University of Louisville

ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

5-2011

Leo Wrye Zimmerman : return to Main Street.

McKenna Graham
University of Louisville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Graham, McKenna, "Leo Wrye Zimmerman : return to Main Street." (2011). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 522.
<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/522>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ThinkIR: The University of Louisville's Institutional Repository. This title appears here courtesy of the author, who has retained all other copyrights. For more information, please contact thinkir@louisville.edu.

LEO WRYE ZIMMERMAN:
RETURN TO MAIN STREET

By

McKenna Graham
B.A., Bellarmine University, 2007

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Fine Arts
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2011

LEO WRYE ZIMMERMAN:
RETURN TO MAIN STREET

By
McKenna Graham

A Thesis Approved on

April 15, 2011

By the following Thesis Committee:

Thesis Director (John P. Begley)

Jongwoo Jeremy Kim

Annette Allen

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give many thanks to the Zimmerman family for making this exhibition and research possible. Leo's widow, Marie and daughter, Zaurie, were integral to the research this exhibition is based upon, providing not only information and access to many of Leo's personal belongings, letters, writings and artwork, but also passion and enthusiasm for the project. Much gratitude is also owed to the friends and associates of Leo Zimmerman, such as Roberta Williams, CJ Pressma, Joseph Fitzpatrick, Bill and Mitzi Friedlander and John Paul who generously donated their input, time and resources. Thanks also to Dick Krakowski whose mechanical savvy made the slu balls "slu" once more and Claire Pope whose optimism and help made installation of the exhibition not only possible but actually enjoyable. Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank John Begley, who made this research possible from the beginning and whose guidance, advice and encouragement saw it through until the end.

ABSTRACT

LEO WRYE ZIMMERMAN:

RETURN TO MAIN STREET

McKenna Graham

April 15, 2011

Leo Zimmerman is a contradiction: A man who was both highly collaborative and deeply influential in the Louisville art scene but was a misanthrope who became increasingly reclusive over the years. He produced prolifically yet chose to never sell work, with a few rare exceptions. Though he believed his work to be of great value he repeatedly and adamantly refused proposals to exhibit. This is the nature of the inventor, pushing ever forwards toward new undiscovered ground.

Zimmerman's style is a reflection not only of the artistic movements taking place in Europe and the U.S. after World War II but also evidence of his orientation towards process, discovery and innovation. The breadth of his style ranges from his earliest work created with a more traditional, formalist approach to painting in a non-objective abstract style, forsaking subject matter later on in favor of an exploration of

color and shape and then finally to the kinetic and computer generated work of his later years, which investigated movement and perspective. Zimmerman fused concepts of mechanics, engineering and art, producing a variety of work that blurred the lines dividing fine and applied arts, such as the sarcoph-couch, Silicoil brush cleaning system and fiberglass reproduction of the Ford Chimera.

This research and exhibition of Zimmerman's work serves several purposes. First, it serves as an impetus to preserve Leo Zimmerman's artistic legacy through revisiting his work and orienting him within an art historical context. Second, the exhibition and research is an opportunity to explore the state of and future of arts in Louisville, Kentucky. Zimmerman felt strongly and worked with tenacity to promote a fertile ground for cultural endeavors in his hometown. Displaying Zimmerman's work raises questions about the future of arts in Louisville and will invite those working within the artistic community, past, present and future, to engage in the conversation. Finally, the exhibition sought to provoke theoretical questions about the parameters of art and suggest potential overlap between artistic creativity and applied/utilitarian creativity (technological, architectural, community planning, mechanical etc.).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
List of Illustrations.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Initial Research.....	2
Early Biographical Information.....	6
Abstraction in Post WWII Europe.....	9
Popcorn in Paris.....	19
Return to Kentucky.....	21
Rural-Mural.....	24
Library Doors.....	29
Inventions.....	30
Kinetic Art and the ‘Slu Effect’.....	32
Apple Art.....	36
A Wrye Life.....	37
The Exhibition: <i>Return to Main Street</i>	38

Louisville’s Art Future: A Panel Discussion.....	40
A Wrye Vision: Art’s Importance in Societies & Conclusion.....	42
Chronology.....	44
Exhibition Documentation.....	46
References.....	54
C.V.	57

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled Façade*, 1948
2. Leo Zimmerman, *St. Germaine des Pres*, 1945
3. Leo Zimmerman, *Confronte*, 1952
4. Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue and Yellow*, 1930
5. Victor Vasarely, *Mar Caribe*, 1950
6. Victor Vasarely, *Méandres Belle-Isle*, 1951
7. Victor Vasarely, *Banghor*, 1951
8. Victor Vasarely, *Yapoura-2*, 1951
9. Leo Zimmerman, *Intralocke*, 1952
10. Leo Zimmerman, *Citron*, 1953
11. Ellsworth Kelly, *Colors for a Large Wall*, 1951
12. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled (Squares)*, date unknown
13. Leo Zimmerman, *Rural-Mural for U.S. 60*, 1956
14. Leo Zimmerman, *Doublecoil*, 1983
15. Leo Zimmerman, *Silicoil Brush Cleaning System*, 1962 patent
16. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled #9*, ca. 1980

17. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled #10*, ca. 1975-1980
18. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled #32*, ca. 1975-1980

INTRODUCTION

In April of 2008, Leo Zimmerman passed away. It had been nearly two decades since his last public show, but his studio in Old Louisville revealed a man busily toiling away, tirelessly charting the progress of an ever-evolving visual manifesto. Years of exploration in the field of geometric abstraction was informed by Zimmerman's diverse array of endeavors in typography, mechanics, graphic design and entrepreneurship. The resulting artistic style synthesized the aesthetic of non-representational, hard-edged shapes and aggressive color with a philosophy of invention.

Zimmerman, who later took up the pseudonym Leo Wrye as a reference to both a favorite drink and his own contrary sense of humor, felt art was vital to the well being of societies. After returning from Paris in the 1950's he spent years invigorating the local arts community, helping to instigate what was hailed as cultural renaissance for Louisville, before dropping out of the public spotlight entirely. Even during his reclusive years, his orientation towards process compelled him to create prolifically, pressing ever forwards towards new ground. Yet, instead of embracing the final products of his efforts as a prized artifact of artistry or invention,

Zimmerman regarded these works as by-products of discovery. But for viewers, they are road maps to realization; a carefully demarcated atlas to help unravel our own journey of seeing Zimmerman's process of creation.

INITIAL RESEARCH

My research for this project began in January of 2010 while enrolled in a Curatorial Methods class. One requirement for this class was a mini-internship calling for students to devote themselves to curatorial undertaking of their choice for the duration of the semester. While searching for a suitable project, one of the professors of the class, John Begley, informed me that recently, in the spring of 2008, a local artist named Leo Zimmerman had passed away and little to no work had been done to preserve or contextualize his work within Louisville's history or broader art history. The challenges of the project appealed to me and I agreed to take it on as my mini-internship but I had yet to discover how the eccentricities of the artist would problematize my work.

As I began to dig deeply into the archives at the University of Louisville it became clear how little had been known or recorded about the elusive character of Leo Zimmerman. The Art Library did have a file on him, however, its contents consisted primarily of notifications of his death, obituaries from the Courier Journal and an article written by Paula Burba on April 3, 2008, two days after his passing, that chronicled some of the mile stone accomplishments of his life. The meager

amounts of information available alluded to the reclusive personality the artist had taken up in his later years.

The archives at U of L did offer a collection of periodicals founded and published by Leo Zimmerman from 1955 to 1963 called, in chronological order of appearance, *Arts in Louisville*, *The Louisvillian* and *Gazette of the Arts in Louisville*. I scoured the issues, searching each page for articles written by the elusive ‘Z’, a signature he used to sign many of his editorials. Over the course of reading these articles, I began to get a picture of the man—but I had yet to see a single picture *by* the man who so slyly outmaneuvered my scholastic investigations.

During my initial research I had discovered that Leo Zimmerman had attended the University of Kentucky where he earned his undergraduate degree in Fine Arts. I contacted Barbara Lovejoy, registrar at U.K.’s Art Museum and Nancy DeMarcus, records manager of U.K.’s special collections during March of 2010. From this source I was able to obtain a Courier Journal article dated April 22, 1948 with the headline *U.K. Veteran’s Oil Painting Takes First Place at Show Here*, including a photograph of Zimmerman standing in front of his winning artwork, *Main Street Façade*. U.K. was also able to provide me with a number of other items including, but not limited to, several news clipping from Lexington’s *Herald Leader* and an invitation to a solo show of Zimmerman’s work taking place in 1953.

The first major progress came when I contacted Zimmerman’s former business associates and friends for an in person interview that took place on March 18, 2010 at the home of artist, CJ Pressma. Those interviewed included Pressma, who had known Zimmerman as a fellow artist and as a neighbor, Roberta Williams, who

had worked with Zimmerman at the Louisville Free Public Library on York Street, and long time friend and collaborator, Joseph Fitzpatrick. Not only was I able to obtain a nearly two hour recorded account of numerous aspects of Zimmerman's life, but also contact information for his widow, Marie Zimmerman who still resides in Louisville, and daughter, Zaurie Zimmerman, who lives in Lexington, Massachusetts. Their accounts described a "curmudgeon", a man with an unending curiosity, someone who was passionately invested in his work, but who had become increasingly destructive to himself-- a man so deeply process oriented that the rapid deterioration of his work was of little concern to him. His choice of automotive lacquers used to create some paintings and propensity to be difficult to work with combined with repeated and adamant refusals to exhibit (particularly in the last two decades of his life) led to an artistic career that was problematic to chronicle and paintings that existed in precarious conditions. Yet, despite all of these challenges Zimmerman's story is one that needs to be told. He existed on the forefront of the optical art and concrete art movement in France during the late 1940's and early 1950's, alongside a number of other prominent American artists studying in Paris such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jack Youngerman and Ellsworth Kelly. In addition to his fellow American artists, Zimmerman worked closely with hailed father of Op-Art, Victor Vasarely and acclaimed abstract artist, Edgard Pollet.

EARLY BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Leo Zimmerman was born in Timlin, Pennsylvania on September 21, 1924 (Zimmerman). He spent the majority of his youth in Kentucky after moving to his mother's hometown of Louisville when he was five years old. He attended and graduated from Male High School and then enrolled at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, where he would ultimately volunteer for the army at the draft board in April of 1944. For more than two years, Wrye served in what he called "that great unpleasantness number two" (WWII), before being honorably discharged at Camp Atterbury, Indiana (Zimmerman). Interestingly enough, Zimmerman's original plan had been to study medicine and follow in his father's footsteps, however it would be during his time in the army that he would first be exposed to formal art training at the Biarritz American University in France. Upon his return to the U.S., Zimmerman enrolled at the University of Kentucky and majored in fine arts (Zimmerman). After graduating in the spring of 1948, Zimmerman returned to Louisville and entered a painting in the Annual Kentucky and Southern Indiana Exhibition of Art at Stewart Dry Goods Store ("U.K. Veteran's Oil Painting Takes First Place At Show Here"). The exhibition was judged that year by Katherine Kuh, a curator at the Art Institute of Chicago. She rewarded Zimmerman with first place for his painting *Main St. Façade*,

which he described as “an abstract with a realistic subject” (“U.K. Veteran's Oil Painting...”). The painting was a formalized vision of main street buildings with several storefronts and a bright red lamppost. According to Marie Zimmerman, Leo had researched the tastes of Kuh and discovered that the judge had a preference for artworks that conveyed a sense of local pride through an avant-garde aesthetic. This may account for why *Main Street Façade* (1948) and Zimmerman’s other extant façade painting from 1948 differ noticeably from previous realistic paintings, such as *St. Germaine des Pres* as well as later abstract artworks such as *Confronte*, 1952, which abandoned subject matter entirely after exposure to abstract movements in France. Either way, Zimmerman was successful in his efforts and won first place for the painting. The prize money would allow Zimmerman to travel back to Paris, France, a thriving locus of artistic development after WWII.

1. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled Façade*, 1948

2. Leo Zimmerman, *St. Germain des Pres*, 1945

3. Leo Zimmerman, *Confronte*, 1952

ABSTRACTION IN POST WWII EUROPE

Michel Seuphor defined abstract art as, “the apprehension of whatever it is which determines that art is art and not just illustration or education or propoganda or a substitute for literature or religion” (Van Wagner 1)¹. Cubism has sometimes been attributed as the precursor to geometric abstraction. The work of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque during the turn of the twentieth century paved the way for much of the non-objective work that followed. They introduced a style that simplified and reduced subject matter to structure, using basic planar fields to create a limited sense of depth and establishing a “pictorial reality which was independent, though derived from and parallel to nature” (Van Wagner 1).

Paris was one of the centers of geometric abstraction’s development, however, the influence of De Stijl, a movement beginning in other regions of Europe, also appeared to have had a profound effect on Zimmerman’s philosophy and approach to artistic endeavors. De Stijl, which translates to “the style” in English, promoted total abstraction, a reduction of subject to emphasize pure form and color and the potential

¹ Michael Suephor wrote a brief review of Zimmerman’s Paris studio exhibition in the March 15th 1953 *Art Digest*, as well as mentioning Zimmerman in his book *Dictionary of Abstract Painting, with a history of abstract painting*, published 1957.

positive effects that art could have on every facet of life ("Tate | Glossary | De Stijl"). Adopted by Piet Mondrian, *Neoplasticism* formed the philosophical basis for the ideas that drove De Stijl, rejecting the decorative flourishes of Art Nouveau "in favor of a simple, logical style that emphasized construction and function, one that would be appropriate for every aspect of modern life... posited on the fundamental principle of the geometry of the straight line" ("Guggenheim Collection - Glossary - De Stijl."). Though there was never an official and distinct school of Neo-plasticians, they did exhibit at Galerie 23 in Paris in 1930 and spread their theories through verbal discussions between painters, architects, sculptors, writers and designers (Henkels). The style spread to the United States during a visit by Mondrian in the 1940's (Henkels).

4. Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930

Victory Vasarely, like Zimmerman, had studied medicine prior to his artistic career (Morgan 18). In 1927, Vasarely suspended his studies at the University of Budapest's School of Medicine and embarked on a two year hiatus during which time he conducted his own investigations in the natural and physical sciences, cybernetics, advanced technology and astrophysics, in an effort to understand quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity and therefore obtain "an objective understanding of reality" (Morgan 18). By 1929, Vasarely had enrolled in the Műhely Academy, an institution founded by Sándor Bortnyik that offered courses combining new techniques and social ideas with art, based on a philosophy of synthesizing fine and applied arts (Morgan 19). Bortnyik had been profoundly affected by the principles of the Bauhaus, though he had never actually been a student there, and sought to translate their "ideals in a way that would be relevant to students in Hungary, inspiring them to think about art as a means for social change and to regard the artist as an advocate for the transformation of values" (Morgan 19).

Műhely exposed Vasarely to a diverse array of visual styles and disciplines, but by 1945 Vasarely was completely immersed in the field of abstraction. As the art world expanded rapidly Vasarely began to educate himself in the area of graphic arts, keenly aware of the effect the advertising industry was having on modern French culture and postulating that graphic design might function as a social application, a tool for achieving utopian social ideals (Morgan 21). "Art had to have a purpose and a function beyond itself. It should reach into the very fabric of society, according to Vasarely, and offer a new and vital optimism, an incentive for social change" (Morgan 21).

During Vasarely's time in Paris, he had two important shows at the Denise René gallery. The first was during the inauguration of the Denise René in 1944, displaying close to 150 drawings and graphics by Vasarely and represented his first major exhibition in the city of lights (Morgan 25). Following this exhibition, he more or less left the graphic style behind, adopting abstraction as a painterly practice after being exposed to artists such as Piet Mondrian, Auguste Herbin and Le Corbusier (Morgan 25). Vasarely's second important show of work at the Denise René gallery happened in 1948, the same year Zimmerman arrived back in Paris to study art. The exhibition was called "Tendances de l'Art Abstrait" and reflected artistic movements towards Concrete art (Morgan 26). The elegantly simple geometric style Vasarely was developing during the middle years of the twentieth century manifested itself in the painting *Mar Caribe*, 1950. The following year would yield paintings by Vasarely that came even closer to embodying the true spirit of Concrete art, a movement that grew out of the work of De Stijl and advocated purity of line and color, a pictorial space without reference to the external visual world, free of symbolical associations. Vasarely's *Méandres Belle-Isle* (1951), *Yapoura-2* (1951) and *Banghor* (1951) achieved these means and marked an extraordinary stride in the development of Vasarely's style (Morgan 29).

5. Victor Vasarely, *Mar Caribe*, 1950

6. Victor Vasarely, *Méandres Belle-Isle*, 1951

7. Victor Vasarely, *Banghor*, 1951

8. Victor Vasarely, *Yapoura-2*, 1951

It was in 1948 that Leo Zimmerman entered this artistic climate, already tinkering with the visual potential of abstraction. Fitzpatrick, who was also in Paris during the late 1940's and early 1950's, recalled one of his early visits to Zimmerman's studio in Paris. Zimmerman was trying to invent new shapes and had gone to the hardware store where he bought two pieces of glass. He taped the pieces of glass around three sides and then put mercury into the top of the open side. Squeezing the glass would compress the mercury, creating amoeboid shapes, which Zimmerman would study and copy for later use in paintings (Fitzpatrick).

During a visit to a gallery in Paris, Zimmerman and Fitzpatrick had their initial exposure to avant-garde art. "Since France had been always been a leader in setting new styles," Fitzpatrick recalls, "we were both eager to be involved" (Fitzpatrick). They knocked on the door of abstract artist and secretary general of art at the *Atelier D'Art Abstrait*, Edgard Pillet, who would welcome them and act as a mentor and artistic collaborator (Fitzpatrick). Later, Pillet would serve as an advisor and contributor to Zimmerman's publication, the Arts in Louisville Magazine during a stint as artist in residence at the University of Louisville.

A letter from July 2nd, 1951 contains the first rumblings of Zimmerman's acceptance into the Paris art community, writing to his parents,

"Bob [Breer] and I talked to Vasarely the other day about the possibilities of having a small group show at the Denise Rene *galerie*. He is a painter friend of ours who is also one of the founders of the *galerie* and one of the directors. We proposed a show of Zimm. Breer

and Youngerman plus a sculptor. He said that he would talk it over with the other members of the staff and see when there could be an opening. He said maybe there would be a chance in January. It is very easy to have a show in many of the galleries around town. It is merely a matter of paying so much rent and hanging the pictures. But at Denise Rene all shows are hung free, but only the painters who are accepted by the group are allowed to show. Therefore the quality is higher and... it means much more to have a show there” (Zimmerman, 1951).

Denise Rene came to look at the artwork of Zimmerman and Youngerman in December of 1951 and according to Zimmerman “she was pleased naturally” and agreed to show their work alongside that of several other young artists (Zimmerman 12-17-51). The “7” exhibition opened Friday, February 8th 1952 at the Denise Rene gallery and included five pieces each from seven young artists in Paris, including Breer, Youngerman and Zimmerman. A Danish artist dropped out at the last moment so the show ended up including only six artists. Zimmerman described the exhibition as successful, though he felt the artworks he exhibited no longer represented him since he had already begun to concentrate all his efforts on his newly formed idea for the rural-mural (Zimmerman 2-10-52). The exhibition ended March 1, 1952, and though Zimmerman failed to sell any paintings, he received positive feedback from critics from the *NY Herald Tribune*, *Art d'aujourd'hui* and *L'Actualite Artistique Internationale* (Zimmerman 2-28-52).

Later, Zimmerman would be invited to join La Groupe Espace, an association founded in Paris in 1951 by André Bloc and artists affiliated with the periodical *Art d'aujourd'hui*. In a letter to his parents dated February 16, 1953, Zimmerman describes his invitation to be part of La Groupe Espace, saying,

“Pillet and Bloc... have ask me to become the American manager of [Art d'aujourd'hui] subscriptions in USA to spread the good word. Also they have invited me to join a group of Artists, Architects and decorators who call themselves La Groupe Espace. They want me to help establish an American branch. There exist in Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, and Holland already branch groups. The purpose is to foster closer cooperation between the various plasticiens” (Zimmerman).

Very little has been written about the plasticiens, probably the result of a less organized movement, transmitted primarily through discussions between artists,

9. Leo Zimmerman, *Intralocke*, 1952

designers and architects close to its conception. Paul-André Linteau, in his book *Quebec Since 1930*, states that the

movement appeared in Canada around 1955 following the return of young critic and painter, Rodolphe de Repentign, from Paris (Linteau 301). It is interesting to see the

term appear in Zimmerman's letter from Paris two years before Repentign wrote *Manifeste des plasticiens*, a document that outlines the aims of plasticiens to objectify paintings, do away with illusionistic space and focus on the components of line and color to emphasize a picture's two-dimensionality (The Canadian Encyclopedia). Clearly, Zimmerman was on the forefront of, if not a major player, in development of the plasticiens style and philosophy, however he has been sadly omitted from its history. Paintings he produced during this period exhibit qualities of this lesser known sect of abstraction.

In a later letter, dated March 11, 1953 Zimmerman describes the Groupe Espace's purpose in more detail, "The Groupe Espace is an organization of artists and architects who are trying through common effort to bring a little closer relationship between the arts and their relation to *la vie*" (Zimmerman). This early allusion to collaboration between fine and applied artists would be taken up again later when Zimmerman returned to Kentucky and is also evident in the philosophical attitude towards creation he would take in producing work throughout the years.

POPCORN IN PARIS

In order to supplement his income, Zimmerman took an entrepreneurial leap and began selling popcorn to the Paris public who were unfamiliar with the white morsels of crispy cooked kernels. Alongside Edgard Pillet, Zimmerman distributed his wares from the back of a beloved but dilapidated English pick-up truck to bars and grocery stands throughout the city (Zimmerman v1 b3 ch1 pg 6b). Zimmerman also designed a sidewalk popcorn machine (which he convinced a French firm to manufacture), an industrial size popper and a bag sealer, the latter two of which were installed in an abandoned sculpture studio that doubled as the young artist's make shift popcorn factory ((Zimmerman v1 b3 ch1 pg 6b). Popcorn sales supplemented the income from the G.I. Bill and the wages Marie Zimmerman was making working at the American Embassy, making it possible for Zimmerman to continue living and studying art in France without compromising his ideals saying,

“I don't hope to make a living at painting. You have to get into the schmook clique to do that. And I would rather paint for art than for

people who like art because they think they ought to. I'll keep on painting for art and make my living selling popcorn" (Zimmerman).

However, between the red tape involved in importing the un-popped kernels from Davenport, Iowa and difficulty with vendors stealing the profits, the operation eventually shut down. The old English pick up truck, which had hauled the popcorn, was sold to Victor Vasarely for one hundred dollars worth of francs (Zimmerman v1 b3 ch1 pg 6b).

RETURN TO KY

On July 4th 1953, Zimmerman arrived back in the United States via New York City. The years he had spent in Paris, France, both during his initial visit while in the army and his return stay of seven years, had sculpted his artistic style and philosophy significantly. These intellectual souvenirs would drive his work in the bluegrass over the following years, infusing the community with a sense of cultural worldliness, and introducing new ideas that would challenge previous concepts of artistic sophistication. Zimmerman was certainly not alone in this measure. Many other American artists (many war veterans) followed the same path of studying art in France during the middle of the twentieth century and cross pollinating the U.S. art world with the ideas they brought back. One example, cited previously, includes Ellsworth Kelly. Kelly, one of the major practitioners of abstract art in America after World War II, had been exposed to European movements in art during his time in the military (Sims). In 1948 he returned to Paris, France, which would act as his European base during the six years he lived and worked there. By 1949, Kelly had produced his first abstract painting and would continue in this style, almost

exclusively, utilizing elements of minimalism, color field painting and hard-edged geometric abstraction (Sims). Note the striking similarities between Kelly's *Colors for a Large Wall* (1951) and Zimmerman's *Untitled (Squares)*.

11. Ellsworth Kelly, *Colors for a Large Wall*, 1951

12. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled (Squares)*, date

Kelly and Zimmerman would also share some of the same intellectual company, such as Jack Youngerman. Youngerman, in an interview in spring of 2011, suggested that had Zimmerman moved to a more important cultural mecca such as NY after Paris, his story might have unfolded quite differently (Youngerman). Speculation aside, it cannot be ignored that Zimmerman's story follows the same lines as many other greats in the field of American Abstraction, however, their choices diverged by the mid-fifties. While artists like Kelly and Youngerman set up shop in NYC, Zimmerman traveled back to his hometown of Louisville, possibly in the true spirit of the Bauhaus. Interaction with Vasarely may have contributed to Zimmerman's belief that art should meet the needs of society and, possibly, seeing

his hometown as a place in dire need of art and its positive effects, Zimmerman returned.

Between 1953 and 1963 Zimmerman would work prolifically within the Louisville art community, beginning with the opening of the Carriage House Art Supply Store in 1953. The store started an art school for amateurs, selling a painting kit that came with six colors, plus white, paint brush, canvas and four painting lessons for \$13. Within a year, they had 500 students (Fitzpatrick).

In 1955, Zimmerman founded the monthly publication *Arts in Louisville*, which was later re-named the *Gazette of Arts in Louisville* after shifting to a bi-weekly publication. Its run ended in 1963. During that time, Pillet, served as one of the publication's advisers and contributed artwork to numerous issues. By late 1957, the Arts in Louisville House on Zane at Garvin Street opened (Zimmerman, Sulphurous Oaths). The Arts in Louisville House consisted of a gallery, bar, theater, library, office for the Society for Arts in Louisville and restaurant that served a variety of foods inspired by Zimmerman's years in France, such as the croque monsieur, a French version of the ham sandwich (Fitzpatrick). Though it was a venue for many cultural endeavors, it would become best known for hosting a number of notable jazz musicians, such as Dizzy Gillespie and Cannonball Adderley, and inciting controversy over its racially progressive policies (Fitzpatrick).

RURAL-MURAL

The rural-mural was an idea originally conceived by Zimmerman in 1952 after spending time driving through the countryside of France. It combines his aesthetic of geometric abstraction, aggressive color palette and sense of visual drama with his philosophy that art should be available to the public, enrich their experience and enhance the beauty of public visual space.

The excerpt below, from a letter dated March 11, 1953, is a translation of the text on the invitation to Zimmerman's Paris studio show of paintings. Composed by a French writer identified only as Alvard, it describes the concept for Zimmerman's *Rural Murals*. I believe, at this point, it is important to quote from this excerpt and Zimmerman's own description of the rural-mural philosophy at length since there is no other published account available. These excerpts elucidate the connection between Bauhaus, De Stijl and Zimmerman's own work and represent a philosophical body of work, which deserves examination and credit in its own right for the avant-garde ideas it proposes—ideas, which are still relevant today.

“Z. knows the dangers of publicity and the servitude that it can impose. But there is not adventure without danger. There exists along the highways great surfaces given over to the most mediocre usage of advertising which awaken the desire to make them serve more noble usages, and who knows maybe reconcile the[m] with the natural beauty of the landscape that surrounds them. Zim. takes the problem in reverse. He reacts against the slavery of publicity in the hope to put, for one time, money at the service of art. What one sees on the walls on his studio it must be underlined are paintings, which if they are destined to be considerably enlarged demand to be judged as paintings. He has simply hunted for simple abstract forms to facilitate their reproduction but without sacrificing anything of their subtlety and their personality. As for the colors, they owe nothing to anything except the interior exigencies of the painter” (Zimmerman, 3).

The rural-mural concept was articulated in a letter to his parents. January 21, 1952.

Zimmerman writes,

“There has been a lot of discussion on the subject of easel painting; its purpose, dissemination, and future. There are those who contend that the easel picture (that is as opposed to the mural painter) shall continue to exist in its present role, being shown in gal[l]eries, sold to collectioners, and museums, and being a possession of someone or a

few for their individual pleasure. There is the opposing view toward easel painting which feels that the future of easel painting is very precarious. This form of art does not reach enough people to be effective as an art form, has too limited means and market to be a financial success, and is therefore doomed to a limited and precious existence...

“I suppose that you are asking me why I put all this emphasis on the importance of the presence of good form (in the general sense meaning shapes, colors, materials etc which are employed with the best of taste). I feel that good form is an absolute necessity in the psychological well being of the human being. You have heard of the results of experiments in industry on production by which the painting of a factory interior in more pleasant tones augmented production. This is one of the more simple effects of form on man. Environment plays a huge role in the psychic formation of a man's character. The presence of art, whether it be music, architecture, sculpture or painting does have a very important effect also as a part of man's environment. But it is obviously ineffectual if it is seen only rarely, and then only when sought by those who feel the need. Good form is a spiritual food that is as necessary to the [spirit] as potatoes to the stomach. Those who are deprived of it are starving... You have gathered that I was planning to make some liaison between fine arts

and commerce. This liaison takes the rather peculiar form of mural painting as a commercial art, advertising a product. But I feel that only [through] mural art can any number of people be affected. And here hangs the tail.

“Rural-Mural Barn painting: You know of course that there are several companies who find it *efficace* to advertise their products on the side of a barn, the whole side of the barn. Main Pouch, Bull Durham, Jefferson Island Salt. These ads are only ugly colored letters giving the name of the product. They are *peut-être* effective as ads, but a blight to the landscape. I have hit upon the marvelous idea of utilizing these huge surfaces for art. And art which will serve the second purpose as advertising” (Zimmerman, 1-3)

In the November 1956 issue of Arts in Louisville Magazine, Zimmerman was able to announce that his vision for the rural-mural would come to life—only in a more urban environment, “On Shelbyville Road about one mile this side of the Watterson Expressway” at a drive-in restaurant owned by patron of the arts, Austin Pryor (Zimmerman, Mural for U.S. 60). Louisville architect, Norman Sweet designed the drive-in’s building and called Zimmerman with Pryor’s request, “Could a rural mural become suburban?”

13. Leo Zimmerman, *Rural-Mural for U.S. 60*, 1956

Zimmerman acquiesced and when completed the mural was sixty-seven feet long and thirteen feet tall. “I hope that this mural becomes more than a source of shock to the 45,000 or so daily passers-before-it; that it becomes an added excitement in the landscape; that it bring[s] to those who pass a response of individual signification in this vast, exuberant, unwieldy, unsettling, modern human extravaganza”, Zimmerman wrote in *Arts in Louisville Magazine* (Zimmerman, *Mural for U.S. 60*). Pryor would also commission Zimmerman to design a forty-foot tall rotating hamburger sculpture for another restaurant (Burba). For five years the mural graced the wall of the drive-on on U.S. 60 until a later expansion of the building obscured the mural from view (Burba)².

² The *Courier Journal* article by Paula Burba, written posthumously, contains several pieces of incorrect information, such as the claim that Zimmerman’s autobiography totals more than 3,000 pages. Zaurie Zimmerman, Leo Zimmerman’s daughter, confirms that the book’s total page count actually falls near 1,300.

LIBRARY DOORS

By the mid-sixties Zimmerman had closed the Arts in Louisville House and disbanded the publication, dropping out as the public organizer and activator within the Louisville art scene he had been, though he continued to stay creatively active working independently and collaborating with other local artists. He was hired on as the physical facilities manager at the Louisville Free Public Library in 1966 where he worked until 1977 (Fitzpatrick). During his time working as physical facilities manager Zimmerman worked alongside prominent Louisville sculptor, Barney Bright to produce a set of cast aluminum door panels for the Main Branch of the Louisville Public Library at 301 York Street (Lansdell). The doors, which were designed by Zimmerman and sculpted and cast by Bright, were composed of 32 panels, each bearing the double “L” emblem that the library used in their seal (Lansdell). The doors were installed at the library’s south entrance from 1970 until their removal in 1993 when renovations were done to the York Street building (Burba).

INVENTIONS

In 1954, dissatisfied with the available brush cleaning systems that incurred damage to paintbrushes during washing, Zimmerman developed an alternative device he named “the Silicoil”. The Silicoil brush cleaning system was patented in 1962 and afforded Zimmerman the financial freedom to focus on pursuing his artistic vision without the pressure of having to sell paintings for income. The Silicoil, manufactured and distributed by the Lion Company, Inc. in Louisville, Kentucky, continues to be one of the leading brush cleaning systems on the market today (Burba). Its design is one variation of the swirling, spinning, rotating movements Zimmerman frequently used to explore relationships between forms. It is these series of concentric circles, manifested three dimensionally in the elegant utility of the Silicoil, repeated in paintings such as Double Coil and Untitled #9 and evident in the rotating motion of the Slu Balls (introduced below) that thematically unites Zimmerman’s visual vocabulary. The Silicoil is also one example of how design concepts used in aesthetic endeavors can translate to meet functional needs, underlining art’s importance in invention and industry.

14. Leo Zimmerman, *Doublecoil*, 1983

15. Silicoil Brush Cleaning System, patented 1962

16. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled #9*, ca. 1980

KINETIC ART AND THE 'SLU EFFECT'

In *Origins and Development of Kinetic Art* Frank Popper contends that kinetic art found its beginnings in the dynamic elements of Impressionism circa 1860 but it was not until 1935 that kinetic art entered a stage of “victorious dynamization” (Popper 58). The previous stages of its development evolved from the abstraction of moving themes like the sea or scaffolding in Paris, followed by a stage marking a transition to truly abstract compositions formed from geometric shapes and color and then finally this third “victorious” stage that Popper states was partly ushered in by Mondrian’s work (Popper, 58).

The influence of kinetic art on Zimmerman’s work becomes more noticeable, particularly in paintings created after 1960. Unlike the angular, static and hard-edged geometric images Zimmerman created during the 1950’s, his paintings in the years that followed reflected an increasing interest in movement, beginning with paintings such as *Untitled #10* (date unknown, but presumed to have been produced during the late 1970’s or early 1980’s based on stylistic elements, color palette and comparison to other artworks with known dates) and *Untitled #32* (also with an unknown date, but presumed to be from the same period).

17. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled#10*, ca. 1975-1980

18. Leo Zimmerman, *Untitled#32*, ca. 1975-1980

“Vasarely would claim that what makes a work of art kinetic is not just the formal vibration of the forms and colors, but how one’s eye moves among the various components... instilled within the picture plane” (Morgan, 23). The paintings produced circa 1980 that exhibit the same fluid qualities, resembling the surface of moving water, demonstrate how a literally static painting can convey a visually dynamic quality. Zimmerman would not stop here, however, combining elements of geometric abstraction, kinetic sculpture and optical illusions he created an entirely new body of work, which he deemed his “illusion-works”.

The Slu Balls (also spelled “slue”), or Lacquered Kinetic Paintings, were first exhibited at the University of Kentucky in 1989. Zimmerman believed that “painting is essentially an astonishing art of illusion” and these paintings represent Zimmerman’s explorations in kinetic or moving/shifting perspective. Through combining elements of hard-edged geometric shapes with mechanical savvy, the artist

created an “illusion and a unique aesthetic experience” (Press Release 1989). The kinetic paintings are fabricated from aluminum sheets that have been lacquered, inlaid and mounted on a lacquered aluminum panel. Behind this, an electrical motor powers the turntable, which creates the motion necessary for the illusion held within the walnut frame. When the motorized turntable begins its revolution, the elliptical discs within the panel appear to “move not in a circle, but in and out and back and forth through space” in a surprising display of optical trickery (Press Release 1989). Zimmerman fabricated a total of twelve Slue Balls in a demonstration of the variety and potential to be found in the relationship between forms. He averred that, “Seeing, itself, is illusory. Perception is an intricate, complex process of integrating and interpreting visual experience. These paintings astonish via that process” (Zimmerman, Wrye Artist Statement).

In a glossary Zimmerman released with the 1989 exhibition, he defines “slue” as deriving from the obsolete Dutch work ‘*slooien*’ meaning to twist and turn “as a spar about a mast” or to “turn upon a circumference”. The term also clearly relates to the English word ‘slew’ meaning to twist, turn or slide in a particular direction. A number of other terms are coined and defined by Zimmerman and reflect the wry sense of humor evident in much of his art. Among these are “slumill: the turntable support structure and mechanism for rotating sluescapes” or slu ball compositions, “sleuphoria: a kinetic form of aesthetic ecstasy”, “sludelusions: incorrect interpretations and explanations of the sluillusions” and “sluephilia, sluephobia” and “sluemia”, psychiatric terms which are defined exactly as their Greek root would suggest (Zimmerman “Glossary for the Slueball Exhibition”).

In 1992, several years after the show of Lacquered Kinetic paintings debuted at the University of Kentucky, Zimmerman added another creation to his arsenal of “illusion-works”. He deemed it the Slu Cube. Developed using a 3-D drawing program on an Apple Macintosh Quadra 700 computer, the slu cube structure is composed of three panels joined together to form a single inside corner with printed design elements fixed to its inner walls (Zimmerman, *A Wrye Life*). In *A Wrye Life* Zimmerman provides detailed directions on how to reproduce the optical effects on a Macintosh computer but notes that given the rapid advances in computing his instructions will quickly be outdated, in lieu of more advanced technologies.

APPLE ART

Deemed “Apple Art” because of their production on an Apple Macintosh Quadra 700, these abstract vector illustrations exhibit qualities found in Zimmerman’s earlier work, but with the added dimension of time and motion (Zimmerman “A Wrye Life”). Created beginning in 1993 using a basic graphics program called Aldus Freehand Version 3.1 and digitalized tablet, Zimmerman created abstract forms that unfurl and evolve dynamically. Zimmerman saw the vast potential for digital drawing technology very early in its development and quickly adopted it as a medium for artwork. More than twenty-five Apple Art paintings are documented in Zimmerman’s book, *A Wrye Life*, and according to friends and family he created approximately 2,000 in the years before his death.

A WRYE LIFE

In 1993 Zimmerman began work on an autobiography. The book, which he titled, *A Wrye Life*, grew to over 1300 pages before its completion and, in addition to his art, covers his life's mastery of all things mechanical including machine, power and painting tools. Hound dogs, Mozart, custom-built automobiles and hundreds of wry aphorisms are detailed and illustrated. Zimmerman attests that Le-Seigneur, the fictitious author of *A Wrye Life*, became interested in the Apple Art during its development and set out to produce a book that would serve as a biography, philosophy, gallery and comprehensive archive chronicling Zimmerman's life (Zimmerman, "A Wrye Life"). Though mostly accurate in re-telling the story of Zimmerman's artistic career, the document does take certain liberties with the truth, acting as a creative reconstruction rather than a totally reliable account.

THE EXHIBITION: *RETURN TO MAIN STREET*

Produced in conjunction with this research, the exhibition *Leo Wrye Zimmerman: Return to Main Street* seeks to tell not only the story of the man but also preserve a small piece of the story of abstract art's development in America and an important piece of Louisville's cultural history. My primary challenges for this exhibition, aside from the lack of scholarly research available on Zimmerman, was the condition of his extant artwork. The artwork for the exhibition came from several sources; Marie Zimmerman's home at Treyton Oak Towers in Louisville, a Stor-All unit down town, the Lion Company Inc.'s factory on 7th street and the York Street Library. Additional items used in the exhibition, such as the small 8" by 10" sketch of *Intralocke*, *Slu Cube* and old issues of the magazine *Arts in Louisville*, were obtained from other sources. The small sketch of *Intralocke* and *Slu Cube* were borrowed from the Zimmerman-LeClair family in Lexington, Massachusetts and the old issues of *Arts in Louisville* were donated to the University of Louisville by Mitzi and Bill Friedlander, who helped Zimmerman patent the Silicoil, of Louisville, Kentucky.

Art from the Stor-All and Lion Company factory had undergone significant damage from coming in contact with inhospitable environments (prior to the artist's

death many paintings were being stored in a basement) and had therefore encountered moisture, extreme heat and cold, pests and insects and this combined with the non-traditional materials occasionally used by Zimmerman (such as automotive lacquers) meant condition of paintings was a primary factor driving their selection. After composing a list of desirable paintings, I viewed the paintings in person to determine which were in good condition and which needed moderate to intensive cleaning and/or repair. Several paintings that were eliminated from the exhibition were *Citron* (1953) due to a tear in the canvas inflicted at some point during storage and *Arrowright #27* (1975), which had significant areas of crackling and chipped paint. I sought to include paintings what would act as a visual map of Zimmerman's stylistic development and also reflect some of the movement occurring within abstract art.

LOUISVILLE'S ARTS FUTURE: A PANEL DISCUSSION

In conjunction with exhibition, I also organized and moderated a panel discussion of Louisville's Arts Future. The panel was inspired by Zimmerman's work throughout the 1950's and 1960's that invigorated Louisville's art community through endeavors such as founding the Arts in Louisville House, Society for Arts in Louisville, opening the Carriage House Art School and Supply Store, initiating an arts festival, publishing Arts in Louisville Magazine, working collaboratively across artistic disciplines and encouraging public art projects (manifested through his idea for the Rural-Mural). Zimmerman's example of leading by doing sheds light on how our community might move forward with what needs to be done and is a testament to what can be done to keep our arts community growing, vital and thriving.

Those on the panel included Peter Morrin, Alice Gray Stites, CJ Pressma, Roberta Williams and Todd Lowe. Panel members were chosen so that a variety of professions in the arts community would be represented; artists, directors of arts organizations and museums, curators and professors. The discussion's goal was to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the local art community and strategize ways

to capitalize on strengths and address weak points. Funding, particularly to the visual arts, was a subject of primary concern during the public forum as statistics brought to the forefront revealed a community in financial peril. Forty-one percent of non-profit arts organizations failed to achieve a balanced budget in 2009 (Morrin 1). In Louisville the arts and humanities comprise ten percent of the total non-profits but receive only three percent of the government non-profit revenue, and in addition, unlike other cities Louisville does not provide any funding for individual artists (Morrin 2).

Though the discussion revealed the dilemmas, financial and otherwise, faced by our city, it also revealed a community of artists and individuals full of energy, vigor and passion; a population unafraid to confront a challenge in unconventional ways. I believe Zimmerman would have been pleased, as he too had been imprinted by the Bauhaus and by individuals such as Vasarely who argued that art should serve society—that it was not a frivolity but a true pillar of civilization, and if allowed to deteriorate would lead to a weakening of the whole structure of society as we know it.

A WRYE VISION: ARTS IMPORTANCE IN SOCIETY & CONCLUSION

“I believe that art (painting, music, sculpture, and literature) is the most important manifestation of human culture. It is art, ‘the finer things of life’, that makes any human activity seem worthwhile. It is though the cultural heritage of the past today’s man think himself as a civilized being... There must be art, no culture has ever existed without it that has deserved to be called a civilization. There must be art, and to make arts there must be artists... I feel that art in galleries is lost to many people who would benefit otherwise if they could be induced to consider art as one of the basic elements of all societies.”

-Zimmerman in a letter to his parents from Paris, France, March 18, 1952

The statement above by Zimmerman encapsulates his notion that art is profoundly important to all aspects of society. Furthermore, it alludes to the possibility that art can be more useful and functional if synthesized with applied disciplines such as city planning, mechanics, advertising or architecture. Zimmerman’s artwork also connects Louisville to the development of the abstract

style. Zimmerman's work within Louisville is an important piece of local history and could also serve as a model for how future generations might approach cultural activism within their own communities. More work still needs to be done to situate him even more clearly within an art historical context, however, this research serves as the foundation for that endeavor and underlines how closely Zimmerman was tied to the beginning of geometric abstraction. Perhaps even more intriguing is Zimmerman's own individual ingenuity and unique vision, his ability to combine unexpected elements to create stunning and unexpected results that have the potential to shift the way we view art and design.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1945 – Attended the Biarritz American University, School of Art in Paris, France while serving as a medic in the army
- 1946 – Honorably discharged from army
- 1948 March 15 – Earns degree in Fine Arts from the University of Kentucky
- 1948 April 22 – “Main St. Façade” Wins first place at the 21st Annual Kentucky and Southern Indiana Exhibition of Art
- 1948 July 2 – Arrives back in Paris, France
- 1952 February 8 – Participates in “7” exhibition at the Denise Rene gallery in Paris
- 1950 – Begins selling popcorn in Paris
- 1953 February 16 – Joins Le Groupe Espace
- 1953 February 28 – Studio exhibition of work in Paris, France
- 1953 March 15 – Brief review of studio exhibition in Art Digest by French critic, Michel Seuphor
- 1953 July 4 – Arrives back in United States via New York, NY.
- 1953 September 15 – Opens Carriage House Studio, Gallery and Art Material Shop
- 1953 November 8 – Paintings exhibition at the University of Kentucky
- 1954 July 1 – Silicoil Brush Cleaning System invented and manufactured
- 1954 January 26 – Exhibition at Wilmington College Fine Arts Gallery
- 1955 – Society for the Arts in Louisville incorporated; Establishment of Arts in Louisville Art School; monthly Arts in Louisville Magazine begins publication
- 1956 – Designed forty foot rotating hamburger sculpture for Pryor Restaurant on US 60
- 1957 – Arts in Louisville Arts Festival, Lemon Galleries 223 E. Broadway
- 1957 December 14 – Arts in Louisville House opens
- 1958 October – Publication changes to Gazette of Arts in Louisville, shifts to bi-weekly
- 1962 June – Silicoil Brush Cleaning System patented
- 1964 July 4 – Fiberglass reproduction of Ford Chimera completed
- 1966 September 1 – Begins physical facilities contract with Louisville Public Library
- 1969 April – Sculptured cast-iron aluminum doors for South entrance of LFPL
- 1977- Contract as LFPL’s physical facilities manager ends

1989 May 14 - Slue Ball Paintings exhibition opens at the University of Kentucky
1992 – Development of Slue Cube
1992 to 1998 – Development and production of Computer Abstract Paintings (aka
vector illustrations)
1998 December – *A Wrye Life* reaches 1050 pages

EXHIBITION DOCUMENTATION

Exhibition Checklist

Title	Year	Medium	Dimensions	Location	Fig. #
"Façade"	1948	oil on canvas	30"x30"	TOT	1
Intralocke (#14)	1952	oil on canvas	20"x46"	TOT	2
Confronte (#25)	1952	oil on canvas	25.5"x39.5"	TOT	3
Untitled #9	circa 1980	oil on canvas	88"x28"	Storage	4
Untitled #23	1978	oil on canvas	88"x20.25"	TOT	5
Untitled #2	1978	oil on canvas	69"x22"	TOT	6
Untitled #29	1975	oil on canvas	24"x64.25"	Storage	7
Controversy (#19)	1977	oil on canvas	78.5"x27.5"	Storage	8
Egg in Cognac (#20)	1975	oil on canvas	40.5"x24"	TOT	9
Entrée Flags (#5)	1981	oil on canvas	62"x41"	TOT	10
Absurd Zine (#30)	1984	oil on canvas	19.25"x65.5"	Storage	11
Double coil (#3)	1983	oil on canvas	40"x40"	Storage	12
Apple Art	1990's	electronic	n/a	n/a	n/a
Slue Ball: Snail	1984-89				13: IMG 7450
Slue Ball: Blue Rings	1984-89				13: IMG 7453
Slue Ball: Jelly Beans	1984-89				13: IMG 7497
Slue Ball: Ghost	1984-89				13: IMG 7500
Slue Ball 5: Masques	1984-89				13: IMG 7503
Slue Ball 6: XVIII	1984-89				13: IMG 7452
A Wrye Life Book	1990-2008	book	8.5"x15"/29"	TOT	14
Cast Aluminum Door Panel	1969	cast aluminum	4'x13'	LFPL	15
Silicoil	1962 patent	n/a	n/a	n/a	16
Slu Cube	1992	Plastic panel			17

FIG. 1

FIG. 2

FIG. 3

FIG. 4

FIG. 5

FIG. 6

FIG. 7

FIG. 8

FIG. 9

FIG. 10

FIG. 11

FIG. 12

FIG. 13

FIG. 14

These 15-foot-high grille doors at the York Street entrance of the Louisville Free Public Library were designed by Leo W. Zimmerman and cast in aluminum alloy by Louisville sculptor Barney Bright.

THE COURTESY OF A. T. TOLSON, LOUISVILLE, KY. SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 24, 1979

ART

By SARAH LANDFELL, Courier-Journal & Times Art Critic

Library's Door Sculpture

IN EUROPE one wouldn't be at all surprised to come upon a pair of monumental doors like the new ones at the York Street entrance of the Louisville Free Public Library. In Louisville the fine filigree look of the 15-foot-high portal marks it as a work of art of a kind rare in this area.

The doors are a handsome piece of sculpture and should be so regarded by this column. Though they serve other purposes, mostly protective, their design is a fortunate aesthetic synthesis. The concept and design is by Leo W. Zimmerman, head of physical facilities for the city library system and a Renaissance man who is artist, engineer, inventor, designer, chemist and just about anything else he decides to be. The doors were cast by Louisville sculptor Barney Bright, himself something of an engineer as well. Looking like bronze or cast iron, the doors are light-but-tough aluminum alloy.

The library adopted the double-L motif as its emblem in 1908 at the beginning of its construction. Like the fleur-de-lis, the "L" has French origins. It was the royal cipher of Louis XVI, for whom Louisville is named, and appears on the

chime and silver of his reign. It is found in the ironwork of the Palace of Versailles (and also adorned the bag of the balloon used for the first balloon ascension—this, too, during the reign of Louis XVI).

The "L" also was be-oven in the supporting section of the marble stair of the older building of the expanded library and appears in brass in the marble floor nearby.

The emblem was somewhat rearranged for the doors. Thirty-two scrolled-L sections make up the two panels of the double doors, forming an unusually coherent and rhythmic scroll design.

A lot of people besides Zimmerman and Bright had a hand in this work. Responsible for foundry-casting was American Brass and Aluminum Co. Helms were welded by American Welding Co.; Paul Wire and Iron Works did the assembly. Also a fine piece of craftsmanship are the wooden doors and frames fitted into the area behind the grille doors—these by American Builders Supply Co. Installation was by the Renovation Department of the Louisville Free Public Library under the direction of Richard Stevens.

The doors are at once contemporary and traditional, light and yet imposing. They admirably reflect the common ground between art and architecture, both in the strength of their design and the way they have been integrated into the Greco-Roman portion. Long may they stand.

Detail from the door at left.

FIG. 15

FIG. 16

FIG. 17

REFERENCES

- Bill, Max, and Carola Giedion-Welcker. *Wassily Kandinsky*. Barcelona: Polígrafa, 2009. Print.
- Burba, Paula. "Leo Zimmerman, Founder of Louisville Arts Society, Dies." *The Courier Journal* [Louisville] 3 Apr. 2008: 5B. Print.
- Chilvers, Ian. "Groupe Espace." *A Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Art*. 1999. *Encyclopedia.com*. 9 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.
- Collischan, Judy. *Geometric Abstraction*. Omaha: Klopp Print. & Lithographing Co, 1974. Print.
- Dempsey, Amy. *Art in the Modern Era: A Guide to Styles, Schools & Movements 1860 to the Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002. Print.
- Fitzpatrick, Joseph, Roberta Williams, and CJ Pressma. Personal interview. 18 Mar. 2010.
- Gagnon, François-Marc. "Les Plasticiens." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Web. Mar. 2011. <<http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE>>.
- Gordon, John. *Geometric Abstraction in America*. New York: Published for the Whitney Museum of American Art by Praeger, 1962. Print.
- "Guggenheim Collection - Glossary - De Stijl." *Guggenheim Museum - The Collection*. Web. Mar. 2011. <http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/glossary_De_Stijl.html>.
- Holzhey, Magdalena. *Victor Vasarely, 1906-1997: Pure Vision*. Köln: Taschen, 2005. Print.

Henkels, H. "MoMA | The Collection | Neo-plasticism." *MoMA | The Museum of Modern Art*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Web. Mar. 2011.
<http://www.moma.org/collection/theme.php?theme_id=10131>.

Lansdell, Sarah. "Library's Door Sculpture." *The Courier Journal and Times* [Louisville] 28 June 1970. Print.

Linteau, Paul-André. *Quebec Since 1930*. Toronto [Ont.: J. Lorimer, 1991. Internet resource.

"The National Gallery of Canada Saddened by Loss of Canadian Painter Guido Molinari." *National Gallery of Canada - Musée Des Beaux-arts Du Canada*. 23 Feb. 2004. Web. Mar.-Apr. 2011.<http://www.gallery.ca/english/550_1178.htm>.

Marantz, Kenneth, Wayne Craven, Dore Ashton, Eduard Trier, Udo Kultermann, Frank Popper, A M. Hammacher, and Jack Burnham. "Surveys." *Studies in Art Education*. 12.1 (1970): 61-65. Print.

Morrin, Peter. *Miscellaneous Questions, Number and Issues to Contemplate*. 31 Mar. 2011. Handout distributed at the panel discussion of Louisville's Art Future. Cressman Center for the Visual Arts, Louisville.

Morgan, Robert C, and Victor Vasarely. *Vasarely*. New York: George Braziller, 2004. Print.

Post War and Contemporary Art & Design: Pop and Op Art. London: Bonhams, 2009. Print.

Pillet, Edgar. *Edgar Pillet*. London: Drian Galleries, 1960. Print.

Popper, Frank. *Origins and Development of Kinetic Art*. Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1968. Print.

Selz, Peter H. *Directions in Kinetic Sculpture*. Berkeley, 1966. Print.

Sims, Patterson. "MoMA | The Collection | Ellsworth Kelly. (American, Born 1923)." *MoMA | The Museum of Modern Art*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Web. Mar. 2011.
<http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=3048>.

Spies, Werner, and Victor Vasarely. *Victor Vasarely*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1971. Print.

"Tate | Glossary | De Stijl." *Tate: British and International Modern and Contemporary Art*. Web. Mar. 2011.
<<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=82>>.

"U.K. Veteran's Oil Painting Takes First Place At Show Here." Courier Journal [Louisville] 22 Apr. 1948. Print.

University of Kentucky. Laquered Kinetic Paintings. Lexington, 1989. Print Press Release.

Van Wagner, Judith K. *GEOMETRIC ABSTRACTION*. LINCOLN, NEBRASKA: NEBRASKA. UNIVERSITY. SHELDON MEMORIAL ART GALLERY, 1974. Print.

Youngerman, Jack. "Interview with Jack Youngerman." Telephone interview. 10 Jan. 2011.

Zimmerman, Leo W. "A Mural for U.S. 60." Arts in Louisville Nov. 1956: 14-15. Web.

Zimmerman, Leo W. A Wrye Life. 1st ed. 3 vols. Louisville. Print.

Zimmerman, Leo W. Letter to His Mother and Father. 11 Mar. 1953. MS. Paris, France.

Zimmerman, Leo W. Letter to His Mother and Father. 11 Mar. 1953. MS. Paris, France.

Zimmerman, Leo W. Letter to His Mother and Father. 16 Feb. 1953. MS. Paris, France.

Zimmerman, Leo W. Letter to His Mother and Father. 21 Jan. 1952. MS. Paris, France.

Zimmerman, Leo W. "Wrye Artist Statement". 21 May 1989. University of Kentucky Art Museum. Lexington, KY.

Zimmerman, Leo W. "Sulphurous Oaths, Hammer Clatter and the Great White Arts in Louisville House." The Louisvillian Nov. 1957: 7-8. Print.

K. McKenna Graham
mckenna.graham@gmail.com

1281 Willow Ave
Louisville Ky. 40204

Cell: 502-594-8709

-
- **M.A. Degree** with experience in public relations, curating, exhibition management, project management, fundraising and special event coordination. Experience maintaining and establishing new relationships with commercial businesses and media outlets. Ability to work under stress, tight deadlines and in a team oriented or independent environment. Detail-oriented.
 - **Self-starter with solid communication and leadership skills**, with the ability to think creatively and work together with a team willing to "go the extra mile". Motivated with cooperative attitude and excellent interpersonal and intercultural communication skills.
 - **Technology Summary:** Windows XP/2000, Mac OSX, Microsoft Office Suite, MS Word, MS Excel, MS Outlook, MS PowerPoint, Internet, e-mail.
-

EDUCATION

M.A. Fine Arts: Critical and Curatorial Studies, University of Louisville May 2011
GPA: 3.9

B.A. Communications major, Bellarmine University, Louisville KY May 2007
GPA: 3.5, Fine Art minor

English Literature studies, National University of Ireland, Galway Winter/Spring 2006
Study Abroad Program

Related Coursework: Publications Management, Non-Profit Management, Grant Writing, Journalism Methods, Museum Methods, Curatorial Methods, Installation Art, Unity of Life, Diversity of Life, Fiber Arts, Photography, Advanced Photography, Drawing and Composition I, Painting I, Art History, Advanced Drawing Concepts, Cultural Immersion Abroad

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Cressman Center Gallery, Curated *Leo Wrye Zimmerman: Return to Main Street*— Louisville, KY

2011

Hite Art Institute, Assistant to the Director – Louisville, KY 2010-2011

Artwithoutwalls, Assistant to the Director – Louisville, KY 2010-2011

Bridging Arizona, Special Events Coordinator – Phoenix, AZ Spring 2008

John Wayne Jackson, Artist's Assistant – Phoenix, AZ 2007-2008

Better Business Bureau, Public Relations Intern – Louisville, KY Spring 2007

HONORS & ACTIVITIES

- Hite Art Institute Scholarship (2010)
- Americana English Tutor (2010)
- Lambda Pi Eta Communications Award (2007)
- National University of Ireland Galway, Irish Studies (2006)
- The Concord, Bellarmine University newsweekly (2004-2005)
- Volunteered at the center for battered women, Cincinnati (50 hours) (2004)
- Volunteered at the Animal Care Society (2002-2003)
- Governor's School for the Arts Recipient (2002)
- Artopia Water tower Art Scholarship Recipient (2001)