

Time and Place

Art of Detroit's Cass Corridor from the Wayne State University Collection

Elaine L. Jacob Gallery

April 24 through June 26, 2009

Keith Aoki
Shaun Bangert
Victor Belisle
Kathryn Brackett Luchs
James Chatelain
Charles B. Cobb
James Crawford
Stanley Dolega
John Egner
George Ettl
Steve Foust
Brenda Goodman
Doug James
Bradley Jones
Aris Koutroulis
Michael Luchs
Ann Mikolowski
Nancy Mitchnick
Greg Murphy
Gordon Newton
Ellen Phelan
John Piet
Nancy Pletos
Paul Schwarz
Robert Sestok
Carol Steen
The Alternative Press

With over sixty works, most of which were created between 1960 and 1980, *Time and Place* illustrates the energetic and bold work done by a group of young artists, many of whom studied art at Wayne State University, who were living and working in the Cultural Center area of Detroit. It was a time of struggle and radical change in societal thinking and behavior, and one of an increased decline in the prosperity and viability of Detroit. The outlook, and limited financial resources, of the artists of the Cass Corridor often led to their employment of used and discarded materials, automatic and irreverent techniques, rough and tumble forms, and tense abstractions. Yet there is a sense of grit and survival that characterizes many of these works—the same “bad ass” attitude on which Detroit, its residents, and its artists, pride themselves to this very day.

Time and Place features works gifted by generous donors to WSU's Art Collection, and honors the substantial gifts by noted Detroit collector and philanthropist James Pearson Duffy.

Within the context of WSU's mission as a major urban research university, the Elaine L. Jacob Gallery serves as an educational and creative resource for promoting artistic expression and diversity through the presentation and interpretation of challenging and thought provoking exhibitions, comprised of works of art of the highest artistic merit. The Elaine L. Jacob Gallery is located at 480 West Hancock Street (between Cass and Second Avenues) in Detroit, Michigan.

Lisa Baylis Gonzalez
Director, Elaine L. Jacob Gallery

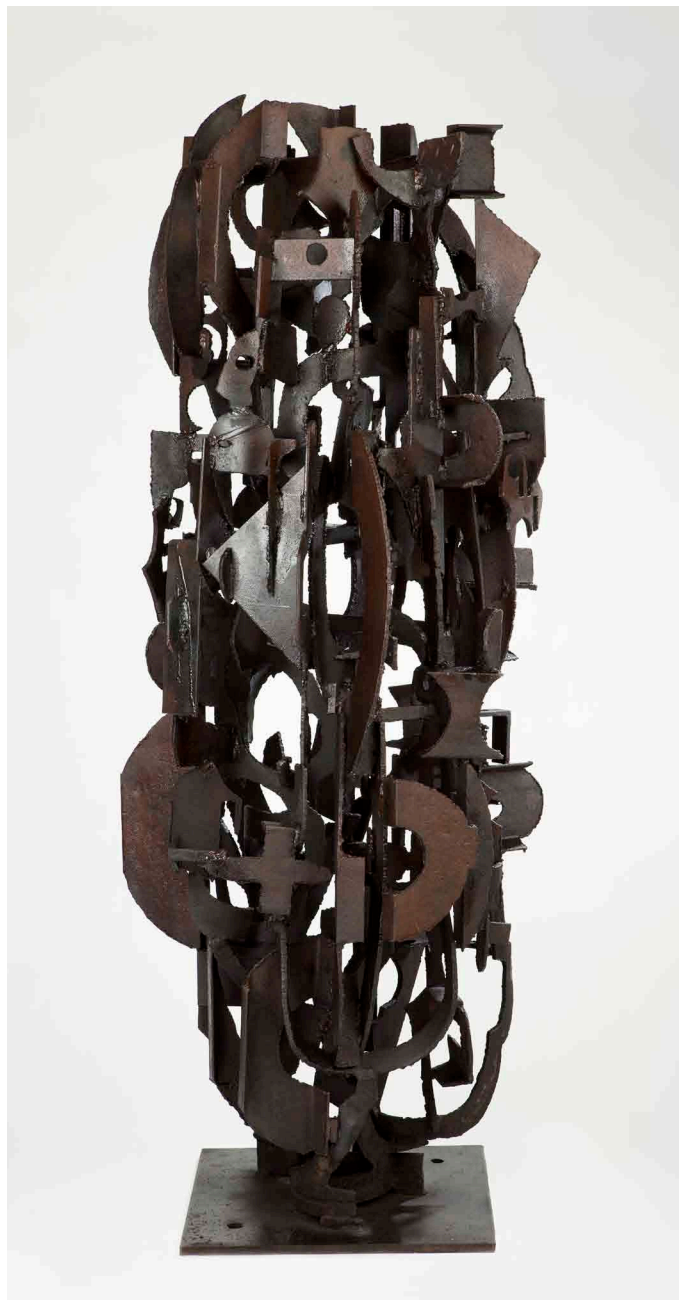


Doug James, *Untitled*, Paint on cardboard, 7 x 10 x 11 in., Gift of James Pearson Duffy, 2008

WAYNE STATE
UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FINE, PERFORMING
AND COMMUNICATION ARTS

communityfoundation
FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN





First of all we were a community:

a community of artists, writers, musicians, politicians and others. We mostly lived in an area of Detroit known as the Cass Corridor. We lived there at the time Newsweek magazine did a cover story entitled “What Is Wrong with America’s Cities?” that listed Detroit as not only the worst city in the country, but also among the worst cities in the history of the world. It was compared to Shanghai of old, and Sodom and Gomorrah. For those of us who lived there at the time it was pure macho delight. We lived in “one of the worst cities in the history of the world” and we were survivors, but more than that we reveled in it, and we swaggered when we walked. We didn’t own much, but we owned this, and we made art with it.

The music of the MC5, Iggy and the Stooges, Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels reflected this tough urban funk. And artists like Gordon Newton, Bob Sestok, Brenda Goodman, John Egner, Michael and Kathryn Brackett Luchs, Paul Schwarz, Ellen Phelan, Jim Chatelain, Ann Mikolowski, Cay Bahnmiller, Bradley Jones, Nancy Pletos, Dayton Spence and many more showed the art of our community in our cooperative gallery, the Willis, in the heart of the Cass Corridor. Poets like Faye Kicknosway, Jim Gustafson, Andrei Codrescu, Mick Vranich, John Sinclair and Donna Brook read their poems at the Willis Gallery, often accompanied by bands like the Shadowfax or Bobby MacDonald. We were a community doing our art in our community.

In 1969, Ann and I moved a big old letterpress from the Artists Workshop into the basement of our home. We had never printed before in our lives, but we had this desire to combine our talents as artist and poet into something called The Alternative Press, so we could publish this new work of our friends, our community. It was a labor of love, with the accent strongly on the labor part. Everything we printed, including numerous artists’ announcements, was done with hand-set type and paper placed one sheet at a time into a press remarkably like the first one used by Gutenberg. But then that’s always been the aesthetic of Cass Corridor art—to use the materials at hand (whatever you have) and make art of it.

One of the advantages of living in post-riot Detroit was the wide availability of big, cheap space. Artists quickly found buildings for studios all along the Cass Corridor. Visiting those studios in the Vernor’s building or Common Ground or a bit later, the Forsythe building, you would come across the artists making their art with found objects from the streets of Detroit. Once, visiting Paul Schwarz at his studio, the found objects were dead mice that he had arranged on a board and covered with a thick layer of white epoxy so that they resembled marshmallows. Truly a lovely piece that dealt with all the absurdities of art reflecting life/death and its spontaneous creation into capital “A” Art.

Everyone was aware of what everyone else was doing and was greatly influenced by what was happening around them. We fed off each other’s energy, but still made individual art. In one major show, The Forsythe Saga, 43 Detroit artists were represented, each with their own unique style. The scene was not exactly competitive, but... you knew your friends had been showing some pretty fine art, and when it was your turn, well then...

Openings at the Willis Gallery were huge community parties with lots of beer and wine and, incidentally, some extraordinary art as backdrop. Every month there was a new party and new art on the walls. In between all our talking and drinking we somehow found time to make art, music and poems. A lot of art, music and poems: that’s what we did.

But it wasn’t just the artists who made it all happen. There was Sam Wagstaff at the DIA who brought collectors to the gallery, and also Susanne Hilberry who was there then and still remains here now for many of the artists. Joy Emery had the courage to bring the art of the Corridor to a wider audience at the respectable J.L. Hudson Gallery downtown. There was the constant patronage of Jim Duffy and Gil and Lila Silverman who kept the artists going with plenty of enthusiasm and some much needed financial support. Joy Hakanson Colby at the News and Marsha Miro at the Free Press provided media attention and sound art criticism. Art historians Jay Belloli, Mary Jane Jacob and Dennis Nawrocki later put together the major *Kick Out the Jams* show at the DIA. And there was Jackie Feigenson who kept it all together for everyone with her gallery in the Fisher Building after the Willis shut its doors. She believed in the artists completely and she made others believe as well.

In a photo Ann took of Bradley Jones, Rob Tyner, Jim Gustafson and me at Feigenson Gallery during one of Bradley’s openings, we’re all looking smug and happy and full of ourselves. And why not? We’re surrounded by terrific art: Bradley’s subtle palette of chartreuse, hot pink, red and yellow does get your attention, and his images of dogs, motorcycles, women, guns and puddles of blood are lush, vibrant and full of the stuff of life. Just like us. Just like the city we lived in.



Take a look around, this city is still alive and so is the art. I expect it will remain so for a long, long time. But now it’s in another time and another place.

- Ken Mikolowski

Ken Mikolowski is the author of three books of poetry—Big Enigmas, Thank You Call Again, and little mysteries. Mikolowski received a B.A. in English at Wayne State University in 1964. With his late wife, painter Ann Mikolowski, he founded The Alternative Press and for over 30 years printed and published the work of nationally recognized writers and leading artists and poets of Detroit’s Cass Corridor. In 1983 Ann and Ken Mikolowski received an Arts Achievement Award from WSU for their work with The Alternative Press. Since 1977 Ken Mikolowski has been a lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Michigan’s Residential College.



left to right: Michael Luchs, *Untitled no. 48*, 1980, Oil, spray paint on paper, 36 x 48 in., Gift of James Pearson Duffy, 2008; Brenda Goodman, *Untitled*, 1971, Pencil and oil on paper, 40 x 26 in., Gift of Linda Dunne, 2008; Ellen Phelan, *Untitled (chair)*, 1971-72, Acrylic on canvas, wood, 38.5 x 22.5 x .75 in., Gift of James Pearson



This exhibition and publication were made possible through a generous grant from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan. Through their exceptional support of the Wayne State University Art Collection, essential conservation, documentation, assessment and preservation has been performed on many of the works in this exhibition and across the university campus.

To the artists in the exhibition who inspire us with their vision, passion, energy and discipline, we extend our deepest respect and appreciation.

Over half of the works in this exhibition were given to the University Art Collection by James Pearson Duffy, whose extraordinary gifts of art have positioned WSU as an important regional and national resource for the study of this significant Detroit art movement. Sincere thanks to J.P. Morgan Chase Bank, N.A. and Barry R. Bess co-trustees of the James Pearson Duffy trust and to Ed Fraga for his generous assistance.

We wish to acknowledge donors Marcia and Eugene Applebaum, Margaret Belisle, Martin Bernstein, family and friends of Mary Jane Bigler, Linda Dunne, Brenda Goodman, Deborah Hecht, Gertrude Kasle, Rex Lamoreaux, the Ludington family, Michael Mahoney, David and Punky Mikesell, Christine Monhollen, Dennis Nawrocki, and Charles K. Sestok III whose thoughtful gifts are included in this exhibition. We also extend our gratitude to Diane Sybeldon and Cindy Krolikowski for assisting with the loan of The Alternative Press materials from the Wayne State University Library System.

For their work on the exhibition publication, we are grateful to Ken Mikolowski for his refreshing essay, to Tim Thayer whose photographs always honor the art and to Daniel Sperry for his thoughtful and elegant design.

On a personal note, it has been my great pleasure working with Lisa Gonzalez, Director of the Elaine L. Jacob Gallery. Her keen interest in this exhibition and her support of the WSU Art Collection is most appreciated. Additional thanks go to the gallery's talented staff and students - Thomas Pyrzewski, Crystal Palmer, Stephanie Campbell, Jenevieve Dotterer, Sicily McRaven and Nicholas Portice. I also wish to thank Kevin McGorey, Christopher Murphy, Bethany Patterson, Isaac Pool and Katie Woodruff for their time with the WSU Art Collection. I am most grateful for their spirit and intelligence. I wish to further acknowledge Daniel Sperry for his special assistance throughout this project.

For the tireless support of Dean Sharon Vasquez and the staff of the College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts we extend our deep appreciation. And finally we acknowledge university President, Dr. Jay Noren, whose enthusiasm for the arts inspires us all.

Sandra Schemske

Coordinator, Wayne State University Art Collection