

Remember
Allison Krause
May 4, 1970

OHIO

Entered the Union: March 1, 1803

Motto: With God all things are possible

State symbols:

Flower — scarlet carnation

Tree — buckeye

Bird — cardinal

Insect — ladybug

Gemstone — flint

Song — “Beautiful Ohio”

Beverage — tomato juice

Fossil — trilobite

Animal — white-tailed deer

Wildflower — large white trillium

Nickname: Buckeye State

Origin of name: From an Iroquoian word meaning “great river”

Largest cities:

Columbus	730,657
Cleveland	452,208
Cincinnati	308,728
Toledo	301,285
Akron	210,795
Dayton	158,873
Parma	82,837
Youngstown	81,469
Canton	79,478
Lorain	67,820

Land area: 40,948 square miles

Manufacturing:

Akron: rubber
Canton: roller bearings
Cincinnati: jet engines and machine tools
Cleveland: auto assembly, auto parts, steel
Dayton: office machines, refrigeration, heating, auto equipment
Youngstown and Steubenville: steel
Toledo: glass, auto parts

Agriculture:

Soybeans, corn, oats, greenhouse and nursery products, wheat, hay, apples, peaches, strawberries, grapes, dairy farming, sheep, hog raising, lime, sand, gravel, crushed stone

Tourism:

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Indian burial grounds at Mound City Group National Monument, Perry's Victory International Peace Memorial, In Memory of May 4, 1970, Kent State: Abraham and Isaac Memorial by George Segal, Partially Buried Woodshed by Robert Smithson, the Pro Football Hall of Fame at Canton, Homes of presidents Grant, Taft, Hayes, Harding and Garfield.



**OHIO:
CHESTNUTS and SOCIAL BENCHMARKS**

"The Culture cannot be jammed because there is no such thing as 'the culture' or 'the system.' There is only a hodgepodge of social institutions, most tentatively thrown together, which distributes the benefits and the burdens of social cooperation in ways that sometimes we recognize to be just, but that are usually manifestly inequitable. In a world of this type, countercultural rebellion is not just unhelpful, it is positively counterproductive."¹

"Counterculture has almost completely replaced socialism as the basis of radical political thought. So if counterculture is a myth, then it is one that has misled an enormous number of people, with untold political consequences."²

Today the critical forms of public protest, rebellion, countercultural activities, and alternative cultural engagement support a frail political base. The friction between mainstream and alternative culture is trivial. Counterculture tactics have become conventions and these conventions have become fashion.³ Their impact and influence on established orders of authority have been rendered virtually ineffectual.



David Hullfish Bailey, *Research Notes (Bush/Blare)*, 2005, photocopies and inkjet prints on paper, 11" x 14"

Page 2: David Hullfish Bailey, *Platform (Proposal)*, 2005, straw bales, owl nesting box, (installation view from Daniel Hug, Los Angeles)



work. Instead these social factions along with the history and the future of progressive democracy are the work's problematic subject matter.

OHIO, the state, is a stand-in for the idea of the "center." It is a metaphor that represents a field or testing ground for democracy. It is a state that is neither east nor west, north nor south, Left or Right. And its history carries an indelible stain of civil unrest. The Kent State shooting in the spring of 1970 has come to emblemize the principles and consequence of protest and opposition.

The five artists in OHIO work within the acute limitations of art's political reach. Yet these artists reach all the same. The work in OHIO does not represent the artifacts of art activism. That type of practice — the subversive undermining or infiltrating of flawed social or economic systems — conversely inhibits the legislation of social change. Instead Rodney McMillian, Sam Durant, Olga Koumoundouros, Andrea Bowers and David Hullfish Bailey work ethically within the tradition of the avant-garde, threading political narratives through conceptual art practice.

The artists in OHIO recruit the materials and languages that are vernacular to ideas of the center. For example,

McMillian's blanket, Hullfish Bailey's straw bales, Andrea Bower's drawings, Durant's Kent State documents and Olga Koumoundouros' household articles, charge the familiar with poetical and political analysis. Their organizational systems are never overly artful, but pragmatically composed, arranged and displayed.

The narratives demonstrated are not always directed, didactic or moral. Each artist starts with a political truth — sometimes weighty and historical as in the case of Durant's photographs or others more ambiguous and metaphorical as evidenced in Koumoundouros' inhumane treatment toward ordinary objects. Yet even the most demonstrative project in the exhibition can be peeled back to reveal a thorny line of questioning. This is the case with McMillian's cut green blanket, *Untitled*, 2005. Here partisanship, duality, paradox and dichotomies are powerfully evoked and then embraced as the formalism of Ellsworth Kelly or Richard Serra, then volleyed back at the viewer. Another loop of analysis in McMillian's element work is art and politics via the reference to Joseph Beuys and his green party.

The fine line that separates countercultural life-style from activism, protest and demonstration is blurry today. And knowing how to contribute to real structural social change



Rodney McMillian, *Untitled (the Great Society 1)*, 2006, single channel video, 15:48 minutes

Page 6: Rodney McMillian, *Untitled*, 2005, blanket, thumb tacks, 72" x 84"

has never been so confused. It has been nearly 40 years since Allison Krause, Jeffrey Glen Miller, Sandra Lee Scheuer, and William Knox Schroeder were shot by Ohio's National Guardsmen at Kent State while protesting Nixon's invasion of Cambodia. Jarringly, Heath and Potter suggest that,



Andrea Bowers, *Eulogies to One Another (AlterNet and Raed Jarrar 1-4)*, detail, 2006, graphite on paper, 30 3/8" x 22" each

Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter's text, *Nation of Rebels* boldly espouses the devastating consequences of countercultural ideology. From the standpoint of social justice, they suggest that the significant gains in American society over the past 60 years have come from "measured reforms within the system." Social welfare, the feminist movement, and civil rights have all been effectuated via drawn-out negotiation with established institutions. "They have been achieved through the laborious process of democratic action — through people making arguments, conducting studies, assembling coalitions and legislating change."⁴

The exhibition OHIO brings together a collection of work that espouses plodding, diligent, and massive progressive change. Operating within the contemporary avant-garde, these artists are not cultural insurgents. Yet they are unquestionably political. Their work underscores the value of incremental change, civic responsibility and the virtues of democracy. They are primarily concerned with issues of social justice and not with the identity-driven subversiveness inherent in countercultural critique.

After World War II, conventionality and conformity was equated with dystopic reality in the Western world. The fear of fascism was so severe that the Left became trepidatious

toward their own belief in social structures and bureaucratic organizations. Disdain for conformity left progressive and social factions without cooperative building blocks. "The preference for individual consumer activism in response to environmental degradation, rather than state regulation of externalities, provides the most clear cut example," states Heath and Potter of the Left's mired inability to overcome unease for collective action. They elaborate by stating, "The popularity of self-help, the growth of individualistic forms of spirituality and the exaggerated expectations about the effects of education or artistic production represents further extremes of the same tendency."⁵

The artists included in OHIO are not inhibited by conventional tropes. They recognize that common and predictable sites within culture are where social thinking and democratic imagination must flourish. The Right has been successful in identifying, labeling and pitching to such groups: soccer moms, NASCAR dads, office park dads, Walmart shoppers, security moms and so on. But certainly there is no illusion that the American center voting-bloc is the audience for this

Right: Olga Koumoundouros, *Dragged Lamp*, 2007, iron, chain, t-shirt, wiring, dimensions variable



"Fighting the rules ... is not dissent, but rather social deviance. It may be fun, but it is not the stuff out of which progressive social movements are built."⁶ The artists in OHIO are faithfully working within the conditions and limitations of contemporary art practice. Yet with visual vocabulary and syntax they are contouring the political quandaries of our time.

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¹ Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter "Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture" (Harper Business: New York, 2004) p. 8

² Ibid. p.16.

³ Ms. Adeide Guevara, the daughter of Che Guevara, and her family are currently working with lawyers in New York City to stop the misuse of their father's image on commercial products. "We're not after money. He can be a universal person, but respect the image." From an article by Marc Lacey, *The New York Times* (Oct. 9, 2007).

⁴ "Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture": Ibid., p. 9.

⁵ Ibid. p. 320.

⁶ Ibid., p. 323.

Andrea Bowers' and Rodney McMillian's artworks are courtesy of the artists and Susanne Vielmetter Projects Los Angeles; inkjet prints by Sam Durant are courtesy of the artist and Blum and Poe, Los Angeles; works by David Hullfish Bailey are courtesy of the artist and Daniel Hug, Los Angeles; and the sculptures by Olga Koumoundouros are courtesy of the artist.

Right: **Sam Durant, *Rust Never Sleeps*, 1998, 1 of 9 archival inkjet prints, 17" x 22" each**

Cover: **Sam Durant, *Rust Never Sleeps*, 1998, 1 of 9 archival inkjet prints, 17" x 22" each**



OHIO: David Hullfish Bailey, Andrea Bowers,
Sam Durant, Olga Koumoundouros, Rodney McMillian
Thursday, Nov. 29, to Saturday, Jan. 5, 2008

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Barbara Wiesen
Director and Curator
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