



David Best

“Building the Tunnel,” 2000 from the Paper Boxes Series
Mixed Media Collage, 20.5 X 15 X 5.5”
On loan from the Ron Casentini Collection, Santa Rosa

In the 1980s, David Best became known for super-assemblages that took the form of bizarre automobiles, wagons and chariots. He would gather a crew of 300 to 400 participants who worked with him to assemble as many as 25,000 separate parts into a layered and tangled extravagant carapace of untrammelled fantasy.

For “Building the Tunnel,” from his “Paper Boxes” series, Best acted alone to create dioramas on a more modest scale. But these works are no less excessive. He cut engravings and black-and-white reproductions out of old books and pasted them in many layers into meticulously crafted and decorated shadow boxes, creating sanctuaries of memories that recall Joseph Cornell’s magically boxed journeys into enchanted worlds. Best’s selection and use of a great variety of images rescued from the past constitute a similar poetic fusion of reflections and references.

David Best lives and works in Petaluma and has shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Oakland Museum of California, the San Jose Museum of Art, and the di Rosa Preserve, where the collection includes Best’s “Rhinocar” and “Mother Tina’s Car”.



Collection of 15 Speed Indicators

1867-1940

Also known as RPM counters
On loan from the collection of John de Marchi, Petaluma

These devices measure the rotational speed of a spinning shaft, most commonly recorded in rotations per minute or RPMs. A shaft is any cylinder or bar that provides for the transmission of power or motion to revolving parts. Humans have long used the measurement of rotation in machines to provide vital information. The early Romans marked the wheels of their chariots and counted the revolutions, estimating distance traveled and average daily speed. In the eleventh century, Chinese inventors came up with a mechanism involving a gear train and a moving arm that would strike a drum after a certain distance. However, with the advent of water and later steam-engine driven machinery, the need to measure and synchronize the speeds of multiple rotating shafts became vital.

The “industrial revolution” and rise of factories in the early 19th century eventually demanded a reliable and convenient method of measurement. The invention of the speed indicator, attributed to German engineer Dietrich Uhlhorn in 1817, took place in the midst of the industrial revolution. Though each of the tools exhibited here do exactly the same thing, they show great variation in form. Some of the variation is due to older versus more modern devices, however much of the variation is the result of creativity of the tool-maker in approaching the same problem of measuring speed of rotation.



Kirsten Bahrs-Jansen

“The Length of DNA and How I Measured Up to the Moon,” 2003
Motors, dowels, wood, hardware, 69,544 cones of thread
7’x5’x417,268,153.980752 yards
On loan from the Ann Hatch and Paul Discoe Collection, Sebastopol

This interactive sculpture is activated by the viewers touch. The piece playfully unravels spools of thread to a dimension incomprehensible in number alone: the distance between the Earth and the Moon. Replicating a DNA strand in motion, this little machine serves as a meandering thought, conceptually understood through the physical nature of the work. Through the constant measuring, with no “real” end, the work’s power lies in the potential or the ideal of a realization. Although this piece intends to measure the moon, the measuring is to serve as an ideal rather than functioning proof.

Living and practicing in San Francisco, Bahrs-Janssen has exhibited at the Berkeley Art Museum, Rubin Museum of Art in New York City, and Fowler Museum of Cultural History at UCLA. She is also a public high school art teacher. You can also view her work November 2007 as part of The Missing Peace exhibition at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.