

# THE RADAR ART

BY SHANE NELSON



WHERE THOU ART From left to right: A stop sign from Wayne Zebzda's *Accidental Sculpture* series, 2003-2005. *An Opera; Apologies to Roger & Angelica*, 2006, by Cade Roster.



## THE NEW RADICALS *Hawaii's who's who of modern art unite!*

For Kauai artist Wayne Zebzda, inspiration often comes from the side of the road. Traffic signs covered in brightly colored stickers, guardrails bent at attractive angles, even the lane lines hold a compelling appeal. One of his recent sculptures, entitled *Laws of Attraction*, was made with long stretches of temporary yellow stripes pulled right off the pavement.

"I saw a huge pile of it one time, wrapped up next to the road like a giant ball of string," Zebzda remembers. "But by the time I could get back with my truck they were gone. So the next time I caught the guys taking the lines up, I stopped right away to ask if I could have them."

Zebzda's work will be featured in the Contemporary Museum's 8th *Biennial of Hawaii Artists*. This year the exhibition is giving seven artists from across the state a chance to represent the exceptional range of contemporary expression taking root here in the Islands.

"It's a really important show because the artists get to create a body of work for a specific space," explains Inger Tully, the museum's curator of exhibitions. "And it's really unusual in Hawaii that they get a space to create work in, especially for artists that are working with installations or sculpture."

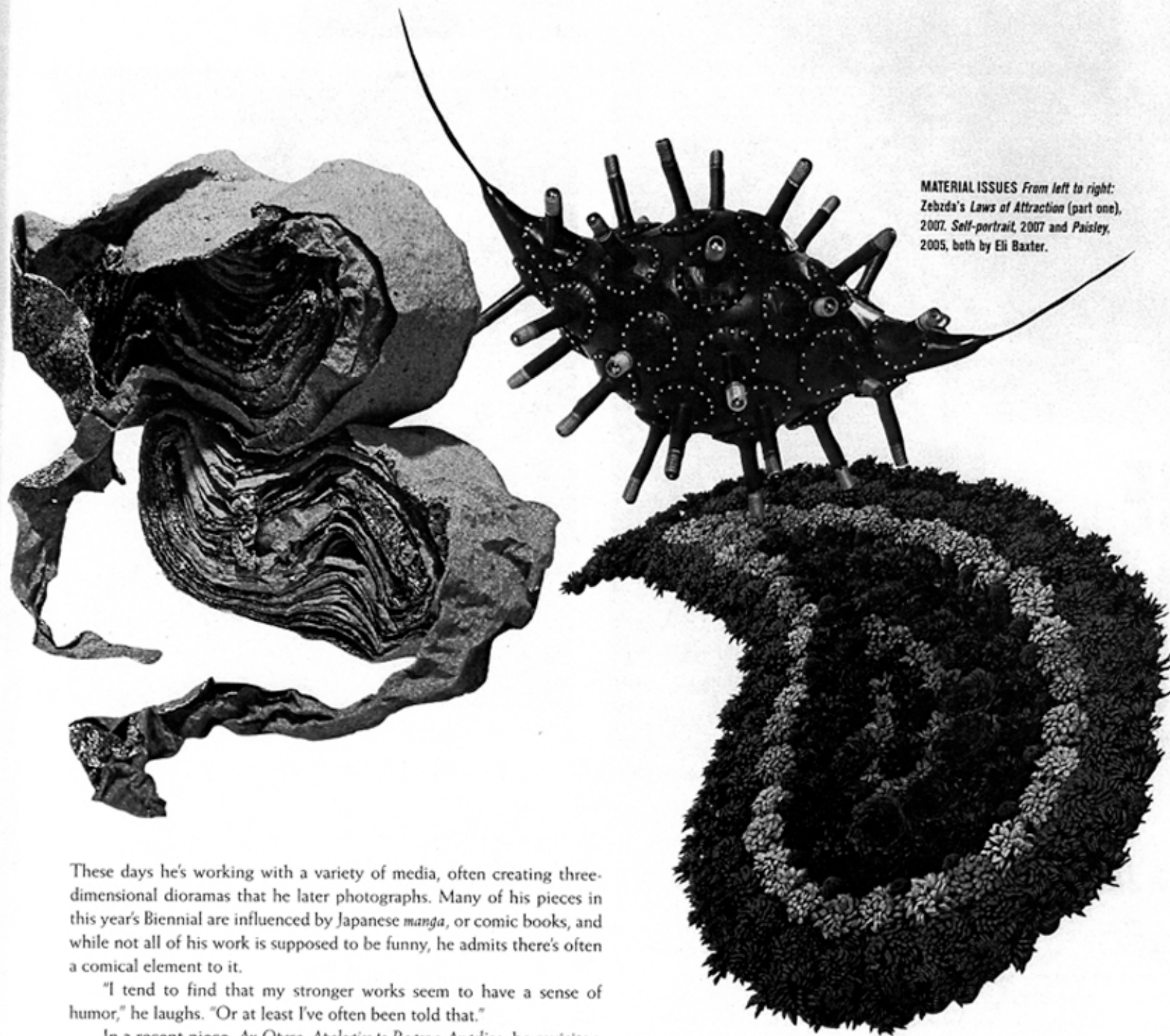
Zebzda, who's lived on Kauai for more than 13 years, often works with found objects and says his fascination with symbols and communication is what makes road signs so appealing. But all sorts of objects seem to inspire him.

"Sometimes ideas are triggered by something I've dragged home into the shop," he says. "I'll have an attraction to an object and bring it home, and then later on it will determine where it's going, which sometimes is just back out into the trash."

Shy as a kid, Zebzda says art, especially drawing, was a great way to say something without actually opening his mouth. Originally from Connecticut, he finished art school in San Francisco before exhibiting his work all over the Bay Area. Regular visits to Kauai started in 1980, but after a pair of art related jobs at hotels on both Kauai and the Big island, he decided Hawaii was home.

"The islands just captured my heart," he insists, "and that was it."

Hawaii's been home to Oahu artist Cade Roster for most of his life—the one exception being his art school years in Chicago. At that time, living as far from Hawaii as possible was important. Two degrees later, Roster came home for what he figured would be a relatively brief stay, met his wife, and has been here ever since.



MATERIAL ISSUES From left to right: Zebzda's *Laws of Attraction* (part one), 2007. *Self-portrait*, 2007 and *Paisley*, 2005, both by Eli Baxter.

These days he's working with a variety of media, often creating three-dimensional dioramas that he later photographs. Many of his pieces in this year's Biennial are influenced by Japanese *manga*, or comic books, and while not all of his work is supposed to be funny, he admits there's often a comical element to it.

"I tend to find that my stronger works seem to have a sense of humor," he laughs. "Or at least I've often been told that."

In a recent piece, *An Opera, Apologies to Roger & Angelica*, he revisits a well-known early 19th-century painting by the French master Ingres. Referred to affectionately by Roster as simply the "Cat Opera," the diorama features a vibrantly colored scene where felines play all the principal roles. Paint, clay, found objects, and even painstakingly sewn fabrics all combine to create a whimsical moment in what was surely quite a performance.

"I really like to take subjects that could be both dramatic and serious and kind of put a spin on it," Roster explains. "Take a poke at it and turn it around to see if it looks different in another light."

Some of the show's most labor-intensive work belongs to Oahu artist Eli Baxter. Many of her pieces are crafted from meticulously cut sections of recycled bicycle tires that she then fashions into extraordinarily ornate forms. Most of her recent work focuses on objects of power and prestige and owes its inspiration to an evening in front of the television.

"I was watching President Bush in the White House speaking in front of all these people and noticed several of these huge chandeliers," Baxter

remembers. "And I started thinking about the power that a certain object can have and how people want and desire objects."

Having lived Europe, and completed her undergraduate degrees in Seattle, Baxter decided the unique mix of cultures in Hawaii might make it a great place for art school. After completing her MFA in Intermedia, she stuck around to teach at UH Manoa while exhibiting all over Oahu. Today, a great deal of what she creates has a decidedly organic feel, and Baxter says that aspect of her work is undoubtedly connected to living here in the Islands.

"Since I've been in Hawaii I've definitely been influenced by the nature here," she says. "Especially in terms of how everything is always reproducing, always fertile. There's this fecundity here that's just absolutely over the top." ■

The Contemporary Museum Biennial of Hawaii Artists runs March 27 through August 17. 526.0232 or [www.tcmi.org](http://www.tcmi.org).