Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Jason Messinger for his thoughtful work and for assisting us with the exhibition process in a thorough manner. The extent to which contemporary artists also play the role of curators in assembling their work is not sufficiently appreciated. The majority of the works in this exhibition are on loan from the artist; however, we are also grateful to a couple of other lenders: Sweet Street Deserts and Sandy Solomon.

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About the Artist

Jason Messinger was born in Woodstock, New York, in 1966, and resided in New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts before moving to Chicago. He received his Bachelors of Fine Arts at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1987.

Since that time he has resided and worked primarily in Chicago. In addition to numerous exhibitions in the Chicago area, he has been featured in exhibitions in Cooperstown, Kansas City, Baltimore, and San Francisco. He has also completed many major tile commissions for both private collectors and public sites, such as the Shriner’s Hospital and Radison Hotels.

About the Artist

Metropolis
Ceramic, 38 x 178 inches, 2004
Collection: Sweet Street Desserts
Dimensions on all tile work are variable
JASON MESSINGER
Freedman Gallery Albright College
Wassily Kandinsky is commonly considered to be the first artist to create purely abstract work. This is, of course, a Western notion, ignoring the abstract patterns traditionally found in carpets, tiles and architectural embellishments of religious works in the Islamic world. Dating back to the seventh century, in the Muslim world, the concept of representation, of attempting to reproduce an image of the natural world was tantamount to heresy, a mocking of God, who was considered to be the only true maker of life or lifelike forms. Fundamentally, this absence of recognizable imagery relates to the Qur'an’s condemnation of idols or idolatry. The written word, calligraphy, played an important role in their religious art, combining literary and visual information.

Jason Messinger’s *Metropolis* echoes many of these precepts of abstraction. There is a hint, a suggestion, of text running through a contradictory narrative, at once beautifully simple and puzzlingly complex. In reference to his work, Messinger speaks of abstraction on the edge of representation, a fuzzy borderline. On one level, reading this large work is akin to attempting to decipher ancient and mysterious hieroglyphs, symbols of meaning. But this route of understanding is eventually debased, as the images are actually undefined, not based in any known language. Instead, the work creates its own language, an enigmatic structure of non-linear thought.

The non-linear aspect of the tile works is emphasized by the fact that they may be arranged and rearranged in a multitude of variations, the modular nature of the work allows it to be horizontal or vertical, re-ordering the sequence of the individual pieces. In the Western world, we are accustomed to reading from left to right, and this cultural constraint pervades the ordered manner in which we view art. In a large horizontal work, we look from left to right. Essentially, Messinger turns this tradition around in a circular fashion, forcing a new way of reading. Although the tile works are based on a grid pattern, paradoxically, rather than following a rigid linear sequence, the eye tends to dance around the composition. Instead of a still pattern of regimentation, there is a choreography of creation on the part of the viewer. This liberation of interpretation, the freedom of the viewer to rearrange the order of objects in the mind’s eye, or even to actually physically alter the installation order is paramount to understanding Messinger’s method, his desire, to include the viewer in the creative process of his work.

Kandinsky often based his work on music, frequently naming his paintings after musical movements. This notion of movement runs throughout Messinger’s work. His sculptures, such as *Fame*, reflect the dynamism of Italian Futurism, such as Bocionni’s *Continuity of a Figure in Space*, the attempted depiction of movement encapsulated in a still figure. This combination of elements, of a physical static figure embodying an emotional suggestion of kinetics, itself creates a dynamic tension. These sculptures are not self-contained. It is as if there is a body, an energy, expressly trying to get out. Rodin’s famous sculpture of Balzac embodies just such a dynamic energy, the strength of Balzac’s character being barely contained in his cloaked enclosure. Yet, both Bocionni and Rodin are using figurative references to the human body. Somehow Messinger manages to portray this energy, this vibrant motion without any allusions to natural form.

Again, in these sculptures, Jason Messinger has invented a language that magically provokes our reading of the work. These works suggest the form of a cat in a bag; yet, the artist never lets the cat out of the bag, leaving us somewhat mystified. Conceptually, this confusion leads to a creative act on the part of the viewer. In our bemusement we are led to continually rethinking the inner nature of the work. The notion of sculpture forming a duality between the container and the thing contained is manifested.

The idea of motion is also embodied in the way that the three-dimensional works demand us to traverse through time, circling each piece in an attempt to gather a visual capsule of the whole. The multiple views of *Thunder*, reproduced in this brochure present but a few angles of view, but still present the radical ever-changing personality of a single work. Rather than being self-contained, *Thunder* is a chimera, changing and shifting dramatically, it evades any attempt to have a singular memory of its being. The very evasiveness of this work, echoing our inability to capture it in a simple cage in our mind, is the core of its beauty. It’s a wild thing.
Gusto

Ceramic, 48 x 38 inches, 2004
Thunder
Ceramic, 24 x 15 x 13 inches, 2004
Celestial
Ceramic, 38 x 48 inches, 2004