

William Allan, Robert Hudson
and William T. Wiley
A Window on History, by George.
1993
pastel, Conté crayon, charcoal,
graphite and acrylic on canvas
61½ x 87½ inches
Courtesy of John Berggruen
Gallery, San Francisco, California
Photograph by Cesar Rubio

Eccentricity, individualism and nonconformity have been central to San Francisco Bay Area and Northern California's spirit since the Gold Rush era. Town names like Rough and Ready, Whiskey Flats and "Pair of Dice" (later changed to Paradise) testify to the raw humor and outsider self-image rooted in Northern California culture.

This exhibition focuses on three artists' exploration of a different western frontier—that of individual creativity and collaboration. It brings together paintings, sculptures, assemblages and works on paper created individually and collaboratively by three close friends: William Allan, Robert Hudson and William T. Wiley.

Bill, Bob and Bill

William Allan, the eldest, was born in Everett, Washington, in 1936, followed by Wiley, born in Bedford, Indiana, in 1937 and Hudson, born in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1938. Their families eventually settled in Richland, in southeast Washington, where the three met and began a life-long social and professional relationship.

Richland was the site of one of the nation's first plutonium production plants—Hanford Atomic Works.¹ Hudson remembers Richland as a plutonium boom town: the city's population seemed to swell overnight from a few thousand to over 30,000. Most of the transient population lived in fourteen square blocks filled with trailer courts. Hudson's and Wiley's families lived in Chubbs Trailer Court where Hudson, whose father was a carpenter, recalls using the back seat of the family car as his bedroom. Wiley and Allan had a nomadic early childhood. Before settling in Richland, where his father poured concrete at the Plant, Wiley lived in Indiana, Texas, California and Utah. Allan lived in Florida, Cape Cod, New Jersey and Quebec while his father was in the wartime military. Allan's father and most of his side of the family were employed in education in one position or another.

The three became close friends while students in Jim McGrath's art class at Columbia High School, Richland, where he taught an Abstract Expressionist style of painting. Wiley recalls that McGrath, a painter, would often include written narration in his paintings. He showed his students pictures of artwork by Picasso, de Chirico and Dali; they took field trips to Seattle art galleries and sometimes San Francisco to view artwork by northwest artists Mark Tobey and Morris Graves among others. Allan recalls that McGrath instilled a strong sense of "one's own humanity and capacity."² McGrath brought local Yakima tribal elders into the classroom to share Indian customs and rituals, and took Allan, Wiley and Hudson on fishing outings and visits to rock art sites. These experiences resulted in a respect

William Allan, Robert Hudson
and William T. Wiley
Dumpster Baby. 1993
charcoal, ink, acrylic, pastel and
graphite on paper
65 3/4 x 45 1/4 inches
Courtesy of John Berggruen
Gallery, San Francisco,
California
Photograph by Cesar Rubio



for the wilderness, American Indian culture and storytelling that remain central to these artists' lifestyles even today. Rosetta Brooks points out in her catalog essay "The Art of Getting Lost" that these shared lessons, experiences and the mentoring role provided by McGrath laid the foundation for their continuing friendship and collaborative spirit.

McGrath encouraged his students to develop portfolios for admissions to art school, and all three attended and graduated from the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute). Allan was the first to enroll at SFAI in 1954, followed by Wiley in 1956; Hudson joined them in 1957. SFAI's influence on the young artists was such that by the 1960s, each had become a significant figure in the Bay Area art community.

Exposure to the cultural and artistic climate of the Bay Area profoundly influenced these artists each in a different way. The region's predilection for the Dadaists' attitude of mistrust of authority and rationalism, as well as the Surrealists' emphasis on individual imagination and fantasy, are well documented. Abstract Expressionism was also important to the development of Bay Area art. According to Susan Landauer,

...many of the most cherished ideals of Abstract Expressionism endured for subsequent generations of artists in San Francisco, whereas in other parts of the country they were repudiated and even ridiculed. Autobiography, fantasy, and subjective feeling continued to be important sources of inspiration, while idiosyncrasy was strongly encouraged. That these ideals were so tenacious may reflect their rooted-ness in the cultural identity of Northern California.⁵

At SFAI the influence of Abstract Expressionism, particularly that of former instructors Clyfford Still and Hassel Smith and guest instructor Mark Rothko, was still present. Important Bay Area Figurative artists David Park and Richard Diebenkorn had recently taught and/or were students at SFAI. Among instructors and fellow students that Allan, Hudson and Wiley interacted with were Elmer Bischoff, Dorr Bothwell, Nathan Oliveira, Frank Lobdell, Manuel Neri, Bill Geis and Joan Brown.

Both Abstract Expressionism and Bay Area Figurative art, however, became less important to Allan, Hudson and Wiley as explained by Thomas Albright:

As students at the Art Institute, and later as teachers, all three were involved in a peculiar ferment that, in part, reflected the influence of artist-teachers such as Frank Lobdell, and in part signaled the beginnings of a reaction against it.... Philip Leider observed: "The concerns of this group and those artists associated with them...have nothing in common with Bay Area Figurative art....Both in sculpture and painting—and there is a remarkable melding of mood and execution between the two, a fluidity of interchange of ideas and techniques that is unique—the major preoccupation is with parody and with the grotesque.... [for example] Robert Hudson [would] simply copy onto his sculpture some motif out of a painting of William Wiley's." The work of these artists was thus more freewheeling than the academic conventions to which most Bay Area Figurative painting had been reduced by 1960.⁴

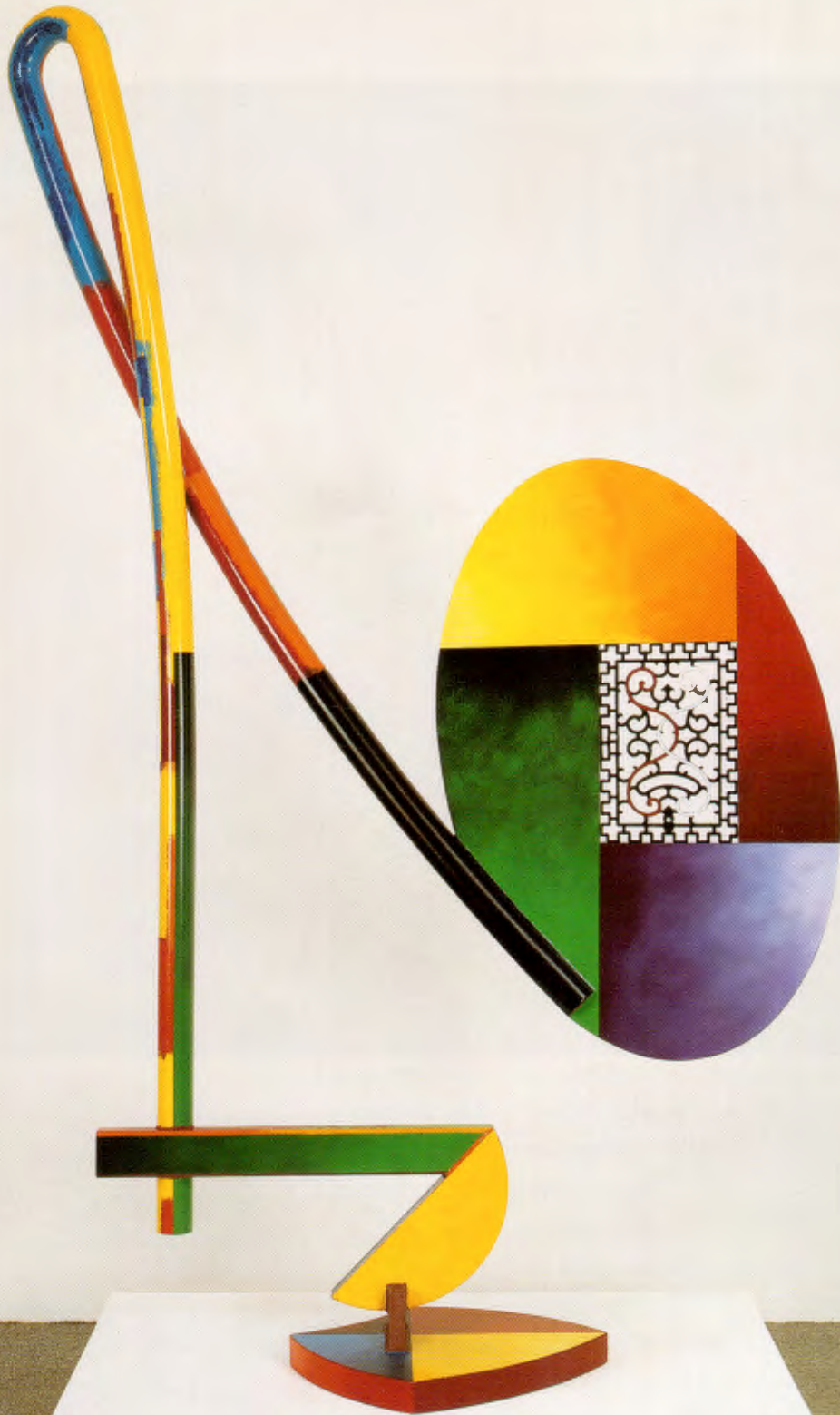
In the early 1960s, Allan, Hudson and Wiley were major participants in the development of Funk Art. The term *Funk* was derived from *funky*, a black American musical term. Funk Art was offbeat, sensuous and direct. Humor, vulgarity and autobiographical narratives were typical elements. Other Northern California artists associated with Funk were Robert Arneson, Bruce Conner, Roy De Forest and Richard Shaw.⁵ Their freewheeling attitude led to an unforced approach to art, life and chance and a wide-openness to other influences. Leider noted, among this circle of artists, "...there was often an interchange and overlapping of themes, motifs, and approaches."⁶ This exchange was encouraged and according to Wiley: "What you get from other people is a different language, a different phase of your own existence.... In my education you couldn't take from somebody else, [but] if you're thirsty, why pre-prejudice yourself about the taste of the water? Trust yourself enough to drink it and go on."⁷

"Drinking from the water" and "going on" is exactly what Allan, Hudson and Wiley did. They have made collaborative pieces since the late 1960s. Yet, while their early collaborative spirit has remained, these artists have developed three distinct mature styles which are discussed in the following essays.

This exhibition combines artworks created individually by Allan, Hudson and Wiley as well as collaborative pieces. Dated between 1984 to 1997, individual

William Allan
Colorado Pond-Blue, 1993
oil on canvas
54 x 70 inches
Collection of Mary Keesling
Photograph by Cesar Rubio







Opposite: Robert Hudson

Dated: 1987

enamel on steel, cast iron

W x 50 x 16 inches

From Springs Desert Museum:

Purchased with funds provided

by the Contemporary Art Council,

1988, and the General Acquisi-

tion Fund

Above: William T. Wiley

Running Out of the Forest. 1993

acrylic, graphite and charcoal

on canvas

94 1/2 x 85 1/2 inches

Courtesy of Locks Gallery,

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Photograph by Cesar Rubio

works were selected as a point of reference and reflection for the collaborative pieces of 1993. Although they are united by common cultural and environmental concerns, the mixed media collaborative works on paper and canvas range in size, style, approach, technique and subject matter. From these complex and intriguing artworks emerge three distinct styles: Allan's meticulously rendered and meditative images commingle with Hudson's colorful and dynamic geometric forms or with Wiley's symbols and witty puns. The collaborative artworks behave much as close friends do—playing ideas off one another verbally, visually and metaphorically. The viewer is invited to ponder, explore, and discover whose hand made which parts and to sort out the puzzles of stylistic similarities and differences.

This multilayered exhibition reveals how each artist has influenced the other by challenging, complementing and contending with varying attitudes, strengths and eccentricities. In this improvisational interplay, these friends honor one another by releasing control and allowing each other's style or approach to meld into a single work of art. Together they form a whole—a separate entity born out of the *spirit of collaboration*.

Notes

1. Richland was a small farming village until 1942-45 when the area north of town became the site for a large scale plutonium production plant for the U.S. government's highly secret Manhattan Project supplying the plutonium for the world's first nuclear detonation. Following WWII, the unexpected onset of the Cold War and the nuclear arms race brought an urgent demand for plutonium that led to major expansions of Hanford throughout the 1950s. Although the U.S. Department of Energy announced the permanent closing of Hanford Atomic Works in 1988, the legacy of defense production at Hanford includes massive amounts of highly radioactive materials that will remain hazardous for thousands of years. It is estimated that more than one million gallons of contaminated liquid has leaked into the ground in this 400,000 acre site.
2. William Allan, "Transient Poet for Jessie," *Transient Poet: William Allan Retrospective* (Sacramento: Crocker Art Museum, 1993), p. 21.
3. Susan Landauer, *The San Francisco School of Abstract Expressionism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 175.
4. Thomas Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area: 1945-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 117-118.
5. The term originated from the exhibition, *Funk*, organized by Peter Selz, University Art Museum, Berkeley, California, 1967.
6. Albright, p. 121.
7. *Ibid*, p. 121.