresll on ig) is a media artist whose work I was recently introduced to. Both of them have amazing energy and I'm looking forward to seeing what they make in the future.

People who are inspiring me include: Michele Obama, for her work and her representation of women of color; Tamar Benzikry, for her ability to raise two small kids while working in a corporate setting; and my daughter, Rosa, for her fearless pursuit of her art and her desire to have a positive effect on the world.

**Mark:** I greatly admire the work of [George Johanson](#), who was always a hero for me through his full embrace of color, use of pattern and the general experimentation and playfulness of his work. He was also a genuinely kind person and perpetually curious about everything. I wish I had been his student. I've been inspired forever by the symmetry of lace and crochet patterns, quilts and all that hand work produced anonymously by women for time on end--the patience and commitment required to produce these works is astounding. Maria has a collection of crocheted doilies at home that has crept into my dreams. I have been a big fan of [Brice Marden's](#) Gonshi-inspired works--what I call his spaghetti paintings--featuring interlocking webs of calligraphic marks. They are wholly enveloping and mesmerizing to experience. [Louise Bourgeois'](#) fabric works are uncomfortably familiar and deeply psychologically felt. And finally the collage-based work of [Jack Whitten](#), who I mentioned before, is monumentally elegant, quiet but expressively powerful. It serves as excellent proof that abstract work can be both beautiful and embody a social conscience.

**S-F:** What's next for each of you?

**Mark:** I am working on an exhibition at [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#) in Portland scheduled for March-April '23. The working title is *Stress Formations*. The idea came about by considering the events of the last few years punctuated by the covid pandemic, the large public demonstrations surrounding Black Lives Matter, the Women's March and of course, the January 6th Capitol riot. There was a fascinating contrast between what people were doing privately at home to cope with stress and the mass events that were unfolding in public. Our daughter Rosa had written a short essay about historical periods of stress such as the Irish potato famine and the two great world wars, where women (for the most part) turned to handcrafts, both as a coping mechanism, and as a means of income and production--think of Irish lace and Victory knitting. I used that as a starting point. My project will include a number of laser engravings which feature groupings of figures (cutouts from the NY Times) overlaid by scanned examples of Maria's doily collection here at home. The figures symbolize the crowds and public manifestation of our collective angst.

**Maria:** Right now, Mark and I are working on a commission for a private client, and I've got a large-scale commission that is supposed to be completed by September. I also have a show scheduled for November of this year.

### **Extra Credit:**

**S-F:** Is there a text that you would consider a touchstone or that acts as a sort of scaffolding for your work?

**Maria:** Lucy Lippard's *Overlay* is important to me in the way it connects the art of prehistory to that of the present. *Islamic Art* by Lucio Mozzati is a book that I turn to often. It's an overview of art and architecture from the Islamic world over the centuries and it's gorgeous. It has an explanation of the relationship between geometry and spirituality that is so poetic, and diagrams of how geometry was used in creating the beautiful tile mosaics Islamic

architecture is known for. Also, I read whatever I can find on the subject of time (most recently, Carlo Rovelli's *The Order of Time*) to try to better understand what time is and how we experience it.

**Mark:** There is a book I've been informed by for several years, (first recommended to me by art historian Sue Taylor), *Crowds and Power (1960)*, by Elias Canetti, which I've used before as source material that is also informing this show. It's a huge poetic treatise on crowd psychology and dynamics which continually returns to the notion of touch as a fueling mechanism. It's a hard read but is full of compelling imagery. As a person of Jewish ancestry in Europe, who somehow escaped the Nazi pogrom prior to and during WW II, he writes with a lot of generous compassion about unruly mobs of people.

**You can see more of Smith's work:**

- at [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#)
- on his [website](#)
- on instagram: [@marksmithstudio](#)

**You can see more of Inocencio's work:**

- on her [website](#)
- on instagram: [@mariatdinocencio](#)





Above and below: Maria T.D. Inocencio,  
Stones from her installation at Nine Gallery: *Sometimes It's Hard To See*  
2021, stones, glue, hair, varnish, dimensions variable



Above and below: Mark R. Smith, *Portals and Rabbit Holes*  
2021, installation at Meta headquarters, Seattle, WA



**Maria T. D. Inocencio, *Heirloom Waterfall***  
2018, linens, baby clothes, 108" x 77" x 7"





A corner of the studio.



A corner of the dining room.



Exhibition Review

## Mark R. Smith: Phalanxes

[Bean Gilsdorf](#)

Published online: 06 Apr 2021

Download citation <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759756.2021.1891672> CrossMark

In its simplest formulation, the word *phalanx* refers to a body of individuals massed closely together, a group united for a common purpose. For his solo exhibition at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, Oregon, Mark R. Smith has developed a suite of works that feel simultaneously balanced and unbalanced and, at times, almost symbiotic. All ten works in the show were created in 2020, mainly from felt, commercial knits, and striped twill tape drawn from the artist's considerable stash of repurposed or reclaimed textiles during lockdown and quarantine in the early and middle months of 2020.

The exhibition of this work during a tumultuous election season only heightens Smith's examinations of cohesion and division. By virtue of their scale and attention to color, three of the works (the large and hypnotic *Sutured Diamond*, *Sutured Square*, and *Sutured Circle*) are in direct conversation with the geometric abstractions produced by Josef and Anni Albers in the middle of the last century. Focusing, as they had, on the interactions of tone and value, Smith cuts and glues fabric in strips to create concentric shapes that expand to the edges of each canvas, and then bisects the work vertically with a black zipper. The two halves created by this bisection are in contrasting colors, implying a mismatch or confrontation, but the silver teeth of the zippers are mated tightly, underscoring a sense of cohesion. *Sutured Square's* 60 × 60 inches plays neutral yellows on the left against dark reds on the right, and the artist handles his hues deftly to produce a vibrational effect ([Figure 1](#)).

Figure 1 Mark R. Smith. *Sutured Square*, 2020; reclaimed textiles on wood panel; 60 × 60 in.



In the press release for the exhibition, Smith cites as inspiration the French philosopher Charles Fourier's plans for shared living spaces that promote gender and social equality. Echoes of this research are perceived most clearly in two smaller framed works, *Ideal Pairs I and II* (Figure 2), which gather independent sets of concentric squares around a central bullseye motif, and which might be understood as rooms massed around a central shared courtyard. These works aim for balance without perfect symmetry, and avoid asserting conspicuously political agendas. Instead, because *Ideal Pairs I and II* works are constructed predominantly in the heathered gray fabrics of athletic clothes, they hint at the material's original use and conjure sports as a manner of uniting—or dividing—around a shared objective. If there's an implied battle to these binaries of light and dark, warm and cool, male and female, inside and outside, or home and away, then in this exhibition there are no definitive winners or losers. With their tense, teetering effect, achieved by the use of color and scale as much as the arrangements of geometries, the compositions propose equilibrium without stasis.

Figure 2 Mark R. Smith. *Ideal Pairs I*, 2020; reclaimed textiles on translucent paper; 31 × 36 in.



The exhibition shifts from a series of meditations on balance to a consideration of stability and support with *Complex Dome I* and *Complex Dome II* (Figure 3), both 24 × 27 inch shapes that mimic the contours of a flattened beanie hat. Smith has used concentric squares here, too, stacking them vertically like so many boxes, giving the feeling of controlled chaos. Each square has been carefully constructed from four right triangles glued to the substrate, about two inches square at the flat base and gradually shrinking to a mere quarter inch at the rounded apex of the dome. The tiny pieces are meticulously positioned, one surmises, with a pair of tweezers. The artist's precise cutting and placement illustrates his command of the materials—even at close range, the cut lines are barely visible, and so, especially for a viewer who works with cloth, these are some of the most satisfying works in the show. Smith has long exhibited considerable prowess with textiles (his prior quilt-like works of animal motifs and silhouettes of sports figures in patterned fabrics also demonstrated his sharp sense of color) but his most recent forays into abstraction foreground material over pictorial content.

Figure 3 Mark R. Smith. *Complex Dome II*, 2020; reclaimed textiles on translucent paper; 24 × 27 in.



On the other side of the gallery, the dome-shaped *The City is a Star* (Figure 4) modifies the tenor of the exhibition yet again. At 62 × 69 inches, it's constructed from pink, white, black, and gray stripes stacked horizontally upon a crenelated base that recalls the parapet of a castle. In the center of the dome, a ten-ring bullseye sits inside a pentagon that extends five long rectangles out toward the perimeter of the dome. Despite the sweetness of the warm pinks, the work introduces a chill into the show; the form strongly evokes a panopticon, the 18th century prison designed by Jeremy Bentham, who proposed that inmates could be motivated to self-reflection via perpetual surveillance. His (ultimately disastrous) theory went that if prisoners don't know when the guard is watching, they will operate at all times as though they are being observed. Reinforcing this interplay between visibility and vulnerability, Smith has affixed his textiles to a translucent paper-and-fabric panel, assembled such that the stretcher bars

beneath are visible; in other words, viewers are given a peek at that which they are not ordinarily permitted to see. The title perhaps plays with the notion of *polis*, the ideal city-state, and with the *star* not as a source of light but as the branches extending from the Pentagon, symbolic hub of US military authority and dominance. In considering this title in relation to the title of the exhibition, one inevitably arrives at one particular meaning of *phalanx*: a body of soldiers formed in close ranks. Whereas before the works pointed to attempts at harmony and balance in service of creating a society of individuals, now the force of stability—of the five-armed panopticon in its sea of stripes—signals the intractability of tyranny.

Figure 4 Mark R. Smith. *The City is a Star*, 2020; reclaimed textiles on translucent paper and fabric panel; 62 × 69 in.



As an exploration of the shifting character that a mass of individuals can take, and as a reflection of the dynamism of collective power, *Phalanxes* stimulates. It's clear that Smith has been meditating on the municipal state of the world, and on our highly polarized society, and he comes away with optimism intact. His enthusiasm, however, is not for utopias, which by their very nature are repressive; a society cannot thrive without variation. Instead, this work is a celebration of those variations and a means of thinking through the frameworks that make equilibrium possible. Though the work here is not overtly political, it doesn't lack the efficacy to envisage common cause. Smith sees that we have potency when we work together to achieve shared goals, and that what we do with that power matters a great deal.

# Processing Loss at Lewis & Clark

[orartswatch.org/processing-loss-at-lewis-clark](http://orartswatch.org/processing-loss-at-lewis-clark)

Laurel Reed  
Pavic



## OREGON ARTSWATCH

### OREGON'S ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

Mark R. Smith and Maria T.D. Inocencio's exhibition, *Loss of Material Evidence*, closed on Sunday, December 9th. The works in the show successfully take on one of art's highest callings: to make visible the unspeakable, here an exploration of grief. The irony of course is that this exhibition about loss also marks the end of an era for the Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art at Lewis & Clark. Only a few days prior to the closing of this exhibition, it was announced that the long-time gallery director and curator, Linda Tesner, had been let go. So the end of the show coincides with the end of the gallery, one loss merging with the other.

It would be a mistake, however, to let sadness over the loss of Tesner and concern over the future fate of the Hoffman Gallery to overshadow the achievements of Smith and Inocencio. The show was beautiful in concept and in execution. Inspired by the aging and inevitable loss of the artists' parents, the works in the show are a meditation on death and the accumulation of things. The lament is tempered by a hopeful note of celebration of the power of family and community. Grief is felt and processed and then, ultimately, transformative.



Maria T.D. Inocencio and Mark R. Smith, "Time Tunnel" (2017).  
Reclaimed textiles, thread, glue, canvas.



An enormous abstract composition (roughly 9-by-16 feet) sets the tone for the show. Vertical stripes of varied colors, interspersed with thin white lines flank a central composition of nested, striped squares. The title, *Time Tunnel*, suggests some sort of flashing tunnel time warp ushering the viewer into the gallery. Perhaps because of too much time with art history books and not enough exposure to time-warp tunnels, I was struck by the similarity to Frank Stella's abstractions of the 1960s. Stella's works were products of High Modernism, abstraction that celebrated the materiality of paint; Stella famously said about his works, "what you see is what you see."

Smith and Inocencio reject this Modernist tautology; *Time Tunnel* isn't an opportunity to meditate on the paintness of paint but rather a call to consider what to do with the stuff accumulated over a lifetime. Smith and Inocencio's stripes are not paint at all but reclaimed fabrics painstakingly deconstructed and then remade into symmetrical stripes. Some of the fabric strips are only inches long but the stripes are so meticulously arranged that the seams between pieces are barely visible. The style of the stripes and their fabric types recall striped polo shirts, the collared garment of choice of many an erstwhile or aspirational golfer. With *Time Travel* and many other works in the show, the stripes aren't a formal device but the answer to the question: what to do with a lifetime-supply of striped shirts?

Several works in the show use these stripes née shirts. In *Mother: The Farthest Ten Acres*; *Father: Late Arrival*; and *Mother, Father: Long-Lived but Not Forever* the stripes are composed into arches, circles, and curves. A pair or trio of framed found photographs interrupts the geometric patterning in these works, the photographs cut from Smith's parents' hundreds of saved copies of *National Geographic*. In *Objects and Aura*, the stripes are fashioned into small squares and used as a backdrop for a pair of figurines made by the artists' son at age 10. The figurines seem to be Smith's acknowledgment that his own saved treasures will inevitably become accumulated stuff that someone will clean out. In *Afterimage: The Night Sky*, the stripes become circular constellations on the ceiling that can be gazed up at from a brown recliner. The chair evokes both limited mobility and the association between the sky and the afterlife.

Many of Inocencio's works use repetition as a form of meditation in the processing grief and loss. For the installation, *Comforter—Beloved Embrace*, Inocencio cut out copies of photographs from family albums, one per day. She combined these photo cut-outs with tracings of leaves that were collected on daily walks, traced, and then cut out. The 365 figures and more than 3000 leaves blanket the ceiling and trail down the walls so that the viewer is enveloped in this space of memory. *Remembering Every Day* presents a large grid of varied colors, but closer inspection reveals that each color is associated with a memory, one colored memory for each day for one year from the day her mother-in-law died arranged as a pinwheel. Each square bears a date and a token description: hand towel, attic tablecloth, fridge magnet. Stuff that becomes memories and those memories then

reduced to a bare minimum—a word or phrase and color.



Mark R. Smith, “Afterimage: The Night Sky” (2018).  
Reclaimed textiles, plywood, metal tubing, stand-assist  
chair.



Maria T.D. Inocencio, "Remembering Every Day" (2018). Paper, gouache, Flashe, glue, colored pencil on wood panel

*Fear of Falling* is a tower of things, not things remade or memories extracted from things but actual, physical things: a discarded strand of Christmas lights, reading glasses, a colander, a plastic novelty goblet, and a ball of yarn among many others. The tower is precariously balanced; the title references the instability of the structure and the mobility issues that accompany aging. What to do with two of life's inevitabilities: aging and a junk drawer (or basement)? When is stuff a treasured memory and when is it just stuff?

A whole self-help industry has emerged to answer this question. Marie Kondo promises that ridding ourselves of things will bring joy. Or if you're starting later, you can always Swedish death clean. Smith and Inocencio don't offer a solution so much as camaraderie. They aren't chastising anyone for keeping a plastic novelty goblet or stacks upon stacks of back issues of *National Geographic*, and they aren't offering a solution or a way out. Instead, they're showing *their* way through, the sifting, remaking, and letting go. They invite viewers to witness their grief and loss as a way to contemplate our own.

High Modernism posited that formal aesthetic qualities were universal, that all people could grasp the beauty in abstraction if they only made the effort. This assumption of the universality of formalism has largely been abandoned—the acknowledgment of plurality and the fact that different visual traditions value different qualities and personal experience affects the way we see. What I find so appealing about this show is that it uses abstraction to speak to a different universal—not formal aesthetics but loss.

At the end of a tumultuous year in the Portland arts community—the closing of the Art Gym at Marylhurst (amid the closing of the university), the end of Tesner’s position at Lewis & Clark, potential changes on the horizon for OCAC and PNCA—it is easy to focus on what we’ve lost or are afraid of losing. In that vein, the December afternoon closing of *Loss of Material Evidence* could have been a dirge but it was not. The afternoon was dreary and cold but the gallery was awash with warmth, art, and community. There was a crowd. Smith and Inocencio were apron-clad, giving a tutorial on how to make Smith’s mother’s apple pie. Tesner was a model of grace and generosity as she shared her thoughts on the show and the larger endeavor of curating. There were even gifts as the show’s beautiful catalogs were given away. Against all odds, loss was spun into something lovely.



Maria T.D. Inocencio and Mark R. Smith, “Fear of Falling” (2018) Found Objects and reclaimed textiles



Thursday  
12.06.12

A Seat At The Table? Considering Soft Power: MK Guth and Mark Smith

*"Only through art can we emerge from ourselves and know what another person sees"* -Marcel Proust

Proust is utterly wrong with that quote of course, but it is a sentiment of yearning and perhaps a tad religious one at that. Instead, Art tends to be as subjective as anything else... though visiting someone's home or having a meal together is a kind of shared experience that is similar to looking at art or a performance together. In fact, all meals are performances and there is a power in such communion. The point being that art doesn't have any special authority, only that it has license to make unexpected demands on those that experience it. Sometime between the time of Lascaux and Titian though, art experiences became increasingly elitist and about projecting power. This was the hard power of class authority or social station.

Which brings me to two current shows by veteran Portland artists, Mark Smith and MK Guth.

Mark Smith's exhibition, Vestibules and Portraits, Laminates and Veneers at Elizabeth Leach Gallery purposefully inverts the whole iconographic process by using the domestic soft power materials as a veneer to a warholian iconographic effect that is personalized, not some top down idol. Visually it also has its roots in populist hippie era psychedelia, which was also trying to generate shared group experiences.



Mark Smith, End Table with The Beatles, Alyson and Leslie and the Reverend Sun Yon Moon (2012)

In particular Smith's End Table with The Beatles, Alyson and Leslie and the Reverend Sun Yon Moon takes pop icons, a religious leader and two people most people do not know is served up as a kind of soft power altar. It isn't that different from Pinterest where users can arrange their visual interests in albums. The difference here is that Smith formally unifies them via soft blanket materials (a Greenbergian and hippie era formal trick) to make them both stranger and more approachable. These soft elements feel like an object commentary on social media, which employs similar veneers to make the internet seem warmer, fuzzier, and more relatable.



### Mark Smith Open Cameo

By turning the entire gallery into a table or shelf Smith's Open Cameo with a stand does the same thing only by making the normally tiny frame and stand human sized and devoid of faces (replaced with a void) it invites a kind of interaction (though its placement in the corner somewhat squelches it). Many artists use soft materials these days to evoke a domestic parlance but Smith has been doing quite a long time exhibiting stadium plans vacuum packed with lost and found clothing over a decade ago in the 2001 Oregon Biennial. Somehow, now that the domestic and soft power is en vogue Smiths veneers have become bolder and more compelling, particularly in the sculptural works. In the past traditional sculpture was relegated to heavy materials like granite, marble, various metals or wood but in these cases the soft veneer itself supersedes the supporting wood... cuing the viewer that it is their own personal relationship to this soft material that is most important.



Mark Smith, Book Stack (top to bottom) German Grammar, Family Sunday and Betty Crocker (2012)

Smith's Book Stack (slyly recalling Judd's stacks) also wears its heart on its sleeve... taking book covers (an autocratic visual form if there ever was one) and handicrafts them into folk objects or heirlooms... which is a quite a reversal for the nostalgic Betty Crocker cookbook or German Grammar. Somehow it feels personal but in fact it is an engineered soft power experience.

Similarly, at the Art Gym MK Guth uses the overlay or veneer of shared experiences (and a lot of gnarled knotty and highly figured wood) to create a somewhat less poppy but still rather folksy experience. Her shelves also recall Judd's stacks. The Proustian title for the show, "when nothing else subsists, smell and taste remain" definitively places the objects themselves in the service of soft power concerns like gathering people together.

Like any dinner party Guth creates socially engineered situations around tables or shelves that like Clark or Abromovic that coalesce around her often wood centric objects. Her Dinner for a Funereal with its handbook-like black embossed book



cover, other books and black baited kitchen knife is perhaps the only terribly edgy thing here but that is the point (bad pun). The point being, real life dramas can beat any fiction.

Likewise situations like Dinner for Women or Curators seem to recreate scenarios that take place all of the time. Curators have lunch with one another to compare notes and coordinate... and sometimes the ladies find it novel to dis-invite the boys. Often these informal soft power moments set important and lasting wheels in motion. Is Guth trying to claim the dinner party? Well Portland is a food driven place and we sure do like wood.

Pieces like Dinner for John Cage and Dinner for Women seem like can't miss happenings. Besides, who can hate John Cage or Women and expect to be invited to any dinner party?

My personal favorite is Dinner for Getting Lost. The stump looks like something from Guth's yard and I can just picture the eventual location for the meal being in some roadless area where the guests are only given a vague map and a machete but only after being blindfolded and driven to an undisclosed wilderness. Directions like, "turn right at the second badger and 30 degrees left at the fourth red squirrel," would ensure that the companion piece Dinner for a Search Party would have to be made.

The point being that this show deals in suppositions as much as supper. Those who don't get to be part of the Dinner for Curators or Dinner for Crying might feel excluded because there is a supposition that what transpired was important. In fact that is hardly ever the case, instead it is the familiarity and bonds of trust one develops through the shared experience and proximity which become the true soft power component that almost all human interaction/empathy traffics in. These interactions become the foundation of relationships that then might lead to something important. In fact all meals are performances and the allusions to Marcel Proust in Guth's show are just a way of giving the meal as a palimpsest an intellectual context. Still, I feel the fact that everyone has to eat trumps Proust's influence.

In many ways Guth's exhibition is an exercise in relational aesthetics for the Northwest crowd.... a people who love food, close clustered groups and wood. I hope people see the kitsch in this choice because Guth clearly did with her campy mushrooms and plates made out of wood... treating the whole affair as if the Northwest was just one big Black Forrest Cuckoo Clock. It is a sly move since making everything out of huge slabs of Douglas fir would have been more typically Cascadian? Guth's objects themselves are just totemic props, a little like ceremonial potlatch feast accoutrements. Smith's are a little more icon driven but both artists felt a burning need to make book shelves, which is about the most Portland thing I can think of.

One thing isn't open for debate though, both artists made use of shelves and domestic style tables. It is an effective ploy to usurp the standard display cases of museums, making the work more domestic and relatable.

None of this channeling of power is new of course ([Fritz Haeg](#) plants gardens and [Harrell Fletcher](#) made other people's wishes come true) but it does represent the art world's increasing focus on reaching out to viewers. Even [Mark Smith's](#) work seems to present art as a normalizing force rather than acting as a fountain of exceptional and the odd. What does art gain from being so accommodating? ...well about as much as it gains from being exceptionally specific, the two are sides of the same experiential art coin.

It is the final weekend for [MK Guth's](#) exhibition at the Art Gym.

[Mark Smith's](#) exhibition runs till December 29th.

Posted by [Jeff Jahn](#) on December 06, 2012 at 13:17 | [Comments \(0\)](#)

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OREGON ARTS  
COMMISSION

For Immediate Release  
August 10, 2010

Contact: Meagan Atiyeh, Oregon Arts Commission, (503) 986-0084  
Leslie Roth, Office of the Governor, (503) 986-6520

## Mark R. Smith's Paintings Exhibited in Governor's Office

*Art work on View through September 15, 2010*

A collection of paintings by Portland, Oregon artist Mark R. Smith is on exhibit in the office of Governor Ted Kulongoski through September 15, 2010.

"In making this work, I was concerned with creating artworks that would read like contemporary folk tales much in the manner of older 19<sup>th</sup> century story quilts." Mark Smith's paintings convey the care and detail of quilts, with carefully placed and painted fabrics. Smith has mined differing cultural inspirations for his symbols over the years, including sporting culture and, more recently, highly organized social structures of humans and animals.

His pieces use materials recycled from vernacular culture; stenciled shapes are cut directly from newspapers to create silhouetted, pictographic forms. The printed fabrics on which the shapes are painted were collected from Goodwill bins.

Smith received a BFA from the Cooper Union in New York City and an MFA in painting from Portland State University. His work has been exhibited widely, including The Art Gym, Portland Community College, Pacific Northwest College of Art, Fresh Trouble, curated by Jeff Jahn; The Drawing Center, New York; Hallie Ford Museum of Art, and Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, where he is represented. He is one of thirteen artists to receive a 2010 Artist Fellowship from the Arts Commission.

Mark R. Smith's work may be seen in the Office of the Governor, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Oregon State Capitol, 900 Court Street in Salem, Mondays through Fridays from 8 am – 5 pm.

The Art in the Governor's Office Program honors selected Oregon artists with exhibitions in the reception area of the Governor's Office in the State Capitol. An exhibit in the Governor's Office is considered a lifetime honor. Artists whose work has been shown there include William Park, Mary Josephson, Gordon Gilkey, Sally Haley, Yuji Hiratsuka, Manuel Izquierdo, James Lavadour, Henk Pander and Margot Thompson.

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The Oregon Arts Commission provides leadership, funding and arts programs through its grants, special initiatives and services. Nine commissioners, appointed by the Governor, determine arts needs and establish policies for public support of the arts. The Arts Commission became part of the Oregon Business Development Department in 1993 in recognition of the expanding role the arts play in the broader social, economic and educational arenas of Oregon communities. In 2003, the Oregon legislature moved the operations of the Oregon Cultural Trust to the Arts Commission, streamlining operations and making use of the Commission's expertise in grant-making, arts and cultural information and community cultural development.

The Arts Commission is supported with general funds appropriated by the Oregon legislature, federal funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and funds from the Oregon Cultural Trust.

# New American Paintings



Juried Exhibition-in-Print No. 67

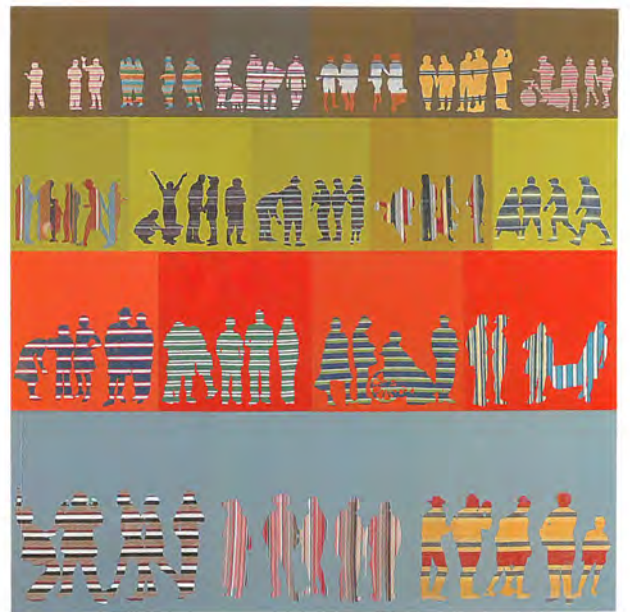
A Catalog of the Winners' Work from the 2006 Pacific Coast Competition

This competition was conducted exclusively for artists from the states of: California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii.

The Open Studios Competitions began in 1993 as an experiment in art publishing. Now bimonthly, they have become America's largest series of artist competitions. Each competition is cataloged in a regional volume of *New American Paintings*: Northeastern, Mid-Atlantic, Southern, Midwestern, Western, and Pacific Coast.



Mark R. Smith  
 CONTEST acrylic and printed fabric on canvas 62" x 48"



Mark R. Smith  
 FIGURES IN LINE acrylic and printed fabric on canvas 40" x 44"



Mark R. Smith

## Mark R. Smith

Portland, OR • 503.224.0521 G

Born: 1958, Salem, OR

### EDUCATION:

1997 MFA, Portland State University, Portland, OR

1983 BFA, The Cooper Union, New York, NY

### EXHIBITIONS:

2006 *Nike Inc., Beaverton, OR*

Hallie Brown Ford Museum, Willamette University, Salem, OR

2005 Aqua Art Miami, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Miami, FL

2005/01 *Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR*

2004 Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art, Lewis and Clark College, Portland, OR

2002 The Drawing Center, New York, NY

2001/1997 Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR

1996 *Allene Lapidus Gallery, Santa Fe, NM*

1993 Artists Space, New York, NY

### COLLECTIONS:

CityArts Inc, New York, NY

King County Public Art Collection, Seattle, WA

Lewis and Clark College, Portland, OR

Nike Inc., Beaverton, OR

Port of Portland, Portland, OR

Providence Portland Medical Center, Portland, OR

Teachers Insurance, New York, NY

### PUBLICATIONS:

Art in America, 3/06

2004 Linda Brady Tesner, Honeycombed News, An Intimate City, Mediating Boxes, catalog and essay for a permanent art commission at Lewis and Clark College, Portland, OR

2003 Douglas Bullis, 100 Artists of the West Coast, Schiffer Publishing Ltd., Lancaster PA

Email: markrichardsonsmith@msn.com

Website: www.elizabethleach.com

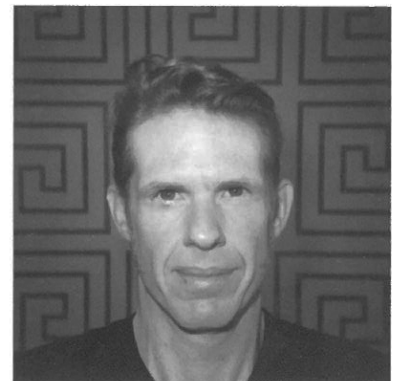
### Represented by:

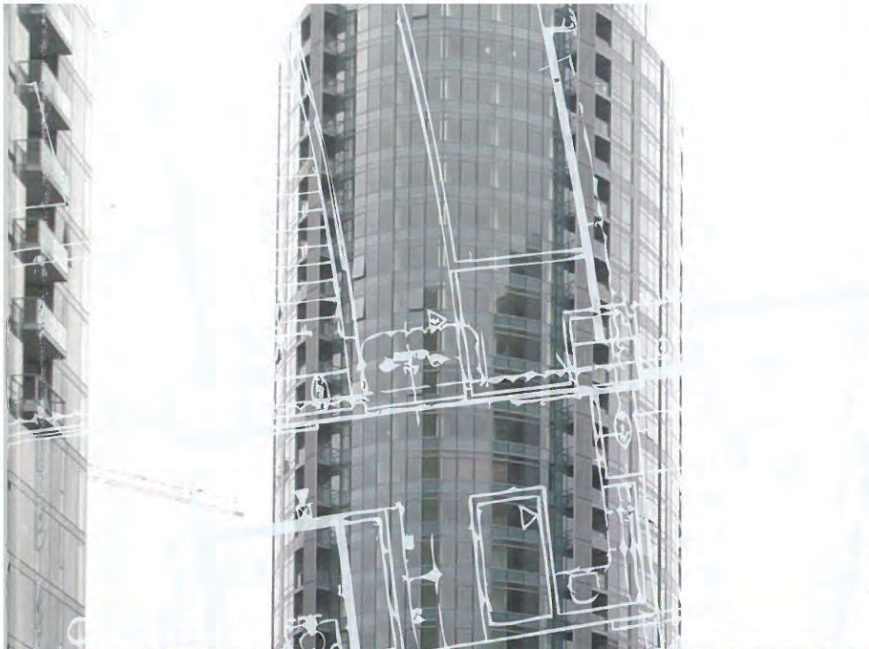
Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR

These are collage-based paintings created from sections of recycled printed fabric, mounted to canvas and overlaid with skins of acrylic paint. The paintings include stenciled shapes—mostly the silhouetted outlines of sports and music figures with their audiences—which operate visually, as transparent openings, exposing the printed fabrics underneath.

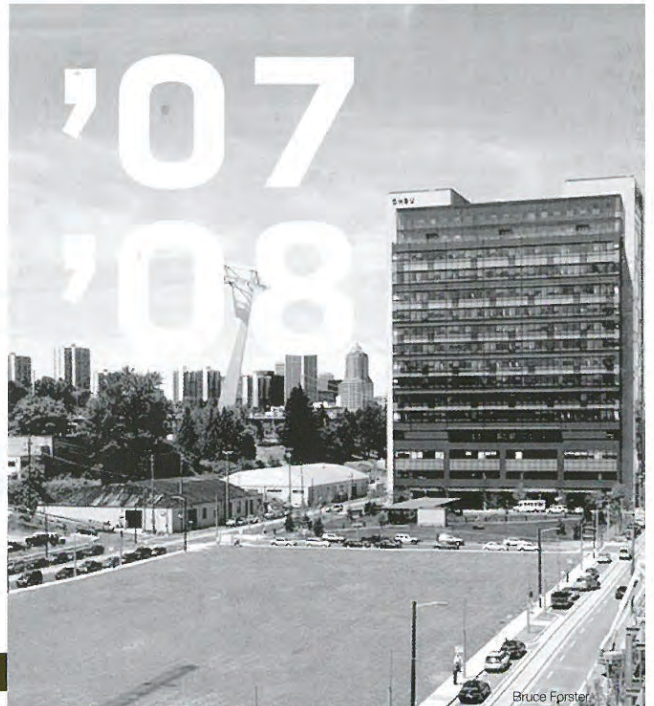
In content, this work addresses the phenomenon of temporary communities—specifically, the public rituals whereby large groups of people gather and interact briefly in architectural settings like sports arenas, churches, music venues or convention halls. Most often, the floor plans of the architecture defines or informs the composition of the paintings. I am specifically interested in these types of settings because they become the vehicles through which collective consciousness and group identity are forged. The process repeats itself in communities of all sizes and levels of complexity across national and cultural boundaries. In these works, my use of clothing is intended to reference that collective human activity, whether it is competitive, celebratory or potentially violent.

For the past several years I have experimented with disparate materials including clothing, leaves, insects, photographs, fabric and other printed matter as a means of democratizing the painting process. I prefer to work within a pop idiom and believe that bringing items of a familiar origin into the process serves to make my work more accessible and less austere. I admire quilts and other related utilitarian art forms. With the fabric paintings, I attempt to hybridize a vernacular process like quilting with my specific interest in large-scale public spectacles through the formal language of abstract painting.





**SOUTH WATERFRONT ARTIST IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM**



**A 13-MONTH CYCLE OF TEMPORARY PROJECTS DEVOTED TO PLACE MAKING**



**PORTLAND, OREGON USA**

- Linda K. Johnson
- Tim DuRoche
- Dana Lynn Louis
- Dmae Roberts
- Tahni Holt
- David Oates
- Christopher Rauschenberg
- Adam Kuby
- Maria T.D. Inocencio/Mark R. Smith
- Horatio Hung-Yan Law
- Linda Wysong
- Bill Will
- Sojourn Theatre
- and
- Special Projects



## MONTHLY GUEST ARTIST SERIES: APRIL 2008: MARK R. SMITH & MARIA T.D. INOCENCIO

### ARTIST STATEMENT

We were interested in the South Waterfront project because we wanted to be part of the evolution of this neighborhood: to witness it, and to make art about it. Our previous work considered the elements of temporary and permanent communities: Mark's paintings and sculptures represented gatherings at concerts and ballparks, and Maria's installations represented the populations of existing schools and neighborhoods. In addition, public participation played an important role in the work, both as a resource for imagery and as an essential aspect of the aesthetic. This project was an opportunity to further examine these dynamics in a community that is just beginning.

Our idea was to create an experience that would be intimate, and an installation that would be human scale in the midst of this vast and (still) industrial landscape. The title, *Compass*, refers to the sculpture literally pointing north, as well as the need in each of us to find our way and our place in this world.

Early on, we invited residents of the area, and other Portland groups, to take part in

our workshops. These workshops were designed to encourage people to get to know each other by engaging in activities that would ultimately yield information to be included in the sculpture. This information - each person's height, favorite color, and an anagram of his or her name - was used to create a flag that represented that individual.

Outside, we built an oval shaped field that symbolized a map of the world, with the South Waterfront at the center of that world. Each flag was then planted within this map at the points that corresponded to the individual's place of birth. The completed installation was then a portrait of the "community" that existed around our residency.

There were challenges in producing this piece. The brief time frame limited our encounters with those who live and work in the district, and it limited our ability to bring in many other organizations to include in the workshops. Despite this, the project was more successful than we anticipated. The number of participants, their interest and their enthusiasm were greater than we

expected. It was exciting to see how the creative process took hold of people. This was particularly evident with the anagrams. Participants sat down and concentrated, they struggled with content, and helped each other to achieve just the right word or phrase to describe themselves.

A residency is a transparent situation that leaves an artist vulnerable to disruption, distraction and (sometimes) opposition. Interaction with the public and other artists is risky; but, when one is open and ready, there are benefits to taking that chance. We have appreciated this glimpse at the approaches taken by other artists and the perspectives of the people that we have met. We hope that our work has promoted a thoughtful conversation about the nature of community and the possibilities for making connections.



### DAILY MOVEMENT JOURNAL: APRIL

Measuring the distance with my head of a long shadow cast by the spring sun; big wake from the sternwheeler; coxswain yells to boat, "more pressure here - use your legs"; flick a menacing bee; avoid the bee; toss a stone; hand in water; shake it dry; stand and brush off crusted moss...



## Compass

“The Smith-Inocencio art project was bursting with creativity and uniqueness. It was fascinating to read about the birth origins of our neighbors, which engendered a special feeling of community as well as an appreciation of our diversity. In addition, the presentation was visually striking with the colorful flag and clever map displays. Participating in the project was a splendid experience.” - **Bob Grover, Artist and retired OHSU faculty member**



### PARTICIPANTS

Brian Alfano, Kennedy Anderson, Yulia Arakelyan, David Banis, Joseph Michael Battig, Carmelia Tronci Bell, Marcia Bell, Jo Ann Bissonnette, Pat Boas, Nancy Brunquist, Kelly M. Bryan, Dania Caron, Elayna Levie Caron, Gordon Caron, Julie Levie Caron, Miriam Levie Caron, Rachel Levie Caron, Sidonie Caron, Jordan Case, Shannon Case, Lauren Chandler, Kim Coleman, Debbie Cronk, Robert Dozono, Maria Echenique, Jacqueline Ehlis, Nancy Fenner, Peter Fenner, Eric Ferguson, Laura Fitzgibbon, Derek Franklin, Heather Franklin, Andrew Gaudreau, Meret Gaudreau, René Gaudreau, Susan Gaudreau, Caryl Gertenrich, Roger Gertenrich, Patricia Giraud, Jill Griffith, Bob Grover, Gerry Grover, Lee M. Hale, Jacob Ham, Lisa Ham, Marc Ham, Megan Ham, Cathy Hannam, Sandra Hanson, Augden Hayes, Stephen Hayes, Belinda Ann Hamilton, Lauren Helm, Rachel Hibbard, Marjorie Hirsch, Amelia Hirsch, Christine Hochstatter, Henry Hochstatter, Chloe Oneonta Huckins, Zach Hubbard, Jeanine Jablonski, Dale Jamtgaard, Ricky Jamtgaard, Deirdre Jennings, Jake Jennings, Max Jennings, Rusty Jennings, Barry Johnson, David Johnson, Linda Kay Johnson, Maximillian Jones, Mike Jones, Samson

Jones, Ibrahim Moussa Kelly, Cindee Kessler, Elizabeth Kinder, Eva Lake, Greg Landry, Horatio Law, Yiu-Hong Leung, Dana Lynn Louis, Elizabeth Macgregor, Hilarus Maeva, Julie Mainwaring, Lisa Manning, Mary McClain, Mary McVein, Annika Mellies, Jay Mellies, Andrew Martz, Wendy Miller, Celina Monte, Laurel Thompson Morris, Terrell Morris, Ana Nicacio, Tom Noguchi, Annick Luther Oberlander, Lili Oberlander, Xavier Oberlander, Matthew O'Connor, Daniel Peabody, John Perry, Mike Piha, Jason Pollack, Allen, Lewis Pusch, Lin Rainier, Kate Reynolds, Dmae Roberts, Adriana Rojas-Echenique, Roxanne, Michael Russell, Nikole Sagnotti, Sarah, Alexandra Schaefers, Jeanine Semon, Debra Fox Shaw, Eulalia Clare Shaw, Arthur Simonds, Juliette Simonds, Kurt Simonds, Amriel Simpson, Rosa Inocencio Smith, Richard Inocencio Smith, Virginia Sprague, Max Jacobs-Swerbilov, Zusse Jacobs-Swerbilov, Dan Swerbilov, Susan Tackmier, Ayako Tamura, Rick Terrill, Katelyn R. Thiesen, Kelly Thomas, Zachary M. Thomas, Iona Truby, Seth H. Truby, Willa Truby, Carla Ueki, Terri Umali, Christopher Vazquez, J.P. Wedge, Roberta Wong, Jana Woodson, Linda Wysong



# Art in America

MARCH 2006

## PORTLAND, ORE.

### Mark R. Smith at Elizabeth Leach

In this exhibition of lively fabric-collage paintings and stuffed-vinyl sculptures (all 2005), Mark Smith addressed the spontaneous, ephemeral communities that emerge at concerts and sporting events. Temporarily united in esthetic experience, ecstatic release and/or vicarious struggle, such crowds also contain riotous potential. Smith's paintings celebrate the colorful excitement of the entertainment and its spectators, occasionally hinting at the violence latent in mass gatherings and competitive games. (In *Contest*, figures wrestle and pummel each other, though the event is ostensibly a soccer match.) Far from chaotic, however, Smith's pictures are tightly composed and pleasingly readable. The organizing motif in each case is the floor plan of a theater or stadium, whether the Hollywood Bowl or Portland's Rose Garden arena; the athletes, musicians, dancers and spectators Smith depicts derive from newspaper cutouts, sometimes just heads, in other instances expressive, gesticulating bodies, whole or partial. In the luminous *Night Arena*, parking lots with rows of silhouetted cars and SUVs about the central stadium, glowing yellow, while patterns of leaves and vines decorate the painting's dark perimeter, implying a nocturnal countryside.

Most intriguing is Smith's use of recycled printed fabrics to construct these images. He applies glue-soaked cloth panels to the canvas, then paints over them with acrylic while holding his little figures in reserve with the newspaper cutouts. When the acrylic dries, Smith removes and discards the cutouts, exposing the printed-fabric silhouettes beneath the thin layer of paint. The effect is something like reverse appliqué, and indeed the paintings, with their discrete forms, bold patterns and overall symmetry are reminiscent of quilts. The old clothing Smith collects from

Goodwill constitutes a palette of sorts, and he plays engagingly with the floral, figural and geometric designs of his materials. In a delightful conceit, *Figures in Line* features four horizontal bands of fans standing in ticket queues; the striped fabrics that make up the standing figures reiterate the idea of their regimented linearity.

In the dozen or so stuffed-vinyl sculptures Smith presented, the clothing itself stands metonymically for the athletes and the crowd. Sportswear, wadded and bunched, fills actual-size gym bags fashioned of clear plastic, or, even more effectively in a series titled "Compressed ID," the crumpled clothing is sealed in 12-inch transparent spheres displayed on the floor. The latter objects allude to soccer- or basketballs, but with their stitched seams following longitude lines, they also read as globes.

Creating an apt and surprisingly beautiful metaphor for fandom as a worldwide phenomenon, Smith suggests how virtual communities of like-minded enthusiasts lend cohesion to the social fabric.

—Sue Taylor

Mark R. Smith: *Contest*, 2005, acrylic and printed fabric on canvas, 62 by 48 inches; at Elizabeth Leach.





Christine Bourdette, *Asides*, 2005, leather, wood, wax, pigment, 44" x 13" x 8" each, at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.

## Oregon

### Christine Bourdette and Mark Smith at Elizabeth Leach Gallery

**F**atefully, Christine Bourdette and Mark Smith's exhibitions at Elizabeth Leach opened in the midst of the Katrina maelstrom. In their explorations of the fragile equilibrium of crowds and of public gathering spaces, both artists unintentionally presaged the chaos and tragedy that unfolded in New Orleans in late August and early September.

Whether abstracted or representational, the human form has always been the focus of Bourdette's work, serving through gesture, posture and affect as a barometer of the human condition. The three distinct bodies of sculpture—*Asides*, *Identification* and *Fellow Travelers*—in this exhibition evolved from Bourdette's interest in what she has described as "the psychological, physical and political dynamics" of the crowd. While she cites influences going back to the paintings of Pieter Breughel, Bourdette also studied more current events, including media coverage of last summer's political conventions, and the elements of paranoia and fear in a post-9/11 world. She recorded her thoughts and observations in a series of remarkable and elemental drawings, in which naked, powerless figures hide their eyes, cover their ears, or, in the case of *Believers*, bellow from between cupped hands.

In her sculpture, particularly in the *Asides*, Bourdette translates the primal energy of these drawings into three dimensions. Nine individual figures, meticulously constructed of fine-grained, carefully seamed leather stretched over wooden forms, stand, lean and kneel in eloquent silence. The leather, although

stretched tight as skin, is not fully tailored, so that tabs and raw edges remain. Through the alert set of their heads and the way one bends in to hear another, we sense the intensity of these men and women's interactions. While at first glance reminiscent of George Segal's similar groupings, Bourdette's work is different in two critical ways.

Her sturdy forms lack arms; instead, the raw edges of leather create flaps like short sleeves. And her figures are smaller than life: averaging approximately forty-four inches high. That critical scale difference puts us at a remove from these people. They become symbolic and we can project our own contests and conversations on their faceless, incomplete bodies.

Bourdette's sculpture and drawings amplify many of the themes in Smith's recent works, whose collective title, *Assemblies and Exhortations*, suggests his overarching thesis. In paintings such as *Night Arena* and *Contest*, Smith uses stenciled forms and cutaway views of public stadiums as frameworks for his meditations on the way crowds come together and interact in buildings intended for such rituals as sports events, concerts and conventions.

Smith gathers his stencils—athletes, performers and audience members—from the print media. His fascinating and effective hybrid technique involves collaging pieces of brightly patterned recycled fabric to his canvas, arranging the stencils on this ground, and then applying paint. Thus, the figures are revealed as colorful silhouettes, and the paintings simultaneously reference the immediately accessible imagery of pop art and the chromatic harmonies of American quilts. As Smith has noted, his desire is to "democratize the painting process."

In works such as *Contest* and *Fan Base*, Smith explores the violence that is inherent in any competition. Soccer players become combatants; outside the arena of the basketball game, men appear to be engaged in more deadly confrontations. This sense of an uneasy balance is also at the heart of *Night Arena* where, beyond the oval of the sports stadium and its sea



Mark Smith, *Contest*, 2005, acrylic, recycled fabric on canvas, 62" x 48", at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.

of parked cars, the outlines of tangled branches and leaves allude to the forces of a natural world kept at a distance by lights and asphalt.

Smith's show also included related sculptures, made of clear vinyl, hand-sewn and tightly packed with clothing left over from his paintings. The scale

of these pieces made them seem like eccentric luggage and many of the shapes—*Basilica* and *Mosh Pit* were two examples—echoed the architecture in the paintings.

—Prudence Roberts

Christine Bourdette: *Small Universes* and Mark Smith: *Assemblies and Exhortations* closed October 1 at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.

Prudence Roberts is a freelance writer based in Portland.

# Thinking outside the sports dome

By HARVEST HENDERSON  
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

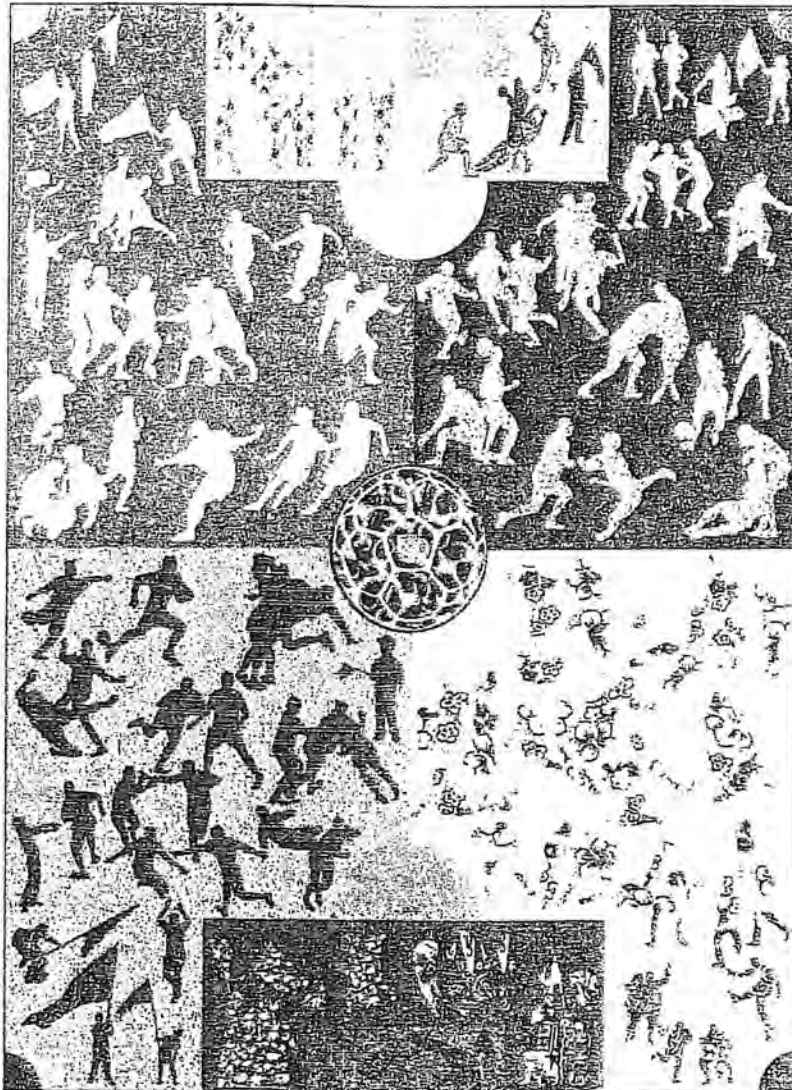
Mark Smith seems an earnest and affable guy. Speaking somewhat circuitously on the phone about the ways in which crowd dynamics at a soccer game represent greater conflicts in global economics and politics, he interrupts himself mid-sentence. "I'm sorry," he says good-naturedly, even softly. "Am I rambling?"

In contrast with his easy-going demeanor, Smith's work is crisp, precise and driven by observations that telescope outward from humble moments of inspiration — like folding laundry and watching television sports. That's what Smith has said he was doing, anyway, when he started thinking about the societal role of athletic stadiums and concert arenas.

In his latest show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, "Assemblies & Exhortations," Smith funnels observations about temporary community gathering places into complex works incorporating layers of acrylic paint, plastic and recycled fabrics. Geometric shapes that at first evoke quilting patterns are actually schematics of venues like the Rose Garden or Memorial Coliseum, as seen from above. Stencils made from newspaper clippings birth a plethora of writhing, silhouetted figures: each figure is a window through paint to reveal the layer of printed fabric below.

"It's kind of a hybrid painting-quilting process," says Smith.

In addition to the paintings, Smith's "Game Bag" sculptures stack neatly on the gallery floor. Made of clear vinyl, stretched into shapes of balls and duffel bags, each "Game Bag" is stuffed with clothing and textile remnants. Smith's duffel, draped, washed, sewn and quilted, is a collage of fabric scraps. "Game Bag" or golf? The duffel represents people. People craning their necks toward the stage where a silhouetted singer is looking out. People crammed into long lines at the basket-



Portland artist Mark Smith has gradually been leading up to his most ambitious commercial show in a while. Pictured is a painting, "Contest," at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

ball game, people peering out from sharp-edged, cookie-cutter shapes.

In "Contest," a roughly 5-foot-tall painting intended to evoke a soccer field, plaid and paisley figures waving flags on the perimeter represent how sport "becomes an element of national or cultural identity," says the artist.

What about the figures beating each other bloody elsewhere in the throng? These are all things that play, our within audiences in these temporary settings. Smith says it's a global phenomenon. There's a certain, not-quite-ritualistic celebration and general indifference.

Smith says it's ironic that his work opened Sept. 1, when sports stadiums began to shut. Public perception as people identify with

Hurricane Katrina piled into New Orleans' and Houston's sports domes for shelter — and examples of groupthink and violence surfaced through reports on armed citizenry and looting mobs.

How perfect, then, that at Elizabeth Leach this month the boundaries between paint and fabric are so fastidiously drawn, the Day-Glo colors so searing and clear. Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave; 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; closes Oct. 1.

## In a place where

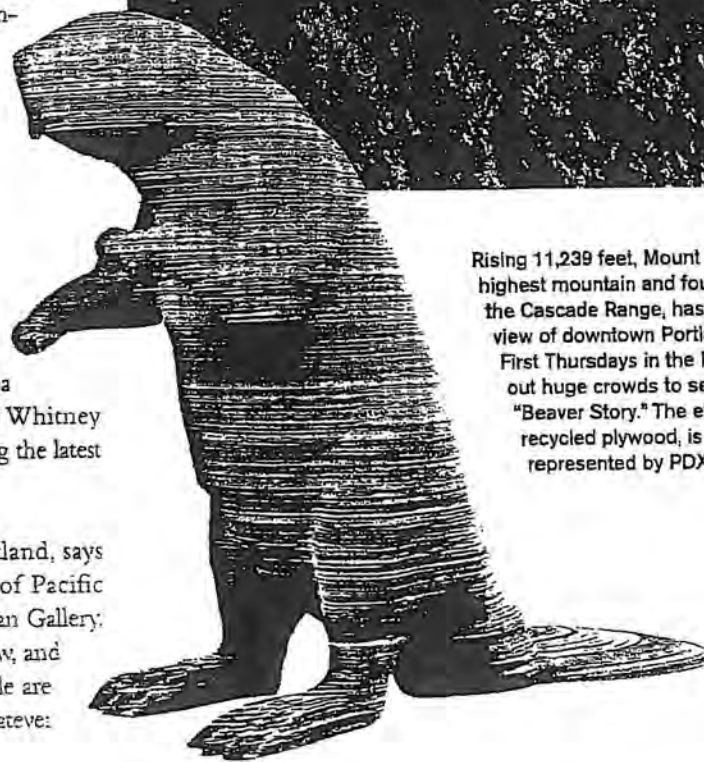
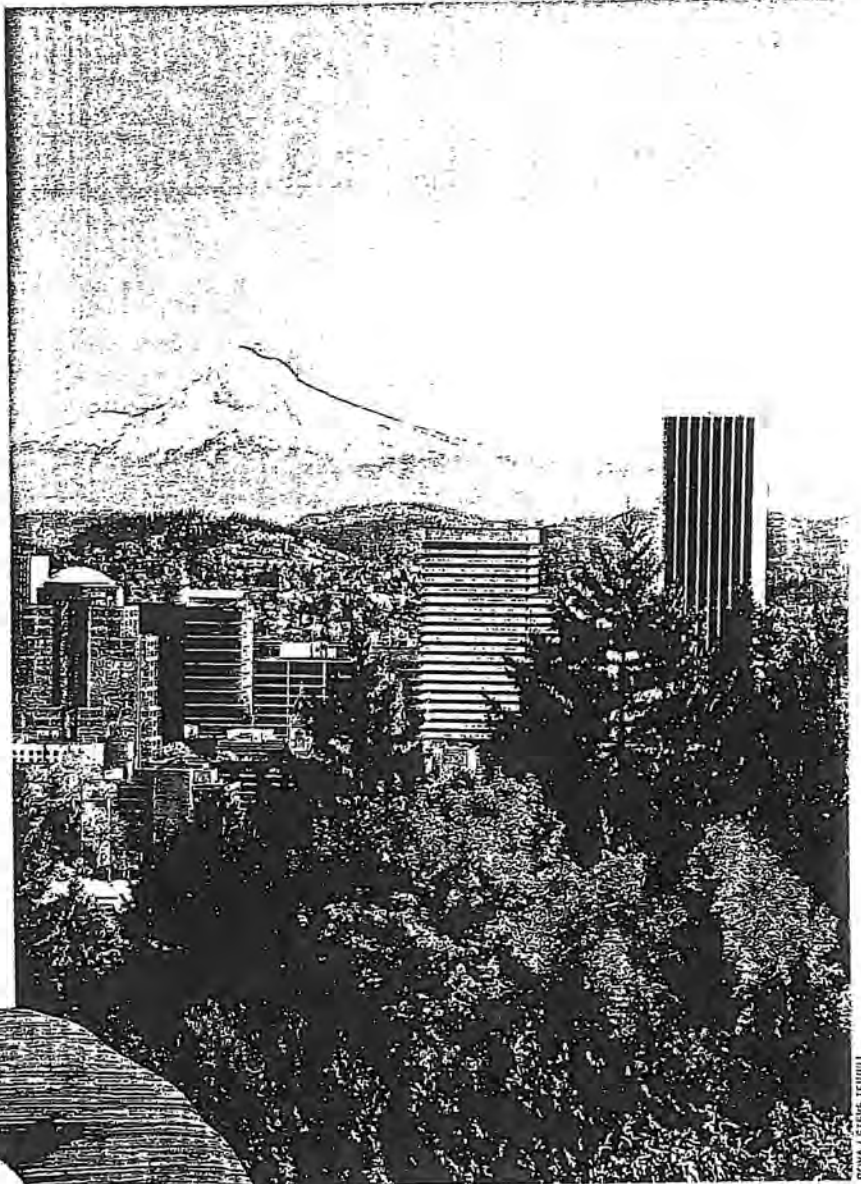
Mount Hood shimmers in and out through layered light and mist, it's not surprising that environmental images pervade the arts scene. What might be surprising is its verve—and nerve. Local artist and writer Jeff Jahn calls the Portland, Ore., arts community a “self-organizing ecosystem,” where established artists regularly “mix and collaborate with the unproven but educated.”

When museums from Vancouver to San Diego launched a 2003 survey of West Coast art that Portlanders felt neglected them, for example, their response was Core Sample, a 10-day, multivenue, “institution-punishing-scale,” do-it-yourself tour de force.

“Here people get an idea and say, ‘Let’s see if we can do it,’” notes Cynthia Lahti, native Oregonian and Rhode Island School of Design graduate. “I didn’t see that back east. We’re just a bunch of settlers here—sure we can do it. No one’s really watching us.”

But people have started watching. The 2000 census found that the city’s immigration of college-educated singles between the ages of 25 and 39 ranks among the top five of metropolitan areas in the country. And Lahti says that the acceptance of Portland installation artist Miranda July in the 2002 Whitney Biennial changed people’s ideas about the city’s artists, a group that’s also growing. Former Bay area artists Chris Johansen and 2004 Whitney exhibitor Harrell Fletcher are among the latest to call Portland home.

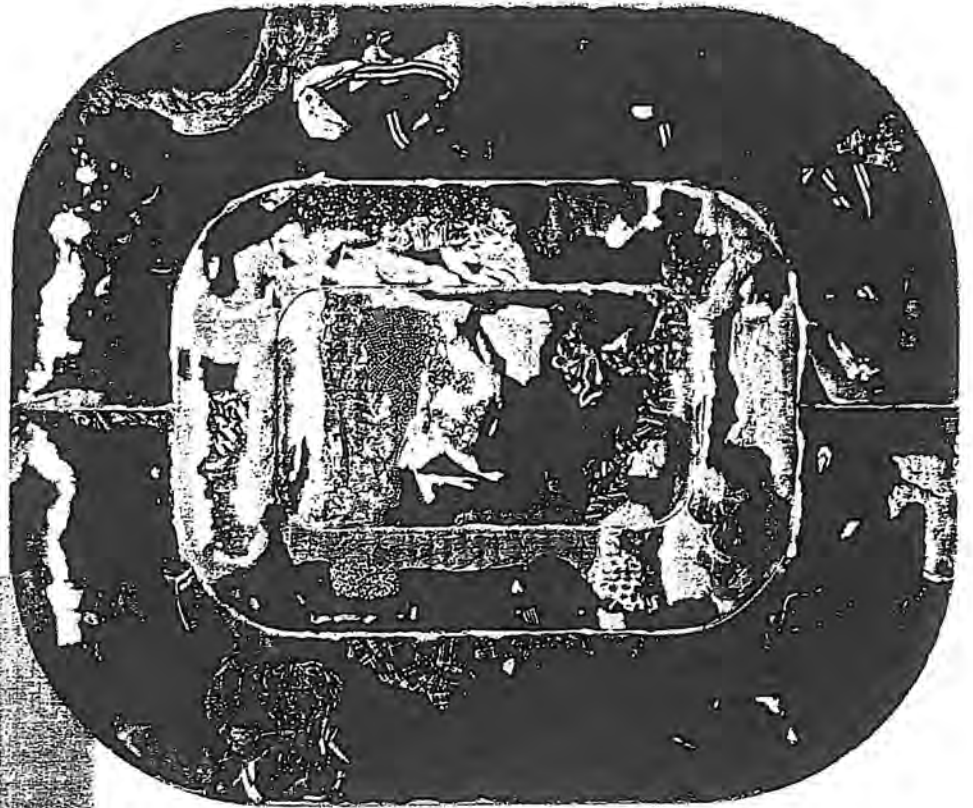
It’s easy to be an artist in Portland, says sculptor Nan Curtis, curator of Pacific Northwest College of Art’s Feldman Gallery. “The cost of living is relatively low, and the spirit of makers is strong. People are making very sophisticated art of whatever materials they can.”



Rising 11,239 feet, Mount Hood, Oregon's highest mountain and fourth highest in the Cascade Range, has a commanding view of downtown Portland. Opposite, First Thursdays in the Pearl district bring out huge crowds to see works like “Beaver Story.” The eight-foot piece, of recycled plywood, is by Malia Jensen, represented by PDX Gallery.



Adrian Arleo's "Embrace" was on view at the Contemporary Crafts Museum & Gallery, which features cutting-edge work in rotating exhibits and has more than 700 craft objects in its permanent collection. Top, Mark R. Smith used old clothing, vinyl and plywood to create "Mosh Pit." His work is shown at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, now in its 23rd year.



In fact, materials are reincarnating all over this city of about a half-million. Marie Watt references her Shona heritage in blanket-and-bronze totems. Mark R. Smith uses old clothing as the pigment for his "paintings." Melody Owen sculpts with crashed windshield glass or pennies she finds on the street. Tom Cramer, always a risk-taker, carves and paints intricate bas-reliefs that

have been called "the missing link between drawing and sculpture."

"I try to use the material that best serves the idea," says artist Malia Jensen. Her intellectual witticisms—an 8-foot layered plywood rendition of a prehistoric beaver, an erotically suggestive soap carving of a woman's purse, the carefully shredded satin cushions that she calls re-enactments—pack an immediate punch while further rewarding viewers who take time to ponder these visual parables.

Storm Tharp, Cornell-trained mixed media artist and Oregon native, ties the current arts energy explosion to dual influences from the '60s. Jensen, he points out, is a potter's daughter who grew up living with finely crafted objects and now uses everything from car paint to satin with ease. "And like '60s abstractionists, her personal search to feel things transfers so obviously to her art. That inspires me."

Environmental awareness is famously acute in the Pacific Northwest. "The forests and mountains here affect us, whether we're conscious of it or not," says Tharp. Michael Brophy's large-scale landscapes lament the loss of Oregon forests. And environmental consciousness can make for provocative work. Chandra Bocci's 11-foot installation "This Would Suck a Lot Less" sets identical toy soldiers amid cardboard hills and trees cut from



"Blue Collar, White Collar, Green Collar," one of Bonnie Meltzer's latest works, incorporates digital photography on maps.

# Howard Hall Art Focuses on 'Community'

Artist Mark R. Smith works in a garage-turned-studio adjacent to his North Portland home. Stacked against one wall are several plastic storage bins full of books, dolls, lapel pins, currency, clothing, and other odds and ends. The items range from 10-cent trinkets, such as a red-white-and-blue-striped Styrofoam top hat, to more homespun pieces, like a clay finger puppet. Many of these cultural artifacts, donated by Lewis & Clark faculty and staff, are destined to become part of the artwork of Howard Hall.

Lewis & Clark, with the assistance of the Regional Arts and Culture Council, selected Smith from a field of nearly 100 artists to create Howard Hall's public art.

With a faculty appointment at Portland Community College and representation at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in downtown Portland, Smith receives a steady stream of e-mails about local public art opportunities. But seldom does one catch his attention as much as the Howard Hall Public Art Project did. The building's sustainable-design ethos and social science focus fit perfectly with Smith's populist approach and collectivist bent. "Sometimes you see a project or an opportunity that says: This is me, this relates to what my concerns are," he says.

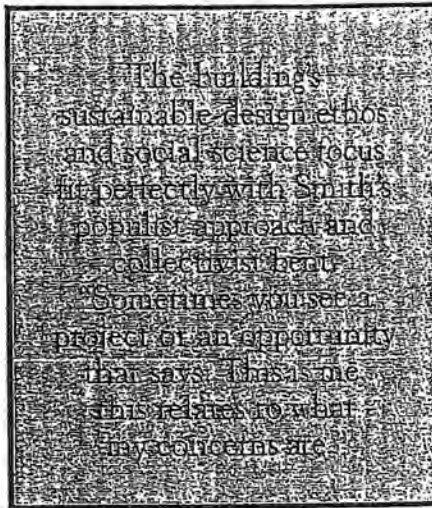
Smith decided that the thread running through all social sciences is the idea of community, and envisioned a three-piece ensemble that "reflects the idea of community in the broadest possible sense: as a collective, cooperative entity composed of unique and disparate voices." Smith's ideas were "conceptually fascinating" to Linda Tesner, director of Lewis & Clark's Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art and a member of the selection committee. She says the panel was taken by his enthusiasm, his collaborative approach—and most of all, his beautiful artwork.

## Mediating Boxes

Divided in two parts and located in the north and south lobbies, *Mediating Boxes* will frequently be the first artwork viewers encounter when they enter the building.

One part focuses on the public role of the individual, the other on the private.

These 5-by-8-foot installations consist of shadow boxes filled with small objects and backed with recycled fabric contributed by the faculty and students of the social sciences division. Similarly sized objects reside in the same box, but within each box the items are juxtaposed to create "a cacophonous dialogue."



"I wanted to represent this overall chaos that you find in any society," says Smith, taking a break from sanding pieces of wheat board that will frame each box. But the wide range of values represented by the objects is controlled by a natural order, he adds, which he conveys by building perfectly square boxes and arranging them in scale increments equal to the proportions of the Euclidian "Golden Mean." These are the proportions that mirror the spiraling growth patterns found in seashells, pinecones, rams' horns, and other objects in nature.

## Honeycombed News: Forty Local Blooms

This series of 40 stencil paintings draws on newspapers from around the world and silhouettes of honeycombs and flowers to symbolize communication and cultural exchange. They will be framed individually and hung in groups of 10 along the main corridors connecting the north and south lobbies.

Each 17-by-25-inch frame is nearly filled with a full-size newspaper page transferred onto a sheet of transparent tissue paper, blurring the words and images. Superimposed on the image is a yellow-painted honeycomb pattern, each made from a unique hand-cut stencil, and shadows of flowering plants harvested from campus.

Smith ticks off several intended metaphors of the piece: newspapers as a form of cultural communication; highly social bees nurturing plants just as dialogue nurtures culture; the hum of bees reminiscent of the hum we associate with simultaneous conversations. "It's all about discourse," he explains.

## An Intimate City

The final piece of the ensemble is what Smith describes as a "crazy quilt," whose 8-by-18-foot size will fill the building's second-floor landing. This acrylic painting portrays culture as "a very complex and unwieldy organism" through its size and plethora of images, Smith says. It is designed to signify collective survival.

The painting's central image is a cross-section of a termite mound, a random web of tunnels, and spherical nodes, which suggests a continually evolving culture that has no preset direction. Surrounding the termite map are rows of painted silhouettes of people, cut from newspaper photographs and placed against a recycled-fabric background. The varied poses, fabric patterns, and paint colors form an intriguing assortment of images that invite the eye to wander.

What is a Howard Hall visitor to take away from this nuanced collection of artwork? "A sense of inquiry, questioning, and discovery," Smith answers, as well as the idea that intellectual development moves between the ephemeral (as represented by the abstract painting) and the concrete (as evidenced by the items in the shadow boxes).

"And I want it to be fun," he adds. "I want it to include enough information so people keep looking at it and discover new things."

—by Dan Sadowsky



# Viewers' challenge

By JANET GOETZE  
THE OREGONIAN

The mundane things of life, from folding the wash to remembering table manners, can propel artists toward creativity with unexpected materials.

Two artists, Linda Hutchins and Mark Smith, are exhibiting work at Portland Community College's Sylvania campus that includes old clothing, simple chairs and a lot of yellow "Caution" tape and red "Danger" tape.

The Portland artists didn't work together, but the ideas behind their art blend in the North View Gallery in the Communications Technology building. Hutchins also has an installation in the campus library. The exhibits will continue through March 21.

Hutchins, 45, who was an engineer before entering the Pacific Northwest College of Art in the mid-1980s, weaves the red and yellow warning tapes, then staples them to walls. She calls her 10-foot-tall and 46-foot-long gallery installation "Crowd Control."

The weaving breaks up the words "caution" and "danger" on the tapes while the bright, clashing colors send an alarming message. More red tape creates outlines of simple, square chairs and a door against the woven background, further confusing the frightening feeling of the wall.

In the smaller library installation, the door is replaced by a window and a table is placed with the chairs.

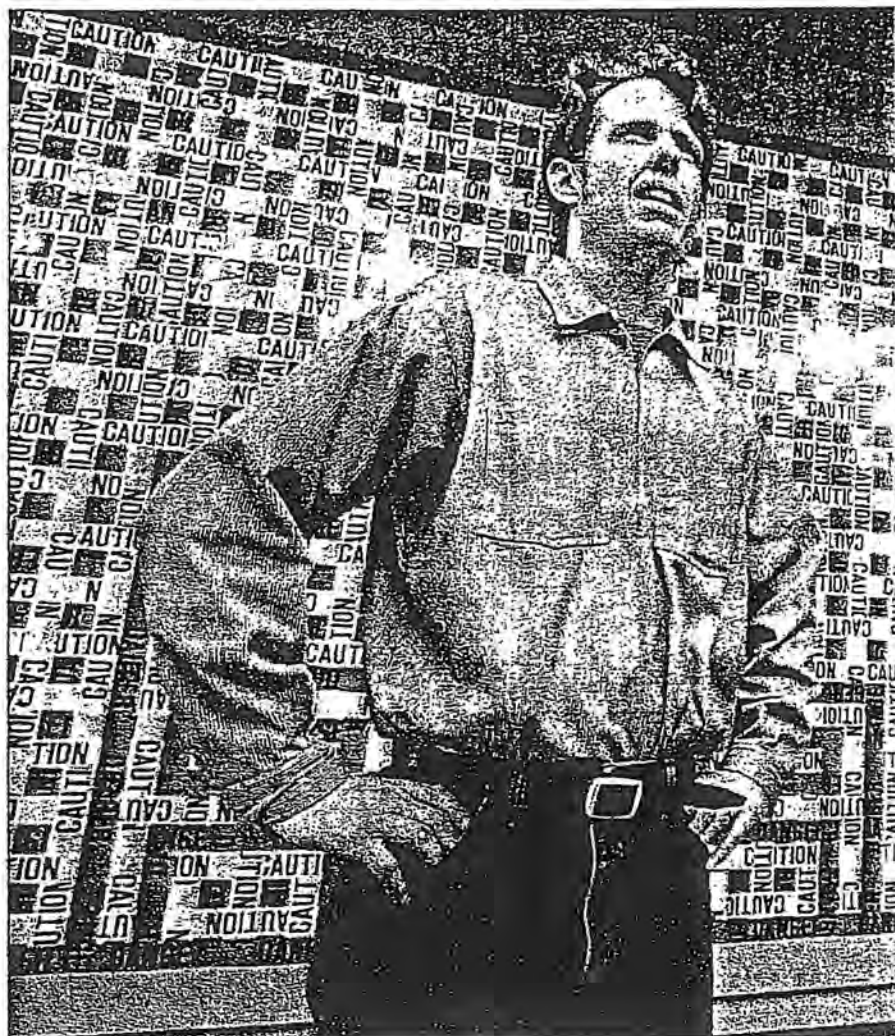
## Everyday pitfalls

The table and chairs create a classic domestic scene that expresses ideas she is emphasizing in her artwork, Hutchins said in a discussion this week with nearly 30 students and faculty members in a classroom next to the gallery.

She is exploring "the pitfalls of everyday domestic life," she said.

With the table and chairs, for instance we are reminded of the customs and rules and "correct" ways to behave at the dinner table, she said.

Yes, Hutchins said, she isn't seeking to overturn the rules and



## DANGER IN THE MUNDANE

**What:** An installation of red and yellow warning tapes, by Linda Hutchins, and fabric folded into plastic athletic arenas, by Mark R. Smith, explores the danger and complexity of ordinary objects.

**When:** 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays through March 21

**Where:** North View Gallery in the Communications Technology Building at Portland Community College's Sylvania campus, 12000 S.W. 49th Ave.

**Cost:** Free

**Information:** 503-977-8017

constraints that she sees as common in most people's childhoods.

"Do you feel liberated by it?" a student asked.

"I don't know. I don't believe liberation is a motivation for me," the artist said.

In a written comment Hutchins said, "My work explores the dan-

ger, complexity and beauty of things that are seemingly safe, simple and ordinary. I am interested in the 'something' that lurks beneath the surface of common, everyday objects and situations."

Smith, who teaches art at Sylvania, has folded clothing of various colors and textures into a series of

*Two art installations at PCC Sylvania  
rely on commonplace objects  
placed in uncommon arrangements*



Artists Mark R. Smith (left) and Linda Hutchins are showing work at Portland Community College's Sylvania campus. Hutchins has stapled woven red and yellow warning tapes to a wall without concern for the work's impermanence. It could be recreated, she says.

ROBERT BACH  
THE OREGONIAN

clear plastic forms shaped like athletic arenas.

Part of his idea, said Smith, 44, began developing as he folded his children's laundry while watching sports programs on television.

Smith, who grew up in Monmouth, studied at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York and received a master of fine arts degree from Pacific Northwest College of Art.

While he studied in New York, he said, he became self-conscious about painting, which many artists were suggesting was "the domain of privileged, white, heterosexual males."

Rather than "push paint around on a canvas," he said, he started exploring other media, from public

murals to designs to art made with "stuff," including a windbreaker, neckties and stockings.

#### Hurried moves

After he returned to Portland, news stories chronicled the former Yugoslavia falling apart, Smith said, with people moving hurriedly from their homes. They moved so quickly that they left items behind, including clothing that remained as human residue.

That idea came back to him as he folded his family's clothing before the television screen and realized stadiums had meanings beyond sporting events.

"They were used to incarcerate people in various Latin American coups and other places," he said.

He worked with the idea of residual clothing and stadiums to

create vinyl architectural shapes resembling sports arenas. He asked friends and students to contribute old clothing that he folded into the forms.

Hanging on the gallery wall, the forms at first glance appear to be large, shiny, ceramic platters. But further examination reveals rolled and folded fabric in a range of colors, sometimes showing bits of lace or an interesting pattern.

"It's fluid, compressed and stuffed, all at the same time," said a student as she examined one of Smith's stadiums.

She declined to give her name. "I don't like things on the record," she said.

Jane Goetz, 503-254-5917,  
janeigoetz@news.oregonian.com

# Artweek

SEPTEMBER 2001  
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## Tony Evanko and Mark R. Smith at Elizabeth Leach Gallery

**T**ony Evanko's collection of recent drawings, *Morse Code*, examines the power of language to smooth the

way for tragedies and betrayals. He uses the outdated code as a visual metaphor for the emotional distance built in to certain kinds of language, weaving the

dots and dashes into screens that hull in much the same way that euphemisms allow us to ignore what we ought not to condone. *Treaty of Point Elliot 1885* and *Hell's Gate Treaty* are word-for-word translations of actual covenants between Northwest native people and the U.S. government rendered in a stylized version of the code. We can only guess what crimes lie hidden behind the string of chalk marks that crawls across the

slate gray plaster grounds. The multi-part pieces look like excavated slabs, ordered with the cues of written information yet devoid of readable content. The point is, of course, that to the native signers, who could for the most part neither read nor write English and scrawled their consent with an "X," the text was no more comprehensible than the blips of chalk are to the viewer here.



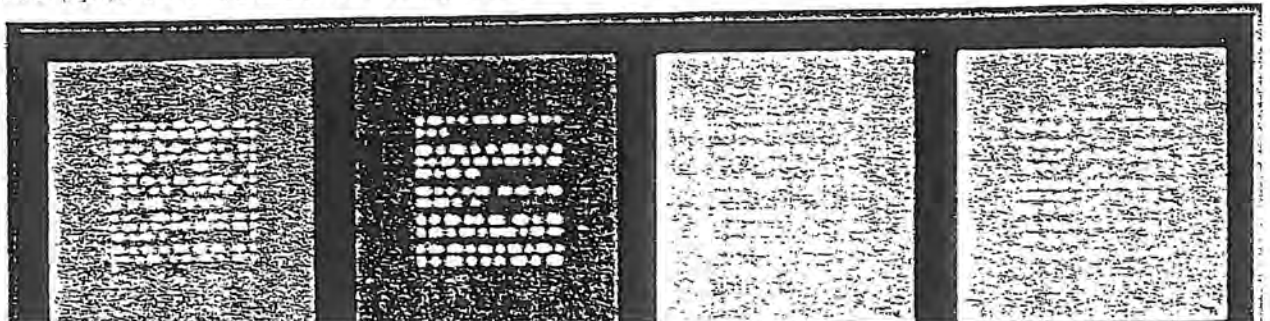
*Segregation Series*, four panels each containing a field of the repeated code for the words "brown," "red," "black" and "yellow," references the arbitrary nature of racial division. Each panel, drawn in the appropriate color against a significantly white background, is filled with marks that form an irregular pattern of darks and lights, representing the range of variation subsumed under a single verbal label and suggesting the impossibility of finding a precise dividing line between one race and any other.

The small, seductive ink drawings that round out Evanko's contribution seem to strike a lighter note. Arranged in decorative grids, the drawings are quiet

squares of luscious color, each with three or four lines of code hovering like signals in a foggy distance. The titles indicate that the drawings are groupings of words, some more pointed than others. Even here, it seems, Evanko does not want to let us off the hook. Given the context of the other work, simply basking in visual pleasure becomes a guilty undertaking.

While Evanko ponders the capacity of language to brand and divide, Mark R. Smith's wall sculptures, *Landmarks and Security Zones*, explore a sense of community, however transitory or incidental. His three large pieces are based on floor plans of places where crowds of people come together for a single purpose and then disperse. Smith piles the plywood bases with swirls of castoff clothing, then shrink-wraps the entire

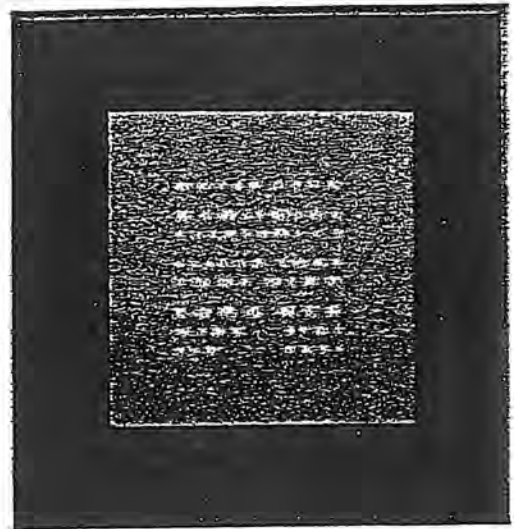
Above: Mark R. Smith, *City Beautiful*, 2001, vinyl, clothing, plywood, 75" x 87" x 6"; below: Tony Evanko, *Control ... Loss ... Trick ... Suggest* 2001, ink on paper, 6" x 6" each, at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.



business in clear plastic. The clothing performs as color palette, an image of contained movement at once random and ordered, while the floor plans recall the shaped sixties paintings of artists such as Frank Stella.

*Rooted Basilica*, stuffed with a range of pale material, looks like it was lifted from some venerated site in Rome. Though not precisely identifiable—perhaps underwear, linens, stockings, crocheted shawls—the items compressed under the plastic cover impart a certain intimacy, a sense of purity and nostalgia. Plant roots, a dark mystery strewn over and through the packed apparel, form their own gently chaotic pattern. *City Beautiful*, a government rounda with a bit of stars and stripes peeking out through the jackets, shirts and scarves, is color-orchestrated with oranges and reds in the outer ring,

Tony Evanko, *Gay, Carefree, Happy, Joyful*, ink on paper, 6" x 6", at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.



darker blues and greens crammed into the middle area and whites in the center. *Exposition Park*, a brightly hued sports stadium, hangs as a fiery, vertical oval.

Smith is drawn to the idea of individuals taking on a shared identity by virtue of participation in a single, time-limited event. His pieces economically and persuasively signal an exuberant democratic presence. Those shown here are formal and conceptual refinements of earlier work in the same vein, suggesting that Smith is aware of the danger of sliding into a formula that lacks depth or surprise. For now, it is enough to enjoy his optimistic view of society, imagining that, the hidden treachery of Evanko's language notwithstanding, we are all of us equally welcome everywhere.

—Pat Boas

Works by Tony Evanko and Mark F. Smith closed in July at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.