

ARTFORUM

B. Wurtz



Left: B. Wurtz, *Untitled (Autobiographical Sculpture)*, 1972, wood, acrylic, 44 x 26 x 15".
Right: B. Wurtz, *Untitled (Know Thyself)*, 1992, canvas, thread, string, socks, 17 1/2 x 18 x 5".

B. Wurtz's first solo exhibition in London is on view at Kate MacGarry from June 7 to July 13, 2013. The show will include a range of his work, most of it made with found objects and raw materials—such as wood, metal, and marble—from the 1970s to the present. Here, Wurtz reflects on his long career and his recent exhibitions.

WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG I had the Eames Giant House of Cards, which unfortunately I destroyed because I played with it so much. Those cards and the images on them were some of my earliest tools (and inspirations!) for making sculptures. I would often make tall towers out of the cards and then proceed to dump our cat on them from above. If I'd known I was harming the cards I would have stopped, but since I was the kind of kid that was constantly building things, I didn't think anything of it! I'd give anything to still have that set today. In the 1980s there was a widespread resurgence of interest in midcentury modern design, and many books came out on the Eameses. I remember coming to a page with the images of the cards and having a flood of memories rush back.

As I got older and began to consciously make art, I started signing my work with the initial "B." (B. Wurtz)—partly because it's shorter to write than "Bill Wurtz." I decided I liked it because it held back some information. I didn't go so far as to give myself a new name ("R. Mutt," for example), but I was

(and still am) more interested in having someone look at the work and draw whatever they can from it, rather than regard the person who made it. For example, there's a piece that's going to be in my London show, an older work from 1972 that I nicknamed the "autobiographical sculpture." While it is, technically, autobiographical—in that it represents my age at its making (twenty-four)—it is more a formal statement than an emotional evocation of my life. The media I used in this piece are in keeping with what I consider my "palette" of common, universal materials—in this case pieces of found wood.

My work wasn't particularly well received in the 1980s. I was (then, as now) presenting people with "lowly" objects from their ordinary lives—putting the mundane up to their faces to look at. Where I saw beauty, others saw insignificance. Many viewers wanted to escape and be given some fantasy instead of being presented with the ordinary. Despite my frustration during that time, I see that I had a sort of freedom—I was incapable of doing anything I wasn't interested in.

These days a lot of artists working with found objects make art I can't relate to. It feels to me like they've taken stuff from a pile of junk and made another pile of junk. Most of my works are fairly simple arrangements. It often takes a long time to get them where I want, but sometimes it's just a matter of a minor tweak that clinches it all. I don't want to obscure what the objects are. I like that there is inherent meaning attached to them in terms of their use-value, but ultimately I want the work to be formal, nearly classical.

Before my Metro Pictures survey in 2011, I had started thinking about showing older work along with newer work. I thought, "Why not? Who says I couldn't do that?" There has always been a weird consistency in my output. One of the things that was really interesting to me about that show was that since it included over forty years of work, I somehow felt objective in seeing it all together for the first time. Much of it had been packed away for so long. I hadn't seen many of those pieces in what seemed like forever! It was almost like looking at somebody else's art entirely.

Lauren O'Neill-Butler