
Fleisher Ollman

1216 Arch Street - 5A
Philadelphia PA 19107
tel +1 (215) 545-7562
fleisherollman.com

Philadelphia Wireman

The Philadelphia Wireman sculptures were found abandoned in an alley off Philadelphia's South Street on trash night in the late 1970s. Their discovery in a rapidly-changing neighborhood undergoing extensive renovation, compounded with the failure of all attempts to locate the artist, suggests that the works may have been discarded after the maker's death. The entire collection totals approximately 1200 pieces (and a few small, abstract marker drawings, reminiscent both of Mark Tobey and J.B. Murry) and appears to be the creation of one male artist, due to the strength involved in manipulating often quite heavy-gauge wire into such tightly-wound nuggets. The dense construction of the work, despite a modest range of scale and materials, is singularly obsessive and disciplined in design: a wire armature or exoskeleton firmly binds a bricolage of found objects, including plastic, glass, food packaging, umbrella parts, tape, rubber, batteries, pens, leather, reflectors, nuts and bolts, nails, foil, coins, toys, watches, eyeglasses, tools, and jewelry.

Heavy with associations—anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and socio-cultural—to wrapped detritus, the totemic sculptures by Philadelphia Wireman have been discussed in the context of work created to fulfill the shamanistic needs of alternative religions in American culture. Curators, collectors, and critics have variously compared certain pieces to Classical antiquity sculptures, Native American medicine bundles, African-American memory jugs, and African fetish objects. Reflecting the artist's prolific and incredibly focused scavenging impulse, and despite — or perhaps enhanced by — their anonymity, these enigmatic objects function as urban artifacts and arbiters of power, though their origin and purpose is unknown. Philadelphia Wireman, whatever his identity, possessed an astonishing ability to isolate and communicate the concepts of power and energy through the selection and transformation of ordinary materials. Over the course of the past two decades, this collection has come to be regarded as an important discovery in the field of self-taught and vernacular art.

SOLO AND TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *James Castle | Philadelphia Wireman*, 5. Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
- 2018 *Extract, Withdraw Earthwards: Richard Bryant and Philadelphia Wireman*, Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand
- Philadelphia Wireman*, World Food Books, Melbourne, Australia
- 2014 *Philadelphia Wireman*, Lambert International Airport, St. Louis, MO
- 2013 *Vaginal Davis and Philadelphia Wireman*, Adams and Ollman, Portland, OR
- 2010 *Philadelphia Wireman*, Södertälje Konsthallen, Södertälje, Sweden
- Philadelphia Wireman*, William Shearburn Gallery, St. Louis, MO
- 2006 *Philadelphia Wireman*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, NY
- 1992 *Philadelphia Wireman and Hawkins Bolden*, Dean Jensen Gallery, Milwaukee, WI

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 *Invisible City: Philadelphia and the Vernacular Avant-garde*, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, Gershman Hall, Art Alliance, University of the Arts; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA
- 2019 *Project 18: Cut Copy Paste*, OV Project at Art Brussels, Brussels, Belgium
- 2017 *Inextricabilia, enchevetrements magiques*, La Maison Rouge, Paris, France
Colloquio Mitico, Galleria Fonti, Naples, Italy
- 2016 *Sex and the City*, Croy Nielsen, Berlin (Organized by Sebastian Black)
- 2015 *Summer Exhibition*, Davis & Langdale, New York, NY
If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day, Outsider Art Fair, New York, NY (Organized by Anne Doran & Jay Gorney)
- 2014 *Enigmas Rapt in Mysteries: American Art without Epoch*, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY
- 2013 *Aggtelek <> Philadelphia Wireman: Four poor monologues*, Exile, Berlin, Germany
Raw Vision, Halle Saint Pierre, Paris, France
Oedipus and Sphinx, Invisible Exports, New York, NY
- 2012 *60/60*, Fleisher/Ollman, Philadelphia, PA
Everyday Abstract - Abstract Everyday, James Cohan, New York, NY
B. Wurtz and Co: Curated by Matthew Higgs, Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles, CA
- 2011 *Remix: Selections by the International Collage Center*, Samek Art Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA (traveled to Bates College Museum of Art, Lewiston, ME, Ewing Gallery of Art and Architecture, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN)
Things That Do, Fleisher/Ollman, Philadelphia, PA
The Medicine Bag, Maccarone Gallery, New York, NY
- 2010 *Approaching Abstraction*, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
Four Decades, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2008 *2000 Years of Sculpture*, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2006 *Rock Paper Scissors: American Collage Now*, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2005 *Cranbrook to Lancaster and Back*, Cranbrook Academy of Art's Network Gallery at Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI (Contemporary Works in Clay, Fiber and Metal from the Robert L. Pfannebecker Collection)
- 2003 *50th Anniversary*, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2002 *The Miniature Show*, Graystone, San Francisco, CA
- 2001 *10th Anniversary Exhibition*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, NY
Sight/Site: Objects Subject to Change, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA
- 2000 *Without Ego: Anonymous Works*, Intuit Center, Chicago, IL
- 1995 *Lives of Invention and Imagery: Self-Taught Artists*, The Society for Contemporary Crafts, Pittsburgh, PA
Specimens, Art in City Hall, Philadelphia, PA
- 1994 *Assemblage: Reordering Chaos—Sculpture by Self-Taught Artists*, American Primitive Gallery, New York, NY
Dream Singers, Story Tellers: An African-American Presence, Fukui Fine Arts Museum, Fukui, Japan (Traveled to: Tokushima Modern Art Museum; Kamakura Otani Memorial Art Museum; New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ.)
- 1993 *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*, The Museum for African Art, New York, NY

- Henry Ray Clark, *Philadelphia Wireman*, Purvis Young, Janet Fleisher Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Messaging the Spirit World, Dean Jensen Gallery, Milwaukee, WI
- 1992 *Revolving Techniques*, James A. Michener Art Museum, Doylestown, PA
American Outsiders: Visionaries, Davis McClain Gallery, Houston, TX
- 1991 *Outsiders*, Eugene Binder Gallery, Cologne, Germany
- 1990 *Art of Healing: Objects of Magic*, Janet Fleisher Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Even the Deep Things of God, Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Pittsburgh, PA
- 1989 *A Density of Passion*, New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ (Cat.)
Obsessive & Accumulative Art, American Primitive Gallery, New York, NY (Cat.)
Two Person Exhibition, Gallery 1709, St. Louis, MO
- 1988 *Material Obsessions: Eugene von Bruenchenhein, Philadelphia Wireman & Anonymous Artists*, Carl Hammer Gallery, Chicago, IL
American Mysteries: The Rediscovery of Outside Art, Art Commission Gallery, San Francisco, CA
American Outsiders, Galleri Wallner, Malmo, Sweden
Materializers: Outsider & Visionary Sculptors, Janet Fleisher Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 1987 *Narrative Images*, The Crescent Gallery, Dallas, TX (Traveled to: Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, TX; Tyler Museum of Art, Tyler, TX; San Angelo Museum of Fine Art, San Angelo, TX)
The Naive Figure: Eccentric Visions, Robeson Center Gallery, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ
The Ties that Bind: Folk Art in Contemporary American Culture, The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH (Traveled to: Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI; North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks, ND; San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA)
Three Person Exhibition, Oscarsson Siegeltuch Gallery, New York, NY
- 1986 Cavin Morris, Inc., New York, NY
Cavin Morris, Inc., New York, NY
Extraordinary Visions, Lawrence Hail Gallery, Rosemont College, Rosemont, PA
Outside Sculpture, Janet Fleisher Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Small Sculpture, Acme Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1985 *Inaugural Exhibition*, Cavin Morris, Inc., New York, NY
Masterpieces of Folk Art, Janet Fleisher Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2010 Greaves, Brendan. *Philadelphia Wireman*. Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia, PA (2010)
- 2007 Cattelan, Maurizio, Massimiliano Gioni, Ali Subotnick. *Charley 05*. Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art (2007)
- 1998 Ricco, Roger, Frank Maresca and Julia Weissman. *American Primitive: Discoveries in Folk Sculpture*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York (1998)
- 1987 Jarmusch, Ann. *International Journal of Contemporary Writing and Art* (Winter/Spring)

EXHIBITION CATALOGS

- 2010 Greaves, Brendan. "Bare Wires: Transmissions for the Philadelphia Wireman." *Philadelphia Wireman*. Södertälje Konsthall, Södertälje, Sweden (2010) (exh. cat.)
- 1990 Gundaker, Grey. *Even the Deep Things of God: A Quality of Mind in Afro-Atlantic Traditional Art*. Pittsburgh Center for the Arts (1990) (exh. cat.)

1986 Metcalf, Eugene. *The Ties that Bind: Folk Art in Contemporary American Culture*. The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH (1986) (exh. cat.)

SELECTED PRESS

- 2019 Dafoe, Taylor, Tim Schneider. "Best Buys: Eight Artists at Independent to Collect for Under \$15,000 (If You're Lucky and Move Fast)." *Artnet News* (March 7, 2019) [online]
- 2018 Simonini, Ross. "PAYING HAVING TAKING KEEPING." *Mousse* (Issue 62, February–March 2018): 118–123
- 2017 Nechvatal, Joseph. "Entangled Objects Through the Ages, from Sorcerers' Amulets to Voodoo Dolls." *Hyperallergic* (August 14, 2017) [online]
- 2016 Voon, Claire. "The Personal Passions and Detailed Devotions of the Outsider Art Fair." *Hyperallergic* (January 22, 2016) [online]
- 2015 Schwendener, Martha. "On the Margins, but Moving Toward the Center." *The New York Times* (January 30, 2015): C34
- 2012 Villareal, Ignacio. "Group exhibition 'Everyday Abstract-Abstract Everyday' on view at James Cohan Gallery." *ArtDaily.org* (June 5, 2012) [online]
- "B. Wurtz, Martin Creed and Richard Hawkins' in LA." *Phaidon.com* (March 2012) [online]
- 2011 Giamerese, Carina. "Things That Do at Fleisher-Ollman Gallery." *Philly Side Arts* (November 21, 2011)
- Loviglio, Joann. "'Wireman': Mystery Artist's Work On Display In Philly Art Show." *Huffington Post* (October 31, 2011) [online]
- 2010 Johnson, Ken. "Inside, Outside, All Around the Aesthetics." *The New York Times* (January 5, 2010)
- 2006 Borum, Jennifer P. "Reviews: Philadelphia Wireman, Matthew Marks Gallery." *Artforum* (Summer 2006)
- 1997 Polsky, Richard. "Five Artists Under \$5000." *Smoke* (Spring 1997)
- 1996 Jarmusch, Ann. "Mysterious Stranger." *ARTnews* (September 1986)
- 1995 Duplessis, Rachel Blau. "Draft 22: Philadelphia Wireman." *Hambone* (Spring 1995)
- 1991 McGonigal, Mike. "Psychic Magnets." *Raw Vision* (October 1991): 48–52
- 1990 Johnson, Patricia. "Art Created in Isolation." *Houston Chronicle* (December 15, 1990): G13
- Chadwick, Susan. "Davis McClain puts Outsiders Front and Center." *Houston Post* (December 9, 1990): G13
- 1988 "Sketchbook." *Art and Antiques* (November 1988)
- 1986 Jarmusch, Ann. "Wired for Art." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (July 1986)

COLLECTIONS

Akron Art Museum, Akron, OH
American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
Newark Museum, Newark, NJ