

## I Saw the Earth Like a Broken Egg

curated by Sam Parker

July 22 - September 6, 2015

Opening reception: July 22, 6-8 PM



Howard Finster  
*I Saw the Earth Like a Broken Egg*, 1978  
Tractor enamel on metal in cypress frame  
12.25 x 18 inches

*I Saw the Earth Like a Broken Egg* borrows its title from a painting by Howard Finster, in which the artist envisions the world shattered and irreparable, cracked by the folly of modern man, "trying things that won't work." Curated by Sam Parker, the exhibition examines the increasingly nuanced relationship between artists and the natural world. Parker has selected works by artists who reimagine natural imagery in unexpected ways. Working in a wide variety of media, these artists incorporate organic elements into compositions that are playful, provocative, and enigmatic.

Fred Reichman drew much of the subject matter in his paintings from the intimate, insular world around him: wife, children, dog, cat, and the happenstance arrangement of humble possessions. *Cat with Garden Hose* depicts a subtly rendered feline silhouette surrounded by the free-form line of a bright blue garden hose. A champion of figurative art, Reichman remained loyal to the traditions of landscape and still life painting, while still creating innovative work that employs an irreverent perspective.

The satirical drawings of Philip Garner reflect a desire to tailor nature to human needs. He contrasts our commodity-obsessed society with the poetry of nature, and the results are delightfully absurd. In *TV Palm*, Garner envisions a commercial application for palm trees, while in *Unitrans Global Multiway*, he imagines a world united in perfect harmony via two massive monorail systems.

The ethereal sunflower people in the work of Charles Steffen represent a more direct relationship between humankind and the natural world. His figures, beings that are simultaneously both man and plant, perhaps allude to the uncertain future of flora on Earth: in order to survive, both must merge. Justin Hodges's sculpture *Resting Bird* features an artificial banana palm cradling a small monitor, which plays a manipulated video of a nesting bird. His work questions the human inclination to mimic nature while simultaneously obfuscating our own integration into natural systems.

*Blue Stones*, a small work on paper by the French-Mexican Surrealist Alice Rahon, depicts stones that have been filled in with abstracted line work that falls somewhere between automatism and hieroglyphs. Ellie Hunter's *Like Saying a Pond is My Brain* inverts Rahon's relationship of the container and the contained; where Rahon uses the silhouettes of stones to contain her drawings, Hunter uses fine netting to contain a collection of stones carefully selected from beaches in California. The gauzy netting veils these stones, and suspends them in airy arrangements.

Each artist in *I Saw the Earth Like a Broken Egg* holds a unique position in the wider art community. The exhibition includes work by those who have never before exhibited in a commercial context, as well as those included in prominent museum collections. In keeping with the gallery's dedication to art brut, the exhibition features "persons unscathed by artistic culture," as well as artists who are very much "on the scene."

The exhibition includes work by Georgia Blizzard, Thornton Dial, Howard Finster, Philip Garner, Graham Hamilton, Drew Heitzler, Justin Hodges, Ellie Hunter, Alice Rahon, Fred Reichman, Emily Ludwig Shaffer, Charles Steffen, Walker Tate, and Anna Zemankova.

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*Art brut is an expression of individual mythology, conducted outside the realms of mainstream culture by people who exist in society's constructed alterity, and returns us to the metaphysics of art where the creative impulse attempts to elucidate the mystery of being in the world.*



Justin Hodges  
*Resting Bird*, 2014  
Artificial banana tree, video installation  
47 x 36 x 33 inches



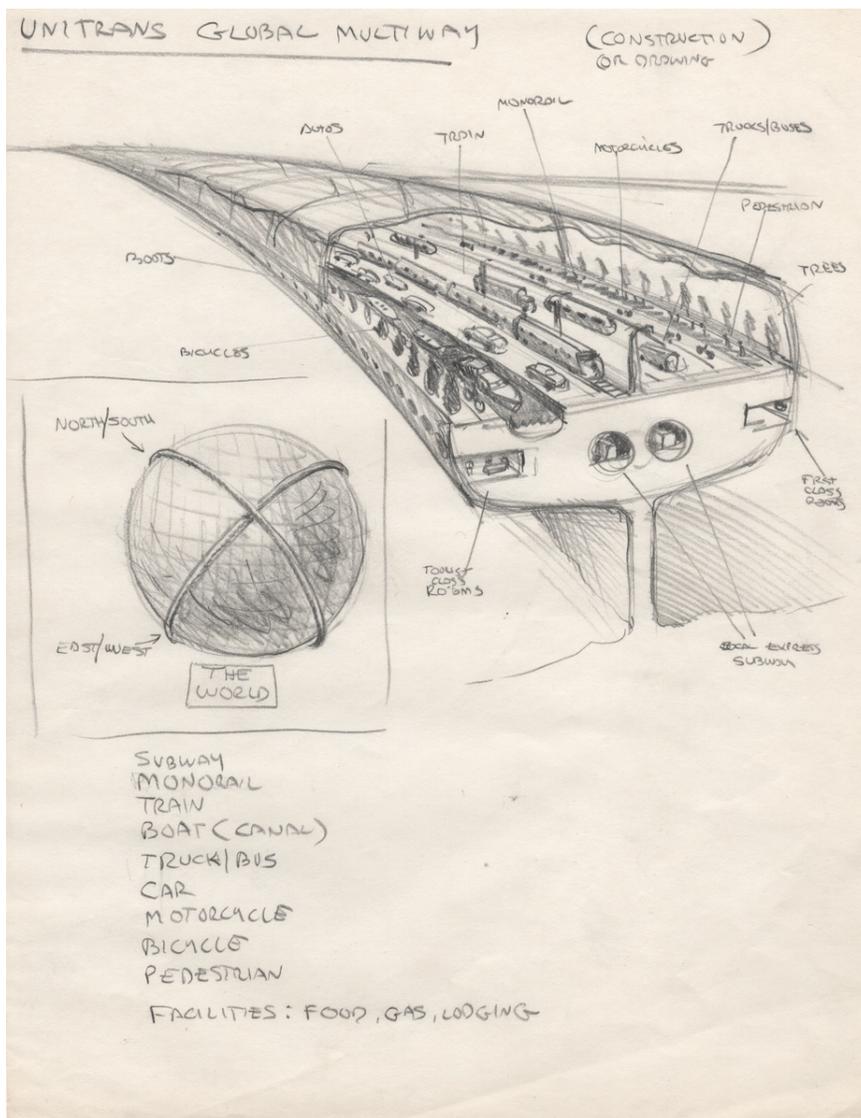
Thornton Dial  
*Birds Will Fly*, 1994  
Cut sheet metal, wire, beer can, concrete and enamel paint  
19 x 9 x 6 inches



Drew Heitzler  
*Untitled #9*, 2008  
Light-jet print  
16 x 20 inches  
Edition of 5 + 2 AP



Charles Steffen  
 Sunflower Nude, 1994  
 Pencil on brown paper bag  
 38 x 26 inches



Philip Garner  
 Unitrans Global Multiway, 1981  
 Graphite on paper  
 11 x 8.5 inches

# WORKSHOP

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Robert Tharsing  
*Paradise Interrupted*, 2015  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
48 x 60 inches

## Robert Tharsing: Paradise Interrupted

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In 1971, Robert Tharsing moved to Lexington, Kentucky to work as a painting instructor at the University of Kentucky, a land-grant institution with a newly established MFA program. Fresh from a short stint as an instructor at Carnegie Mellon after years studying at UC Berkeley under talents such as David Hockney and Elmer Bischoff, Tharsing was familiar with but weary of the dogma surrounding abstract painting. As a result, he began incorporating abstract elements into his work that could be recognized as human forms or physical places; he created grid-like structures that ceased to be flattening, non-objective agents, and instead became references to windows looking out onto and sometimes into the world.

The winter of 2015 was particularly cold. In an optimistic act of visual defiance, Tharsing began painting sunlit, tropical landscapes and summer views of his own garden. As the snow piled up outside the studio doors, he busily created his own versions of paradise, dividing them with grids and color bars that snaked across the surface, breaking up the fantasy, like a glitch on a television screen. Formally, Tharsing is interested in layering the abstract and the representational, juxtaposing flat elements next to images with visual depth. Metaphorically, these paintings are about something else.

Eight years earlier, in the fall of 2007, Tharsing developed bone cancer. The color bars that had appeared in his works for decades as formal structures became personal, akin to a television color test screen interwoven with static, a metaphor not only for the feeling of being scrambled, but also an acknowledgment of death. These paintings are immediate reminders of choices and paths, the stuff not of death but of life. Their resemblance to game boards is not coincidental. According to the artist, "the whole idea of the game board is like life, in segments, a path, a direction, and partitions, one event after another." In his most recent body of work, Tharsing leads us through gardens, tropical environments, and fields of color, affording us a glimpse of paradise, forever interrupted, but present.

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*Workshop at Christian Berst is devoted to the exhibition of contemporary artists engaged with the works or ideas present in the gallery's program, recent discoveries, and immersive installations.*