

VIEWS

Rhode Island School of Design | Fall 2000

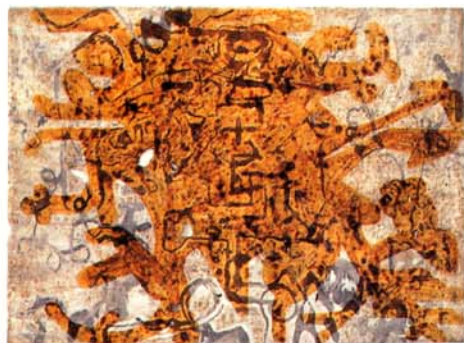


Bartel's "Cycle Study" (1998, mixed media on pages from *Metamorphosis*, 6 x 7.5")

making a tontine

Over the years **Todd Bartel '85 PT**, **Bo Joseph '92 PT**, **Michael Oatman '86 PT** and **Jamie Scott '94 AR** have discovered they share a lot more than their experiences at RISD. Since graduating and making their way as artists, they have been gravitating toward each other and the concept behind *Tontine*, their recent group show at the Hermen Goode Gallery in Brooklyn. Last spring's exhibition revolved around the mutually influential dialogue between these four artists and their common interest in disparate iconography; pentimento and palimpsest; the use of collage as a vehicle for layering imagery; and their insistence on "unfoldingobject" - a term Todd coined to describe the type of "art that tends to open up and unfold in time and not yield its mysteries all at once."

The concept represents a school of thought shared by these artists, who may some day open an actual school. At this point, although they sometimes create collaboratively, their imagery continues to evolve separately. Yet they feed off a shared philosophy, similar work ethic, related techniques and informal group crits.

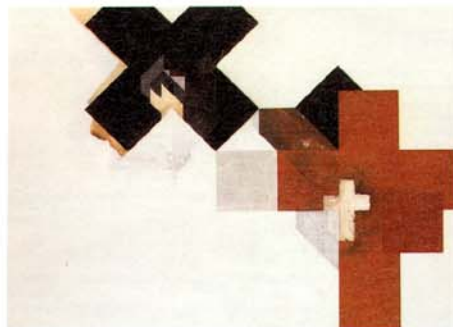


Joseph's "Chemical Wedding" (1997, mixed media on paper, 25 x 18.75")

Another common thread is their mentor, **Alfred DeCredico '66 PT**, a prolific painter and associate professor at RISD. Bo and Jamie met as freshmen in 1988, and then met Todd and Michael when each of them returned as visiting critics in DeCredico's drawing class. They, in turn, had met in 1983 "as a result of mutual friends saying we had to see each other's work." In recent years, their ongoing friendship

with Alfred along with their mutual interest in each other's work have allowed them to keep the spirit of RISD alive long after they've left.

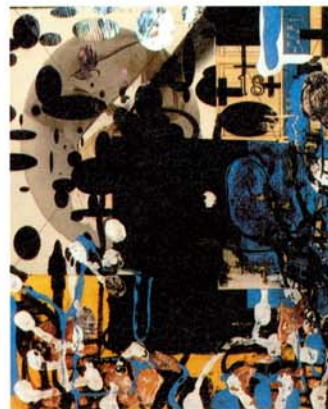
Using e-mail, phones and faxes, the four artists keep in touch. But periodic studio visits are the most important part of the equation. With Bo living in Brooklyn and working at the Allan Stone Gallery in Manhattan, he often sees Jamie, who freelances as an architectural model maker at the Rockwell Group, also in Manhattan. For the past eight years Todd had been head of the art program at the Mead School in Stamford, CT, a job he left in June to work in his studio full time and focus on painting, box constructions and collage, along with art consulting. Perhaps the most mobile, Michael has satisfied his thirst for artistic engagement as a visiting lecturer at SUNY/Albany, the University of Vermont and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he's currently teaching drawing and design in addition to being on the graduate faculty at Vermont College.



Despite divergent lifestyles, these four artists have developed what they dubbed a "tontine" when brainstorming about names for their first group show. "The whole concept of 'tontine' is that it is a pact based on shared goals and shared resources," they explain. "But we're bending the concept so that it's not about money or insurance, but about the ideas of unfoldingobject."

Those ideas continue to fuel their individual explorations as artists, while also bringing them together in a pact. "Coming from RISD we all have a common groundwork and common references," Bo explains. "We have also followed each other's work for so long that we can see where the other has come from, know what the efforts and goals are, and can better assess and evaluate changes and events in the work."

"In a very important way, just knowing that the other three are out there producing - fighting the good fight - helps reinforce our shared ethics. Whether we talk regularly or not, we have a certain faith in each other's commitment."



Oatman's "The Immortals: Past Master" (1998, mixed media on paper, 18 x 22")

Above: Scott's "Development of a Cube: Cross" (1998, mixed media on panel, 60 x 44")

For more on these artists, check www.unfoldingobject.com.