LAWRENCE RINDER

THE UNITED STATES is perhaps unique in the world for the role that private philanthropy plays in supporting the arts. In the absence of the major government funding that is common in Europe, American visual culture would be solely dependent on the vagaries of the market were it not for institutions such as the Flintridge Foundation. The support, and the promise of support, from such foundations sustains hope for countless artists whose work is not, for whatever reason, the focus of critical attention. The foundation seeks specifically to identify mature artists "who have not received a level of recognition that corresponds to their merit." Its awards are retrospective, in that they recognize artists with several decades of unusual achievement, and also anticipatory, making possible renewed exploration by relieving the recipients of some degree of financial concern.

Flintridge is defined also by the fact that its grants are exclusively for artists working in California, Oregon, and Washington. West Coast artists, with the exception of those working in Los Angeles, do have greater difficulty gaining a national audience, and therefore a market, for their work. This is due not only to their geographic isolation from the New York–L.A. axis but also, I feel, to the nature of their work. West Coast artists seem less inclined to conform to style trends. Their work is often idiosyncratic, site-specific, or ephemeral. I find West Coast artists to be generally more engaged with social concerns, with science, history, and the particularities of personal cultural traditions. One might expect that such engagements would make their work even more relevant to the general public, yet the critical establishment and art market shy away from complexity, preferring simple charm, audacity, or provocation.

Flintridge's 2003/2004 grants have been made to artists working in painting, sculpture, photography, and mixed media. Regardless of whether their practices might be defined as "traditional" or "experimental," these artists have each combined rigorous focus with a willingness to take risks. For an artist who has devoted a decade or more to the exploration of the subtle meanings of a motif or form, even the simplest shift can take courage. Indeed, the trajectory of a successful artistic career is often defined precisely by the tension between deep study and radical change. One of the pleasures of reviewing the career of a mature artist is being able to appreciate the dynamic interplay between these phases and to discern underlying essences and continuities beneath apparent shifts of imagery, medium, or form.

MIKE HENDERSON
To Be Nature, 1984
Acrylic on canvas; 79 x 93 1/2 in.
Courtesy of the artist and
Haines Gallery, San Francisco

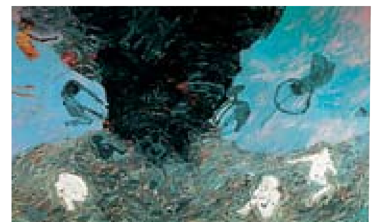
MIKE HENDERSON'S career in painting has followed a path from socially engaged figuration to pure abstraction. As a young artist, Henderson sought to bring a more contemporary relevance to the use of the figure. He rebelled against the simple stylization of studio models being practiced by painters in San Francisco, where he was studying. Instead, he represented figures in action, suggesting an empowered response to the racial inequities of the time. Working under the guidance of artists such as Philip Pearlstein, Bruce McGaw, and Robert Nelson, Hen-derson nevertheless retained his focus on the aesthetic aspect of painting, recognizing that regardless of its subject matter, a painting needed to stand up, finally, as a work of art.

Over time, Henderson gravitated toward more neutral subjects, such as interiors and, since the mid-1980s, pure abstraction. His recent works display a virtuoso handling of color, form, and composition. Other critics have compared his work with music, citing especially the blues, in part because Henderson is also an accomplished blues guitarist. There is indeed in these works a profound sense of rhythm, counterpoint, and heartfelt mood. To me, their closest visual relatives are the works of another East Bay artist, the quilt maker Rosie Lee Tompkins. Like Tompkins, Henderson excels in balancing order and dynamism, playing the grid as if it were a musical instrument and bringing out a feeling of astonishing vitality and even joy. Yet Henderson's works are also very much paintings, and the materiality of this medium, its lusciousness and viscosity, is essential to the character of his works.

RANDY HAYES
Overnight Sensation, 1987
Pastel on paper; 64 x 59 in.
Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson; Purchase, 1989.005

For virtually his entire career Randy Hayes has been engaged in representing the figure. In terms of medium, his works are almost unclassifiable, combining two- and three-dimensional elements, photographic and painterly media, according to the artist's needs. Perhaps his most distinctive works are those composed of grids of photographs on which he has painted a single image, itself de-rived from a photographic source. These pieces are strangely beautiful as well as conceptually compelling. They create a perceptual palimpsest that is both spatial and temporal in nature. One's gaze wanders simultaneously across layers of images and from image to image. The whole resolves into something greater, and truer, than its parts.

Initially, Hayes's subject matter was prostitutes, transsexuals, bodybuilders, boxers, and other marginal characters of contemporary urban society. Other writers have suggested the influence of the Ashcan school of American painting, an early twentieth-century movement in which artists such as Robert Henri, George Luks, and John Sloan defied convention by focusing on laborers, outcasts, and other subjects on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. Over the past fifteen years the thematic range of Hayes's work has broadened to include subjects from a variety of world cultures as well as scenes from his native American South. Recently he has refined his palette, imagery, and handling of paint to convey a particularly sensuous yet cool atmosphere. There is something both loving and apocalyptic in his scenes, a duality that somehow strikes a chord with the present state of the world.



OLIVER JACKSON
Untitled (7.21.81), 1981
Oil-based enamel on cotton canvas; 108 1/2 x 180 in.
Seattle Art Museum; Margaret E. Fuller Purchase Fund

The Bay Area has always had a strong connection to European, especially Continental, artistic tendencies. In Oliver Jackson's paintings and sculpture, these influences come together with the artist's unique expressive energy to create a vital and varied body of work. It is fascinating to discern in Jackson's paintings traces of Vincent van Gogh's dynamic brush stroke, Marc Chagall's stained-glass palette, Emil Nolde's frenetic figuration, Henri Matisse's schematic line, and Wassily Kandinsky's stormy composition. Like much twentieth-century European (and postwar American) painting, Jackson's work is also inspired by music, particularly jazz. These paintings evoke a sense of openness and spontaneity that is tied to both the physical experience of being in the world and the emotional aspects of the human spirit. Similarly, Jackson's sculptural works echo

the work of European masters such as Medardo Rosso and Constantin Brancusi, whose balance between figuration and abstraction alludes to the meeting of materiality and ethereality that gives life its magic force.

Representing what he calls "paint people," Jackson composes mysteriously compelling arrangements of figures. Stripped of clothing or any reference to a particular time or place, they become archetypes of the human condition. Whether crouched alone, embracing, or arrayed as if in a sacred circle or dance, these gestural bodies play out the fundamental relationships of human existence. Through his handling of color, line, and brush stroke, Jackson insinuates these figures into their environment, creating a visual metaphor for an underlying unity of existence and experience.

ROBERT C. JONES
Untitled, 1965
Charcoal on paper;
30 1/2 x 25 1/2 in.

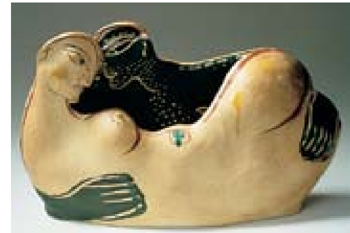
The legacy of European painting, particularly as interpreted by the American Abstract Expressionists, is also strongly evident in the work of Seattle-based artist Robert Jones. His bold color and emphatic line, for example, are anticipated in the work of the artists of the Fauve and Brücke movements, such as Matisse, Erich Heckel, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Yet in contrast to these artists' strong figural bent, Jones's work shows little evidence of the figure, which is sometimes simply suggested by a particularly sensuous curve or a pairing of oval forms. Because of their degree of abstraction, Jones's paintings rely more on purely formal and material accomplishments. He possesses a keen sense of color, and his feeling for compositional harmonies is striking. Consistent in his work over the past decades has been a use of black to create bold contrasts of light and dark areas. The black elements serve variously as figural counterpoints to the colored forms and as structural—almost girderlike—devices to unify and give shape to the compositions.

Almost all painters draw, and for Jones this medium is a particularly significant aspect of his work. His figurative drawings from the early and mid-1960s display a masterful confidence and a remarkable feeling of energy latent in the posed, static body. By the late 1960s Jones had already shifted his attention to the expressive possibilities of pure form and abstract composition. His drawings from the 1970s are characterized by a particularly energetic, almost calligraphic line that flashes across the surface of the paper in a staccato rhythm. His subsequent drawings can be seen as sharing many of the formal characteristics of his paintings, including the introduction of intense passages of color.

ROBERT HELM
September Burn, 1991
Oil on wood; 30 x 40 x 2 1/2 in.
Private collection; courtesy of
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York

The cosmopolitanism of even the most remotely located West Coast artists can sometimes be surprising. Robert Helm, for example, who has spent virtually his entire life in eastern Washington, could not have made his remarkable mixed-media works without an intimate knowledge of Renaissance painting, Sur-realism, and the artists of the so-called Metaphysical school, such as Giorgio de Chirico. Yet there is simultaneously something distinctly of-his-place about these strange images, or at least they do not pretend to be somewhere they are not. Their spare ocher palette recalls the arid landscape of eastern Washington, as does the feeling of emptiness, intruded upon occasionally by some humble, thorny plant or migrating bird. Helm introduces a number of recurring motifs, especially pillars and mirrors, which impart a sense of human presence and the intimation of ruin.

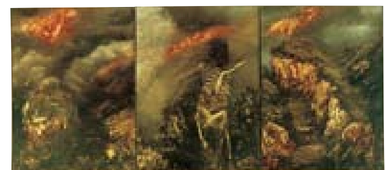
One of the most distinctive things about Helm's works is their technique. Combining paint and fragments of wood veneer, they are, technically speaking, collages. Interestingly, Pablo Picasso's *Guitar and Wine Glass* (1913), which is identified as one of the first works in this medium, introduced a fragment of fake wood veneer onto the surface of a still-life painting. Helm is meticulous in his selection of veneers, choosing them not only for their special appearance but sometimes for their unique provenance as well. One fragment was salvaged from the boat that took Robert Louis Stevenson on his last voyage, another from Ernest Hemingway's Paris studio. Thus, Helm combines physical artifacts of cultural history with elusive imagery drawn from his memory and dreams.



AKIO TAKAMORI
Couple, 1980
White stoneware clay;
12 x 16 x 6 in.
Collection of Ken Ferguson,
Shawnee, Kansas

Akio Takamori's career has been marked by a pronounced shift in the form and content of his work. Until 1997 he was known for an innovative approach to the vessel form, which involved treating it as a virtual two-dimensional surface. Somewhat flattening the ceramic vessel form to create a surface for his figurative paintings, he also liberated the pot's rim to become an expressive, anthropomorphic line. Though relatively shallow, the inner space of the vessel allowed for expressive spatial contrasts in the manner of a compositional foreground and background. His subject matter was almost invariably erotic, a theme that some writers have traced to his childhood experiences in the venereal disease clinic run by his father in the village of Nobeoka, Japan. Stylistically, and also thematically, these works are indebted to a variety of cultures and practices, including Greek mythology, Persian miniatures, Japanese ukiyo-e prints, tantric drawings, and Spanish cave paintings.

In 1997 Takamori introduced a body of work involving a wholly new approach to image and form. In these works, also made of ceramic, he created tableaux of diminutive figures that were solid rather than vessel-like in form. His painting style also became much simpler, with spare, monochrome brushwork replacing the colorful, ornamented style of his earlier work. While the vessel figures seemed to represent human archetypes, many of these pieces were clearly rooted in a particular time and place, the village of Nobeoka in the postwar years of Takamori's childhood. Deftly and economically rendered, these works present a host of distinctive characters, from pigtailed schoolgirls to elderly men to tall American military personnel. Recently Takamori has produced a number of figures alluding to characters borrowed from art historical sources, including works by the Spanish painters Francisco de Goya and Diego Velázquez.

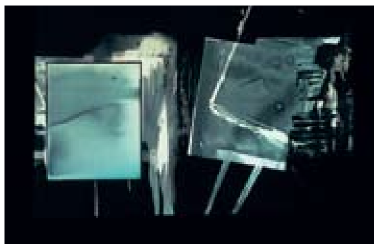


JAMES LAVADOUR
Boom! 1988 (detail)
Oil on canvas; 68 x 72 in.
Private collection

James Lavadour paints with oil on wood, typically combining multiple panels into a single work. His works have a power and simplicity that derive as much from the confidence and energy of his brush strokes as from the grandeur and vitality of his subject, the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon. Lavadour, who grew up on the Umatilla Indian Reservation, has been hiking the Blue Mountains since he was a child. He has found in this beautiful and isolated range forms that embody the inner forces and spirit of being. His painting practice has developed as a means not only to represent but also to enact these very forces in his works. In this sense, his work is akin to that of the Abstract Expressionists, who felt that their works were not so much about nature as *of* nature.

In fact, Lavadour identifies the work of the nineteenth-century English painter J. M. W. Turner as a more direct influence. Turner's paintings captured the dynamic energy of light and matter in the otherwise conventional form of landscapes and seascapes. Despite representing identifiable sites and incidents, Turner's paintings suggest an opening onto the infinite. The metaphysical aspect of Lavadour's work is underscored by the appearance in several of his works from the 1980s of mountain-size skeletons and towering figures that seem to emerge from the very core of the earth. The presence of these seemingly malevolent spirits calls to mind another nineteenth-century painter, Gustave Moreau, who populated his crags and mountains with similarly inauspicious demons.

For Susan Rankaitis, it is the intersection of nature, science, and technology that calls forth her dark and mysterious works. Fascinated by the startling new developments in complexity theory, biology, and genetics, she has delved deeply into these worlds, informing herself about the technical minutiae of flight dynamics, fractals, and DNA. While not commenting explicitly on these fields, her works possess a portentous tone, alluding to an aspect of science that is hardly the rational paradise promised by the Enlightenment and modern technocrats. In addition to scientific themes, Rankaitis's works express evocative aspects of the Southern California landscape. Invoking the allusive qualities of Song dynasty painting, she captures the ethereal mood of a rough, dry land transformed by industry and pollution.



SUSAN RANKAITIS
Untitled, 1976
Multimedia photographic collage; 11 x 14 in.
Private collection

Although Rankaitis trained as a painter, her unusual technique was in-spired by the early twentieth-century photograms of László Moholy-Nagy. In these pieces, Moholy-Nagy created photographic images without a camera or negatives by manipulating the exposure of light on photographic paper, often by introducing opaque and transparent objects. Rankaitis's works are considerably more complex than Moholy-Nagy's, however, utilizing multiple negatives (twenty to one hundred in a single piece), appropriated images, and decals as well as painterly processes such as brushing emulsions directly onto light-sensitive paper and selective bleaching and tinting. The finished works may take months, even years, to complete. The scale of her work is commensurate with her expansive themes: several pieces have exceeded twenty-four feet in height.

Lewis deSoto has explored a wide variety of media in his efforts to express the nuances of various social histories and worldwide cosmologies. Although he worked primarily in photography until the late 1980s, deSoto's subsequent work has been almost exclusively in sculpture and installation. His installation work can be divided into two forms of practice: works that respond to and reflect a given site and works that create an autonomous space that transports the viewer to an alternate reality. The former type include several important public commissions that depended on a combination of deft and elegant formal gestures and in-depth research into local social, economic, and cultural histories.

DeSoto's cosmological installations have explored themes derived from Catholic, Muslim, and Buddhist traditions as well as from the mythology of the Cahuilla people of Southern California, from whom he is patrilineally descended. Utilizing light, space, text, sound, and various evocative objects and forms, deSoto

has created works that do not merely rehearse sacred narratives but actively embody them, producing installations that are intellectually rigorous, sensually rich, and spiritually resonant. Recently he has begun to make discrete sculptural works such as his monumental *Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)*, an inflatable twenty-six-foot-long figure of the Buddha on his deathbed based on a twelfth-century carved figure in Sri Lanka. DeSoto has subtly substituted his own face, painted by hand with an airbrush, for the Buddha's, thereby alluding to the Buddhist notion of ego impermanence while simultaneously inserting his own history into a larger, cosmic narrative.

LEWIS DESOTO
Paranirvana (Self-Portrait), 1999
Painted nylon, electric fan;
7 x 25 x 6 ft.
Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Museum purchase, International and Contemporary Collectors Funds

The unusual career of Carl Cheng has involved quasiscientific investigations of physical processes, the development of interactive public artworks, and the creation of a corporate "persona," known as John Doe Co. Cheng's explorations of natural processes, begun in the late 1960s, included phenomena such as erosion, wave patterns, and bubbles. His interest in physical systems paralleled that of artists such as Robert Smithson and Hans Haacke. Beginning in 1972, Cheng produced a series of works that investigated the flowing, dripping, and drying properties of paint, anticipating by decades the painting machines of Roxy Paine. Cheng's explorations of physical phenomena often had a powerful aesthetic dimension, as in his series of reflecting pools begun in 1976, which both demonstrated properties such as wave patterns and also had a profoundly contemplative effect.

Removing his own hand from the process of creation, Cheng made works that were animated by the flow of external information—such as weather reports—or by the involvement of viewers. Inspired in part by a two-year journey around Asia, where he witnessed diverse publics interacting with sacred monuments, he determined to focus on public art projects. His first such project, *The Natural Museum of Modern Art*, was installed on the Santa Monica Pier and allowed viewers to create drawings on a large bed of sand using a specially designed machine. He has gone on to develop numerous inventive and engaging public artworks around the country. Long skeptical of the personality-driven aspect of Western art practice, Cheng has established a shell company, John Doe Co., which he often uses as a surrogate identity.

CARL CHENG
Santa Monica Art Tool, 1988
Concrete roller, steel armature, hitch; 9 x 14 ft.
Commissioned by and collection of City of Santa Monica

AS SOMEONE WHO is uncomfortable with the art world's powerful consensus machine, I have particularly enjoyed being reminded, through the Flintridge Foundation's awards, of many wonderful artists who have been operating under the mainstream radar. Even with my own relatively broad exposure—and twelve years spent living on the West Coast—some of these artists were previously unknown to me. Perhaps even more important than its generous monetary support is the key role that the Flintridge Foundation plays in exposing these artists and their remarkable work to a broader public. It has been tremendously satisfying to participate in a small way in this important process.