

# Vida Moderna MODERN living

mixed media sculpture and furniture design by

**KEVIN WAUGH**

APRIL 26 - MAY 25 2002

MAIN/ACCESS GALLERY



Visiting Kevin Waugh's workshop on Logan Avenue, right away you know you're in the heart of Winnipeg's old industrial district. There are machine shops and welders everywhere, and sprawling scrap dealers who recycle the junk no one else wants to handle. As you wheel into the dirt compound Kevin's studio shares with Logan Iron and Metal, a distinct redolence hits the nostrils, an aromatic stew of lubricants, abrasives and blighted oxides.

For irritable sinuses, the area hereabouts is Dante's Ninth Circle of Hell. But if you're an artist of Kevin's needs, the neighbourhood is sweet paradise, a happy hunting ground-- as it is here he finds much of the materials and expertise he needs for his work.

Kevin's workshop is not your typical studio. Works in progress compete for space with power tools and chunks of salvage. Dust and debris kicked up by sanders and saws cling to every inch of available space. An air hose serves as a sweeper, blasting the dust about in explosive gusts whenever a clean surface is required. The chaotic environment is eminently suited to Kevin's freewheeling approach to art.

Pinpointing his creative influences is

no easy matter. Kevin is a scavenger who delights in using castoff materials and found objects; and a process-oriented purist who relishes the elegance of industrial fabrication. By his own admission his most significant influences are conceptualist Denis Oppenheim, and Dada pater familias Marcel Duchamp. In any event, he's got to be the only sculptor who cites Krazy Kat as a meaningful force in his early creative development.

The work on display in the Gallery shows just how far afield he ranges for ideas. His references are all over the dial, pulled in from TV, the internet and magazines, as well as literary and historical sources. The art works contrived from adapted materials are pure madcap.

A reenactment of European power games circa late 17th century, *The Treaty of Utrecht* is a risible oddity of the first order. Consisting of Mexican wrestling figures-- actual merchandise peddled outside Mexico's wrestling palace-- the installation likens the power games of dynastic Europe to a cage match between musclebound prima donnas. His amoeba-shaped *Empress* is a dubious love token consisting of foam rubber hearts that have been bound together and compressed beyond recognition by

utility wire. Made from the same utility wire, *Accelerator 1 and 2* are molecular models for quantum physics' dynamic universe theory. They repel from the wall, casting random shadows when bobbed; they exist in quantum space, that vibrating vacuum physicists and hangover sufferers refer to as the Void.

Kevin's antic streak is also plainly evident in the work crafted from engineered materials. Squat pin-like cylinders fashioned from precast steel, his five piece *Malleus Maleficarum* references the religious tract credited with launching the infamous Inquisition. The polished forms, from welded gas pipe sections, could be a band of Dominicans on the way to a grilling or an execution; or maybe a collection of newly minted Iron Maidens, the classic full-body torture devices used by the Church to extract confessions in the Middle Ages. A steel and lead creation dressed in rubber asphalt pain, *El Captain* turns a dumbbell shape a few degrees inward to produce a pair of trophy gonads. Other forms like *Parade* and the *Pearlizer* are consummate fetish objects meant only to incite conjecture while tempting tactile exploration.

Kevin's signage work tweaks our

expectations with industrially finished fixtures designed to convey a mood of thoughtful pause. In *Devour*, a typical corporate backdrop for neutral information is made to brandish the least neutral verb in our language. Set in a sedately pearlescent slab of lit plexiglass, the improbable message 'devour' directs pedestrians to unleash the ravaging impulse to gorge. In *Mercurachrome*, a suite of six steel boxes fitted with filters and fluorescent lighting, the artist has insinuated suggestive anatomical glimpses whose crimson hues become clinically gory inside the stainless steel frames.

His three large paintings are truly devilish celebrations of the commonplace. The block text cites the names of container companies specializing in intermodal rail transportation. To anyone who's ever been stuck at level train crossing the names may be familiar. The blurred lettering is what happens to the image when the train and its cargo are too long in passing. As the impatient mind empties, the image becomes monumental and fuzzy. Kevin has hit on a truism of post modern art: blowing up the mundane to epic proportions automatically makes it comical.

The irrepressible artist is just as

adept at pursuing a punch line through his applied design work. His wonderfully crafted table pieces, combining wood, various aniline dyes and satin finishes with fabricated steel, reveal the confident hand of a master craftsman. *Delta V*, *Orbital Tables* and *Vida Moderna* could stand on their technical invention alone. But they are sculptural pieces first and foremost. Paying tongue-in-cheek homage to Sixty's chic, they exult in the era of the split level home, the martini lunch and the tail fin. They epitomize the sizzle and snap of an outward bound decade drunk on the promise of space travel and synthetic creature comforts.

Moving through Kevin's eclectic storehouse, one cannot help but be impressed by the diversity of materials and the polymorphous nature of his curiosity. His art is witty, maddening, deadpan and demonic, and in the end delightfully subversive. If there's an artist who's having more fun than Kevin Waugh, I don't know who it is.

Stephen Phelps, Curator  
Main/Access Gallery  
Winnipeg

## About the Artist.....

KEVIN WAUGH received his B.F.A. (Honours) from the School of Art, University of Manitoba.

Exhibiting in group and solo exhibitions since 1996, Waugh's work has already gained a loyal and growing cadre of fans, always curious to view his next project.

His sculptural pieces have necessitated acquiring skills with various electric and air powered hand tools and ferrous metal welding as well as oxy-acetylene gas cutting and welding.

In addition to demand for his work, Waugh's multi-faceted skills have put him in demand as a Gallery Technician at local galleries as well as acting as consultant for other artists seeking to work in sculptural forms.

In the past year, Waugh has been engaged in a new initiative in relation to expanding his art practice. This involves an ongoing partnership with Mexico City artist and professor, Carmen Lang, whose diverse art production in drawing, painting and sculpture matches his own. Ms Lang and Waugh soon arrived at conclusions regarding the nature and possibilities of cross cultural and philosophic joint projects. These observations have stimulated a continuing examination of their relationships to one another as viewed through our social, political and economic cultures and the more personal body politic. Evidence of this is clearly seen in some of the works in this current exhibition. Both Lang and Waugh look forward to greater collaborations in north/south art production and curatorial developments. It is hoped that with larger participation in the different communities will allow this initiative to broaden its original mandate.

Waugh will continue this work with Ms Lang in Mexico City in June through August of this year.

To view more of Waugh's works, visit his site: [www.kevinwaugh.shaw.ca](http://www.kevinwaugh.shaw.ca). He can be contacted via email at: [kevinwaugh@shaw.ca](mailto:kevinwaugh@shaw.ca)