

COWBOYS
& INDIANS

Yoram Wolberger



BENRIMON
CONTEMPORARY

Cowboys & Indians

June 10th - July 3rd 2010

BENRIMON CONTEMPORARY
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The Archaeology of False Idols

Mundane as Medium in Wolberger's Cowboys & Indians

Across the room from their humble origins as toys, Yoram Wolberger's life size enlargements of classic cowboy and Indian figurines might appear as glorified tokens of childhood nostalgia. Looming heroes in candy colors, they evoke that age when such figures can appear larger than life. Once standing to inspire so much imagined reality, now they leap out as cartoonish monuments to childhood fantasy.

Closer, the sculptures reveal features formerly too diminutive to affect their function. Wolberger's back-to-life-size enlargements are in the same world as Andy Warhol's pop portrayals and Jeff Koons's kitschy adaptations, but his creativity is purely focused on uncovering the flaws in icons that we do not, or choose not to, see. Thus, he faithfully reproduces each sculpture from multiple scanned images of a miniature dime-store figurine, using an exacting process of precision 3D digital enlargement and hours of meticulous detailing.

Each sculpture perfectly echoes every production flaw of its original: the faulty seams, distorted proportions and semi-translucent flashings that are the unmistakable, and ironically individual, birthmarks of its mass production. The cowboys are "true blue". The Indians are red, like "redskins" never were. Towering in threatening poses of colonial conflict, they can no longer be judged simply as playthings, but instead as monstrous inventions of ethnocentrism. However playful their appearance, Wolberger's figures are nonetheless critical monuments to untried historical stereotypes in the bygone era of childhood innocence.

The Medium of the Mundane

That the foreign-born artist himself played with such toys during his own childhood is testament to how seamlessly cultural bias may be transmitted through innocuous media. This power of media to subliminally convey social norms is a topic whose antecedents are worth considering.

In 1931, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* presented an absurd and eerie vision of a futuristic utopia that embodied the seemingly progressive values of our society so driven by the promise of 'better living through technology'. Central to such myths is the replacement of nature's spontaneity with the predictability of a constructed world, and worldview. In Huxley's world of engineered happiness, children are no longer born of mothers, but eugenically designed and hatched *in vitro*. Through years of subliminal conditioning, somnolent children are indoctrinated with the reassuring rules of neophobia, narcissism, classism and racism that uphold the stability of their designed social order. Deluded by their programmed reality and attachments to state-fabricated icons, they float through life unquestioningly content in their frictionless society – each one an individual plastic stereotype, a life size figurine.



Top: Maddona (2004), Bottom: Farm Girl (2002) with Bride and Groom (2002), Right: Toy Soldier #1 (2001)
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting, Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane

When disillusionment destroys one's faith in the established order, it is natural to question the solidity of every brick in the building. With eyes newly opened, one reassesses the trusted icons and expressions that were once permitted to cement our ideals of morality and normalcy. For Huxley's protagonist, the rude awakening occurs on a trip to a 'savage reservation' containing the last vestiges of unconditioned native Indians and wilderness. There, he witnesses the paradoxical beauty and ugliness of humanity untamed. Upon his return to his synthetic society, the familiar becomes suspect, his socially conditioned sense of security betrayed by his unsanctioned experience.

Is trust in the familiar an invitation to unconscious influence and eventual alienation? Object-associations and attachments form automatically through repeated exposure, as our brains work relentlessly to wire reliable order into our worldview. For Wolberger, unrealistic promises of perfection are found embedded even in the innocuous objects of everyday life. Cultural beliefs are implicitly encoded in the mass production of the characteristic tools and toys that pervade and define what is 'home'.

Brave New World is a pronouncement against the mass production of cultural ideals. Such ideals compose the dehumanizing fiction of state-conceived models of perfection, and the loss of human individuality and freedom. Huxley's warning here is simple: when there is no more room for human error - there is no more room for humanity.

Wolberger writes:

Human error and its consequences can be simultaneously disturbing and beautiful. We are not 'perfect'. Our blemishes - as the faults of our culture's icons and stereotypes - are in fact what make us human. We are 'all the above' - beautiful and ugly, compassionate and mean, and so on. Through my work, I am struggling with the need to accept the faults along with the disillusionment they bring of being denied the perfect world that we were promised.

How is this promise inferred? In *Understanding Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan famously states, "the medium is the message": that the very vehicles of communication may themselves subconsciously influence our understanding, beliefs and behavior. Within society's seemingly mundane trappings, Wolberger discovers an overlooked medium that impresses the collective unconscious. In humble domestic surroundings he identifies trivialized objects as icons saturated with hidden meaning and unconscious suggestion, both personal and cultural.

Sculptural Archaeology

Wolberger's body of work encompasses a variety of everyday objects; toys, models, appliances, furniture. His method is the painstaking manipulation of these iconic artifacts. Grossly

enlarging, dissecting or reconstructing them, he overthrows their utilitarian context to expose associations normally concealed by their continuity with the environment. His pieces are at times ironic and personal, even tender, while at others they are highly critical.

Transformed beyond their expected appearance, construction or functioning, Wolberger's arrestingly mutated objects stimulate renewed contemplation of their ideological origins and significance. Typically, his sculptural interventions employ three principal approaches for evicting viewers from their comfort zone of habituated perception.

By slicing and collapsing familiar household objects, Wolberger demolishes reassuring symbols of domestic comfort and stability. Still standing, a refrigerator cut into layers provokes the uneasy feelings of instability and displacement that arise when trusted relationships are cut. Turning things inside out, deconstructing and reconstructing objects into newly functioning configurations, he exposes the intimate personal space housed within and around them. Through such manipulation he explores the construction of meaning at the junction of our physical, social and personal worlds.

Through his process of enlargement, he meticulously magnifies toy figurines and models to expose the flawed faces of our cultural ideals. Gun-slinging cowboys and brutish Indians, the iconic American "good guys and bad guys", idolize society's original villains and heroes. His toy soldiers and chromed sports trophy figurines aggrandize our essential ideals of heroism, patriotism, physical prowess and beauty that drive our economy. A life size wedding cake bride-and-groom garishly mass-markets marital love as pure saccharine sweetness. Now, he is enlarging unassembled toy models of war machines to confront us with our society's industrialized vision of peace through rigidly uniform order.

Each of Wolberger's sculptures is a perfectly rendered tribute to the pantheon of imperfect stereotypes upon which our society's continuing order is dependant. Seeking a unified view beyond the contradictions of cultural concept and physical form, his art transcends the realms of the trivial and the traumatic.

Mark Mian is a writer living in San Francisco.



COWBOYS



1 **Blue Cowboy #1 (Gunslinger)**
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting, Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
2006, Edition of 3 plus 2 Artist Proofs
Size: 80 x 70 x 22 inches



2 **Blue Cowboy #2 (Rifleman)**
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting, Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
2007, Edition of 3 plus 2 Artist Proofs
Size: 75 x 70 x 22 inches



3 Blue Cowboy #3 (Double Gunslinger)
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting, Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
2006, Edition of 3 plus 2 Artist Proofs
Size: 75 x 75 x 22 inches



4 Blue Cowboy #4
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting,
Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
Edition is in production.
Approximate Size: 80 x 75 x 30 inches



5 Blue Cowboy #5
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting,
Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
Edition is in production.
Approximate Size: 80 x 75 x 30 inches



INDIANS



6 **Red Indian #1 (Chief)**
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting, Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
2005, Edition of 1 plus 1 Artist Proof
Size: 94 x 80 x 26 inches



7 **Red Indian #2 (Bowman)**
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting, Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
2007, Edition of 3 plus 2 Artist Proofs
Size: 97 x 67 x 33 inches



8 Red Indian #3 (Tomahawk)
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting, Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
Edition is in production.
Approximate Size: 80 x 75 x 30 inches



9 Red Indian #4 (Spearman)
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting, Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
2009, Edition of 3 plus 2 Artist Proofs
Size: 78 x 60 x 24 inches



10 Red Indian #5
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting,
Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
Edition is in production.
Approximate Size: 80 x 75 x 30 inches

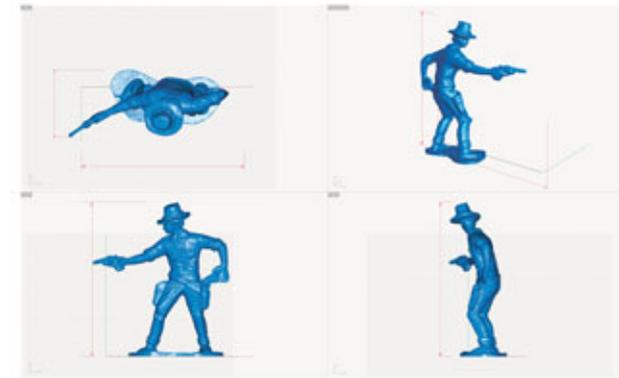


11 Red Indian #6
3-D digital scanning, CNC digital sculpting,
Reinforced fiberglass composites, Urethane
Edition is in production.
Approximate Size: 80 x 75 x 30 inches

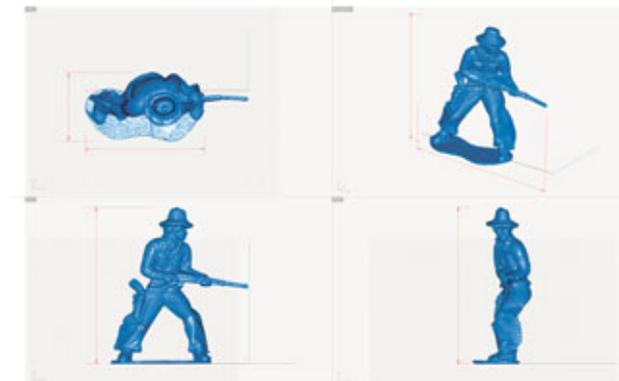


EDITION WORKS

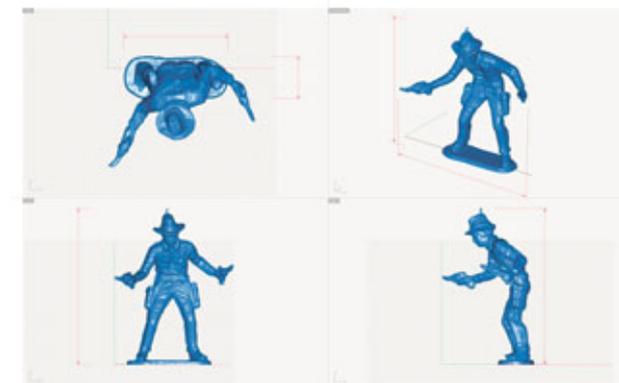
12 Blue Cowboy #1 (Gunslinger)
Print, 2010
Edition of 20
Size: 22 1/2 x 32 3/4 inches



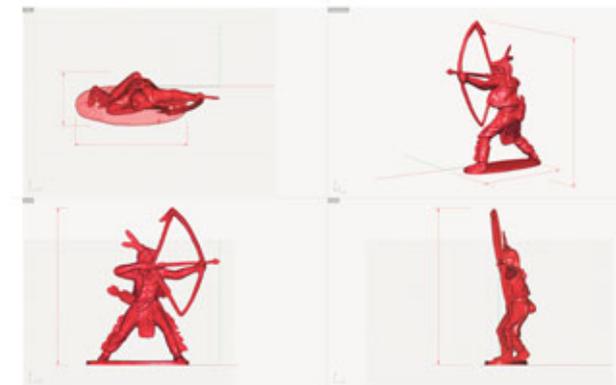
13 Blue Cowboy #2 (Rifleman)
Print, 2010
Edition of 20
Size: 22 1/2 x 32 3/4 inches



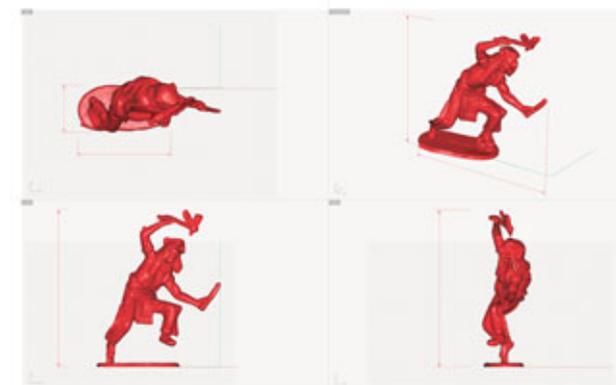
14 Blue Cowboy #3 (Double Gunslinger)
Print, 2010
Edition of 20
Size: 22 1/2 x 32 3/4 inches



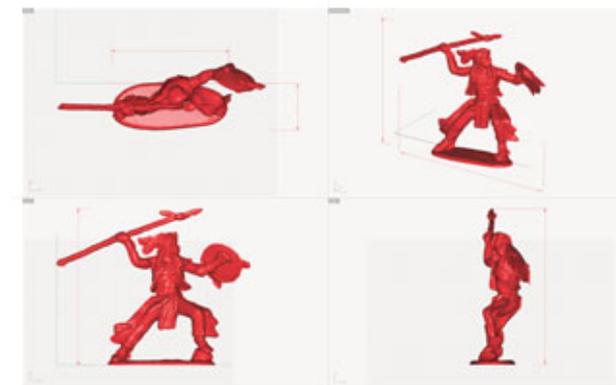
15 Red Indian #2 (Bowman)
Print, 2010
Edition of 20
Size: 22 1/2 x 32 3/4 inches



16 Red Indian #3 (Tomahawk)
Print, 2010
Edition of 20
Size: 22 1/2 x 32 3/4 inches



17 Red Indian #4 (Spearman)
Print, 2010
Edition of 20
Size: 22 1/2 x 32 3/4 inches



BIOGRAPHY

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 Benrimon Contemporary, New York, NY
- 2006 *A Survey of work from 1998 - 2005*, Center for Contemporary Art, Sacramento, CA
- 2004 Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
- 2002 *Parting Lines*, New Langton Arts, San Francisco, CA
- 2001 *Introductions 2001*, Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2000 Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1999 Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco, CA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *New Art for a New Century: Contemporary Acquisitions 2000-2010*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA
- Child's Play*, Institute of Art, Design and Interactive Media CCBC, Baltimore, MD
- 2009 *American Identities*, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY
- DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA
- Syzygy*, The Lab, San Francisco, CA
- NY Pulse*, with Mark Moore Gallery, New York, NY
- 2008 *From the Permanent Collection*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
- Group Exhibition*, Scott White Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA
- Scope Miami* with Mark Moore Gallery, Miami, FL
- 2007 *California Art: Selection from the Fredrick R. Weisman Art Foundation*, American Jewish University, Bel Air, CA
- Made in California: Contemporary California Art from the Fredric R. Weisman Foundation*, Fredric R. Weisman Museum of Art, Peperdine University, Malibu, CA
- Model Behavior*, organisms, Portland, OR
- 2006 *No Reservations*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT
- Through the Rabbit Hole*, 21C Museum, Louisville, KY
- See Jane Run*, The Bedford Gallery, Walnut Creek, CA

NY Pulse, with Mark Moore Gallery, New York, NY

NY Pulse, with Catharine Clark Gallery, New York, NY

- 2005 *Summer Pleasure*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
- Social Insecurity: The Future Ain't What It Used to Be*, Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- Scope New York* with Mark Moore Gallery, New York, NY
- Scope New York* with Catharine Clark Gallery, New York, NY
- 2004 *Overt/Covert*, Aidekman Arts Center, Tufts University Gallery, Medford, MA
- Domestic Odyssey*, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA
- The Armory Show with Henry Urbach Architecture*, New York, NY
- Scope New York* with Mark Moore Gallery, New York, NY
- Scope New York* with Catharine Clark Gallery, New York, NY
- Hard Candy*, the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), San Jose, CA
- Just One Word: Plastics*, Square Blue Gallery, Costa Mesa, CA
- 2003 *Scope New York* with Catharine Clark Gallery, New York, NY
- Art on Site 2: officespace*, Tel Aviv, Israel
- Sprout*, Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- realUNREAL*, Sheppard Fine Arts Gallery, University of Reno, NV
- War (What Is It Good For?)*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
- A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, Sun Valley Center for the Arts, Sun Valley, ID
- 2002 *2002 California Biennial*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA
- Portrait Obscured*, the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), San Jose, CA
- Pro Arts' Juried Annual 2001-2002*, Pro Arts Gallery, Oakland, CA
- Art Chicago*, with Catharine Clark Gallery, Navy Pier, Chicago, IL
- San Francisco International Art Exposition* with Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2001 *Present/Tense*, University Art Gallery, Sonoma State University, Sonoma, CA
- Introductions South 2001*, the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), San Jose, CA

By Appointment, Refusalon, San Francisco, CA

Jernigan Wicker Fine Arts Gallery, San Francisco, CA

About Body and Space, Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco, CA

House and Garden Show, Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco, CA

Installation, Annual Mystery Ball, Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA

2000 *OpenHouse*; Art on Site 1, San Francisco, CA

Bay Area Student Sculpture Biennial, San Francisco, CA

Limited Situations, curated by “Los Carpenteros” and Toni Labat, San Francisco, CA

1993 *The Week of the Young Artist*, The Schrieber Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel

1992 Gallery 13, Jaffa, Israel

The Week of the Young Artist, The Israeli Museum of Modern Art, Ramat Gan, Israel

1991 Tel Aviv Museum of Modern Art, Tel Aviv, Israel

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY

Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, CA

21C Museum, Louisville, KY

Orange County Museum of Art, CA

EDUCATION

2001 MFA, New Genres Department, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA

1992 BA in Design, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, Israel

AWARDS and FELLOWSHIPS

2002 Pro Arts’ Juried Annual 2001-02, Juror’s Commendation

2000 Jack and Gertrude Murphy Fine Arts Fellowship
Schmidt Family Foundation Fellowship

1992 American Israel Cultural Foundation Scholarship

1991 American Israel Cultural Foundation Scholarship

1990 American Israel Cultural Foundation Scholarship

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Choquette, Marc, “Simplicity Makes Wolberger’s Piece Very Intriguing”, *Pepperdine University The Graphic*, November 26, 2007

Genocchio, Ben, “Visions of Native Americans in Today’s World”, *The New York Times*, December 3, 2006

Cowan, Alison L., “A Pile of Blankets, With Personal History Woven Into the Fabric”, *The New York Times*, August 25, 2006

Dalkey, Victoria, “Out of the ordinary”, *The Sacramento Bee*, April 2, 2006

Joanne Silver, “‘Overt’ forces look at aggression”, *Boston Herald*, October 22, 2004

Sapina-Kerkhove, Mari, “Domestic Pains And Gains On Display”, *Spartan Daily*, April 19, 2004

Sullivan, James, “A Love Affair with Appliances Only Keeps Us in the Kitchen”, *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 25, 2004

Gant, Michael S., “House Unbound”, *Silicon Valley Metro*, March 17-24, 2004

Hayes, Holly, “Domesticity goes for a spin” *San Jose Mercury News*, Mar. 13, 2004

Gordon, A.L., “Out and About”, *The New York Sun*, March 15, 2004

Hayes, Holly, “What’s in the fridge? Art”, *San Jose Mercury News*, Mar. 05, 2004

Fischer, Jack, “Twisted Visions of Youth”, *San Jose Mercury News*, February 1, 2004

Baker, Kenneth, “California Artists Take the Traditional Still-Life in Wild New Directions,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 31, 2004

Woods, Casey, “Alternative to Exhibit Space”, *Miami Herald* (Neighbors), December 7, 2003

McCarthy, David, “Fantasy and Force: A Brief Consideration of Artists and War in the American Century”, *Art Journal*, December 2003

Shefi, Smadar, “Executives Games”, *Haaretz*, May 27, 2003

Director, Ruth, “Velvet Underground”, *Ha-ir*, May 15, 2003

Kantor, Sharon, “Another Day at The Office”, *Ha-ir*, May 15, 2003

Gilerman, Dana, “New Life to a Deserted Office”, *Haaretz*, May 8, 2003

Hieggelke, Brian, “When Hawks Cry” *NewCityChicago Online Magazine*, March 26, 2003

Hawkins, Margaret, “WAR, Exhibit Cry Out for Peace,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 24, 2003

Tanous, Adam, "Center Exhibit Examines the Concepts of Home," *Express*, December 18, 2002

Frank, Peter, "2002 California Biennial," *LA Weekly*, August 30-September 5, 2002

Chang, Young, "Strange Beauty," *Daily Pilot*, May 25, 2002

Pincus, Robert L., "Ordinary Strangeness," *The San Diego Union -Tribune*, June 20, 2002

Walsh, Daniella, "Exhibition Two Years Young," *The Orange County Register*, June 2, 2002

Mendenhall, Lauri, "A Multi-layered Debut," *Coast*, June 2002

Goldner, Liz, "Provocative Summer Shows, from Warhol to Edge of the World, Post-pop, Multimedia Extremism," *OC Metro*, 2002

Walsh, Danielle, "Avant Art," *Riviera Magazine*, May-June 2002

Fisher, Jack, "About Face," *The Mercury News*, March 28, 2002

Baker, Kenneth, "Yoram Wolberger," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 12, 2002

Baker, Kenneth, "Toying with the Human Form," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 28, 2001

Betsky, Aaron, "Tangerine Dream," *Interiors*, May 2001

Novakov, Anna, "Open House: Art on Site 1," *Vistaview Journal of Contemporary and New Media Art*, March 25, 2001

Baker, Kenneth, "Rooms with a View," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 10, 2000

CATALOGUES

2007 Klien, Richard, *No Reservations*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT

2004 Northrup, JoAnne, *Domestic Odyssey*, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA

2002 Armstrong, Elizabeth and Hofman, Irene, 2002 *California Biennial*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA

RELATED ACTIVITIES

2003 Co-curator of group show installation in a vacant office space: *Art on Site 2: officespace*, Tel Aviv, Israel

2000 Co-curator of group show installation in a vacant Victorian house, *Art on Site 1: OpenHouse*, San Francisco, CA