

Bardian

BARD COLLEGE SPRING 2013



Piecing Art Together: Stephen Sollins '90

In his solo show, *Piecework*, at Smack Mellon Gallery in Brooklyn, **Stephen Sollins '90** exhibited five large works on paper—the size of full- and queen-sized bed quilts—made from used mailing envelopes. Each work was meticulously constructed with hidden seams, creating three-dimensional structures beneath the surface, much like those in traditional fabric quilts. An unusual marriage of anachronism and modernism, the patterned design of quilts and detailed envelope interiors embodied, for Sollins, geometric abstractions that predate Geometric Abstraction. “I am interested in using the geometry, grids, and systematic approaches of high modern, minimal, and conceptual art, in part to show how they do and do not relate to more popular and sentimental forms.”

Source material is key to Sollins's art. In *Piecework*, envelopes and quilts also intersect as devices of cover, referencing his longstanding interest in domesticity and anonymity. Sollins has been working for more than a decade with found materials that evoke the domestic sphere—Scotch tape, worn household linens, handkerchiefs, television schedules, newspapers, daily mail. “Sometimes it takes years to figure out how a source material can be used to express the ideas I'm thinking about,” he says. Those ideas—sentimentality versus silence and non-communication, the urge to be known versus the reluctance to divulge too much, the split between private and public—synthesize Sollins's work, which traverses a wide range of media. “About every two years, what my work looks like changes. The subject matter holds it all together. I find myself circling around the same issues and coming at those ideas from different directions.”

When Sollins entered Bard he thought of himself as a poet and took classes with **Robert Kelly**, Asher B. Edelman Professor of Literature. However, he soon moderated into photography, studying with **Stephen Shore**, Susan Weber Professor in the Arts, and Professor of Photography **Larry Fink**. He went on to study with **Joel Sternfeld** as a graduate student at the School of Visual Arts in New York. At the time, he was interested in making work that dealt with the subject of loss, and struggled with conveying his ideas through the camera. Sollins experimented with abstraction, taking pictures of “mute” surfaces, such as a blank wall, but that did not satisfy him. “It was a failing of mind more than a failing of medium,” he says. Sternfeld gave him license and encouragement to experiment with any media he could find that would express his ideas. Sollins put down his camera and has yet to pick it back up. He began working with Scotch tape as a transfer medium, pulling off ink from daily newspapers and found photographs to create drawings. He produced *30 Drawings and Last Portraits*, which were chronological sequences of the portraits printed in the obituary section of the *New York Times*, using this process.



Stephen Sollins '90. PHOTO Justine Cooper

Sollins's art has been supported by fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, New York Foundation for the Arts, and Smack Mellon, and is in collections at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Brooklyn Museum, and Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, among others. Unrestricted by medium, he is continually exploring new ways of working. *Static* is a series of works on paper made from redacting sequences of newspaper television schedules with correction fluid or black ink, leaving a systematic organization of information over time. “I was interested in process time and how, in a contemporary art process, repetitive mark making, when pursued over time, results in something greater than its parts.” The MoMA owns *Static #4* from this series. Another series, *Untitled (Threadsun)*, is an installation of 105 vintage white handkerchiefs embroidered with the shape of the uneven right-hand edge of each poem from Paul Celan's *Threadsun*—making visible the rhythms of silence, the intakes of breath between one utterance and another.

Piecework was the culmination of four years' worth of work and exploration. “Discovering the history of American quilt making hit me like a ton of bricks. It's a staggering quantity and quality of abstract work,” says Sollins, who immerses himself completely in whatever medium he is at work in. “I'm thrilled to be coming to end of an odyssey and excited to see what is next. I have a studio with white walls, which is very thrilling.”



Adolfas Mekas (left) and Jonas Mekas (right), 1950s. PHOTO Courtesy of Pola Chapelle

Adolfas Mekas Lionized in Lithuania

The late **Adolfas Mekas**, professor emeritus of film and the first director of Bard's MFA program, was honored by his native Lithuania with a tribute and retrospective that spanned several months. The fete began at the end of November in Vilnius, the nation's capital, with screenings and talks at the **Jonas Mekas Visual Arts Center** (named for Adolfas's brother and fellow filmmaker), Contemporary Art Centre, and Vilnius Academy of Arts, where **John Pruitt**, associate professor of film and electronic arts at Bard, lectured on the honoree's comic iconoclasm. Films by Mekas's former students—including **Ozan Adam '99**, **Chris Hume '87**, **Anne Meredith '86**, **Jan Peterson '78**, and **Jeff Scher '76**—were shown, as was *Going Home*, a collaboration between Adolfas and his wife, **Pola Chapelle**, who made the trip with their son, **Sean Mekas '94**. “It's been hectic, but gratifying and worth every bit of the time I spent gathering material for them,” wrote Chapelle after the celebrations in Vilnius. “Adolfas has to be smiling, maybe even wearing his rabbit suit.” The tribute traveled to Klaipėda and thence to Kaunas, where its attendant exhibitions continued into the spring.