

Reckless Rolodex

January 13 – March 18, 2023

Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago

Exhibition Checklist

Susan Anderson

Lawrence Steger, St. Georges Ct., Chicago

1992

Lightjet print on silver gelatin paper, mounted on Dibond

Courtesy the artist, © Susan Anderson Photo, 1992/2022

Anderson frequently created publicity photographs for Lawrence Steger's work, especially for the performances *STAVE* (1992) and *The Swans* (1995), and the series *Crimes of Reckless Youth* (1989). About this photograph, which came to be Steger's definitive portrait, Anderson says:

"I can still remember the day we made that portrait, in his loft off of N. Milwaukee. The space had that tin ceiling material on the walls. In fact, as I recall, he told me that day that he was HIV positive. He wanted this portrait to be the way he would be remembered."

Max Guy

Sketch for Sock and Buskin

2022

Enamel paint on Rives BFK paper

Courtesy the artist

Sock and Buskin refer to the comedy/tragedy faces of theatre. In ancient Greece, tragic actors wore a buskin boot, while comic actors wore a thin-soled "sock." Guy, who has created numerous mask and silhouette works, is more fascinated by the tools used to make traditional masks, often diagrams and silhouettes, than characters and stories. The artist made these two masks by digitally developing a lattice of intersecting silhouettes protruding in the third dimension of what is more typically a flat image of a face. Lawrence Steger, secret about much of his private life, extended that privacy into his creative work, working to obscure what lay behind the mask.

Barbara Kasten

Crown Hall 1

2018-2019

Digital chromogenic print

Courtesy the artist and Bortolami Gallery, New York

This photograph and two others elsewhere in the exhibition stem from the artist's investigation of color, surface, and line in materials in the active architectural studios inside 20th century modernist architect Mies van der Rohe's iconic Crown Hall at the Illinois Institute of Technology. A later exhibit by Kasten used the title *Architectural Fiction*. The idea that one can cloak fiction in forms borrowed from architecture echoes Lawrence Steger's interest in the inherent warp of obsessively perfected structures. Steger seemed drawn to formally refined spaces like S. R. Crown Hall as portals to imaginary worlds or private fantasy.

Devin T. Mays

At rest, a vessel

2022

Vessels, water Courtesy the artist

Mays has said,

"I believe my role as an artist is to punctuate: interrupt, accentuate, emphasize, etc. Linguistically, the placement of a comma or period can radically change the meaning or intention of a sentence, phrase, or statement. I guess I'm trying to do the same thing visually. In this dynamic work, dispersed throughout the gallery and among the other artworks, imperceptible evaporation is conjoined with the gallery staff's maintenance of the water levels. Lawrence Steger was interested in the openness, fluidity, and porosity of Fluxus performance operations, characterized often by an unfinishable gesture, a gesture that allows an unfolding to continue."

Betsy Odom

Wüsthof Knives

2012

Graphite, fur Courtesy the artist

A passage from Lawrence Steger's 1992 *STAVE* script reads,

"Depending on the script, you may be holding a hunting knife, a carving knife, a penknife, a letter opener, an ice pick, an icicle, a hatpin, a spindle, a shard of glass, or whatever long,

sharp instrument ... For our purposes it does not matter. In all of these cases it looks like a knife. It is being handled like a knife. It will have the same effect as a knife.”

Across their practice, Odom subverts traditional craft practices creating intricate objects that appear functional yet are purely aesthetic. Odom’s *Wüsthof Knives* evoke the Baroque aspects of Steger’s work in which the actual and its illusion converge.

Lilli Carré

Loose Lock

2019

Terracotta, underglaze

Courtesy the artist and Western Exhibitions

Odd and out of place, *Loose Lock*, with its chain dangling and without a door to lock, recalls the imperfect and unsettling aspects of Lawrence Steger’s apartment that he explored in an unfinished project late in his life. Steger wrote that he was photographing and casting the banal errors of his renovations to his apartment, domestic flaws that he likened to the odd effects of disease on his body.

“The main part of this project is the documenting of my household. The aesthetic concerns that I have.... evidence of in-exactitude in the molding ... and other such mundane household observations. I am documenting what is “wrong” with my body. The disease has manifested itself in odd ways — wounds are a long time in healing, i.e., saving bandages from a wound on my shin that won’t heal. Taking polaroids of the wound in various stages of duress...”

Derrick Woods Morrow

Gravity Pleasure Switchback

2023

Used mattresses, natural stains, subwoofers, balloons filled with human breath and helium, looped 8:57 mins. audio track, as well as empathy, patience, and time occurring unnaturally
Courtesy the artist and ENGAGE Projects

Lawrence Steger rendered the final climactic scene of his performance *The Swans* (1995) as a “film sequence” narrated on stage and titled *As If Beating A Featherbed Against A Wall*. Woods-Morrow’s *Gravity Pleasure Switchback*, evocative of a materialized array of desire, rest, vulnerability, intimacy, and possession, echoes the disconcertingly specific imagery and hyper-personal formal innovation of that haunting climactic scene.

Inviting sensorial participation in this piece, Woods-Morrow offers you, the visitor, the opportunity to include your own breath by blowing up a balloon to add to the installation.

John Neff

Beaver & Shark

2023

Paint, FM radio transmitter, portable radio, vinyl Courtesy the artist

Neff has reconfigured two wall paintings by conceptual artist and photographer Robert Blanchon (b. 1965–d. 1999), a contemporary of Lawrence Steger's. In the 1990s, Steger and Blanchon rethought creativity under the shadow of their HIV positivity. Blanchon's 1995 video *Let's Just Kiss + Say Goodbye* was a touchstone for Steger's later work.

Through color and sound, Neff refers to a mid-90s Blanchon exhibition at Chicago's Randolph Street Gallery that featured walls painted with a color named "Beaver" and Blanchon's 1994 *Carcharodon carcharias (Jaws)* exhibited in Artists Space, New York's AIDS Forum series. The second work reconstructed the famous 1975 illustration for *Jaws* depicting a swimmer above the ascending shark with a portrait of a nude Blanchon substituted for the original swimming figure.

Cherrie Yu

Trisha and Homer

2018

Video, 9:05 mins. Courtesy the artist

In collaboration with Homero Muñoz, a former maintenance worker, Yu methodically unfolds notions of identity and pedestrianism inscribed in dancer/choreographer Trisha Brown's 1986 solo work *Accumulation with Talking Plus Watermotor*. Yu's reenactment examines Brown's notions of authenticity, skilled and deskilled movement, and audience participation. In the context of *Reckless Rolodex*, the video gestures toward a form of lip-sync in which the performer wears the material lightly and transparently. The enactments shared by Lawrence Steger and Iris Moore in *Rough Trade* (1992), of Yoko Ono's song *Hirake (Open)* and of an emblematic interrogation scene from the 1992 film *Basic Instinct*, operated in this offhand style.

Young Joon Kwak

Brown Rainbow Eclipse Explosion

2017

Cast aluminum, welded aluminum rods, resin, glass mirror tiles, acrylic mirrors, epoxy putty,

acrylic paint, motor, steel chain and hardware, custom LED light, shadow
Courtesy the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles and Mexico City

Brown Rainbow Eclipse Explosion is part mirror ball, part event, staging an object becoming something other than itself. It presents what the artist has described as, an open-ended sort of choreography, expanding our sense of what our bodies can be, what they can do, how they can feel.

“I think of how sculpture can be active; that matter is an actor; and how it can take up space and create space for non-normativity. I often look at materials as surrogates for transitioning marginalized bodies into a space of greater recognition. The sculpture recalls three chandeliers, two in Steger’s work and one created for his memorial by artist Mary Brogger. Brogger’s huge metal sculpture suspended a constellation of skewered dripping ice cubes and dominated the memories of so many who attended the memorial.”

Eddie Fake

Open Moment

2022-2023

Plywood, acrylic latex paint

Courtesy the artist and Western Exhibitions

Open Moment adopts the conspicuous utopianism of the everyday board game, scaled to human size. Over the course of the exhibition, it operates both as its own object and as a hosting platform for scheduled performances and events. The design carries forward themes in Fake’s ***Memory Palaces*** (2013-2014) project, a series of vibrant drawings reimagining Chicago’s queer history through the creation of detailed storefronts and about which the artists says,

“Thinking of the body as a building is very easy for me to do. The queerness is in the nitty-gritty construction. I think the interesting thing to think about buildings and architecture is that they are just shells for people to occupy and it’s impossible to assign a gender to that. ***Memory Palaces*** was a mix of things. A couple of buildings were based on empty spaces around Chicago that already looked like a ready-made queer space, and I figured I wanted to composite and draw that because it is a space I would want to have. A lot of them were spaces that existed once as a queer space but don’t exist anymore and are reimagined. It’s always been about tapping into knowing that these things existed as a source of power in the future versus a nostalgia trip. Less “Boo hoo, that doesn’t exist anymore,” and more like, “We have agency in the present to create a world.” It’s an ecstatic drawing of space and bodies.”

Lawrence Steger

Road

Episode 50: Shoulda Been Dead, This American Life, January 17, 1997

Audio, 10 mins.

Soundtrack to Lawrence Steger's *the Swans*

1995

Robert Coddington, composer Audio, 34:08 mins.

The Swans Performance Ephemera

The Swans (re-mix) touring laminated crew badge and lanyard

The Swans (re-mix) touring laminated luggage tag #3 and chain

The Swans (re-mix) poster from Cankarjev Dom, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1998

The Swans (re-mix) poster from the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1996

The Swans poster from Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, 1995 ***The Swans*** incense censer prop

The Swans Francois Prelati costume by John Darmour, worn by, Douglas Grew

All items courtesy Douglas Grew

Lawrence Steger wrote, directed, and starred in the theater performance ***The Swans***. He described it as, "An exploration of the desire for solace and ecstasy based on the lives of King Ludwig II of Bavaria and Gilles de Rais." It premiered at Chicago's Randolph Street Gallery in 1995 and toured internationally through 1998 under the title ***The Swans (re-mix)***.

Crimes of Reckless Youth Performance Ephemera

Crimes of Reckless Youth: A Series calendar, 1990 Four copies of the tear off calendar

Return of Reckless Youth poster, 1991 Club Lower Links publicity calendar, 1991

All items courtesy Douglas Grew

Crimes of Reckless Youth: A Series (Boys Behind Bars) (1990) and ***The Return of Reckless Youth*** (1991) were each a month- long series curated and hosted by Douglas Grew and Lawrence Steger and presented at Chicago's Club Lower Links. The press release described ***Crimes of Reckless Youth*** as, "A weekly cabaret with film, video, poetry and performance art about Juvenile Delinquents, Deviants, and All-American Social Outcasts."

Cross From the Cross House

Courtesy of Steven Thompson

Photograph of the Cross House

By Jim Zanzi

Courtesy of Lisa Stone

The Cross House, a home at 1544 W. Chestnut assembled by Mitchell Szewczyk, stood across the street from one of Lawrence Steger's apartments. Steger left notes for an unfinished film project that would have combined images of the Cross House, a conversation with Szewczyk about the house, and reminisces of architect Mies van der Rohe from van der Rohe's Chicago associates.

Fruitcake Baked With The Ashes Of Lawrence Steger

Shortly after his death in 1999, Lawrence Steger's Antioch College community of friends and colleagues gathered at a memorial event to divide their portion of his ashes among themselves. A former teacher proposed baking some of the ashes into a large fruitcake as a memorial gesture in the spirit of levity that had so characterized their relations with Lawrence. The confection has since traveled among this community, accruing mementos, as each person in turn kept it for one year. With the blessing and permission of family and friends, the fruitcake makes its first public appearance in *Reckless Rolodex*.