



OUT OF THE ORDINARY

THE ART OF GAVIN ZEIGLER

IN A MADE-OVER AUTO BODY SHOP ON SHELTER ISLAND, AN ARTIST TRANSFORMS THE LEFTOVERS OF OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES.

BY SARA EVANS PHOTOGRAPHY BY DOUG YOUNG



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Gavin Zeigler, an artist who lives and works on Shelter Island, is the ultimate recycler. He works with old pennies, lost and discarded keys, and the paper ephemera that float through people’s lives. These stamped tickets and intricately engraved, defunct stock certificates, punched timecards and cancelled checks, all notes from an indecipherable past, hold and intrigue this artist. Of particular interest are those pieces from the past that have gone through many phases of handling: first stamped, then cancelled, endorsed, then stamped again, and thrown away. One man’s trash, as they say...

The act of transforming these discarded objects and papers into art has a profound effect on Zeigler. He finds that the things we carried are both intensely human—and deeply poignant. “They are,” Zeigler notes, “the material symbols of the lives we lead.” Keys have always had a profound and symbolic significance. There are keys to our homes, the ones we have lived in and the ones we have left; keys to our safety deposit boxes, diaries and mailboxes, keys to our first cars, keys lost and keys found. Pennies, bright and shiny, new and lucky, have passed through an infinity of unknown pockets; we grab them when their heads are up; ignore them when they aren’t.

Originally from Franklin, Tennessee, Gavin Zeigler grew up on a farm in a family that recognized and valued his talents early on. His mother always made sure her kids were knee-deep in projects, giving them a passion for preserving and collecting. His father laid the groundwork for

definitely the place to be. New York City inspired the grid-formations of many of his collages, the pennies and keys and paper collages that are laid down with geometric precision.

When he first moved to Shelter Island from Sag Harbor in 2003, word got out that there was an artist on the island who worked with pennies and with keys. Soon after his arrival, when he got up in the morning, he would find bags of pennies and bags of keys on his doorstep. He notes that while coins are essentially impersonal, handed off without a thought, keys are intensely personal and intimate. He uses both in his collages, set carefully in a precise geometric grid that renders them almost unrecognizable. He then paints over them, removes some of the paint, and then paints them again, over and over, in a painstaking and elaborate process. His is a complex process of layering and stripping away, of building and tearing down, resulting in collages of great beauty and sophistication—a constant,

much of Gavin’s later work by dealing in architectural antiques. “Opening containers...and finding statuary, doorknobs and stained glass fueled my passion for artistic geometry...and introduced me to the beauty of commonplace objects.”

Zeigler won a scholarship to the Atlanta College of Art, later finishing his degree at Fordham. If one was going to be an artist, he concluded, New York was the



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GAVIN'S WORK ON THE WALL, AND THE ORGANIZATION OF HIS VARIOUS MATERIALS AND TOOLS IN THE STUDIO, SEEM TO MIRROR EACH OTHER. THE ARTIST CANNOT HELP BUT VISUALLY ARRANGE HIS LIFE AND WORKSPACE MUCH IN THE SAME WAY AS HE LAYS OUT HIS PAINTINGS.



almost musical and rhythmic interplay of texture and color.

His collages made from paper ephemera are also intricate and richly layered in color. Bits of type reveal themselves through the overlaid paint—a name, a stamp, a fragment of a bank check, an elaborately printed stock-certificate border. Looking closely at the work is like trying to peer into someone else's past, opaque but with flashes of clarity. They evoke prisms of refracting light and stained glass windows.

Other Zeigler collages are vertical build-ups of graduated color; they remind one of the amazing excitement of opening a large new box of pastel crayons or colored pencils, their graduated hues promising infinite possibilities.

His Shelter Island studio, which stands right in the center of town across from a pizzeria, is, like Zeigler himself, both lighthearted and organized, filled with the tools of his art, the many pieces that are in-process and his finished art itself. The space is also shared with his two vintage cars, a mint-green 1970 Mercury Cougar convertible and a 1970 Huger orange-and-white GMC pickup truck. The artist lives over the shop, in a sleekly configured and furnished loft apartment that looks more like inner-city Copenhagen than downtown Shelter Island. Lola and Olive Oyl, two elegant rescue dogs, and Samson, his pug, have full run of both the studio and the loft, often holding court from one of the vintage vehicles.

When one looks at Gavin Zeigler's website cold, it's tempting to wonder whether this guy has multiple-personality disorder. Pennies and keys, scraps of printed paper, acrylics, boards, canvas, wood, bronzes, and art furniture, are all grist for his mill. There seems to be no medium in which he cannot happily function.

After meeting and talking with this hugely talented, gently focused artist, you realize his work displays genuine cohesion and a clearly logical progression. Whatever the specific medium Gavin Zeigler works in, it is all about the gradual building-up of form or color. His work in collage led him to work more dimensionally. He began playing with geometric pieces of scrap wood, which led in turn to his creating intricately built-up abstract forms which he then cast into bronze. These sculptural works have a cubist, elemental quality about them; they are at once precise and elegant. His work, "Orchard at Night" is a fascinating assemblage of triangular forms that conjure trees in the mind of the viewer. Once a work has been cast, he sands and finishes it to achieve a variety of complex effects. Like

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his flat collages, his sculpture represents an intricate process of building-up and of taking-away. "My sculptures," he insists, "are discovered, not created. Assembled, not preconceived."

Unlike many artists, Zeigler seems completely comfortable with his success, and moves easily between the commercial world and the more elite gallery scene. He recently completed a major installation at the New "W" Hotel in San Diego. His work has been sold by Ralph Lauren Home and used by such major interior designers as Thom Felicia and Jamie Drake. He has had several solo shows, which have met with considerable acclaim, and has also participated in many group shows from Aichi, Japan to Guild Hall in East Hampton.

Always seeking to expand his range, skills and knowledge, Gavin Zeigler holed up last winter for three freezing months at the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship in Rockport, Maine. The Twelve-Week Intensive Woodworking Course gave the artist yet another set of tools and skills. Zeigler's art furniture, which he makes from a variety of wood scraps, recycling yet again, is sparsely elegant, original and beautiful.

Working in plain sight on a main road in Shelter Island has both its plusses and its minuses. Sometimes interrupted at his work, Gavin Zeigler is unfailingly courteous; his Southern roots come in handy. He notes that the positives of living and working on Shelter Island far outweigh the negatives.

He notes "Shelter Island does have an effect on my work. I find that more than anything it is my mood that responds to the tranquility and natural setting of the island. Living on Shelter Island also affords me the space to create and that is indeed important as I work on many items as once."

He is a strong believer in chance; which he regards as a creative tool. Chance is a recurring variable for most artists, impacting the process of creating art. Zeigler is clearly an artist who is prepared to take chances, always learning new skills and working in new media. He goes where his art takes him, taking risks while incorporating the spirit of Shelter Island, and the beauty of everyday objects in his work.