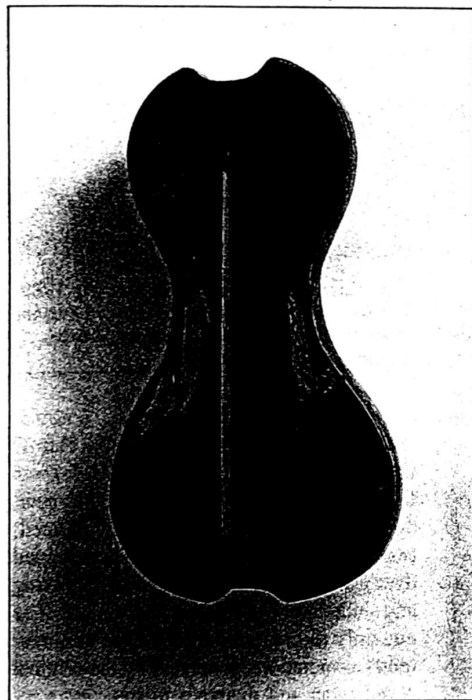


Timothy Hawkinson

CONCRETE METAPHORS

Sometimes a single work of art turns out to be emblematic of an artist's life, of his total creative output, and of all he stands for. In the case of Los Angeles artist Timothy Hawkinson, it's a concrete violin that



Violin, 1988, recalls Man Ray's *Violon d'Ingres*, 1924, and Ingres' *The Great Bather*, 1808.

takes on this importance, blending the artist's personal memories with layers of art history in a work that is both intimate and intellectually appealing.

Violin (1988), recalls Man Ray's famous photograph *Violon d'Ingres*, the black-and-white image of a nude woman's back altered to read as a violin. The photograph, in turn, is an allusion to Ingres, to his violin playing, and to his famous painting *The Great Bather* (1808), in which the subject sits with her sensual back turned to the viewer. In addition, one can scarcely avoid the reference to *musique concrète* (the movement begun in the late '40s of recording live sounds and then modifying them electronically to make music). The tone bar that was once hidden inside of Hawkinson's violin is now stuck on the outside of the concrete body, making visible what was once the secret source of the sound. Since this artist delights in rendering the double

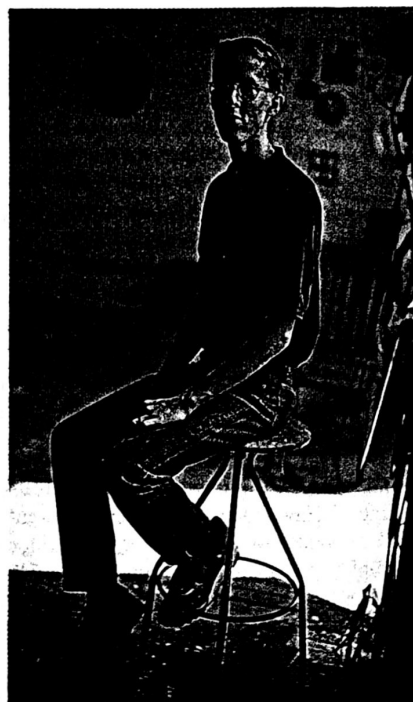
entendre, both verbally and visually, you can be certain he is aware that in making the object physically sound, he deprives it of its potential for sound.

To this intricate web of external allusions are tiers of references to Hawkinson's own past. *Violin* was made from the instrument the artist used to play as a child. Though he eventually gave up playing the violin, he for a while considered making musical instruments as a career and even fashioned his own mandolin. So by pouring concrete into the violin, Hawkinson was forced to externalize, perhaps even exorcise, some of his youthful memories and aspirations.

Hawkinson, who is 28 years old, manages to combine the irreverence of Dada with the metaphysical earnestness of Joseph Cornell to produce a tantalizing body of sculptural reliefs, drawings, and paintings. And it has been well received both critically and commercially. The artist has been in a number of group shows, including one last year at Curt Marcus Gallery in New York, and solo shows, with his first, in 1981, at Carlson Tower Gallery in Chicago. His show last year at Ace Contemporary Exhibitions in Los Angeles nearly sold out. Prices for Hawkinson's work currently range from \$2,500 to \$3,500. He is having another show at Ace this month.

Of Hawkinson's debut exhibition at Ace, Christopher Knight, the art critic for the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, wrote that it "signals the arrival of a quirky and unusual artistic voice. . . . The very refusal to allow a singular style to restrict direction is itself one cue to the young artist's interest."

Lanky and boyish with large glasses, Hawkinson has the air of a precocious inventor. In a shy and distracted way, he

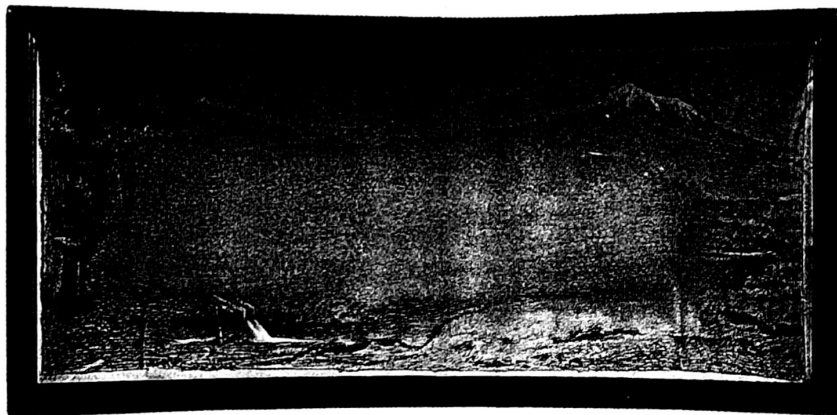


DEREY NICKS

"I try to keep the work honest," says Timothy Hawkinson.

explains his working process: "I find a fragment of what I need and have to make up the rest. I often simulate the found object." Rather than beginning with a structure, "the form of the object follows the idea." He began, he says "making intimate, reliquary kinds of pieces. I wanted to include art-historical references in work that comes from everyday encounters. I do a lot of dredging of art history to keep the work alive for me." This associative process accounts, to a great extent, for the eclecticism and freshness of Hawkinson's work.

Hawkinson lives in a studio in downtown Los Angeles with his wife, painter Patty Wickman. He confesses that his work today is closer to the kind of art he was doing in high school. While he was at San Jose State



COURTESY ACE CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

In *Depressed Drawing*, 1988, a depressing landscape has been erased from the center. The paper puns on the image by being "depressed" into a concave wooden frame.

University, from which he graduated with distinction, earning a BFA degree, he was doing painting on vinyl and using it to make upholstered biomorphic objects. His interest at that time was in the formal properties of color and shape. After graduating he spent a year, 1985–86, in the MFA program at the University of California at Los Angeles, but he left before completing the degree, feeling that art education was too confining. One of his UCLA instructors, artist Alexis Smith, recalls: "He was already formed when he got to school. There was nothing to teach him."

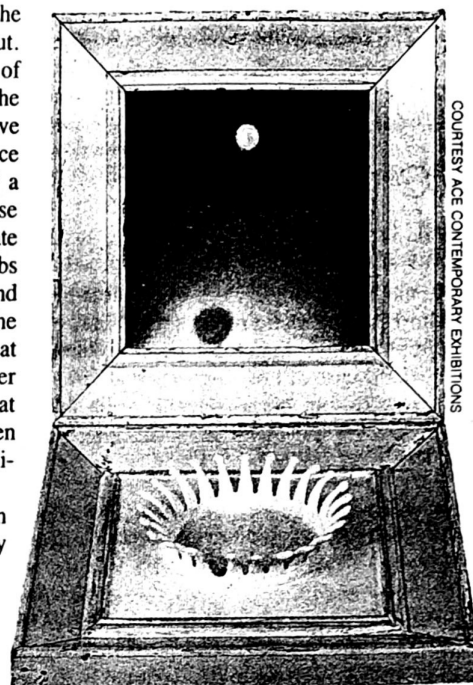
Hawkinson was raised in Los Altos, California, north of San Jose. His parents owned an antiques store in nearby San Carlos. Though he acknowledges this as an obvious influence, he protests, "I'm turned off by the preciousness and value attached to old artifacts. I'm interested in tossed-off objects." Hawkinson looks for a different kind of value—a "show of concern, for example, on some anonymous person's part, for the object, the way it was repaired or something." Frames provide another catalyst. "Usually I have an image or idea I want to deal with, but the frame can determine the materials and the tone."

In *Depressed Drawing* (1988), a delicate pencil rendering of a melancholy or de-

pressing landscape has been erased in the middle of the picture—literally wiped out. The "depressing" elision of the center of the drawing is reinforced physically, the paper being "depressed" into a concave wooden frame. The art-historical reference is Rauschenberg's notorious erasure of a drawing by de Kooning. While in that case the one artist was erasing his immediate predecessor in art history, Hawkinson rubs out a hackneyed image of an old mill and stream with snow-capped mountains in the background, a metaphor of tranquility that has become a calendar-art cliché. Whether using objects or images, he renovates that which is timeworn or inoperable and then returns it to society in more credible condition.

Bringing his quirky esthetic to bear on sundry disciplines has resulted in a widely varied body of work. "I have a fear of repeating myself," Hawkinson admits. "Each piece opens a different corridor of thinking. I want each piece to contain a totality of concerns." All of his works are united by an awareness of the cyclical issues in art history, including investigations into the nature of perception and time.

With tongue firmly in cheek, Hawkinson takes on the problem of representing two-



COURTESY ACE CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

Hawkinson's *Untitled (Milk Splash)*, 1988, freezes the action anew of Harold Edgerton's famous 1957 stop-action photograph of a drop of milk.

and three-dimensional space. *Untitled (Milk Splash)* (1988)—derived from Harold Edgerton's startling photograph *Milk-Drop Coronet* (1957)—freezes the action anew, this time in plaster and paint. A painted, two-dimensional drop of milk is suspended over a three-dimensional splash, removing any indication of cause and effect. The ungainly re-creation strips away the miraculous associations generated by the original photograph and manages to stop, even rewind, time.

Hawkinson demystifies many of the received ideas of art history. For example, *Vibrating Lines* (1988) is a row of black and white bars that might constitute a generic geometric painting. Parodying and simultaneously reviving the Op Art of the '60s, Hawkinson wanted the composition to vibrate physically as well as optically, but he used an electric switch rather than charged colors and patterns to produce the effect. "I thought of it as a *caricature* of Op Art," he grins.

For art critic Susan Kandel, "It is only when you get the 'joke' that Hawkinson's objects begin to speak."

With such strategic humor, Hawkinson manages to subvert the drama of art history. "I got tired of work that only wanted to conceptualize ideas," he says. For, above all, Hawkinson explains, "I try to keep the work honest." —Hunter Drohojowska

Hunter Drohojowska chairs the department of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Otis/Parsons in Los Angeles.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DENISE NICKS

The artist in his downtown Los Angeles studio, with *Untitled (Elongated Dart Board)* (top left) and *Untitled (Crucifix Scale)* (bottom right), both 1989.