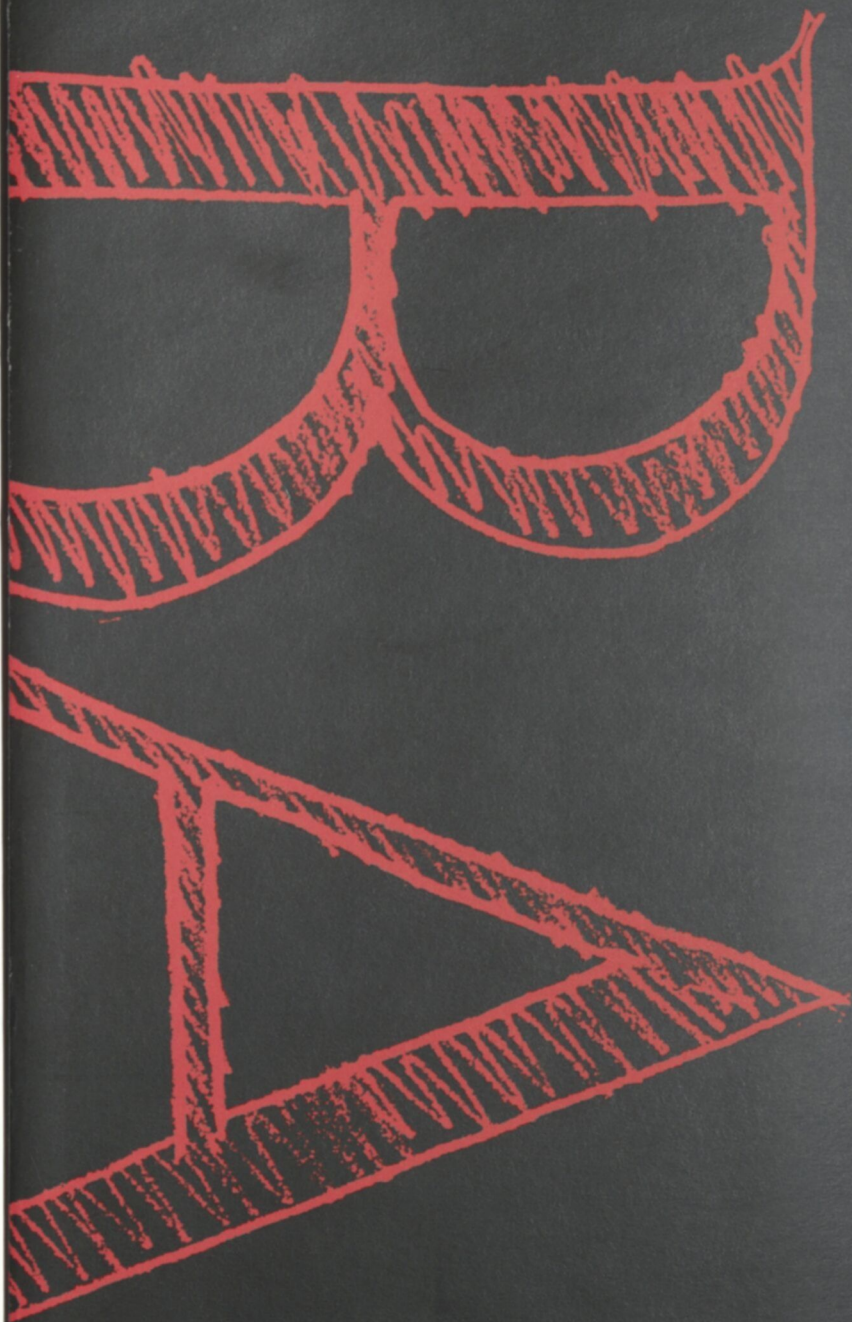


THE LABORATORY EXHIBITIONS **3**



ANDREW DAVIS

BATHYSPHERE

## NEW MEXICO

has a long tradition of artists working with wood. Because our region does not have an abundance of forests, trees are more deeply appreciated here. In summer a full tree provides much needed shade. A dead tree means heat for a household, and a large tree could be used for making furniture. The early religious carvers carefully selected cedars and aspens to create Santos for their devotional practices. The large and somewhat rare pines were used to make retablos, reredos, and relief carvings.

Even cottonwood roots, which hold special spiritual meaning to certain groups of both Native Americans and Hispanics, were used to make sculptures and religious objects.

The early part of the last century saw a revival of these traditional forms, and today we have, perhaps, an even greater level of artistic production using these traditional materials.

With the migrations of Anglo-Europeans from the Eastern United States (following the construction of the railroad) a new aesthetic developed in the region. As the communities grew and became more cosmopolitan the language of art broadened to include the "latest" in contemporary art. The exhibition before you clearly demonstrates the sensitivity and reverence for materials of the early Santeros, blended with the analysis and introspection of an

artist who has spent much time investigating the language of contemporary art.

The Museum of Fine Arts wishes to acknowledge the artist Andrew Davis for his continuing contribution to woodworking, literature, and sculpture. We are grateful to Curator of Contemporary Art Aline Chipman Brandauer for her insightful essay accompanying this publication, and for conceiving the laboratory exhibitions, which have served to expand our region's knowledge of contemporary art while giving artists the opportunity to explore new ideas and processes. We also thank Lumen Books for collegial support and advice; Melody Sumner Carnahan for expert editing; Michael Sumner for his design skills; the Museum of New Mexico's award-winning Exhibitions Department for its assistance, particularly Charles Sloan, chief preparator, for skillfully installing the exhibition; and the Friends of Contemporary Art (foca) whose consistent and significant support made this program possible.

STUART A. ASHMAN  
DIRECTOR  
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS  
MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO



## BATHYSPPHERE

traces the materiality of words and their treachery.

This installation of poems and objects raises the question of self and self-consciousness in a double frame. We have, on the one hand, the fractured experience of the modern human being, on the other, the older but ineluctable submission to fate, which form the structure of the subject's submerged vessel of understanding. ¶ A bathysphere is a metal container used for deep-sea exploration. In Andrew Davis's installation, ten tall cabinets stand in two facing rows with a gate at one end and a confessional at the other. On one side the gate proclaims, "Just as, at night, the plankton," and on the other, "So he stirred, he flared, alive." A long table placed between the cabinets near the confessional bears small pencil boxes, one open, the rest closed. Eighty linked sonnets of a long narrative poem hang on the walls of

the room for the reader to piece together. Parts of the poem are carved or written on the objects as well. ¶ The words act as an integral part of the "furniture" while the furniture defies use by its abstract insistence. This seeming double-bind plays into the story of Jonah and the whale that weaves its way through *Bathysphere*. The bathysphere is the belly of the whale—a space of redemption and fear, of holding and transformation. But it is also a man-made thing, one that the person inside hopes will keep air pressure even and keep the water out. In the biblical story of Jonah, the protagonist tries to run away from his fate, and from God, and in so doing change the fate of others. He is "saved" within the whale despite his attempts not to be. His fate then becomes being the unwilling redeemer of a people he believes are without faith. Davis's protagonist in the poem is battered about, first, by trying to

define himself in relation to art objects and poetry, and then, as his persona mutates, by circumstances and shifting selves. ¶ "Pandemonium, proper," Davis writes, "had touched him," but after a change in self it is the felt but not comprehended, sensed but not known, transformation at the hands of fate or multi-leveled consciousness, that throws Davis's protagonist into the internal maw of instability. And back to words themselves. . . . ¶ Over time, words have been explored for their material qualities. The Russian Formalist poets, especially Vladimir Khlebnikov, went to great lengths to posit essential meanings for particular sounds. Concrete poetry, as it was known, was to elicit precise and universal responses in the hearer or listener. Drawing on mystical traditions and foreshadowing such thinkers as Noam Chomsky, Khlebnikov's

HIS SPIRITS ROSE A LITTLE AS HE SWAM THE LACK OF PRECISION ESPECIALLY THAT THERE IN THE CROSS SUCK THE COUNTERWASH OF WAVES AT CROSS PURPOSES THE SUN ITSELF A SMALL HALF-HIDDEN DISK JUST THE LEAKAGE OF THE FALLING TIDE SETTING OUT TO SEA MEASURED CASUALLY AGAINST ON THE CLIFFSIDE A PINCH OF GREEN

AS IF SOME OLD TRIANGULATION BETWEEN ANOTHER GALAXY AND OURS SOME CALCULATION ON THE SCALE OF PLANETS HAD WORKED ITSELF OUT TO THE FINAL NUMERAL AND MAPPED HIM INEXACT AND HAPPY SOMEWHERE ANYWHERE IN SPACE AND TIME

idea was that humans respond to certain sounds in identical, or “hardwired” ways. Khlebnikov often wrote poetry that had no “words,” only “sounds.” The distinction between the two is what Davis is trying to get at in *Bathysphere*, both in the poems and in the wood work. ¶ In poetry, we are familiar with the idea that words have symbolic meaning, are signifiers. Conversely, we are comfortable with furniture just being there to be used, rather than having symbolic meaning, or yet, even more confusing, having multiple meanings. By carving words into objects in a way that refers to Latin prose—no word breaks, which is hard to read—one begins to see the objects shift. The cabinets are there as objects but also as ground for the words, in effect, the page. Can we look at such a thing as a place to put shirts? Or

do the words change the object’s function irredeemably? In a similar way the narrative within *Bathysphere* seems unstable—the protagonist mutates and the story inverts and twists. One must ask if it is possible to work with words and objects without confusion. The bond between ground and symbol that we assume in a book is revealed as a fragile operation when seen in wood. ¶ Inversely, by association, the highly finished cabinetry asserts the material or concrete nature of the words carved into it. If the furniture is carefully crafted by the carpenter’s hand, emphasizing the individual nature of the woods, it implies that there is a fixed or stable core to

the words themselves. ¶ The installation and the poem maintain their uneasy alliance and continue to resist full compliance and connection with each other. The journey through the created space is internal and eternal. The artist and viewer are kept alert yet seduced into participating. Davis raises the question of our control over our fate and tools, be they verbs or lathes. And the question’s inevitable companion, whatever that may be, follows us silently.

ALINE CHIPMAN BRANDAUER  
CURATOR OF  
CONTEMPORARY ART © 2000



photography: Robert Lutz

His spirits rose, a little, as he swam—  
Especially the lack of precision, especially  
That—there in the cross-suck, the counter-  
Wash of waves at cross purposes—little waves—  
The sun itself a small, half-hidden disk—  
Just the little leakage of the falling tide  
Setting out to sea, measured casually  
Against—on the cliff-side—a pinch of green.

As if—as if!—some bold triangulation  
Between another galaxy and ours,  
Some calculation, on the scale of planets,  
Had worked itself out to the final numeral  
And mapped him—inexact and happy—just  
Somewhere, anywhere—in space and time.

ANDREW DAVIS was born in 1953 in Long Beach, California. He received a B.A. in American History and Literature from Harvard University. During the 1970s, he worked in shipyards and the construction trades. From 1979, Davis has been self-employed as a cabinetmaker. Awards include Best “Other” Furniture, *New Mexico Woodworker’s Exhibition*, 1992; Best of Show, *New Mexico Woodworker’s Exhibition*, 1993; and Juror’s Award, *New Mexico 2000*. Davis’s poems have appeared in *River Poems* (Slapping Hol Press), *Poetry*, *The Formalist*, and *THE* magazine. Prose pieces have been published in the *Chaco-Bisti News*, *Bisti* (ed. with photographs by David Scheinbaum), and *Fine Woodworking Magazine*. His first volume, *Craft*, is available March 2000 published by Lumen Books.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- New Mexico Woodworker’s Exhibition*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1992
- Out of Bounds: Art Which Extends Beyond Traditional Categories*, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1993
- New Mexico Woodworker’s Exhibition*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1993
- New Mexico Woodworker’s Exhibition*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1995
- “Bojes” *Insight/Onsight* (text) for sculptor Dee Homans, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1995
- Erotica ’96*, Copeland Rutherford Fine Arts, New Mexico, 1996
- Two Person Show*, (with painter Nancy Dennison) Kent Galleries, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1996
- Sculpture Project*, College of Santa Fe, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1997
- Enduring Form*, LewAllen Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1999
- New Mexico 2000*, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1999
- Bathysphere*, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2000 (solo)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS Above all to my partner, Dee Homans, and our children, for their patience and good counsel; to Aline Brandauer for her groundless faith; to Pat Simpson, long-suffering friend, ideal co-conspirator; to Thayer Carter, for his skilled help in an hour of need, and for the gift of a marvelous pencil box, parent to the boxes in the exhibition; and of course to the rest of the museum staff, especially Charles Sloan; and to our neighbors in Bojes, Asturias:

*A flare of love — like radiation . . .  
Produced by a peculiar shade of green . . .*



Museum of New Mexico  
Museum of Fine Arts

#### EXHIBITION DATES

March 24 – June 25, 2000

#### GALLERY TALK

March 29, 12:15 pm  
by Museum admission

#### POETRY READING

Co-sponsored by the  
Friends of Contemporary  
Art and Lumen Books:  
April 13, 2000, 7 pm.  
\$5 donation requested,  
foca members free.

This exhibition has been generously  
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