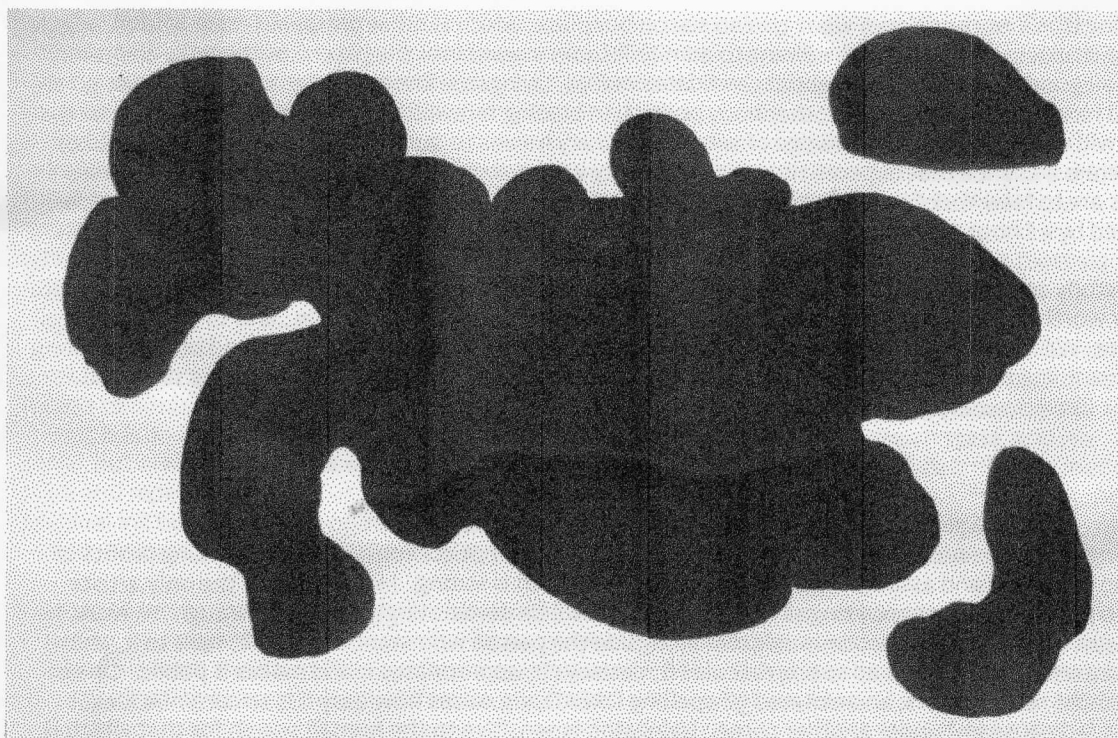


Bat Guano, Ebola Face, Teacher's Unions, Fighting For What's Right

a retrospective of the New Haven-era work
of David Livingston



Comings and Goings: Geographical Obit of a Traveling Alder

As we have learned over the past three years, we inhabit a country that is deeply divided, mostly in part by the capacity of our minds to imagine the ways in which we know and don't know one another, live similar existences (scaled up and down), and in the end, are all fragile beings. What we share is a life-sustaining need for certain comforts, be it food, time, space, access to water/air/sunlight, creativity, freedom, escape from the demons of our minds, family, friends, and sometimes intimate affairs with death. We also need to feel a sense of purpose.

What keeps us divided is being afraid of change and discomfort, most often that which halts us from picking up and moving, especially in old age. David Livingston's is a story of a long-term commitment, finding place, fondness for community, making a home and being changed. It took years for him to recognize the special qualities of New Haven, a city of 130,000, riddled with inequities that when scaled-up represent the oatmeal goop of our settler-colonial nation's post-post neo industrial melting pot. What greater fodder for an Alder looking to understand the human condition and make a difference than such a city.

Livingston's work critiques what we can see on our plate, which is more preserved meat, starch, veggie and chicklets rationed than we want to admit. It looks inward into the psyche of the belly and mind. As all good Alders and Presidential candidates realize, Livingston knows that the banquet must go on, and he will continue to serve other body politics. In bidding farewell to Alder Livingston, we know that he will only expand his knowledge of what democracy means to our distant neighbors in Milwaukee. There is a chance that our constituent connectivity will be strong...that New Haven's artist communities are to New York City's what Milwaukee's artist communities are to Chicago's. We are both separated by a 1 hour 40-minute commute.

To study and understand how we collectively and individually make sense of our identity and calculate our worth in relation to our neighbor is the key to solving the puzzle of people...and to getting the Vote. We New Haveners know that Livingston's new term in Milwaukee will paint and pollinate a long elegant line that links our coastal community with the middle of the country. From the sky it will look like a powdery golden line of magic.



Livingston as an Alder is fruitful and generous, and he does not conform to the misleading profits of granted power and assimilation. His legacy in New Haven is strong. He was one of the only artists who pursued performance tinged with humor, and will be devastatingly missed. Through his work, he taught us how the image communicates alongside the person who stands behind it, next to it, above it, draws it, sends it into ad space, ridicules it, destroys it, appropriates it and makes it public. One of his most recent pieces, an animated gif spelling DREAD, visualizes how easy it is to continue illegal acts (ad nauseam) under another name. Livingston is sensitive to the human search for that which is literal in abstraction, it's our condition, it's his condition too. And as he walks into the unknown, we send love, knowing that he will do this without the desire to conquer or make sense of it all. David Livingston, we will miss you.

- Sarah Fritchey

Bat Guano, Ebola Face, Teacher's Unions, Fighting For What's Right

I first met David in 2012, when we both showed work in an exhibition called *Local Builders: An Anthology of Connecticut Sculptors*, curated by local institution Stephen Kobasa. It was the beginning of a long and fruitful friendship, with many studio visits, trips to the city, and discussions about art. It seemed appropriate to mark David's departure from New Haven with a modest representation of the substantial amount of work he accomplished during his 7 years here.

In looking back upon David's work, it struck me how much of it has been eerily prescient of our current conditions. For instance, take his sculptural and fearless performance works, starting with the Worm series, in which he sewed phallic sculptures and wore them, attached to a standard business suit, in the streets of Manhattan. By engaging a craft (sewing) often seen as feminine, to create a phallic but limp and impotent appendage to be worn, he thwarts the traditional narrative of the performance artist and the Viagra-addled, hypermasculine businessman. Now it seems remarkably prescient, a sharp augury of the current #MeToo movement. It's literalness means that this work almost could not be made now, or at the least would have a radically different response in the streets.

A similar feeling of prophecy pervades his "political" works, particularly in 2014 when he ran for Alder of a non-existent neighborhood in New Haven, and in 2016, when he ran for President of the United States. At the time, his engaging speeches and ability to mimic the language, cadence, and simultaneous emptiness and import of political rhetoric seemed like a brilliant sendup of the structures of politics. His "campaign signs" of abstract, biomorphic ink blots dived deep into the possibilities of the collective subconscious mind. Now the work seems almost violent in its explosive alteration and debasement of language. The current President's ability to deflect any violation - sexual violence, treason, corruption, collusion - back onto a numbed and narcotized public is mirrored by the ink blots that David has drawn continuously over many years. We might as well be receiving ink blots via twitter from the vile leader of our country.

As I look back on the breadth of his work, what's perhaps most interesting is the way in which David moves between the visual and physical and the subconscious and intangible. His besuited political persona reminds me of Magritte's painting *Son of Man*, but instead of the green apple hovering over his face, it is an ink blob. His work plumbs the depths of the subconscious, the dream state, and the surreal, but always ties it back to the body that is the carrier. David's process is self-described as meditative and repetitive, leaving us with a body of work in which variation and difference is important. An individual ink blob may seem opaque, if beautiful; but as a body of work we begin to see a roadmap of thought, process, and the hand of the artist, as if a post-apocalyptic MRI in a world without electricity.

As you look at some of the photographic and video documentation of his performance works in the exhibition, you might be struck by familiar faces, maybe even yours. This speaks to the faith of David's friends in his work and his ability to rally a crowd in support of his sometimes unorthodox projects. It will be fascinating to see where David's work goes next - and how Milwaukee and the mid-West affect (or not) his conceptual and formal interests ("cheese fries" - as cited in his 2016 speech, *Vote Your Conscience*, at the Ferguson Library in collaboration with Franklin Street Works in Stamford). Our loss is Milwaukee's gain. Or in the words of The Candidate himself, "This is the future of America."

- Jeff Ostergren

Checklist of Works

Exterior (placed around yard)

The Candidacy (Campaign Signs)

Ink, corrugated plastic, steel
2014

Interior (L-R)

Chapel

2013

Digital Video, TRT 12:24

Untitled

Gouache and ink on paper

2017

Worm, 60 Centre Street

Digital photograph

2012

Untitled

Gouache and ink on paper

2017

Vote Your Conscience

HD Video, TRT 1:44

2016

Untitled (Worm Drawing), #4

Gouache on Arches 140 pound hot press

2012

River Worm

Digital Print

2011

The Candidacy (Documentation)

Digital Prints

2014

January 10, 2017

India ink on Arches 140 pound hot press
2017

Worm, At the Food Cart

Digital Print

2011

Untitled

India ink on Arches 140 pound hot press
2015

Husk (Stills for Forthcoming Stop-Motion Animation)

India ink on paper

2019

The Cold Hard Facts

Digital 3D animation, TRT :52

2019

skybox_3

Gouache on paper

2019

(hanging from loft)

Bunting

Rope, fabric

2016

Center

Raising the Dead

Polyester

2012