



BEDAZZLING: THE ARTISTIC INVENTIONS OF VAUGHN STUBBS



Philadelphia Art Alliance

contemporary craft + design

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ABOUT THE PAA

The Philadelphia Art Alliance is dedicated to the advancement and appreciation of innovative contemporary art with a focus on craft and design, and to inspiring dynamic interaction between audiences and artists in a setting of historic and aesthetic significance.

Major support has been provided by Jessica Berwind, Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz, Nancy Hellebrand Blood, and Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius.

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Cover: Vaughn Stubbs, *Urn*, ceramic and mixed media. Collection of Erik Bonovitz, Philadelphia, PA.

BEDAZZLED BY VAUGHN

Vaughn Stubbs was that irrepressible mix of audacious artist, hospitable host, unfailingly cheerful optimist, imaginative chef, gallant gardener, best friend, great dancer, elegant dresser, courageous patient, and bon vivant. I don't think anyone loved life more, and this was certainly evidenced in his artwork.

Vaughn was born in Reading, PA in 1946, the ninth of ten children. Early on, his interest in art was evident and encouraged by his teachers and family. His sister, Pam, who had been designated the family artist, would paint in the kitchen into the night, giving Vaughn lessons in art and life.

Vaughn was drafted into the Army and was sent to Vietnam, where he became the company artist. Even in the midst of war, Vaughn painted *plein air* in Saigon, taught art and photography and escorted celebrities performing in the USO shows. He told me that "It wasn't so bad -- I had a pet ocelot." After his discharge from the Army, Vaughn had the choice of studying to be an art teacher at Kutztown State Teachers College or studying fine art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. He chose the latter and left Reading for Philadelphia. In 1972, he won PAFAs prestigious Cresson Traveling Scholarship and traveled throughout Europe and North Africa.

I first met Vaughn when he came into the art gallery where I worked looking for a job. The director and I took one look at each other and knew that Vaughn was someone special, with the little braid in his beard. His bike, which he brought into the gallery, had antlers on the handlebars. Everything about him was unusual. He had such an engaging smile and infectious warmth, we knew he would be a wonderful addition. He came to work with us and thus began a lifelong friendship that enhanced my life in ways I couldn't have imagined. It was on my first visit to his apartment in Powelton Village when I got an inkling of his visual perceptiveness. When I saw his Mylar-covered bathroom, I knew that I would

be his admirer for the rest of my life. Who did that? The little jewel of a bathroom was so gorgeous and outrageous, and it was a harbinger of his future work.

Soon after, he moved to Chancellor Street into a loft, which was a work of art in itself – a huge, ever-changing cabinet of curiosities. Over the decades, he accumulated mountains of art materials and *objets d'art* that he either found on the street or received from an admirer. Vaughn's friends were always hoping to provide him with some great find that would end up in his art. Living up on the fourth floor, Vaughn didn't have a doorbell – or a telephone! He rigged up a cowbell on a rope – the person ringing could barely hear it, but somehow Vaughn always did. He would then throw down a key nestled in a glove, for the visitor to enter and then either climb the exhausting staircase adorned with art or brave the rickety elevator.

Vaughn worked in almost any medium. He was not afraid of experimenting. The first work I saw, for which he won the Cresson, was a combination of Astroturf, Mylar and foam board – not your traditional artists' materials. It was one of the strangest things I'd ever seen and this changed my perception of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts - that they would honor such an unusual artwork spoke to their openness – or, probably more accurately, it spoke to Vaughn's winning creative personality and sense of humor, which was evident in his work throughout his life.



Brooch (James Dean); mixed media. Collection of Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius.

Vaughn was inspired by everything he encountered, paying homage in different ways. As a super fan, Vaughn fashioned dozens of pins and paintings in tribute to Joan Baez and James Dean.

He painted an excellent likeness of Picasso, including an unmistakably Picasso-esque gesture at the top of the painting. His portrait of the great proponent of non-violent civil disobedience, Mahatma Gandhi, included one of the master's most moving quotes, "Hatred ever kills, love never dies. Such is the vast difference between the two. What is obtained by love is retained for all time. What is obtained by hatred proves a burden in reality, for it increases hatred. The duty of a human being is to diminish hatred and promote love."

Vaughn's painting of Paul Robeson came about when he was asked to participate in a competition marking the 100th anniversary of the all-American athlete, actor/singer, and activist's birth. Vaughn knew little about Robeson at the time but he consulted with Professor Charles L. Blockson at Temple University who recommended some reading materials. Impressed with Robeson's multifaceted accomplishments Vaughn decided that he wanted to reflect Robeson's versatility. In 1996 Stubbs won the competition and for the next sixteen years, he researched and made hundreds of sketches until the portrait was completed and later dedicated at the Paul Robeson House in 2012.

As an African American proud of his cultural heritage, Vaughn was deeply affected by the quilts of Gee's Bend. He was aware of them long before the groundbreaking exhibition of this work that opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2002. Before Vaughn could become a quilt maker, he had to learn how to sew and that he did. His quilts rivaled those of the ladies in backwater Alabama, and just as the quilters from Gee's Bend did, he used recycled fabric in an imaginative and unexpected juxtaposition of colors and materials, prints and patterns. Some of his quilts are narrative and have a playful quality. One quilt is a grid, perfect for a game of tic tac toe, so he added soft sculptures of X's and O's. Another depicts a winding road. Never wanting to miss an opportunity to create, Vaughn often made two sides of the quilts

each with distinct personalities – one side could look like your grandmother's tablecloth, with flowers and pastel stripes and the other side could be a cacophony of fluorescent swatches of polyester and plaid flannel. Yet another quilt is really more of a soft sculpture of a mermaid, made for his niece, Arvolyn Hill. The quilts, and their by-products, scarves and bags of all shapes and sizes, were fabricated with whatever serendipitous remnants found their way to Vaughn.



Picasso; acrylic on canvas. Collection of Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius.



Ghandi; acrylic on canvas. Collection of Maryann Stubbs.



Tic, Tac, Toe; fabric and mixed media. Collection of Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius.

Margie Meyerson, widow of Martin Meyerson, the President of University of Pennsylvania from 1970 to 1981, commissioned Vaughn to make a quilt out of her husband's academic hoods. He had dozens of these colorful hoods of satin and velvet. The quilt measures 101" square and weighs a ton! It was his most complex commission, and not the sort of material he generally chose to work with, but he managed to put his unique spin on the quilt represented in the exhibition.

He paid homage to Vincent Van Gogh, his favorite artist, by painting "Vaughn-Goghs." These paintings ranged from almost literal copies to other pieces done "in the style of." He even made pieces of furniture like those depicted in some of the paintings. The paintings included large paintings on canvas and small gouaches and watercolors – Vaughn was equally comfortable in many mediums.

Collage in all forms was one of Vaughn's most accessible art mediums. There was no end to the material: discarded magazines fished out of recycling bins; photos of celebrities, architectural images; animals; favorite works of art; and well-built men -- just to name a few of his favorite images. They graced his pins, cigar boxes and traditional collages in frames. Then he started making the boxes out of foam core and was able to achieve much larger surfaces and fanciful shapes to embellish.

Vaughn received a gift of a book about Fabergé eggs - a perfect inspiration for an artist, whose own work was similarly over the top in design and materials. Like the eggs designed by Fabergé, Vaughn's "Fab Eggs" were made in fantastical shapes with showy exteriors and surprises on the inside. His "Dino Egg" is covered with broken glass, probably from smashed car windshields, to create a jeweled effect. The interior of the eggshell holds a baby dinosaur.



Dino-Egg; papier mâché, glass and mixed media. Collection of Helen Drutt: Philadelphia. Promised gift to National Museum of Sweden.

Other Fab Eggs contained charms, stones, and other magical treasures, often personally designed for an individual. Like much of his work, these eggs were not perfect! Crafted of *papier mâché*, twigs, paint, jewels and beads, they were often lumpy and quite the antithesis of the actual Fabergé eggs, which are, without exception, elegant and precise. But Vaughn's work was often created with a sense of humor and even if the subject matter or artist he was honoring demanded respect and serious consideration, the twinkle in Vaughn's eye was always apparent.

Vaughn's love of painting is evident in his luscious landscapes of rolling country sides and Caribbean beaches; stylized florals and natural disasters; and his inventive abstract paintings. His early abstractions convey his love for experimentation, playing with different sculptural mediums. He embellished his portraits of the gods, with three-dimensional frames of, in the case of Bacchus, the drunken god, by adding grapes not only to the frame, but also to adorn his privates. Bacchus is described as "The god of wine, viewed as the promoter of civilization." A Stubbs sentiment? Who knows?

All the while exploring new materials and techniques, Vaughn made extraordinary sculptures in the guise of jewelry and outrageous adornments. He created crowns and hats, which are spectacularly bejeweled and over the top. These pieces took many forms and were perhaps, the most physical example of Vaughn's generosity and love. Every February, Vaughn made valentines in the form of pins and delivered them to friends all over the city. Recipients wore them proudly and we all felt that we were part of a special club.



Valentine Pins; mixed media. Various collections.

Crafts doyenne Helen Drutt, was both a collector and curator of Vaughn's pins, and she placed them in some very important collections, like The Hermitage, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Helen also introduced Madeleine Albright, the first woman Secretary of State



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Raquel Higgins.

for the United States, to Vaughn. Albright is well known for her politically revealing brooches, and of course, she had to have a Vaughn piece in her collection. The last major body of work Vaughn completed and exhibited were large urns, encrusted with jewels, toys and

doo-dads of all sorts. These were shown in "Mosaic Muse" in Art in City Hall in 2015. These pieces are the jewelry on megavitamins - over the top, bursting and explosive -- completely delightful. The true expression of Vaughn's joy of life!

Everything about Vaughn's life was artistic. From teaching art to the visually impaired at the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Form in Art program for more than thirty years, to teaching the elderly and youth. Vaughn's inventive teaching methods and warmth won him the love and admiration of all of those lucky enough to have crossed paths with him. When December 1 was declared "A Day Without Art" and Museums and institutions and artists all over the country darkened their galleries until a cure for AIDS was found, Vaughn helped plan and participated in a silent march from the Art Museum to Love Park. He took the initiative to suggest that everyone carry a black umbrella, and his own was adorned with names of lost loved ones. It had a stunning visual effect and continued for years on December 1. It is fitting that *Bedazzling: The Artistic Inventions of Vaughn Stubbs* opens on the eve of the Day Without Art.

My thanks to Thora Jacobson, director of the Philadelphia Art Alliance, who, without a second's hesitation, gave a resounding YES to my request to have the exhibition at this wonderful Rittenhouse Square institution. It would have made Vaughn so happy. Thora and PAA curator Melissa Caldwell ably handled all the administrative details and design and editing of the catalogue and card. Their advice and counsel has been priceless. I'm grateful to Constance Mensh, who was responsible for the challenge of photographing this complex work. At the eleventh hour, Dove Leis from Formally Taws, stepped up with last minute framing and indispensable advice. Cynthia Stubbs-Hill, Vaughn's sister, and The Stubbs family have been so supportive and I'm so thankful for the opportunity to celebrate this amazing man. Curating this exhibition has been bittersweet. It breaks my heart that Vaughn isn't around for this, but Vaughn's friend and loved ones have been great advisers throughout. Vaughn's good friend Marilyn Monaco has been a valuable resource and support and I thank her. I'm so appreciative of the lenders. I know first hand what it means to have to give up that favorite pin or painting, even just for a short time and I thank them for their generosity.

I am greatly indebted to the donors to this exhibition: Jessica Berwind, Nancy Hellebrand Blood, Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz, Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius. This

catalog wouldn't exist if not for their generosity and enduring affection for Vaughn.

I am humbled that Vaughn asked me to do this exhibition. He didn't need to ask – I always knew I would do it. I know my life was richer for knowing him.

Julie S. Courtney

Guest Curator

November 1, 2017

Since 1991 Julie Courtney's curatorial practice has consisted of commissioning artists to create temporary site specific projects in historic sites and untraditional art spaces. Artists give fresh perspectives of and new insights to the history of places, causing both the staff and visitors to rethink their pre-conceptions about a place or a historical event. Courtney has transformed places like Eastern State Penitentiary, where Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller built a sound installation, Pandemonium, that recreated the feeling of a prison riot. At John Bartram's house, Mark Dion retraced the travels of William Bartram and, like the Bartrams, sent back both natural and man-made artifacts, which were installed seamlessly throughout the house.

Courtney's projects bring new audiences to the historic sites and introduce their current members to contemporary art.



Hat; fabric and mixed media. Collection of the Stubbs Family.



Urn; clay, found objects, and mixed media.
Collection the Jessica Berwind.



Urn (two views); clay, found objects, and mixed media. Collection of the Stubbs Family.



All: Hat; fabric and mixed media. Collection of the Stubbs Family.



*Mermaid Quilt; fabric and mixed media.
Collection of Arvolyn Hill.*



Peninsula; acrylic and canvas. Collection of the Stubbs Family.



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Raquel Higgins.



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius.



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Julie Courtney.



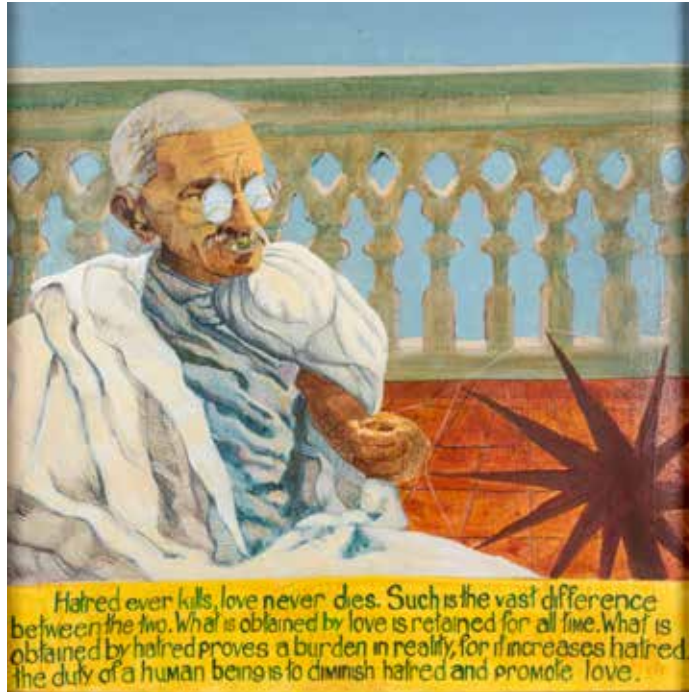
Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius.



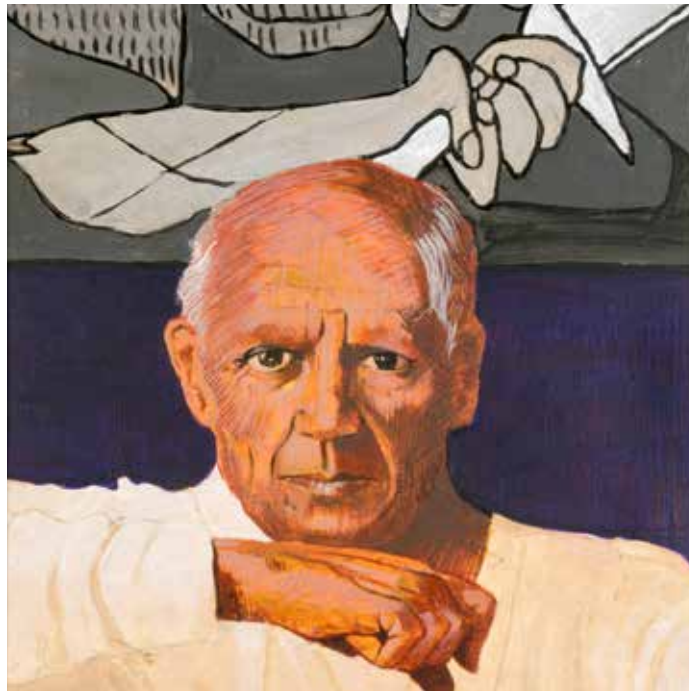
Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Julie Courtney.



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Marilyn Monaco.



Ghandi; acrylic on canvas. Collection of Maryann Stubbs.



Picasso; acrylic on canvas. Collection of Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius.



Dino-Egg; papier mâché, glass and mixed media.
Collection of Helen Drutt: Philadelphia.
Promised gift to the National Museum of Sweden, Stockholm.



Urn; clay, found objects, and mixed media.
Collection of Nancy Lisagor.



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Julie Courtney.



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Julie Courtney.



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Maryann Stubbs.



Brooch (James Dean); mixed media.
Collection of Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius.



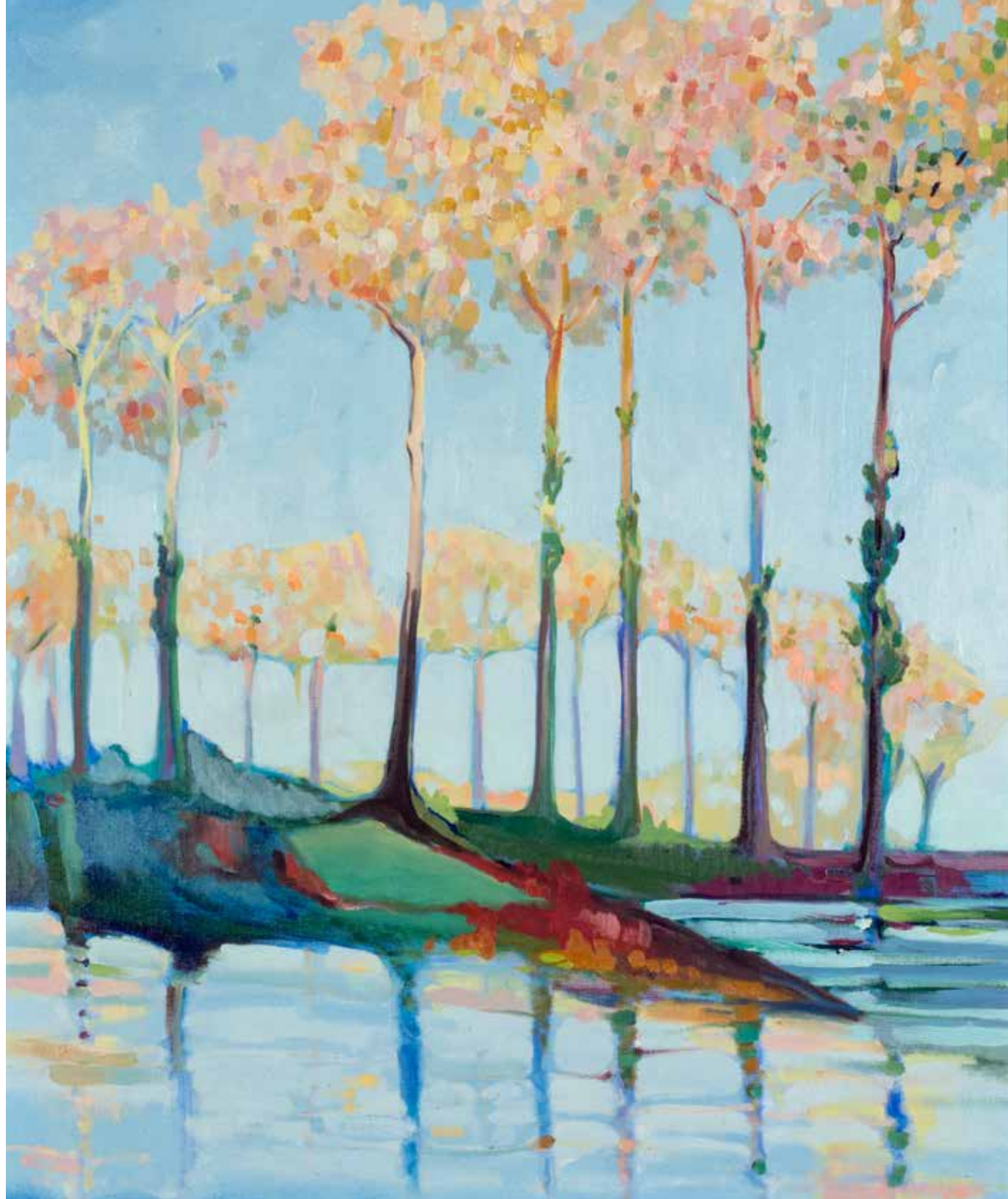
Brooch (Joan Beaz); mixed media.
Collection of Julie Courtney.



Trees by the Sea; acrylic on canvas. Collection of Marilyn Monaco.



All: *Untitled*, papier mâché and found objects, Collection of Nancy Lisagor and Frank Lipsius.





White Rose; acrylic on canvas. Collection of Maryann Stubbs.



Flowers; acrylic on canvas. Collection of Maryann Stubbs.

Opposite page: *Trees, Fall*; acrylic on canvas. Collection of the Stubbs Family.



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Jessica Berwind.



Brooch; mixed media. Collection of Cynthia Stubbs-Hill.



Vaughn Stubbs attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and received his certificate in painting in 1972. His exhibitions include *Mosaic Muse*, Art in City Hall, Philadelphia, PA (2015); *Some Recent, Some Not So: Works by Vaughn Stubbs*, Goggle Works Center For The Arts, Reading, PA (2008); *Gods, Myths, Legends, Icons*, Wilson Art Gallery, Rowan College of New Jersey (1994); *Vaughn Stubbs at the North Star*, Philadelphia, PA (1992); *Vaughn Stubbs: New Jewelry*, Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia, PA (1989); *Creativity*, North Side Bank Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (1988); *50 Friends*, Painted Bride Art Center, Philadelphia, PA (1986); *Persistence of Memory*, Kling Gallery, Philadelphia, PA (1984); and *Wildflowers Gallery Space*, Philadelphia, PA (1973).

He has been in several prominent group exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum, The Netherlands; Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst's-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands; Museum of Fine Arts Houston; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; the Abington Art Center; Sande Webster Gallery; and Art in City Hall, Philadelphia, among many others. Stubbs work is in the public collections of The Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Paul Robeson House; the Library for the Blind, Philadelphia; Afro-American Cultural and Historical Museum, Philadelphia; and the Pennsylvania Convention Center. Private collections include Helen Williams Drutt English, Madeleine Albright, Janet Fleisher, Joan Baez, Lily Tomlin, Mark Graves, Jessica Berwind, Carol Rutenburg, and Samuel Hopkins.

Stubbs was a notable instructor at institutions throughout the Philadelphia region, including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Senior Adult Activity Center, Norristown; Rowan University; St. Rita's Senior Center; the Philadelphia Art Alliance; the School District of Philadelphia; and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia Office of Catholic Education.

Valentine Pins; mixed media. Various collections.

Back cover: *Look Like An Egyptian*; acrylic on canvas.
Collection of the Stubbs Family.

