



coleen sterritt  
stuck to the world





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Riverside Art Museum

May 4- July 2, 2006





The Riverside Art Museum's core mission is to serve as the major visual arts museum/institution for the fast-growing/dynamically changing Inland Empire metropolitan region, currently populated by nearly four million residents. Housed in a National Historic 1929 building designed by Hearst Castle architect, Julia Morgan, the Riverside Art Museum is a 50-year-old, private, non-profit cultural arts institution. The Museum's Spanish Revival three-story architecture now accommodates five different exhibition spaces (25 exhibitions in 2005), permanent printmaking gallery, atrium restaurant, conference room, classroom and adjoining youth gallery, Museum store, arts reference library, administrative offices, and a rooftop courtyard.

There are nearly 800 objects in the permanent collection—the works of greatest historical/cultural value are graphic arts and works on paper. Currently, the Museum is experiencing tremendous growth in many areas of programming. In an effort to expand our sculptural and installation projects, the *Stuck to the World* exhibition inaugurates our newly renovated Art Alliance Gallery---redesigned to accommodate the specialized needs of large-scale three-dimensional work.

The Riverside Art Museum received a significant grant from the James Irvine Foundation for core support to develop and expand the Museum's exhibitions, educational programs, and audiences within the Inland Empire. As part of this expanded curatorial vision for the Museum to showcase important Southern California artists, we are proud to present the art of Coleen Sterritt and the *Stuck to the World* exhibition and catalogue publication. We are most appreciative of the efforts by the exhibition's artist, Coleen Sterritt; the exhibition curators, Andi Campognone and Peter Frank; and, the fine essay by guest writer, Julia Couzens.

Enjoy this outstanding sculpture exhibition that presents one of the finest contemporary artists working in Southern California today.

Daniel Foster  
*Executive Director*







*Untitled, March 2006 #1, 44" x 30", oil, acrylic, ink, collaged paper*

Coleen Sterritt concocts sculptures out of myriad distinct segments. To various extents Sterritt's sculptures seem like functional objects, but never quite reveal what they're supposed to do, much less do it. Rather, they brim with possibility, with poetic metaphor, and with the ever-present threat of entropic dissolution, a coming-apart of their components. Sterritt has long been associated with a group of southern California-based sculptors (including Jud Fine, Peter Shelton, and Margaret Honda, among others) who work with organic imagery and/or material, even exploring the relationship of material to form in the context of evoking the natural world. In the dense, constructed approach she takes to formulating her current sculpture, however, Sterritt establishes a relationship with other contemporaries, including New York - based artist Jessica Stockholder, the Anglo-German sculptor Tony Cragg, and prominent Los Angeles artist Tim Hawkinson. It is important to note that,

currently, Sterritt's approach to material is more homogeneous than that of these other assemblers and bricoleurs; that is, everything she fabricates in three dimensions is made primarily from wood of some kind. Thus, the texture and apparent heft of Sterritt's pieces is constant, and her process of formal reasoning is basically abstract. Still, her freestanding work is expansive, energetic, and humorous, yet disciplined. Sterritt's work on paper bears a significant formal and spiritual connection to the sculptural work (although the paper pieces do not serve as studies for the three-dimensional). And both bristle with suggestions, of the human body, of tools and tables, of machines and furniture, of things as they are and as they appear to us in dreams.





Untitled, May 22, 2005 #1, 40" x 30", graphite, acrylic, shellac, collaged paper

## STUCK TO THE WORLD: The Art of Coleen Sterritt

The leggy, gawky sculpture of Coleen Sterritt seems born from the architecture of desire. Its edge is the cusp on which the work hovers between art and non-art. The quotidian materials she's used for the last decade are culled from the lowly: scraps of lumber snatched from woodshop floors, cardboard, discarded household sponges, discs of dried paint and varnish too banal to even be considered as the raw material of art. Yet it's Sterritt's abiding affection for material – the wedges, the splintered stakes – that effects the humble earthbound no-tech matter to be animated and informed by her agile, sentient eye.

In an artworld littered with the remains of short-fused careers and dead-end dreams, Coleen Sterritt has been working for thirty years. Her work has accorded her a life. It is a life she has pushed, questioned, doubted, and opened. And life kicks back, hard. But for Sterritt, life has also given back – in work – in work that

expresses the intangible realities of lived experience. Her art has come to challenge us to understand her visual language not only on the referential level, but also, like life, on that of the poetic, the contingent, and the ephemeral.

Sterritt's recent work does not conceal the tainted connotations of her materials. She appropriates cheap, mass-produced tables that give glancing reference to Louis XV rococo and the catalogue cottage comforts of L.L. Bean – the fodder of late century capitalism. In *Diagramme de Navigation de Mon Coeur* and *One and Nine and Five and Three* the furniture mart dreams of domestic comforts are upturned, sawed off, and interrupted by her primordial will to stack and graft splinters and shards of wood to the legs and table surfaces. The consequence of heeding such a will is the recognition of conjuring something antisocial. Store bought decorative clichés become the model foil for unsentimental impulse. The cranky, jagged Matterhorn of splintered wood rising from a middle-class drawing room table and the sprawling rhizomes of cobbled stakes sprouting from chubby table legs suggest a primal sense of geometry. But Sterritt's is an organic, nervous, biological geometry. A geometry that addresses the flaws of any utopian ideal, a geometry that subverts rationalism and naming.

Much of Sterritt's work is driven by a sparking energy and unpolished grace. She is most salient when she reduces the making activity and the material to its minimal point. Her interventions are sometimes simple and sometimes methodically ambitious. She is not interested in seeing her hand in the work. Sterritt speaks of "inserting more of the real world, something that throws off the 'made' element either through found objects or peculiar materials." Yet, perversely, it is the handmade quality of Sterritt's work that channels the code of desire. The stacking, twisting, and cutting create rhythms, harmony and dissonance. These are basic primal activities.



It is what humans do. And it is these stuttering, inchoate shifts of matter that signal the intelligence of her work. Her working process is triggered by consequences – if this, then this, then this. Quality becomes a moral quest to articulate only the inevitable, and what is conjured by need rather than the civilities of taste. The organizational level of her work resists totalizing forms and single signs. It splinters into fragments, pluralities, creating crossing points and webs of open structures tolerant of disorder with themselves.

With *Domestic Fairytale* and *Pinecone Stack* Sterritt seems to daydream with objects, characteristically incorporating found materials as prominent formal elements. This harvesting from the world – the pinecones, the scratched and lacquered tables, the birch, and blocks of wood – estranges the material from their normative contexts yet resonates with associations to social reality. This sticking to the world is also evidence of Sterritt's desire to understand the physical, and to sort insight into language. The hyperaccumulation of blocks of wood becomes



Domestic Fairytale, 2005, detail

an intense sequence of reality that in the search for meaning opens up a path. But both *Domestic Fairytale* and *Pinecone Stack* resist summation in flight to non-sequiturs and expansion. Drawing no conclusion, this work posits questions. And questions have a longer life than answers.

It is important to note that form *is* Sterritt's work. Form is in everything. No thought, activity, or thing can exist outside of it. Sterritt crafts gesture out of cadences of balance and imbalance and finds a natural persuasiveness in formal hybrids of the organic and machined. Careful attention is given to the joints in her work. How one element is articulated, or embedded, or sprouted from another is critical to the work's sense of authenticity and the integrity of its facture.

Central to all of Sterritt's work is the permission of one process, such as grafting, or fitting, or stacking to give form to its own will. This permissiveness signifies Sterritt's confidence as an artist. And the orchestration of sequences, mostly additive, skeletal, jointed and skinned is evidence of her presence. In her drawings she exploits a finely calibrated sense of touch. The drawings are tangential to

the sculpture and often implicate abstracted meditations on the body as oozing, as skeletal, as plant like, while always remaining contemplative studies of form.

Coleen Sterritt's work underwrites her interest in the familiar and the mysterious. It is work of ache and rapture and enchantment, unlocking concealed desire. This work is divined from internal pressure, chance and urgency - it's work conjured by a witch.

*Diagramme de Navigation de Mon Couer, 2005*

84" x 32" x 33"

wood, glue, found furniture, hardware





*One and Nine and Five and Three, 2004-05*  
102" x 78" x 80"  
wood, glue, found furniture, hardware







*Daddy-O*, 2006  
83" x 38" x 40"  
wood, glue, insulation foam, cork,  
paint, shellac, found furniture



*Domestic Fairytale*, 2005  
108" x 70" x 55"  
wood, glue, found furniture, hardware







*Pinecone Stack*, 2003 - 04  
96" x 35" x 22"  
pinecones, wood, adhesive





*Untitled, May 22, 2005 #1*  
40" x 30"  
graphite, acrylic, shellac, collaged paper





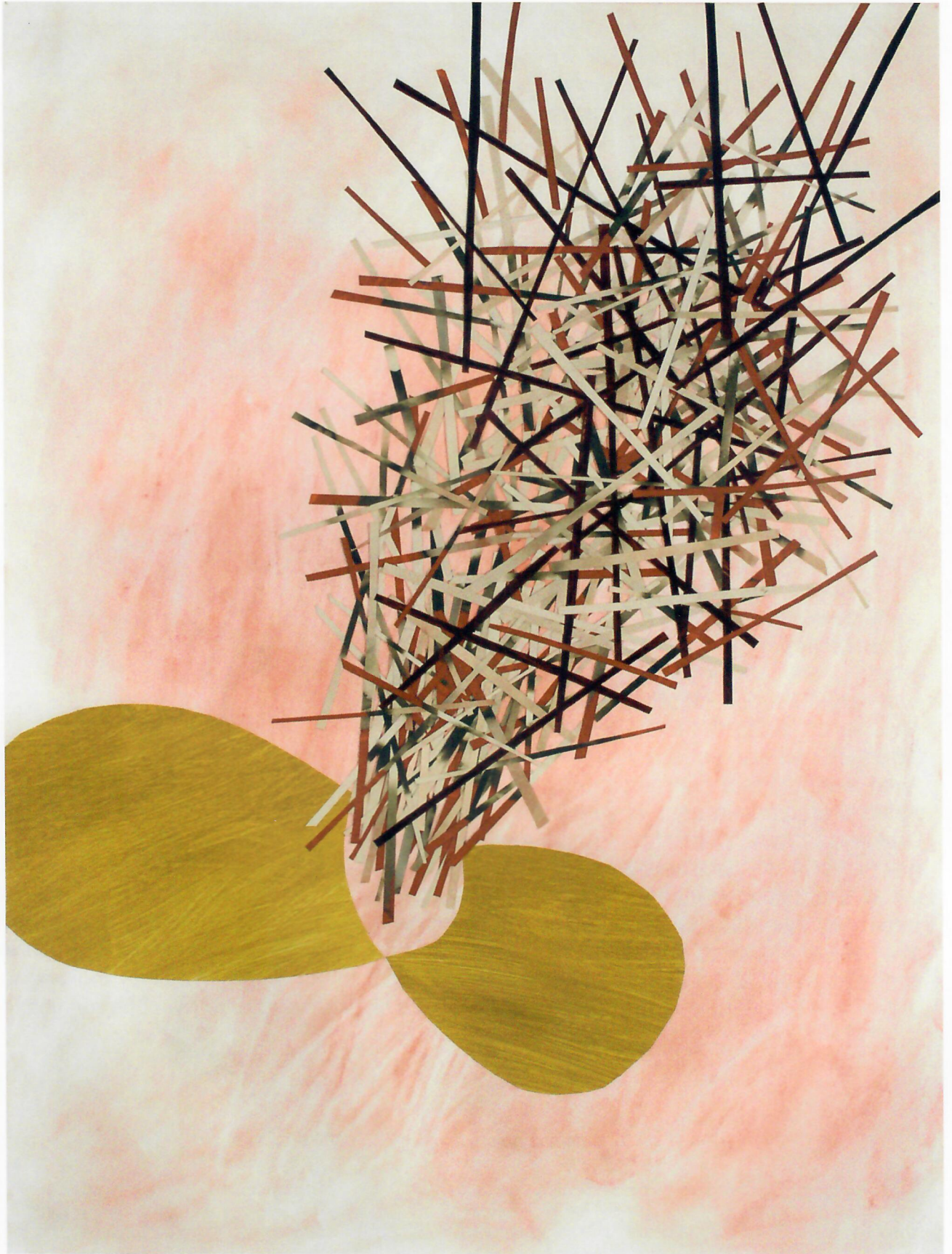
*Untitled*, June 17, 2005 #1  
40" x 30"  
pastel, acrylic, collaged paper





*Untitled*, May 22, 2005 #2  
40" x 30"  
pastel, acrylic, collaged paper









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## stuck to the world

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Julia Couzens is an artist who lives and works on  
Merritt Island, Clarksburg, California.

Front Cover  
*Daddy-O*, detail, 2006  
83" x 38" x 40"  
wood, glue, insulation foam, cork,  
paint, shellac, found furniture

Photography: Chris Warner  
Layout & Design: Micah K. Carlson



