

Protesters (2012) detail, handmade chalkboard, found box, chalk, and rags, 12"x24"x12"

THE ART OF PROTEST

Zachary Skinner

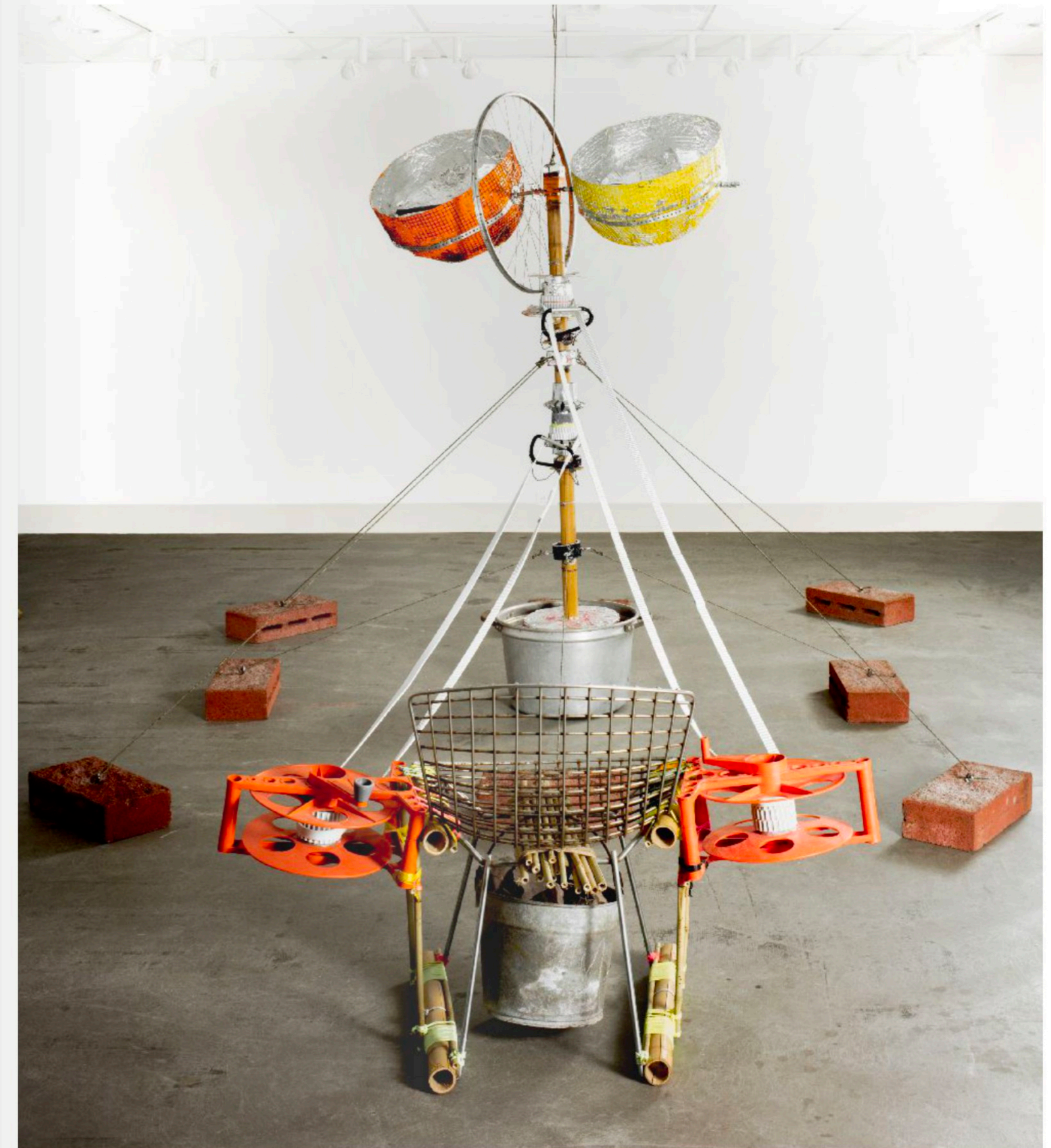
Skinner shares how his work is informed by humanitarian and ecological thought:

I named my most recent solo exhibit “Be The Change”. It comes from the words of Mahatma Gandhi; “Be the change you would like to see in the world.” The show combined works with issues of community and humanity (my ongoing *Protesters* project), as well as works about ecological and environmental concerns (my most recent structures broadly named

Geo-Robots). Although we can talk about them as separate bodies of work, I like to think of them as interconnected aspects of a bigger journey to create a positive change in this world through empowering the self. I can’t claim that I have made a great change in society, but I can claim that I have made some great changes in my own philosophy of “self”. I think that is an ability we all have within ourselves.

The power of individual action can resonate for years, with reverberations we

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Sun Reflector (2015), mixed media sculpture, approx. 7'x10'x15'

can't anticipate. So, of course my question as an artist is how can I cultivate the cultural change through the self? It is a very big, often complicated and humbling challenge.

A somewhat ridiculous saying comes to mind: 'You eat an elephant one bite at a time.' Being a vegetarian, this was a horrific saying to me at first, but it kind of resonates with me every time one must face something challenging. We have to break it down into little bite-sized pieces. So to me, that means in daily life I should spend a little bit of time each day thinking beyond the "self," into the shared concerns of humanity.

My work is informed by reading, lectures, and curious web searching about humanitarian leaders, ecology and sustainability. But I think what's important is to then live out that information. Humanitarian and deep ecological paradigms are not meant to sit idly in the mind. They are to be lived. To be lived, they cannot be taught to us, they must be experienced. They need to be interpreted, and internalized. Perhaps for an artist, the leap from inspiration to manifestation is a natural leap. Often the art making is our way of living our concerns; it can be our philosophy and activism wrapped into objects.

As a contemporary artist, I try to make sense of information through collected objects and materials, and often find humor, playfulness and irony in our material and information culture. Humor is a great asset for social transformation. Like food, it has the power to break down boundaries. There is something funny to me about trying to reinvent the wheel, which I often find myself



Above: *Wind Catcher* (2014), mixed media sculpture, 7.5'x3'x3'
Below: *Water Collector* (2015), mixed media sculpture, 6'x8'x3'





Protesters installation (2015), acrylic transfer/mixed media collage, reclaimed materials, Xerox posters, handmade chalkboards, approx. 12'x20'

doing. I am looking for ways to re-design very old, time-tested technologies, like a windmill, or water wheel, or solar cookers, but I am re-purposing them. My fantasy is for us to not just be Modernists or Futurists, but to mix our technology with old knowledge that has been lost.

Another aspect of humor that I embrace, is laughing at my own limitations. Some things are beyond the grasp of 'Man,' and certainly beyond my grasp even when I think the issue should be confronted fearlessly. I think Einstein said "Knowledge is limited, but

stupidity is infinite." In fact, for my recent *Geo-Robots* series, the sculptures owe everything to the stupidity of Man (and I don't separate myself from that stupidity).

...there is great value in citizens, like you and I, and children to tinker and cobble our way toward a sustainable ecosystem.

The idea of making a mechanism that should interact with and influence forces of nature, would not have meaning if we weren't close to a tipping point in the delicate balance between the ecosystem and Man's ambitions. But I don't want to say that my work is so ironic, or nihilistic as to never suggest solutions. An engineer stopped by my open studio not long ago,

and said he was quite amused that something which should be very complicated was made very simple and primitively in my sculpture. I think that is quite on point.



Protester (2012), acrylic transfer, mixed media collage, and graphite on reclaimed fabric, 9"x13"

and said he was quite amused that something which should be very complicated was made very simple and primitively in my sculpture. I think that is quite on point.

I believe there is great value in citizens like you and me and children to tinker and cobble our way toward a sustainable ecosystem. I mean, shouldn't our children be taught to confront the big issue of climate change from a young age? The mind of a child is very powerful. Why not build a solar system with them instead of watching tv? In the tradition of Art being a philosophic object, my work often acts as a catalyst, not a literal solution. But with my recent *Water Collector* series, the boundary has been blurred between being a catalyst and an actual func-

tional solution. So time will tell where these geo-projects will go.

What does it look like to 'practically' use my art and career to serve my community?

Jerry Saltz, a well-known art critic, said "Art influences through sublimation." Certainly my artwork is a slow-burning fire, not a blaze. It can spark a thought or notion that may change a single person, if even for a moment. Maybe over time that notion grows into something larger, and is shared with someone else. And that is success to me.

Some people ask is your Artwork enough? Can it replace activism? I think it is not. And for me, it doesn't replace activism outright. But my art maintains and nourishes a very

pure part of my life. It is a well of inspiration that inspires personal action in life. My art inspired me to try being Vegan, to participate in the NYC Occupy Wall Street protests, and join an Earth Initiative group (Green Mountain Earth Initiative, Brooklyn NY). Since moving to a more rural area in the Hudson Valley, my art has inspired me to use my studio space to host a free meditation and yoga group led by friends and to volunteer for two non-profit organizations, creating artistic media for their fundraisers. I also joined ReThink Local, an organization which aims to redefine models of business,

breaking from the Wall Street profiteering model and instead concentrating on small, sustainable, eco-friendly, local-friendly ways to approach economics.

I have faith that small changes can make an impact over a lifetime, not just for myself, but for the world.

These are all little steps, and yes I should do more (that is always the challenge). But for now, I make very personal changes in my community and in myself with limited resources.



Protesters Installation with Participants (2015), acrylic transfer, mixed media collage, reclaimed materials, Xerox posters, and handmade chalkboards, 12'x20'

