

Frank McEntire: reli-Queries The art of containing the sacred

By [Brian Staker](#)

<http://www.cityweekly.net/utah/article-14116-frank-mcentire-reli-queries.html>

Photo [provided] by Frank McEntire // "Reliquary for a Host of Broken Hymns"

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Reliquary For A Host Of Broken Hymns

Entering a space filled with Frank McEntire's artwork—whether in his West Valley City studio or at an exhibit of his new works at Nox Contemporary gallery—the room becomes an uncanny kind of space. But that's by the artist's own design. *Reli-QUERIES*—the 10th solo exhibit of his sculptures and mixed-media assemblages and the most unified in theme—explores the notion of artworks as reliquaries, or containers, in which sacred as well as secular artifacts are kept. He has found a singular way to make use of the gallery space as a locus of aesthetic as well as a kind of spiritual contemplation.

McEntire appropriates objects in a manner reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's "Readymades," fashioned from found objects, but his purpose is to "re-sacralize" them—to transcend their physicality and direct the viewer toward a spiritual contemplation. But it's a convoluted exercise at times, approaching the numinous from unconventional angles and juxtapositions to reawaken a sense of invention and immediacy. The apprehension of the spiritual in his work is to confront the radical Other, but it's an alternative perspective from which subtle relationships with the viewer start to grow. He wants viewers to meditate on these works: "When you spend time with them, you see multiple layers that transcend the object," he says.

Familiar, even iconic figures catch the eye in settings that are sometimes lush, at other times stark. “Living Water” is a faucet issuing forth glass rosary necklaces, and “Reliquary for a Host of Broken Hymns” contains communion wafers and torn-up strips from a hymnal inside a glass box. “It’s taken hundreds of years for these shapes to take the form they have,” he notes. “They not only get stuck in time, but they also mark time. They are a link to the past.”

“Merkabah”—a sculpture depicting the chariot on which Ezekiel was taken up into heaven—was based on Our Lady of San Juan and includes holy water from the San Juan basilica in Texas in an antique vial, although the chariot has echoes to other religions as well.

For McEntire, the way to the spiritual has to include the political. Sometimes, that connection is by coincidence, as with the sculpture “Immaculate Conception,” where a plastic anatomical model of the womb is mounted alongside a figure of baby Jesus, which McEntire says resembles Jason Chaffetz. “He has a [Christ] complex, anyway,” the artist says, chuckling. The religious artifacts in McEntire’s work occasionally have been misinterpreted as disrespectful—a vending machine stocked with communion wafers was taken out of a show—but these are always efforts to comment on the way religion has been perverted by those in power. “The Five Underwood Stations” places in antique typewriters a jet print of five evangelical or political leaders, like Jimmy Swaggart, who committed indiscretions, succumbing to the feeling of invincibility of being in power.

A Houston native, McEntire took an interest in discarded and found items at an early age. That ritual of discovery extended into spirituality as well, as he explored everything he came across. He’s studied everything from astral projection to Buddhism, joined the Hare Krishnas, and lived in a political commune in the 1960s, where he organized anti-Vietnam war events and civil-rights activities. Recently, he converted to the LDS Church and does philanthropic work for the church. “Some people think you are one thing spiritually, then another, discarding the last,” he notes, “but it’s all part of who I am, and I mine all of that. It’s all part of my creative vocabulary.”

McEntire has had a major presence in Utah arts that sometimes is felt behind the scenes, apart from the dramatic aesthetic of his artworks themselves that comes from his training as a theatrical scenic designer. Of his work as an educator and arts administrator—he’s on the board of numerous local agencies and was formerly executive director of the Utah Arts Council—he says, “Budgets are moral as well as political and economic documents. It’s a discussion of how people are treated.”

Reli-QUERIES coincides with the release of the book *The Destructible Object and Other Essays: The Sculptural Work of Frank McEntire*, including essays on his work by several scholars and critics, including poet Alex Caldiero and Jay Heuman, former curator of exhibits at the Salt Lake Art Center. In his essay, Caldiero says McEntire’s work is “ritual free of dogma and is nondenominational; ritual brought back to its primal roots: the human need to respond to the ineffable.”

These “queries” aren’t in search of an answer, but serve as a container for contemplation, an attempt by McEntire to allow the metaphysical to exist in space and time—if only for a moment.

RELI-QUERIES: NEW WORKS BY FRANK MCENTIRE

Nox Contemporary

440 S. 400 West

801-289-6269

Through Aug. 6

NoxContemporary.com



June 2011

Exhibition Preview: Salt Lake

*reli*Queries*

<http://artistsofutah.org/15bytes/11june/page3.html>

Frank McEntire at Nox Contemporary

by Geoff Wichert

Frank McEntire is the rare courageous artist for whose aesthetic mill everything is grist. He overlooks nothing, even the clouds of language, abstract words that trail his artwork until they eventually burn off under the heat of gallery lights. Left behind are exquisite objects originally encountered as discards. McEntire transforms this raw material, its former meaning dissipated like vapor, into talismans: reinvigorated vessels filled by, and with, his faith. And his faith is uncompromising, encompassing the recognition that we humans spend too much time living by symbols, arguing over symbols, fighting on what we think is behalf of symbols, and not nearly enough time in touch with the transcendental facts these symbols set out to represent.

*reli*Queries*, the title of his upcoming show at Nox Contemporary, is an example of Frank McEntire's hunger to refashion whatever he finds, not just lending it a new purpose, but refurbishing it, using his skill to bring out the craftsmanship that went into its original construction. Reliquaries are sturdy, albeit precious vessels that derive a transient value from the rich materials and skill employed in their making, but acquire their lasting value from their originally mundane, carnal contents: a fragment of skeleton, a scrap of textile, something left behind. In his assemblages, McEntire seeks to find and set forth the limit of exchange between sacred value and secular price. In an overwhelmingly materialistic age, when the street corner preacher is as likely as a broker to advocate material goals, when investment and accumulation are considered equivalent to prayer, Frank McEntire challenges us to distinguish price from value.

To do this requires courage because no object, least of all one of veneration, ever entirely loses its power over holder and beholder alike. In an age of insecurity, no one is allowed to disrespect anything that someone, somewhere, once respected. We decline to throw out the bath for fear of accidentally discarding the baby, and so our world of discourse has gradually filled up with

bathwater. Abraham Lincoln said, “As our situation is new, so we must think anew and act anew, and then we shall save our nation.” But it often seems we cannot do anything anew, so crowded is our public space with mental furniture we cannot use, but lack the clear judgment and decisiveness to move aside and stride past.

The service that McEntire performs is to burn away the excesses of piousness, especially where they cross the line into material expression that lend themselves to misunderstanding, that tend to stick around beyond their useful life, in order to let the real experience emerge. His works function on two levels simultaneously, at once representing objects on which reverence can be focused, and at the same time calling the attention of the reverent to the transfer. “Be aware that this memento is not the experience it memorializes, any more than a photograph of a loved one is what one loves.” At their best, the mechanism by which Frank McEntire’s art accomplishes this double duty, connects this double awareness, is laughter.



Written With The Point Of A Diamond

*reli*QUERIES*, an exhibition of new work by Frank McEntire opens at Nox Contemporary in Salt Lake on June 17. A reception for a second installation of the exhibit will happen Friday, July 15. Through August 6. To view more of McEntire's work visit www.frankmcentire.com.



Immaculate Conception (detail)



Altimeter



Living Water
(detail)

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Artys 2011

Staff Choice

http://www.cityweekly.net/utah/article-2-14659-artys-2011-staff-choice.html?current_page=4

BEST BOOK ACCOMPANYING AN ART SHOW

The Destructible Object and Other Essays: The Sculptural Work of Frank McEntire

A chapbook with full-color photos published by Dirt Devil Press, the collection includes six essays examining McEntire's work, by Utah Valley University art professor Scott Abbott, former Salt Lake Art Center curator of exhibits Jay Heuman and poet Alex Caldiero. Perspectives range from the academic to Caldiero's look at the ritualistic nature of McEntire's work. Among other things, these essays demonstrate the lasting impression McEntire's body of work has had on the local art environment; they are a testament to the indestructible nature of art. FrankMcEntire.com