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Robert Dean Stockwell
One of the Buys
 2005
 Craig Krull Gallery



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Times Squared
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SOLAR BUZZ

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Robert Dean Stockwell, "Collage, Assemblage and Art," Oct. 21-Nov. 30, 2006, at Craig Krull Gallery, 2525 Michigan Avenue, Santa Monica, Ca. 90404.

When I call Robert Dean Stockwell at his home in Taos, N.M., he is listening to *Modern Times*, the new Bob Dylan CD. "Dylan has always found openings in his audience that he can penetrate into," he says. Even over the telephone, this actor-turned-artist comes across as preternaturally hip, though he admits that his hipness (and that of so many other West Coast bohemians) was influenced by Beat artist Wallace Berman. In conservative Los Angeles of the 1950s, Berman was the pied piper who attracted Stockwell, George Herms and Dennis Hopper, all of whom credit him with inspiring their entry into the realm of visual creativity.

Stockwell's recent photo collages and new sculptures made of dice are on view, along with paintings by Llyn Foulkes, at the Craig Krull Gallery in Santa Monica. Stockwell, one of the few child actors to maintain a successful career as an adult, began making collages in the middle of the '50s. One of his designs was used as the cover of Neil Young's 1977 album *American Stars 'n Bars*.

Stockwell's collages have a Pop Art flair and reflect the '50s funk esthetic of artist-friends like Berman and Herms, as well as the still-earlier influence of Surrealist collage. Originally, Stockwell cut and pasted witty bits trimmed from newspapers or magazines in keeping with the antic, existentialist collagist spirit of the '50s and '60s. He employs the same technique these days, buying multiple copies of his source material in order to have numerous identical images. To create order, Stockwell often composes on a grid or allows the imagery to reflect itself as though in a mirror. Among the images in his new show are disembodied lipsticked lips, an old-fashioned conductor's arm with a lantern, machine parts, scenes of war and conflict, sunbursts, beauty queens and rocket ships. The collages sell for \$2,500-\$9,500.

The result is the kind of utterly bizarre visual landscape that appeals to L.A. artists now as well as then (an inclination seen in Foulkes' works as well). Additionally, as a New Mexico resident, Stockwell seems to have been destined to include at least one picture with a floating bone, and his sculptures of crosses made of plastic dice meld Georgia O'Keeffe with the presence of casino gambling.

After Berman was killed by a drunk driver on the eve of his 50th birthday in 1976, Stockwell stopped making collages. "Berman was the closest friend I ever had," he says. "I had been making art since I was seven, but Berman's art was an enlightenment. Just visiting his house and seeing the work of other cutting-edge artists opened a window of vision for me."



Neil Young's 1977 album *American Stars 'n Bars*, with cover design by Robert Dean Stockwell



Robert Dean Stockwell's *Nectar Crosses* (2006) at Craig Krull Gallery



Robert Dean Stockwell
What Goes Up
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In the 1980s, Stockwell rededicated himself to his acting career and his association with the art world led him to appear in movies like *Blue Velvet* and *Paris, Texas* as well as in many TV series, including *Quantum Leap* and *Battlestar Galactica*. A few years ago, he returned to making kaleidoscopic collages, using a computer.

At random intervals, Berman would publish a magazine called *Semina* which included collages and poetry, sending it to friends and colleagues. His interest in the mystical, especially Kabbalah, permeated his work. "Berman had a wonderful thing for communication, sending incredible collaged postcards to encourage people, and I got caught up in that. Some people got postcards from me in those years."

Besides involving Stockwell in a West Coast version of Mail Art, Berman also prompted him to begin collecting art. "Once Wallace said that Jess had pictures he needed to sell. He sent a message to me because he knew I had 300 bucks. That's how I have my collection."

Stockwell was also the one who put up \$150 to bail Berman out of jail after he was arrested for exhibiting obscene drawings at the Ferus Gallery in 1957. Stockwell stood in court with Berman. "The judge was going to make a decision about whether it was obscene or not. Berman jumps up and goes to the black board and writes, 'There is no justice here, only revenge'."

"I'm 70 now and I have met incredible people, but Wallace was somewhere else," Stockwell says. "I have never known anyone who could read your mind like he could. He was the funniest guy I ever knew and the greatest with the women. He didn't even need to be flirtatious or seductive."

Another actor who mixed film and art in Los Angeles in the '50s and '60s was Dennis Hopper. "I was not close to Dennis then, but we knew our arrowheads were aimed at the same target," Stockwell says. "As of today, he's buying works of mine and I just got to see his show [at Ace Gallery]. I think it's fantastic."

"My life began to shape itself after meeting Wallace, seeing his art and understanding what that art meant. Ever since then, my life has been a flow to art. Berman had a phrase: Art is Love is God. That has been driving me throughout my life."

The work of Stockwell, Hopper, Herms and many others can be seen in the mesmerizing "Semina Culture: Wallace Berman and His Circle," organized for the Santa Monica Museum of Art and currently on view at the Berkeley Art Museum, Oct. 18-Dec. 10, 2006. The show appears in New York at the Grey Art Gallery, Jan. 16-Mar. 31, 2006. Stockwell is mentioned some 30 times in the superb catalogue by curators Michael Duncan and Kristine McKenna.

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Rollercoaster

2006

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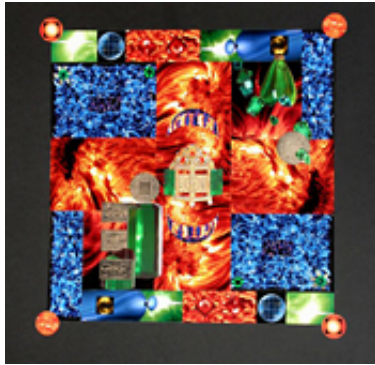


Robert Dean Stockwell

The Palm Reader

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Solar Buzz

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Robert Dean Stockwell with *Ziabirds*