



## Capital City Arts Initiative

*The Capital City Arts Initiative [CCAI] is delighted to present For Detail View, an exhibition by artist Jeff Hantman at the CCAI Courthouse Gallery, February 5 – May 25, 2016. CCAI extends its sincere appreciations to Mr. Hantman, the Carson City Courthouse, and to all those involved with the exhibition. In addition, CCAI commissioned writer Chérie Louise Turner to write the following essay.*

### **Nostalgia, Kerfing, and Two-Exits Down the Freeway**

Nostalgia, printmaking, family living, and craftsmanship play strongly into Oakland-based artist Jeff Hantman's sculptures. For these wall-hung works, Hantman curves multiple pieces of wood (save one flat work) and fits them together into rounded organic shapes that belie the rigidity of the material. Most all of the wood Hantman uses is found, and he leaves the traces of use visible to the viewer: oil stains, old paint, saw marks, shelf paper, and the like. He also incorporates imagery that interests him onto the wood surface. This results in artworks that feature a distinctive style and are also narrative, the use-marks on the wood as well as the additional imagery providing jumping off points: sitting with the pieces for periods of time teases out storylines that become increasingly rich. Aesthetically, the pieces have a well-hewn feel to them, which is nicely juxtaposed with a fresh sensibility: the pieces are finely crafted—joints and surfaces are smooth—so as to, structurally, look like new.

Jeff Hantman grew up in New Jersey, close to Manhattan. His mother was an artist and art teacher, and she fueled in Hantman a lifelong love of art and art-making: "I grew up taking art classes," he says. "Pastels, oil paints—my whole life I've been doing some kind of art." Hantman also took advantage of his proximity to New York City by spending a lot of time viewing the world-class art shown at such notable venues as The Metropolitan Museum of Art and MOMA. From his earliest memories to the present, Hantman has been immersed in the world of art.

Fittingly then, when it came time to apply for college, Hantman applied to art schools and landed at the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design, commonly known as RISD, or "riz-dee." After starting out as an illustration major, which he quickly realized was not for him, he switched to printmaking. Unlike most artists who pursue this medium, however, Hantman wasn't interested in making multiples, or editions of work: he wanted to create one-of-a-kind pieces, an interest that has stayed with him throughout his career. For his early print works, he made his own paper and then applied multiple printing processes such as silk-screening and etching to each piece: "Things were forever transforming and that process carries through to what I do now," he says.

While in school, Hantman also started working with wood, creating small sculptures. "I was photographing those sculptures, and then I would silk-screen the image of the sculpture onto paper and show the original sculpture and the print together."

After finishing school, Hantman moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, where he had been living the previous summer, completing an internship at the internationally recognized fine art print

shop Crown Point Press. For his first year out West, he had a number of odd print jobs: silk-screening police car decals, letter-pressing numbering sequences for SF parking permits—"That's where I learned how to letter press," notes Hantman—doing wedding invitations. Then only a year out of school, Hantman was asked to be the first printer at the also highly regarded Bay Area print house Paulson Bott Press, a dream job. There he got to work with internationally renowned artists from the Bay Area and beyond such as Radcliffe Bailey, Hung Liu, and Squeak Carnwath, among others. The plan was for Hantman to train to be the press's master printer.

But he soon realized that his path was to be the artist, not to primarily help other artists fulfil their visions. So, Hantman decided to leave and further pursue his own practice, which had by then begun to include gluing together remnant paper he got from Paulson, called tear-offs (it's literally the extra paper torn off of a print), and onto these he would paint and transfer photos.

However, as Hantman himself states: "I'm never content with what I'm currently working on; any time I have an idea, I'm already two exits down the freeway of where I want to be next." This propensity, along with getting a studio space—which allowed him to work bigger and messier—soon found Hantman branching out to working with wood again. In the late 2000s, he began experimenting with the process of bending the material, which he later learned is called kerfing, a technique he continues to explore to this day: "This process is still something that interests me; it still excites me," he says.



*Lever*, mixed media on wood, 48"x54"x14", 2010

Hantman combines his passion for kerfing found wood with his long love of printmaking and image-making—he silk-screens, transfers, or draws images and patterns directly onto the wood—to create truly original pieces. He uses a visual vocabulary, some of which is repeated from one work to the next, that connects to his memories and passions. That said, the works also resonate with and are influenced by artists whose work Hantman has long admired; in particular, Robert Rauschenberg and Martin Puryear.

Hantman is, in particular, taken in by diagrams and schematics as well as images and illustrations having to do with childhood, education and work, and home; specifically, he looks to old school texts and children's "how to" books, Sear's catalogues, Boy Scout manuals, and the like. Take, for instance, *Lever*, which features a silk-screened illustration from a kid's book showing how a lever works. *Know Your Typewriter* features a 1950s-esqe picture of a how a woman should properly sit at her desk to type. Showing his interest in process, also found on this work are Hantman's preliminary drawings—red pod- or spore-like shapes—for another sculpture.



*Know Your Typewriter*, mixed media on wood, 20"x36"x3", 2014

Hantman also exposes his interest in image-making, and incorporates elements that speak to the traditional foundations of the printing process as well as graphic design: for instance, *Lever* features Letraset patterns, which were commonly used by designers beginning in the 1960s. And, color halftone patterns, the very basis of printing (think newspaper comics), feature in *Kit5256* (see, in particular, the overlapping dots in the upper left-hand side). In that piece Hantman also plays with focus: the image of an airplane, a P-51 Mustang, is fuzzy, appearing like a memory, which, for Hantman, it is. He had a childhood love of making model cars and airplanes; the title refers to the Revell kit that is a model of that plane. Another common feature, also seen in *Kit5256* with the two upside-down houses (houses and mobile homes can be seen in several works, bringing to mind family and summer vacations), is Hantman's interest in playing with horizon-line orientation, a practice he simply finds comforting: "It's a different perspective."



*Kit5256*, mixed media on wood, 52"x52"x12", 2010



*45°*, mixed media, 49"x30"x14", 2013

Play with negative space is evident in several works, including *Lever*, where a cut-out in the wood can be found on the left-hand side. This also speaks to the aforementioned interest Hantman has for using found objects: that piece in *Lever* was from the back of a chair. This found object element features very distinctly in *45°*. Hantman created this work during a Recology residency, which takes place at a solid waste transfer and recycling center in San Francisco: artists use items they find there to create artwork. Hantman notes that contractors frequently discard construction waste from renovations there. Testament to this, *45°* shows different types of shelf paper—a result of redone kitchens. On the right, Hantman again plays with positive and negative space.

Curved lines also abound in the work, inspired by a radio program Hantman was listening to years back that talked about the Voyager 1 getting to the outer



*Always Ground Wire*, mixed media on wood, 28"x26"x5", 2014

most part of the earth's atmosphere: these lines recall the arched path of an object's orbit in space. *Always Ground Wire* shows a strong example of this, as does *Fax Transmission*.

Stepping back from the details of the work, it's a pleasure to take in the overall composition and shape of these pieces. The compositions are complex—each work comprises many different-looking pieces flush against each other—but nicely balanced, keeping the eye

moving; there's always somewhere else to land. The shapes of the works—simple and smooth, the rounded surfaces gentle, as well as never the same—nicely balance the intricacy of the imagery.

Further, while the imagery derives from what speaks to Hantman personally and his own childhood memories, it is general enough to also speak to a broad audience; as well, the works are made from pieces of objects any one of us may have owned. In Hantman's work, then, we can each find something that evokes in us the nostalgia and sense of personal relationship that inspires him to create them.



*Fax Transmission*, mixed media on wood, 30" x 21" x 12", 2011

Chérie Louise Turner  
San Leandro, California  
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