



/ solo exhibition /

oct 27 - dec 8, 2010

willie
COLE

CREDITS

The College of New Jersey

President

DR. R. BARBARA GITENSTEIN

Provost

DR. CAROL BRESNAHAN

Dean, School of the Arts and Communication

DR. JOHN LAUGHTON

Chair, Art Department

ANITA ALLYN

Director, Art Gallery

SARAH CUNNINGHAM

Graphic Designer/Associate Professor, Art Department

CHUNG CHAK

SPONSORS

Willie Cole: Solo Exhibition is sponsored by the Art Gallery, the School of the Arts and Communication, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the Committee for Cultural and Intellectual Community at The College of New Jersey.

The exhibit is also made possible in part by the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission through funding from the Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

IMAGES

All images and artworks are courtesy of Willie Cole and Alexander and Bonin, New York.

FRONT COVER

Pixels

4 holographic glitter, resin and steel each
8' diameter, 2009, Photo: Jason Mandella
Installed at the College of New Jersey

BACK COVER

Double-Headed Gas Snake

articulating sheet metal hose with metal nozzles and rebar
46.5" x 83" x 59", 1997, Photo: Orcutt and van der Putten



/ solo exhibition / oct 27-dec 8, 2010



Infestation, 4 scorched plywood panels, 42" x 168", 2000, Photo: Orcutt and van der Putten

ARTIST TALK:

Nov 18,
11:30am-12:30pm,
Mayo Concert Hall,
Music Building

RECEPTION:

Nov 18,
5:00pm-7:00pm,
Art Gallery,
Art & IMM Building

WILLIE COLE: SOLO EXHIBITION

To celebrate the new Art & IMM Building at TCNJ and *Pixels*, the public artwork commissioned for its exterior, TCNJ Art Gallery is thrilled to present a solo exhibition of artist Willie Cole's work spanning the last twenty years. Working with the artist and his gallery, Alexander and Bonin, I aimed to assemble an exhibition that puts *Pixels* into context and allows a deeper understanding of this important American artist's body of work.

The two earliest pieces in this exhibition, *Untitled (You iron with that professional touch!)* and *Untitled (You steam out wrinkles as you iron!)*, are from the beginning of Cole's extensive artistic investigation into the iron as both conceptual motif and mark maker. These shadow box assemblages pairing actual irons with photocopies of a woman ironing are poignantly awkward. In each, the disproportionate mask like iron is precariously perched on the woman's grainy neck and painted to exaggerate its human attributes. The image (used in both pieces) appears to be a stock advertising photo of a housewife with a shiny new iron. Pasted at the bottom of each is the titular wry slogan proclaiming the woman's skill as a laundress. In this work, Cole underscores the iron as the embodiment of domestic work while exploring its anthropomorphic form.

Wind Mask is an early example of Cole's technique of combining vast numbers of the same massed produced, now discarded object to create new sculptural forms. Patterson Sims describes Cole's self-termed practice of "exponentialism" as "the capacity to take singular objects..., and, by multiplying their number, turn them into more universal, transcendent statements."¹ In the case of *Wind Mask*, hairdryers are fused together to create a mask strongly referencing African art while also illustrating the excess of American consumerism through repetition.

Cole's *Double-Headed Gas Snake*, made of salvaged gas hoses, is perhaps more purely a readymade, insofar as the sculpture is a hose and only a hose. However, Cole is not a purist. By internally supporting and positioning the hoses, choosing an object with embedded meaning, and naming the piece, he creates a pointed critique depicting the oil industry as a venomous serpent poised to strike. While created in 1997, this undeniably political piece remains relevant today in the aftermath of the BP oil spill and the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

An acrostic poem of sorts, *How Do You Spell America? #6* is a biting analysis of American society. A-M-E-R-I-C-A is written across the top of a schoolroom chalkboard, below, a loose grid of words starting with each letter fill the board. Read vertically or horizontally, disjointed sentences like, "American Malaise Eases Right Into Chronic Apathy," tell a grim story. The use of the familiar tools of education is an effective method with which to critique the idea of "America" and the ways that idea is taught and perpetuated. Cole continues his use of acronyms and grids in a later series that includes *America Papers III*.

¹ Sims, Patterson, *Deep Impressions: Willie Cole Works on Paper*, exh. cat. New York, NY: The James Gallery, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York, 2010

Cole's frequent use of scale to exaggerate and demand reconsideration is powerfully manifested in *Iron Board I* and *Iron Board II*. As large as the viewer, these plywood panels cut in the shape of an iron's face are striking in their size and simplicity. Cole regularly highlights rather than conceals the unique physical attributes of his materials. In this case, the wood grain patterns are an integral component of the design, texture and surface of the work. The rawness is intensified by wax filled holes paralleling an iron's steam vents.

Comprised of 138 bowling balls resurfaced with glittering patterns of national flags, the installation, *International Balls 2000*, suggests that global politics is a massive game of chance and skill. Whether set up to reference marbles or pool, the sheer magnitude of the piece inevitably involves the viewer as would-be player as she moves throughout the space. Cole uses play to reveal the capricious nature of international deal making.

In many works Cole uses a hot iron to scorch paper, wood or cloth. The burns themselves invoke the branding of slaves, while the artist uses the single image of the iron to represent a wide array of ideas including a slave ship, warrior's shield or mask, or sometimes in repetition to create larger, more complex images. Unlike the artist's more orderly scorch patterns, the random scattered marks crowding the four wooden panels of *Infestation*, and the artist's choice of title, suggest a swarm of unwelcome insects.

The title of *Kitchen tji wara* refers to the antelope headdresses worn by the Bambara in northwest Africa on which the piece is modeled. A kitchen table and chairs reconstructed into a fantastic chrome and Formica creature, the sculpture makes the foreign domestic, and the domestic foreign. By bringing African tribal culture into the quintessential American kitchen of the 1950s, Cole seems to long as much for his African roots as the fantasy of apple pie America.

In *Pixels*, Cole explores scale and tangibility with wit and immediacy. Comprised of four large sparkling spheres representing digital pixels, Cole effectively uses the building blocks of the digital realm and merges them into the many media that are taught and learned in TCNJ's new Art & IMM Building. By enlarging the pixels and making them solid in the literal sense, Cole demands that the viewer reevaluate the very essence of how things in general, and art in particular, are made.

In considering Cole's practice over the last twenty years it becomes clear that he not only recycles found objects, but also his own ideas, repeatedly returning to motifs (iron, mask, glittering balls) and techniques. Not at all rote repetition, each reinvestigation deepens his, and our, understanding. Cole's ongoing use of humor, naming, and exaggerated scale are also evident in the works exhibited here at TCNJ. Also noteworthy is the artist's ability to fuse the multiple influences of Minimalism, Pop Art and African art into a cohesive body of work that is uniquely his own.

SARAH CUNNINGHAM

Director, TCNJ Art Gallery

October 2010



●
Untitled (You steam out wrinkles as you iron!)

metal iron, colored and xeroxed paper in wood and glass frame
16" x 12.75" x 3.5", 1989
Photo: Bill Orcutt



●
Untitled (You iron with that professional touch!)

metal iron, colored and xeroxed paper in wood and glass frame
16" x 12.75" x 3.5", 1989
Photo: Bill Orcutt

EXIT

Game Show
modern sculptures by Billie Lee



LEFT



Iron Board I

wood, wax and woodstain

75.5" x 37.5" x 3", 1998

Photo: D. James Dee

RIGHT



Iron Board II

wood, wax and woodstain

75.5" x 37.5" x 3", 1998

Photo: D. James Dee



OPPOSITE PAGE



International Balls 2000

urethane on 136 bowling balls

each ball 8.5" diameter overall dimensions variable, 1999

Photo: Oren Slor

Installation view from *Game Show: Installations and Sculptures* by Willie Cole,
The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, 2001

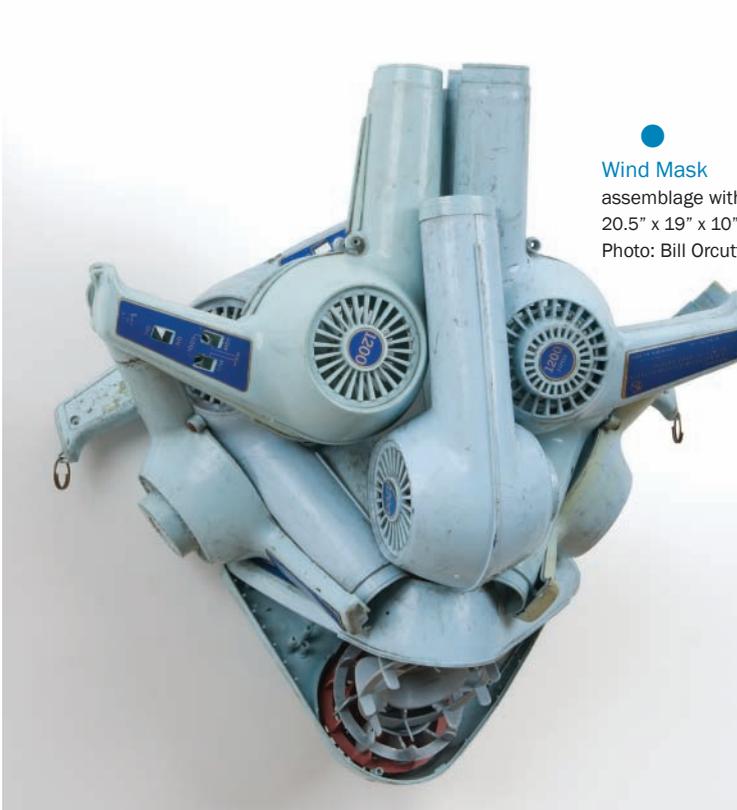


Kitchen tji wara

vinyl, wood and metal

98" x 47" x 30", 2004

Photo: Bill Orcutt



●
Wind Mask

assemblage with hairdryers
20.5" x 19" x 10", 1991
Photo: Bill Orcutt

BIOGRAPHY

WILLIE COLE is a native and current resident of New Jersey who is well known for his ability to transform ordinary objects into powerful works of art. He is represented by Alexander and Bonin in New York. He has exhibited extensively and is also the recipient of many awards including the Augustus Saint-Gaudens Memorial Fellowship, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant and the Penny McCall Foundation Grant. Additionally, his work is included in many museum collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

 The College of New Jersey



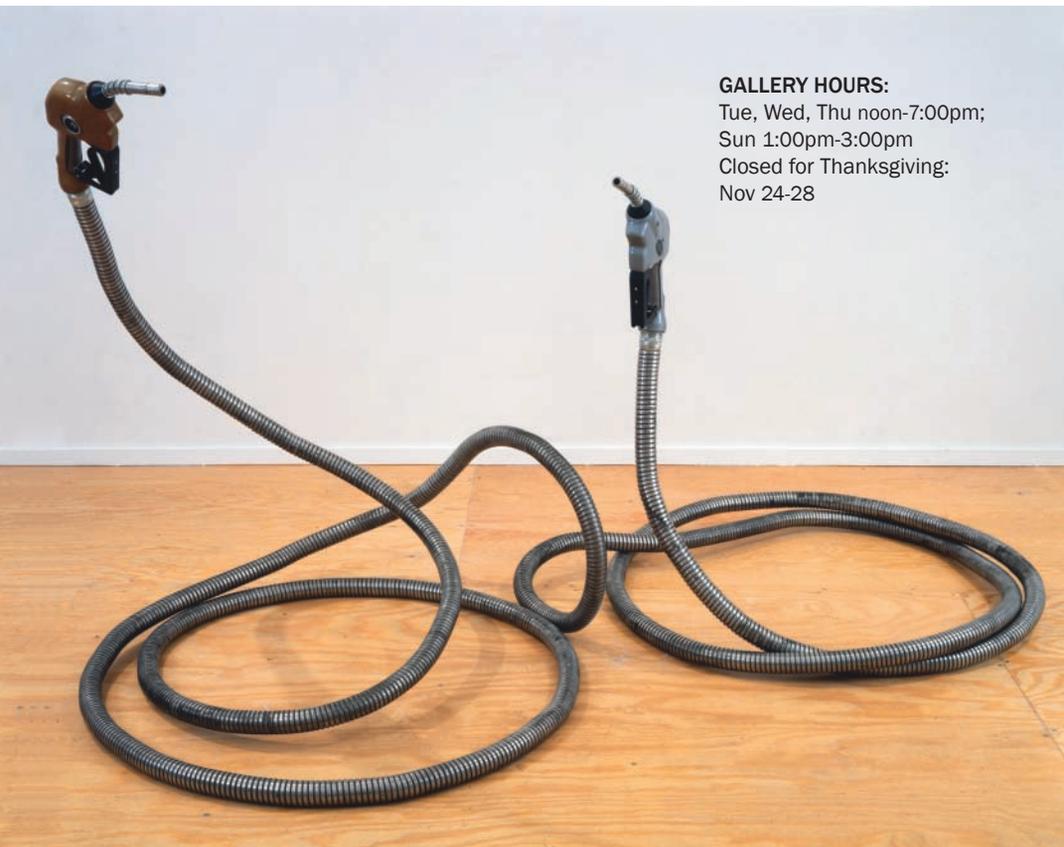
ART GALLERY

The College of New Jersey
115 Art & IMM Building
2000 Pennington Road
Ewing, NJ 08628

tcag@tcnj.edu
www.tcnj.edu/~tcag
609-771-2198

GALLERY HOURS:

Tue, Wed, Thu noon-7:00pm;
Sun 1:00pm-3:00pm
Closed for Thanksgiving:
Nov 24-28



This program is made possible in part by the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission through funding from the Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders, and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, A Partner Agency of the National Endowment of the Arts.

