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Jim Agard: A Retrospective

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Jim Agard: A Retrospective

Description

The subject of illusion has been at the core of Jim's work from the get-go. So when he serendipitously met some guy one night who was toying with a bent hanger, insisting Jim entertain him by seeing if he could visually make the wire cube turn inside out, Jim was captivated. Moving from side to side, as instructed, Jim experienced the cube floating on an invisible axis. He went rampant. Up until then, his work had implied illusion rather than created actual illusion. A chance encounter and his discovery of the Necker cube propelled him into what would become the basis of his life's work. Like when one learns to open one's eyes underwater for the first time, everything becomes wildly different, just knowing there is a whole other way of seeing.

Jim's work is purely non-objective and formal, yet equally laden with profound conceptual significance. It invites an approach that is lucid and straightforward, while encouraging a willingness to let the focus blur. To hold these views simultaneously. To see and then hyper-see and be willing to not see, and in not seeing, see even more. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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Comments

Jim Agard: A Retrospective was on exhibition at the Schmucker Art Gallery at Gettysburg College, January 27 - March 9, 2012.



JIM AGARD
A RETROSPECTIVE

A teacher and a student.

Dimmed consciousness brings ultra awareness that dualities are inevitably sort of one-and-the-same. In perfect balance, they exist purely in accordance with one another. As I humbly and constantly readjust in alignment to this notion, I offer abundant gratitude to the teachers in my life. I give thanks for the gifts I hope to relentlessly give away.

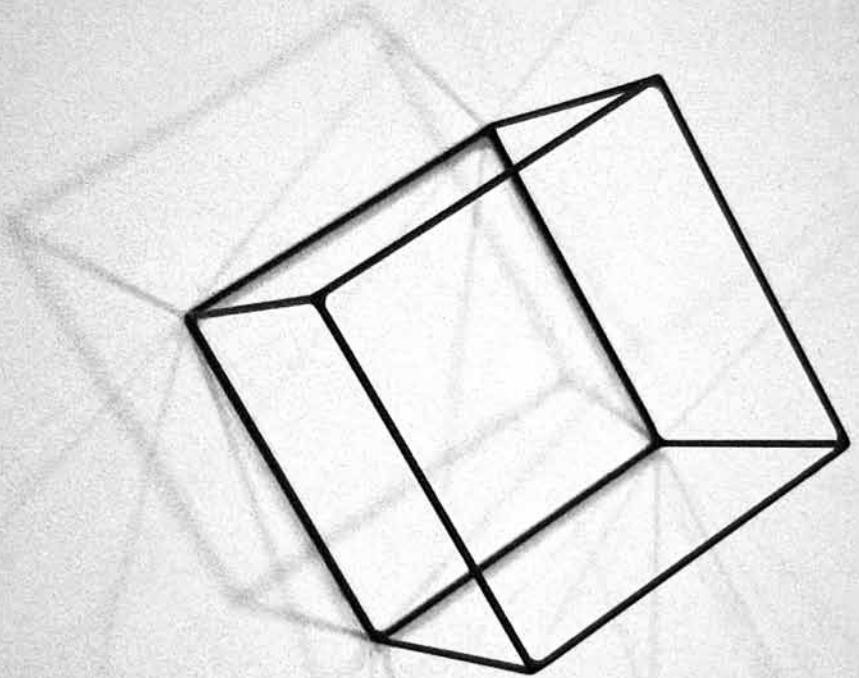
As day one of drawing class concluded, I introduced myself to Professor (and now lifelong friend) Jim Agard. I asked if he knew of any jobs in the Art Department. He proposed for me to be his studio assistant. And so it was. For the next four years, we would work together preparing exhibitions, building maquettes, organizing slides, and whatever else was needed. While those days seem like lifetimes ago, it is rewarding to trace memories and see what remains. Aside from any particular tasks or events, it is the times and spaces in between and interwoven that I recall more than anything. Grace and comfort came from working alongside one another in silence. Sharing space where focus was premium and authentic, where unselfconscious presence was pure. This was a most enriching way to come to know one another. Connecting in the deepness of meaningful life conversations, and equally in the quiet between them. I had no idea then how significant this relationship would be in my days to come.

JIM AGARD

A RETROSPECTIVE

1962 _____ 2011

Curated by Kerri Rosenstein

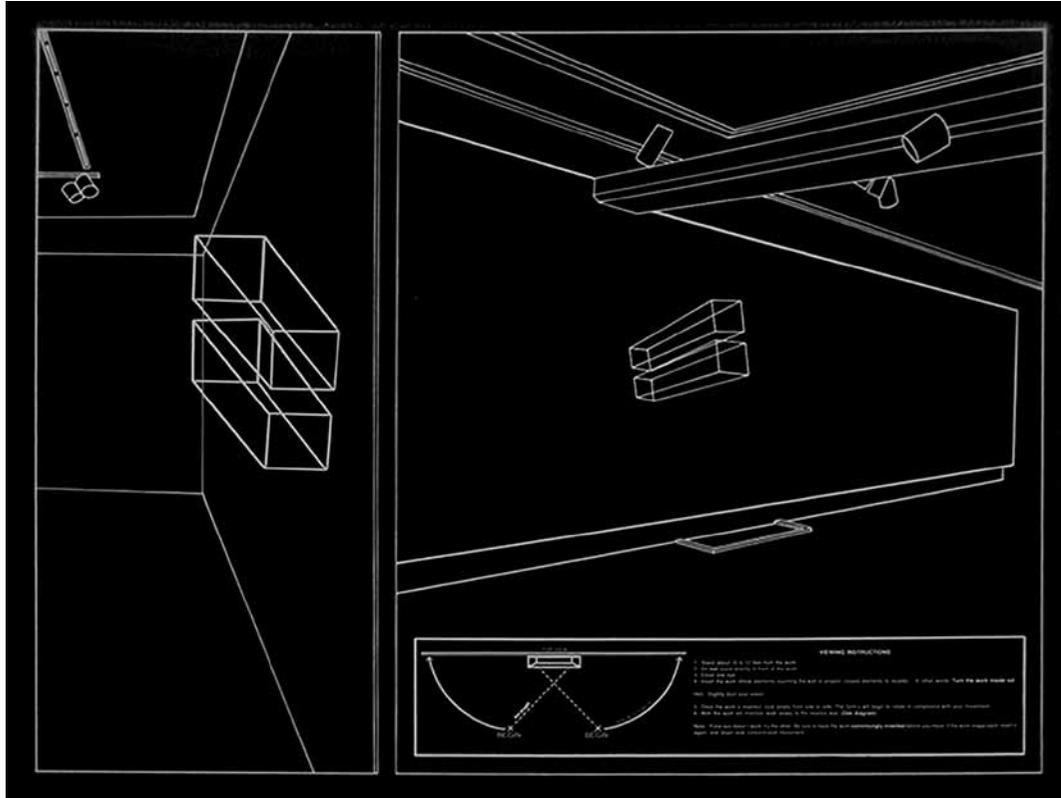


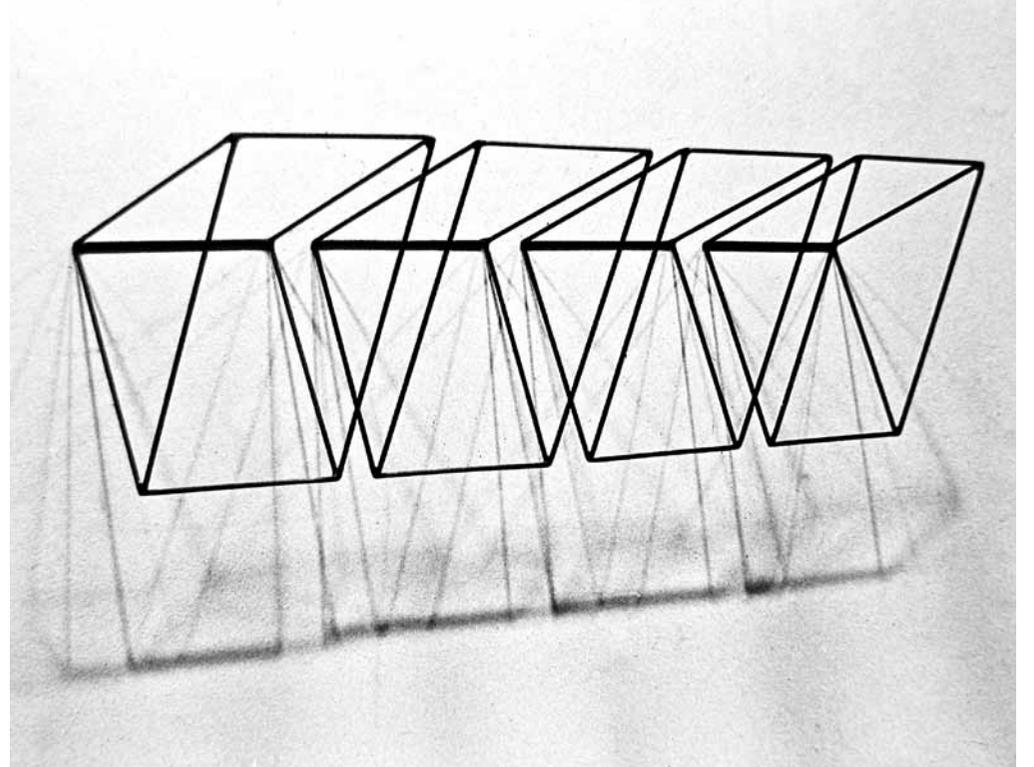
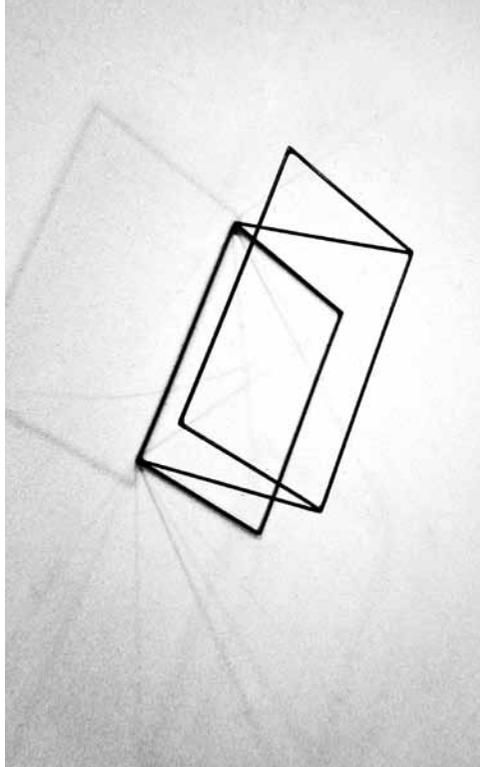
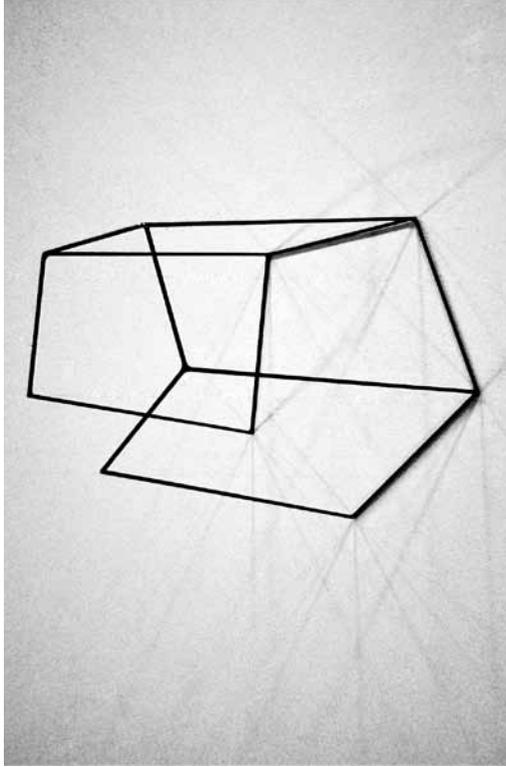
When I met Jim, he was immersed in what he refers to as *Inverted Illusions*. Although I may be biased by the fact that I entered into his work at this time, nonetheless, it is this body of work that seems predominantly central to everything else he has done. I have approached this exhibition from that point, branching both chronologically forwards and backwards. Growth occurs more so in a web than a line. It flows in a process of honoring what comes. These illusion-based structures lay foundation for Jim's drawings and sculptures as a means to pursue a quality of perception that takes place somewhere between mind and body and the ever-changing nature of reality. While the forms appear minimalistic and simply geometric, the more intimately I engage the work, the more I see it evokes the vastness of perspective (literally, metaphorically, metaphysically and so on). The experience builds on itself as one not only senses an object in relationship to its environment, but also oneself in regards to that space. One sees an ability to alter one's own experience by shifting views.

The subject of illusion has been at the core of Jim's work from the get-go. So when he serendipitously met some guy one night who was toying with a bent hanger, insisting Jim entertain him by seeing if he could visually make the wire cube turn inside out, Jim was captivated. Moving from side to side, as instructed, Jim experienced the cube floating on an invisible axis. He went rampant. Up until then, his work had implied illusion rather than created actual illusion. A chance encounter and his discovery of the Necker cube* propelled him into what would become the basis of his life's work. Like when one learns to open one's eyes underwater for the first time, everything becomes wildly different, just knowing there is a whole other way of seeing.

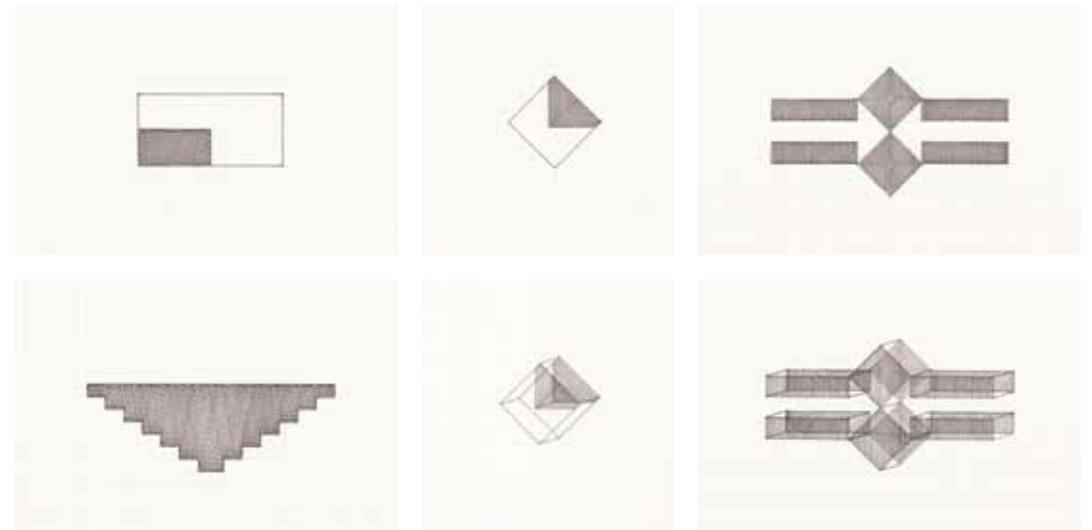
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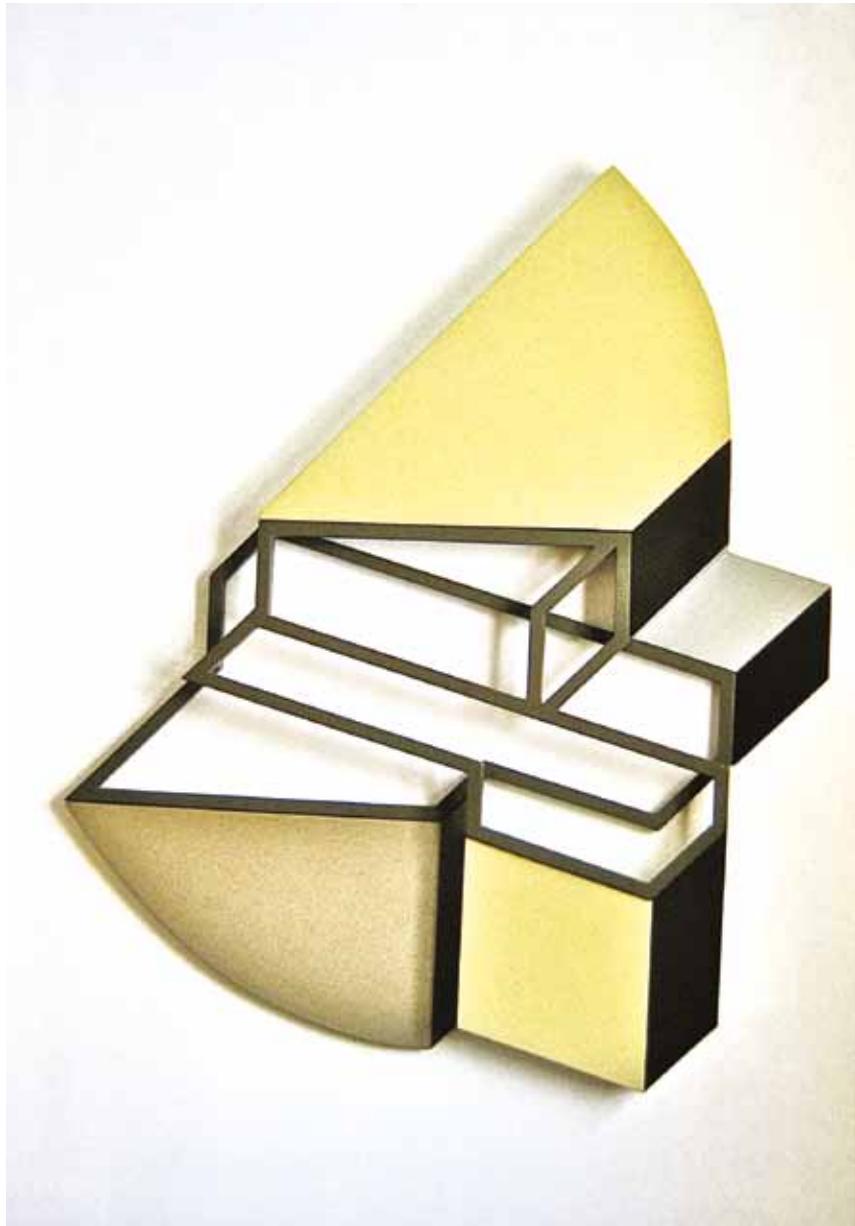
* The Necker cube refers to an ambiguous line drawing that creates an optical illusion. Attributed to theorist Louis Albert Necker, the phenomena explains that the human visual system picks a part to focus on and then aligns the whole to fit that interpretation. It acknowledges interchangeable stable views that human perception can shift between depending on the point of focus.

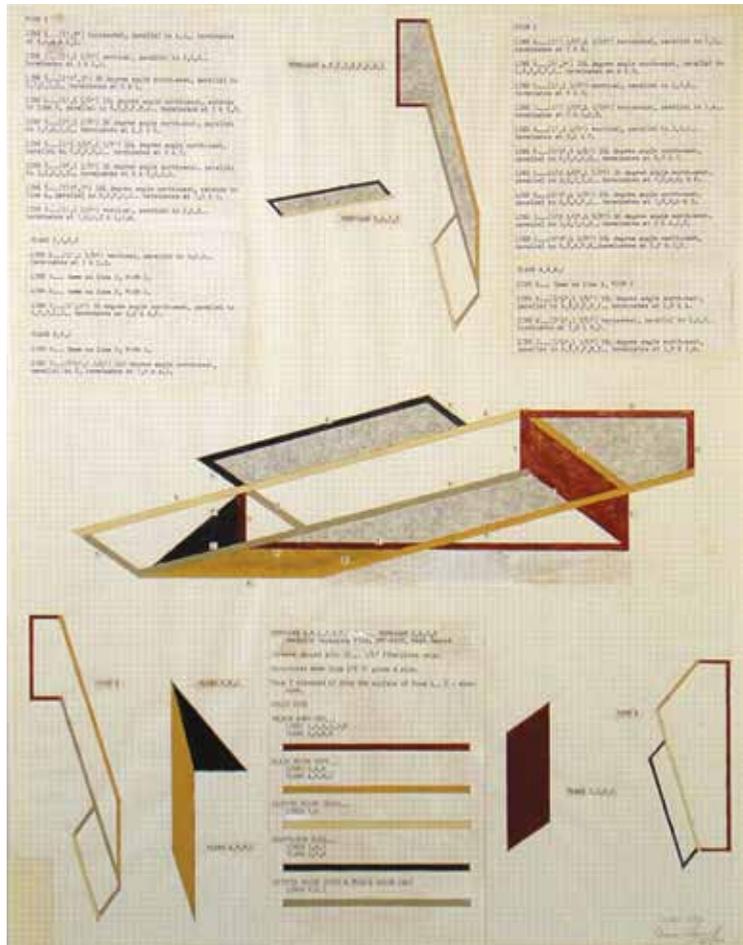




Jim's early paintings and sculptures were experimental and exploratory, as are his current drawings and sculptures. His works from the 1960s were raw and unrefined, and so are they now. Yet there is also a prolific mass of work throughout the years that is fine-tuned, sound, solid and honed. There is a refreshing honesty regardless of any so-called maturity or sophistication, even a bit of humility in his enduring persistence to see the work through regardless of any sort of success or failure. And it seems most things move according to some inexplicable rhythm – in cycles, circles, spirals – evolving in roundabout ways, layering over and over themselves. In recognizing the things that persist, a heightened awareness reveals what the work is truly about. It is the artist's [not-so] simple responsibility to listen to what he feels compelled to do and to do it.

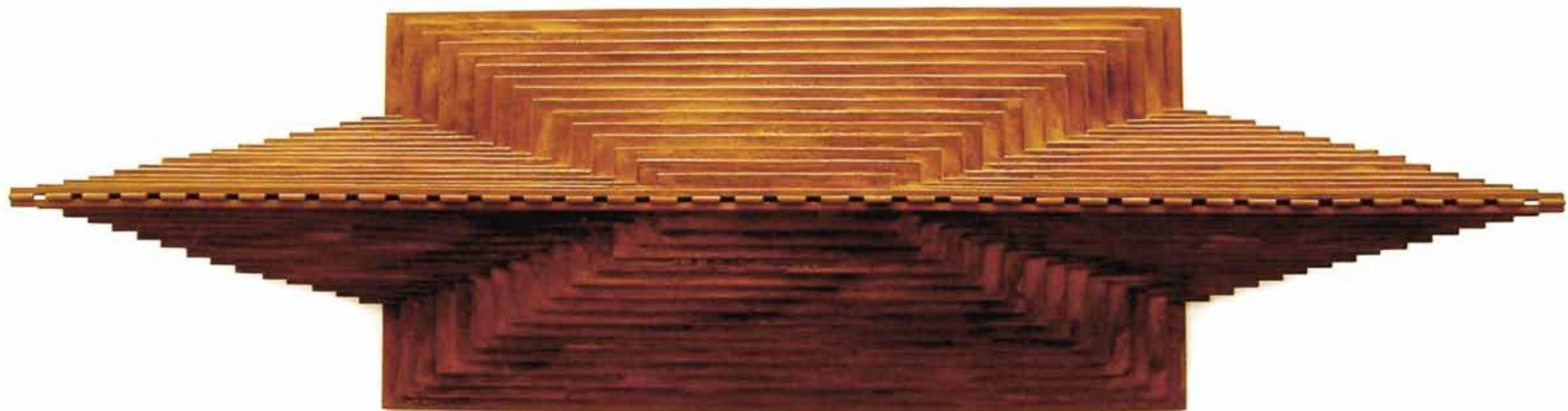


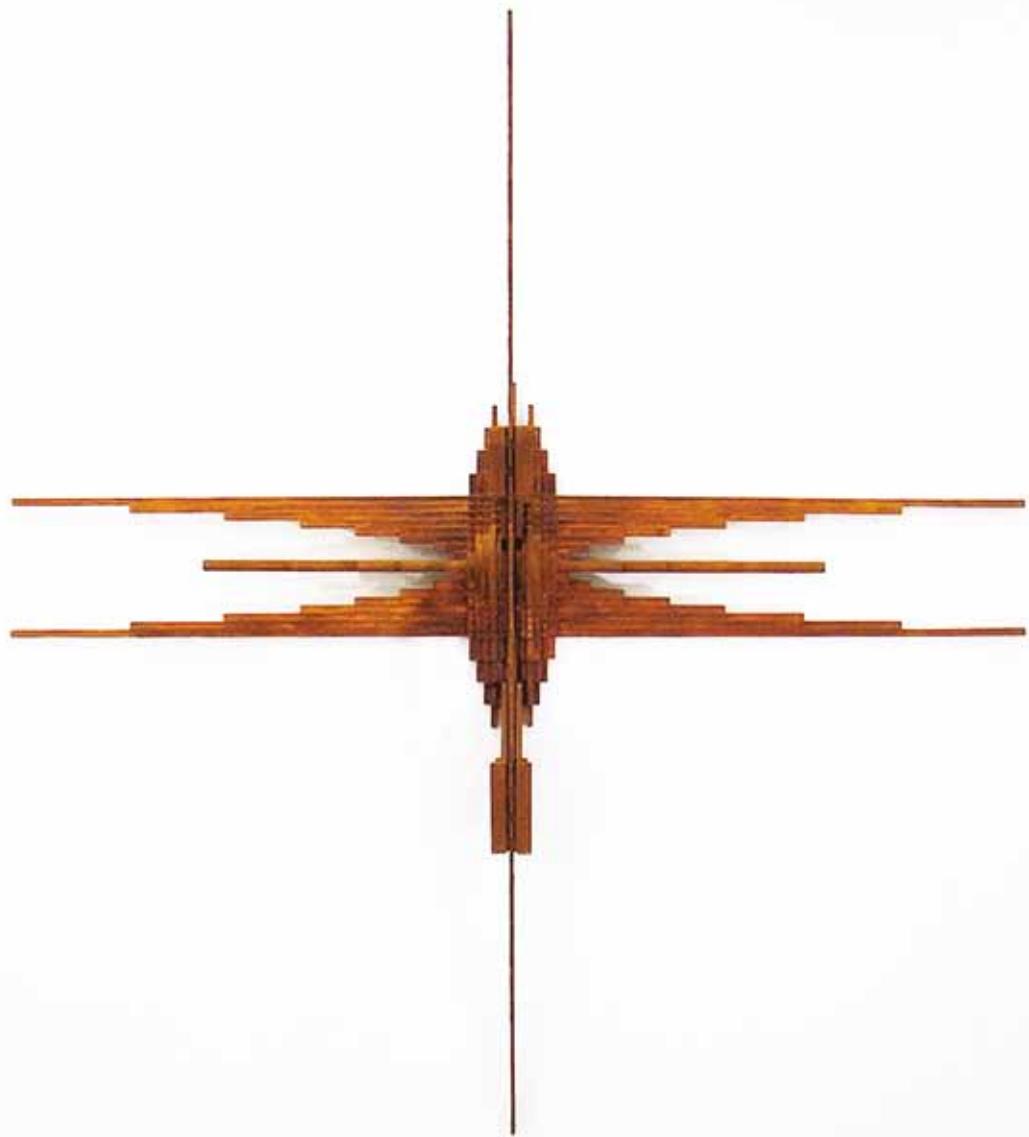




With a sensibility akin to architecture in his attraction to shape, materiality and construction, Jim's work is dynamically functional in a phenomenological inquiry. His drawings and sculptures perpetually toil in a bottomless study of oneness as he deeply pursues the integration and relationship of parts to a whole. There is clear favor towards order, logic, structure, hard edge, precision and control; along with attention to a counter modality – a soft-edged side, legitimately as potent, that is organic, spontaneous, fluid and loose. And like the fine line between sky and sea, night and day, sense and nonsense, these two threads inform and practically validate one another. They bare an openness and sincerity in getting at the essence of the work by enduringly questioning the form, as well as the process and any subsequent outcomes.

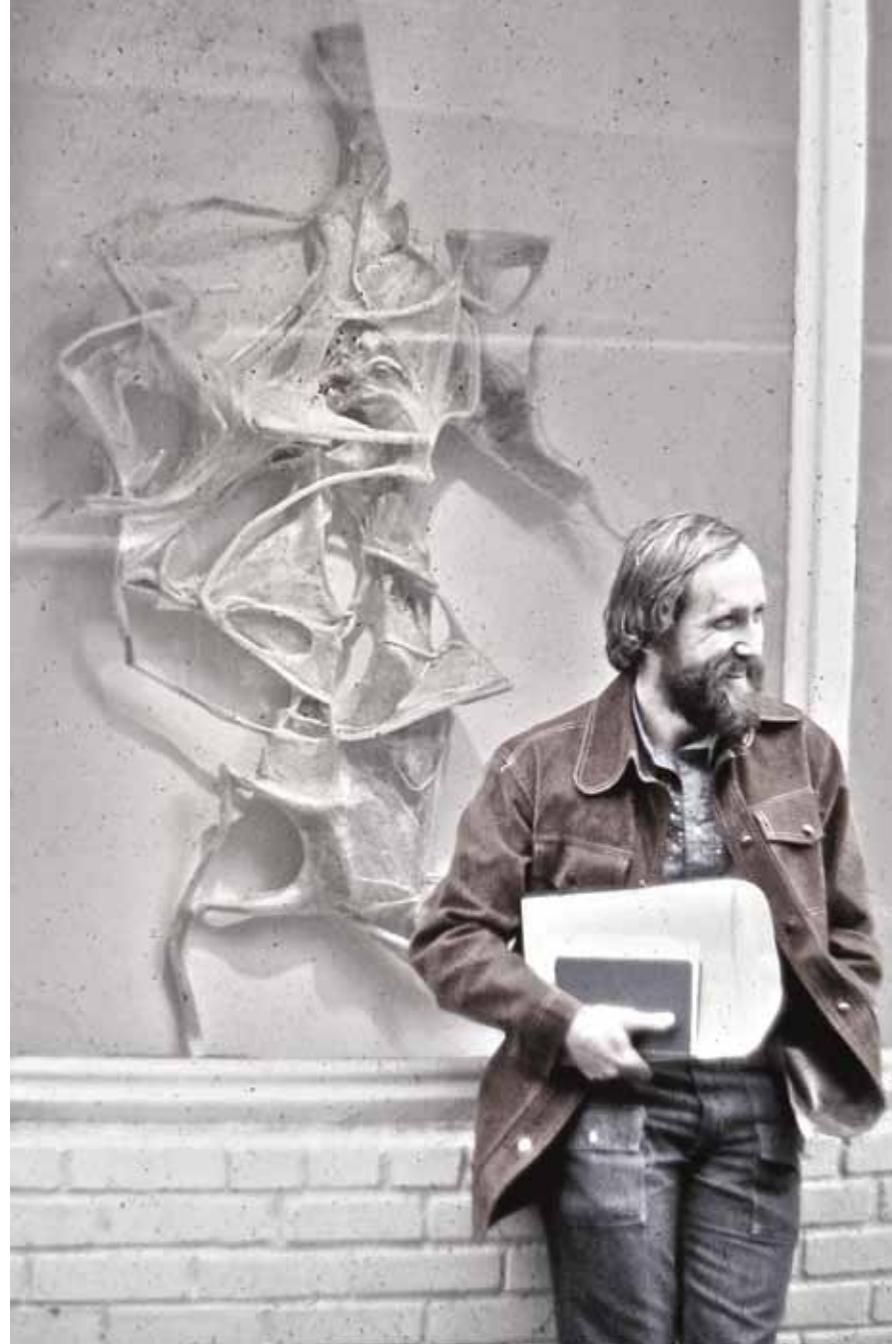








Raised by a driven, resourceful man of innovation and maker of things, Jim embodies similar traits. His father, a self-made computer engineer, built everything from sailboats to bows and arrows to collapsible gurneys and diving boards. He was a perfectionist and his industrious work ethic was instilled in Jim and his older brother, an accomplished violinist and conductor. His mother was a solid anchor. A self-proclaimed *domestic engineer*, she took care of the family.



In an attempt to understand the nature of illusion, it is relevant to question the nature of reality. When one surrenders the sharpness of mind, an overall interconnectedness emerges – a transcendence of dualistic perception. Philosophy, spirituality, science, mathematics and art all entertain this discourse.

Tender Buttons, the poetic masterpiece by Gertrude Stein, elicits that transcendent potentiality, much in the way I feel Jim's work does.** While one can audibly swim in the blatant and literal nonsense, a collection of words departed from conventional meaning strung together on behalf of their sounds and rhythms, by blurring focus there is a profound possibility to experience what Stein considered *moments of consciousness*. The words, complete in themselves and in their verse form, are also a means for seeing something beyond them. Like my breath that is always there, shifting my attention to it has an enlightening ability to alter my way of being.

** Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*. New York: New York: Claire Marie, 1914.

A Retrospective, like many things that elude their titles, being much more, less or otherwise, this exhibition is no exception. The works have been selected from relevant and significant periods over five decades. What is presented is in no means comprehensive. Furthermore, I question whether the pieces even appear cohesive in their extraction from the abundance in which they once existed. Jim and I made the selections collaboratively, some on the basis of importance, others purely on preference.

This event, along with Jim's impending academic retirement, has spurred an energetic resurgence in the studio. With unassuming sincerity, he keeps doing what he does wholeheartedly – as a teacher, a mentor, an artist and a peer – in a perpetual continuum reflecting the cyclic nature of all things true.

JIM AGARD

1944

Born in Binghamton, New York.

Always seemingly just outside of the hubbub, Jim made his homes on the outskirts, as if having space around him was integral to his study of it.

1962-1966

BA in Arts Education at State University of New York in New Paltz, New York. Textured monochromatic abstract paintings. Studied with Manual Bromberg.

1966

Participated in demonstrations in New York protesting the war in Vietnam.

1966-1968

MFA in Painting at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Furniture Pieces. Freestanding panels of accurately detailed, life-size drawings of furniture placed between panes of Plexiglas and colored-in with precisely cut, adhesive-backed, translucent paper. Implied illusion of three-dimensionality on two-dimensional surface and incorporated negative space. Celebrated Jim as a technical draftsman and craftsman concerned with both precision and ambiguity. Studied with John Goodyear, Bob Watts and Hui Ka-kwong.

1967-1968

Teaching assistant for Hui Ka-kwong at Douglass College in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

1968-1970

Taught at Virginia Inter mont College in Bristol, Virginia.

1969

Son, Adam, born in Bristol, Tennessee.

1970

Led student protests at Virginia Inter mont College after the shootings at Kent State.

1970-1982

Taught Drawing and Painting at Green Mountain College in Poultney, Vermont. Also directed the college art gallery and served as Chair of the Art Department.

1969-1973

Reflective Translucencies. Built non-objective, three-dimensional, geometric pieces covered with translucent colored paper. Transitioned from representational work to minimalistic pure form, light and shadow.

1971

Son, Jason, born in Rutland, Vermont.

1974-1978

Founded *Exhibiting Artists Federation* in Poultney, Vermont. Organized and circulated 65 exhibitions.

1974-1980

Resinite Pieces. Constructed wall-based pieces and began to incorporate negative space, as well as contained/uncontained frameworks. Wrapped and painted found materials with meat-wrap resinite. Explored visceral, organic, spontaneous, expressive, abstract form.

1979-1980

Suitcase Pieces. Returned to organized, structured, geometrical work. Continued to explore spatial relationships and perception. Precision took precedence and strict justification writings/details assisted the works. Built directly into constructed suitcases to present to gallery dealers.

1981-1985

Vorpal Gallery Pieces. Created a body of work for show in New York City. Two-dimensional, geometric, monochromatically painted wood shapes that incorporated negative space and implied three-dimensional illusion.

1982-2012

Taught Drawing and Painting at Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Also directed Schmucker Art Gallery (8 years) and served as Chair of the Art Department.

1985-1993

Bought and restored the historic Brafferton Inn Bed and Breakfast in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. [Restored 10 houses between 1970 and 1995, including a Gothic Revival house and a Cape house.]

1987-1996

Inverted Illusions. Interest in principles of the Necker cube. Created three-dimensional, entirely linear, hollow shapes that attached to the wall. With presented instructions, this work offered an experiential view of actual optical illusion based on visual and mental perception. Also built diorama installations with maquettes, creating an alternative sort of exhibition space.

1994-1998

Kerri Rosenstein assisted in the studio with *Inverted Illusions* work.

1996-1999

Opposites Attract. An extension of the illusory-based work, the hollow shapes were paired with complementary solid parts.

1999-2002

Exhibited large outdoor sculptures at Navy Pier in Chicago, Illinois. Worked with a fabricator to construct large, solid, geometrical shape forms out of steel. Continued to explore spatial shape relationships and visual experience based on physical positioning.

2000-present

Alchemized Structures. Smaller version constructions related to the large outdoor sculptures. Built with wood and covered with steel impregnated paint.

2011-present

In revisiting five decades of work, a resurgence in the studio. *Fingertip Drawings*, digitally made on iPad, return to organic, spontaneous, expressive way of working that relate to *Resinite Pieces*. Made alongside large singular, precise, wood, machine-like constructions that relate to *Alchemized Structures*.

2012

Retrospective exhibition at Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Retirement. Move to Florida with wife, Jennifer.

Selected exhibitions:

The Brink Gallery, Missoula, MT; The State Museum of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, PA; Navy Pier, Chicago, IL; Broadway Windows, New York, NY; Schmucker Art Gallery, Gettysburg, PA; Robeson Center, State College, PA; Krasl Museum, St. Joseph, MI; Milwaukee River Walk, Milwaukee, WI; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; Skokie Northshore Sculpture Park, Skokie, IL; Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA; The American Architectural Foundation (The Octagon), Washington, DC; Vedanta Gallery, Chicago, IL; Liverpool Community College, Liverpool, England; Pyramid Hill Sculpture Park, Hamilton, OH; Christine Price Gallery, Castleton, VT; The Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA; Spartanburg Museum of Art, Spartanburg, SC; The Kitchen, New York, NY; Marcia Woods Gallery, Atlanta, GA; M. Louise Aughinbaugh Gallery, Grantham, PA; Robert Ferst Center for the Arts, Atlanta, GA; School 33, Baltimore, MD; The Alternative Museum, New York, NY; Sande Webster Gallery, Philadelphia, PA; Connecticut College, New London, CT; O.K. Harris Gallery, New York, NY; Leonard and Associates, New York, NY; Allentown Museum, Allentown, PA; Blandon Memorial Art Museum, Fort Dodge, IA; Handwerker Gallery, Ithaca, NY; Fosdick-Nelson Gallery, Alfred, NY; Vorpal Gallery, New York, NY; Una Bare Gallery, New York, NY; Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH; Westbroadway Gallery, New York, NY; Frank Marino Gallery, New York, NY; Ward-Nasse Gallery, New York, NY; Robert Hull Fleming Museum, Burlington, VT; Furman University, Greenville, SC; University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK; Henri Gallery, Washington, DC; Windsor Gallery, Richmond, VA; Rutgers University Gallery, New Brunswick, NJ; New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ.

Cover	Photograph of the artist in Williamstown, MA with work for Vorpall Gallery, New York City, 1983. (Photo by Carol Repsher)	14	<i>Anvil II</i> and <i>Fulcrum</i> (alchemized sculpture drawings), 12x20 inches each, printed ink on paper, 2008.
2	<i>Pallion</i> (cube), 12x12x12 inches, aluminum, 1990.	15	<i>Trebuchet</i> , 324x124x30 inches, hot-rolled sheet metal, 2002.
4-5	Illusion print, 15x20 inches, plate lithograph print, 1988-1990.	16-17	<i>Alchemized Stepped Structure</i> , 84x24x12 inches, steel impregnated paint on laminated wood, 2011.
6	<i>Covered Bridge</i> , 12x26x10 inches, aluminum, 1991.	18	<i>Alchemized Clamped Removable Structure</i> , 90x96x48 inches, steel impregnated paint on laminated wood, 2011.
6	<i>Folio 3-Fold</i> , 10x16x8 inches, aluminum, 1991.	19	<i>Untitled</i> , 46x22x4 inches, steel impregnated paint on laminated wood, 2008.
7	<i>Panoptic Tri-Quad</i> , 8x36x8 inches, aluminum, 1989.	20	<i>Fingertip drawings</i> , 6.5x9.5 inches each, digital prints on paper, 2011.
9	<i>Untitled</i> (studies for <i>Inverted Illusions</i>), approximately 6x8 inches each, pen on paper, 1995.	21	<i>Untitled</i> , 55x67x7 inches, Styrofoam, cardboard, colored paper and acrylic paint wrapped with resinite, 1977.
10	<i>Morning Star</i> , 32x48 inches, wood and acrylic lacquer, 1984.	23	Photograph of the artist with work at Ward-Nasse Gallery, New York, NY, 1976. (Photo by Fred Wall.)
11	<i>Crystal Coffin</i> , 31x74 inches, resinite and acrylic on wood, 1979.	Back	<i>Fingertip drawing</i> , 6.5x9.5 inches, digital print on paper, 2011.
12	Justification drawing for <i>Crystal Coffin</i> , 16.5x21.5 inches, type and acrylic on paper, 1979.		

Kerri Rosenstein's work pertains to an inquiry into the nature of things. She works with and responds to circumstances of an external world as a means to access internal understanding. She has exhibited nationally and internationally.

Rosenstein received a BA in Psychology from Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (1998), where she also studied art and worked as assistant to Jim Agard. She studied Aboriginal Art and Psychopathology at The University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia (1997) and received an MFA in Drawing and Painting from The University of Montana in Missoula, Montana (2002). She has curated and taught for various programs, including farm ART SPACE, Caldera, Trickhouse, Gallery Saintonge, Rocky Mountain School of Photography, and The University of Montana. Additionally, Rosenstein holds certifications in facilitation-based work and contributes extensively to arts and outdoors youth programs.

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A RETROSPECTIVE
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Gettysburg
COLLEGE

Schmucker Art Gallery

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Gettysburg, Pennsylvania
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