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MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2011



**Tony May
retrospective:
Admiring old
technology –
whimsically**

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"M. Lantern" mixed - media

Tony May retrospective: Admiring old technology—whimsically

By Mary Gottschalk

A glimpse inside the wonderful, whimsical world of artist Tony May is as near as the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art.

“Tony May: Old Technology” is a retrospective of works by this much loved and highly respected professor emeritus at San Jose State University.

It utilizes all the gallery space in the ICA, including a tree house you can climb up, and altogether leaves you wanting more.

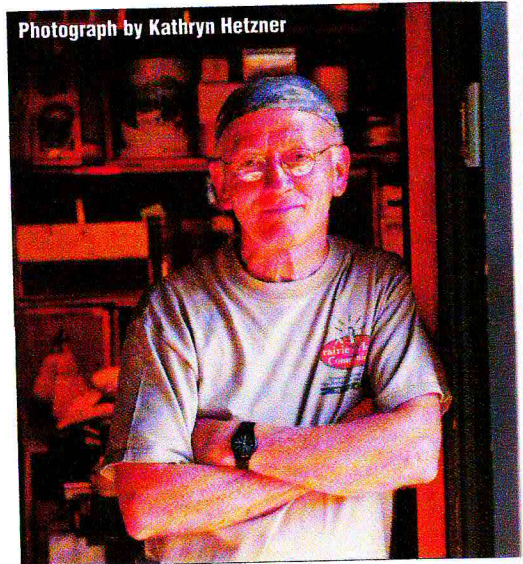
May, who was born and grew up in Wisconsin, is clearly someone who knows the value of saving things, repairing instead of discarding, the beauty of books and the necessity of a sense of humor in navigating life.

There is the “My Darned Sweater” piece, an obviously beloved sweater, passed down from his grandmother to his mother and carefully darned over the years.

May takes this piece of family history and turns it into a piece of art, displaying it in a glass-topped drawer that seems to be coming out of the wall.

The series of paintings dealing with home improvements and décor are in the vein of photorealism, but the finishes are like exquisite enamels.

The obvious skill and time that went into their creation is a contrast to the subject matter. They memorialize things like the repair of a tea kettle handle, replacing a cracked sidewalk with bricks, a new home heating system or a decoy positioned on a low-hanging branch that is a visual reminder to duck.



Photograph by Kathryn Hetzner

Tony May is his studio

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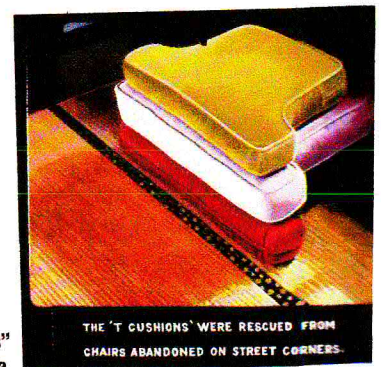


“Refurbished Antique Foldable Device” is a homage to Duchamp



THE SIDEWALK BROKEN BY THE TREE ROOT HAS BEEN MENDED WITH BRICKS.

Painting from Home Improvement series



“T Cushions” mixed-media

THE ‘T CUSHIONS’ WERE RESCUED FROM CHAIRS ABANDONED ON STREET CORNERS.

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Books are turned into hanging light fixtures and lamps and used in other ways.

The "RC Boat" is a wooden boat with the pages of a copy of Robinson Crusoe laminated on its exterior and interior surfaces.

May also has fun with tributes to other artists and the use of puns.

"No Gucci" is a paper lantern tribute to Noguchi's lamps and "Refurbished Antique Foldable Device" is a vintage wooden ironing board tribute to Duchamp.

Two pieces make you wonder if May ever discards anything.

There is a small box with what looks like the most exotic plant in the center, which is actually an arrangement of cat whiskers. And a rectangle of red cloth with "Santa Claus" spelled out in claws shed by his cats.

May, who turns 69 this year, says preparing for and installing the show brought out "a full range of emotions, from delight to feeling almost frightened.

"It's sort of weird seeing that much of your life production spread out in one spot. There is almost a ring of finality about it, which I think is a little unnerving."

He then chuckles and promises, "I am continuing to make art, it's not necessarily the final straw."

May spent more than two years working with show curator Susan O'Malley, who supported his choice of pieces. The model of the show on a table in the lobby shows how meticulous he was in both planning the pieces he wanted and their placement in the galleries.

May keeps good records, so he was able to borrow some favorite pieces from local art collectors, including Sheila and Ralph Pickett and Patricia and Mike McDonald.

Looking ahead, May says he hopes to do more painting.

"I tend to do paintings that document things I build or encounter nearby that are fascinating or possibly humorous," he says.

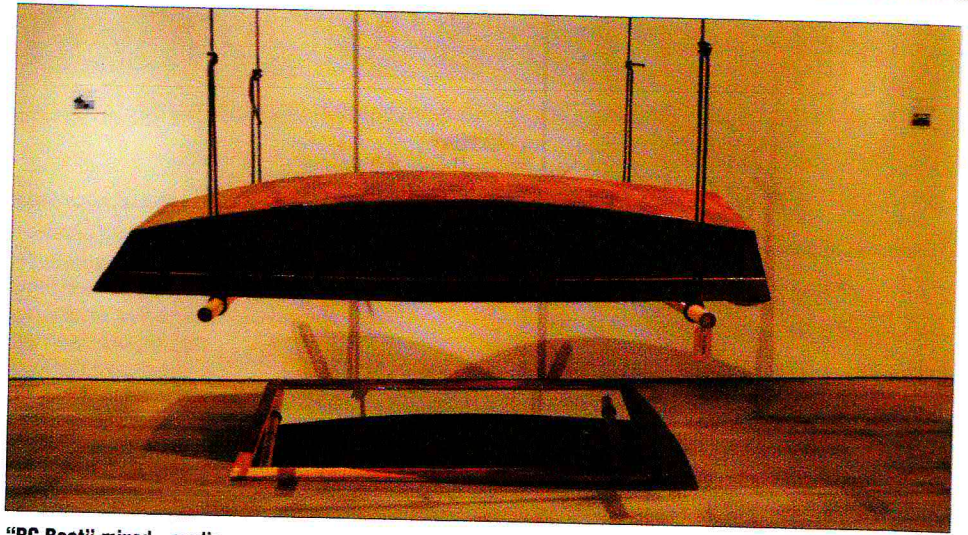
"I really have engaged pretty strongly with the small scale and intimate.

"The close view of a small detail of something is where I often find things of interest and thing most people might not find worthy subjects.

"Not to be ornery, I just literally do follow my interests and I'm often looking for something that does catch my interest that I suspect may have been overlooked by other people."

"Tony May: Old Technology" continues at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, 560 S. First St., through Feb. 26. The catalogue of the show is itself a piece of art—a box filled with envelopes, photographs and other items that has been likened to "rummaging through a box of personal belongings." The show itself is free, the limited edition catalogue is \$150.

Visit www.sjica.org for additional information.



"RC Boat" mixed - media



Painting of Shadow Producing Device



The "T House" tree house in the main gallery