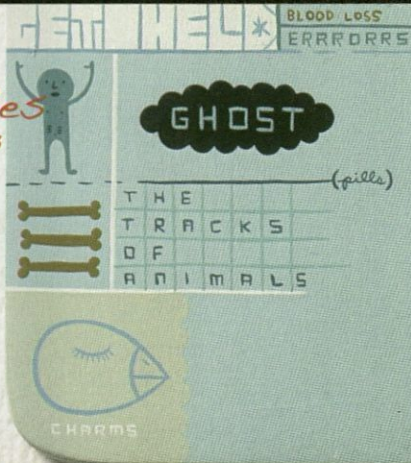


4-Sites
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TRACES

HUSH

JIM HOUSER

THIS BEATING HEART
ACTS AS A TIMER

GALLERY GUIDE

JIM HOUSER

THIS BEATING HEART

ACTS AS A TIMER

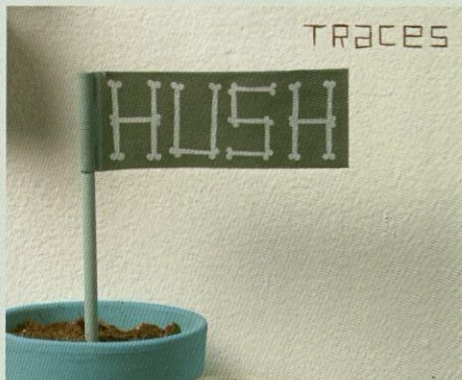
April 6 - May 19, 2007

THIS BEATING HEART ACTS AS A TIMER is the fourth and final exhibition in the Bride's 2006-07 season of 4-Sites, which presented solo, site-specific installations by four Philadelphia artists.

Like every one of us, Jim Houser carries a world inside his mind. Most recently, he's been carrying "sickness and death, the world of science, war terminology and code breaking, interpersonal development, flora and fauna, decay and rebirth." Each of his installations is a record of his thoughts, inspirations, and interests over a period of time. **THIS BEATING HEART ACTS AS A TIMER** is Jim's name for this, his largest and most fully realized exhibition.

Life is Jim's subject, medium, and muse. In his own life, he's known friendship, love, and the satisfaction of work well done and appreciated; he's also known struggle and the cruelest tragedy. Art is his ordered, systematic, yet improvised response to life's vagaries. It is the way he lives.

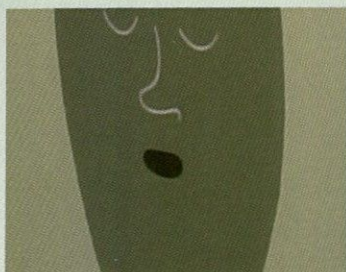
Jim is an artist/poet who explores the relationship between the look, sound, and meaning of words and the things they represent. His painted words suggest snippets from overheard conversations or his own inner monologue, but they are not random—they converse with one another and with Jim's vocabulary of images, saying a lot about the artist and his art. Jim's gifts are his abilities to survey the infinite inventory of his own consciousness, to clear away the static, to find those shapes, words, colors, thoughts, feelings, and sounds that reside at the core of his being, and to translate and transform all of this, his essential self, into art that speaks to others.



In his earliest years as a practicing artist, he gave his paintings away to people who responded positively to them. Occasionally, he would attach his paintings to signposts, enabling passers-by to take them. While no longer working gratis, Jim needs to be prolific. His work-ethic is legendary.

Jim is a painter of paintings within paintings. He paints directly on walls, ceilings, and floors, then layers atop clusters of smaller, discrete pieces. He paints on canvas, paper, everything—wood scraps, sneakers, basketballs, flowerpots, skateboard decks, figures that he's cast. He cultivates environments that grow to surround us. This embrace isn't cloying or constraining. Every element is thoughtfully conceived, carefully rendered, and precisely placed. The parts and their sum evoke delight, reflection, and the urge to explore.

There are precedents for Jim's work. Dada's collaged collisions of word and image. Surrealism's subconscious mining. The influence of cartoons and advertising in cool Pop Art and



the more fevered work of Chicago Imagists such as Jim Nutt and Ed Paschke. The pictorial, graffiti-inspired, populist individualism of 1980s New York Neo-Expressionist and Neo-Pop artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. The powerful, obsessed visions of so-called "outsider" artists. The carefully scrawled marks and words of Cy Twombly's narrative paintings. The way Raymond Pettibon conjures noir-ish, edgy, novelistic moments by combining disparate pictures and texts in his drawings.

But precedent feels beside the point when discussing Jim's art. Jim and his contemporaries—artists such as Shepard Fairey, Chris Johanson, the late Margaret Kilgallen, Barry McGee, and Clare Rojas—seemed to spring fully formed from the overlapping, late-twentieth-century worlds of punk rock, skateboarding, and graffiti. Jim's had solo shows in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco and, most recently, was featured in a two-person exhibition in Sydney, Australia. His work is in the collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. He earned a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowship in 2004. Despite this widespread acclaim, Jim's art is the antithesis of many attitudes reigning today. It is not ironic, self-referential, self-conscious, anchored in academic theory, or otherwise "conceptual." It is heartfelt and visceral, speaking with the same clarity to those steeped in or unaware of art's canon.

Like his installations, Jim's career to date appears equally random and purposeful. His innate talent was always apparent and encouraged, but he never studied art formally. Nearly lifelong friendships with fellow artists Adam Wallacavage and Ben Woodward (and their colleagues in Philadelphia's internationally regarded Space 1026 artists' collective), and his transforming relationship with his late wife, Rebecca Westcott,



and her family, welcomed him to the milieu of artists and art-making. Wallacavage brought him to the attention of Shelley Spector (curator of this exhibition), who launched SPECTOR Gallery in 1999 with a solo show of Jim's work. Over the course of six years and five solo shows, Spector gave Jim the guidance and context for growth. The 2001 exhibition *East Meets West: "Folk" and Fantasy from the Coasts* at Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art (organized by Alex Baker) presented him in the company of others (including Kilgallen, Johanson, and Rojas) with roots in "street culture".

Informed by popular culture, Jim now shapes it with sneakers designed for Nike and skateboards and graphics for Toy Machine and Designarium. His work has been celebrated in the magazines *Anthem*, *Strength*, and *Swindle*. Inspired by words, Jim has illustrated the *New York Times Sunday Magazine's* "On Language" column. He designed the cover of Ben Dolnick's 2007 novel, *Zoology*. A maker of seriously playful environments, he's created murals for children's interiors for Design Within Reach, and his art graces Duke [University] Children's Hospital and the Children's Cancer Center of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Hospital.

Jim lives, in Philadelphia, with his dogs, Stuckley and Ella, and his cat, Birdy. *THIS BEATING HEART ACTS AS A TIMER* is "a map of the contents of his head," the topography of his life, right now. In the whirlwind of living, Jim's is the still, small voice. Listen.

—Matthew F. Singer (*curator and writer*)