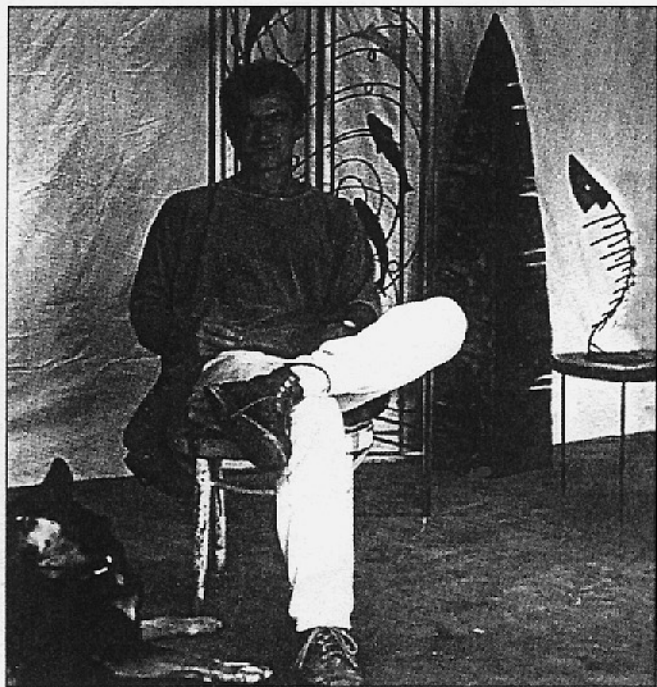


WAYNE ZEBZDA

Weighty messages with a light heart



Time was when use of the descriptive word "citized" connoted upscale glamour and savvy sophistication. Savoir faire, a kind of hip know- ingness was implied. Over the last few decades, however, the decline of American cities has enforced grimmer meanings on this urbane adjective. Homelessness and ghetto crime have taken the compliment out of the word, and Wayne Zebzda, currently an 'Oma'o artist and sculptor, made a West Coast reputation for himself by reminding his audience that more than bright lights and white knights lurked in the streets of our metropolises.

With a uniquely compassionate humor and pathos in installations and shows in and around San Francisco, the Zebzda touch used wood and welded metals to incorporate found objects in sculptural exhibitions that often required viewer participation. That participation almost always resulted in a turnaround nudge at the same viewer, leading him or her to think again about what is funny here, and why, and how is it so.

In a 1988 show entitled *Rip Off: On the Nature of Security*, the artist modeled his Heart Protector, a steel plate strapped onto the body to defend the wearer against heart- break (it didn't work, Wayne quickly asserts), and displayed a Bad Boy Tricycle trailing a ball and chain alongside Nice Doggie, Nice Doggie, an elaborate mesh kennel run where two attack trained guard dogs sniffed out gallery patrons and

supplied ferocious sound effects. What are we securing and what are the effects on our lives were the inherent questions.

From his studio space in San Francisco's skid row, Wayne produced pieces that repeatedly reflected his surroundings. In 1989, his 99 Bottles on the Wall on the Wall enticed viewers to partake of the bowery wino's favorite beverage. Ninety-nine bottles of Thunderbird were lined up on a shelf, labels to the wall, making a handsome display. The nudge came with the taster cups offered nearby as though the gallery goer were attending a haute vino tasting social. Twenty-eight bottles were consumed during the course of the show.

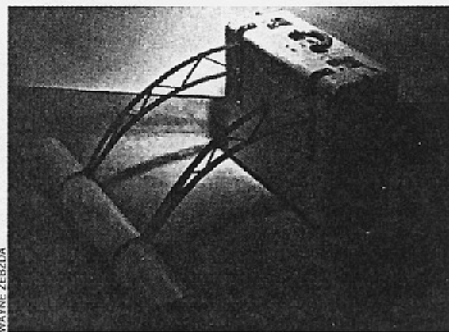
In the same exhibition, Cancrusher, a cylindrical metal weight suspended from on high by a pulley could be used to smash Miller Genuine Draft beer cans for recycling, turning them into gold doubloons – a wry comment on the economics of street imbibition. A contraption called Begging Machine mechanized the panhandler's solicitation – a very literal jab at the dehumanizing effects of that pavement gig.

After fifteen years in this urban milieu, where his truck was broken into thirteen times, Wayne pulled up stakes and followed his heart to Kaua'i in 1993, where he's been sinking his feet into the sand, casting his gaze to the mountains behind Lawa'i and trolling the deep blue ocean for fresh ideas and new material. Found objects island-style include beach plastic, driftwood and bits of fishing net, maybe a glass ball or two, or scraps of broken surf board. New references have bubbled to the surface slowly, thoughtfully as the citified sculptor settles into a green world where nature replaces asphalt as muse.

Still, a Zebzda strain of perfect humor percolates through Wayne's island work epitomized by Outrigger Suitcase, a 1940s era hardbody manila suitcase elegantly equipped with Hawaiian ama (outrigger) for fanciful seafaring. Design lines have taken on lighthearted airiness as seen in Koi Screen (pictured), a welded steel, functional sculpture in which the rippled pool of splashing fish changes as the screen folds open or closed. Lamps shaded by cut metal banana leaves or anthurium candle sticks reflect new influences, commercial place holders while soapbox sculptor finds his bearings in his new environment.

For Wayne Zebzda's true artistic role seems to be that of social commentator. Lately, anthropomorphous lava stones hold stony seduction for this carver and shaper of life's detritus. The rocks haunt him, but islanders will be the beneficiaries: Bets are on for big work of large scope on a public scale,

work that will prick our civic and eco-con- sciences and per- haps help us to envision and cre- ate a sane and soulful future in the Hawaiian Islands. ♦



"Outrigger Suitcase", by Wayne Zebzda

by Evelyn de Buhr