

Sketches, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 72 x 72 inches

About Tom Stanley

Born in Fort Hood, Texas, **Tom Stanley** grew up in Concord, NC, and attended Belmont Abbey and Sacred Heart colleges in Belmont, NC. He received a MA in Applied Art History and a MFA in Painting from the University of South Carolina in 1980. Since then, Stanley has served on the faculty at a number of institutions including Arkansas College (now Lyon College) in Batesville, AR; Barry University in Miami, FL; and as the director of the Waterworks Visual Arts Center in Salisbury, NC. Currently the Chair of Fine Arts at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, SC, he was also the first director of the Winthrop University Galleries from 1990-2007.

His work has been featured at SECCA, Winston-Salem; gallery twenty-four, Berlin; Hampton III Gallery, Greenville, SC; the George Gallery, Charleston; and if ART, Columbia, among others. His curatorial projects include *Worth Keeping: Found Artists of the Carolinas* for the Columbia Museum of Art; *New South Old South Somewhere In Between* for Winthrop and the Levine Museum of the New South; and *Still Worth Keeping: Communities, Preservation and Self-Taught Artists* in collaboration with the South Carolina State Museum, and many more. His public art endeavors include *Balancing Act* in Simpsonville, SC, *Journey* in Raleigh, NC, and the Winthrop Monolith in Rock Hill, SC. He has also been commissioned by the Charlotte Area Transit to create a public installation at the Tom Hunter Station on North Tryon Street in Charlotte.



#1 (from the series *Red, White, and Black*), 2010
acrylic on canvas, 48 x 68 inches



Houses, 2017
acrylic on canvas, 47 1/2 x 37 1/2 inches

CORRELATING EVENTS:

OPENING RECEPTION FOR THE EXHIBITION:

Friday, May 19, 6:30pm, Halsey Institute

SGRAFFITO WORKSHOP WITH TOM STANLEY:

Saturday, May 20, 10am-12pm
at the Charleston Farmer's Market, Marion Square

ARTIST LECTURE AND GALLERY WALK-THROUGH:

Saturday, June 17, 2pm, Halsey Institute

LOCATION:

161 Calhoun Street
Charleston, SC 29401
halsey.cofc.edu

PARKING:

Available in the St. Philip St. and George St. garages

GALLERY HOURS:

Monday – Saturday, 11am – 4pm
during exhibitions, or by appointment
Open until 7pm on Thursdays

CONTACT:

843.953.4422 or halsey@cofc.edu.

BLOG:

Join the conversation at halsey.cofc.edu/edu/blog

GUIDED GROUP TOURS BY APPOINTMENT:

Free tours are led by knowledgeable and experienced guides and can be adapted to various time lengths, group sizes, and ages. Contact Education and Outreach Coordinator Maya McGauley at McgauleyM@cofc.edu or call (843) 953-5659.

MISSION:

The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston School of the Arts provides a multidisciplinary laboratory for the production, presentation, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas by innovative visual artists from around the world. As a non-collecting museum, we create meaningful interactions between adventurous artists and diverse communities within a context that emphasizes the historical, social, and cultural importance of the art of our time.

HALSEY INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

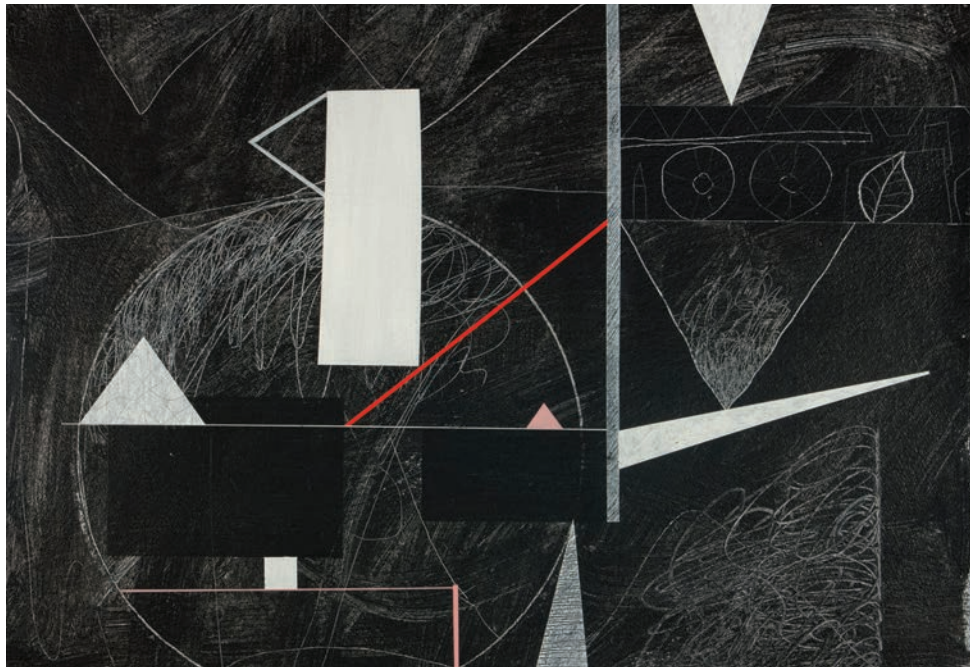
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Tom Stanley:
Scratching the Surface
May 19 – July 8, 2017





Drawing Across the Sea, 2016
acrylic on 300# Arches paper, 22 x 30 inches

Tom Stanley: Scratching the Surface

By Bryan Granger

“Painter drowns.”

So read the obituary for Tom Stanley’s grandfather, whose body was pulled from the Mississippi River in New Orleans in 1920. Eighty-four years later, the younger Stanley, an established artist himself, traveled to the city to see the spot where his grandfather had been removed from the water. Encountering a levee that obscured the alleged site where his grandfather had been found, he did what many others do in New Orleans: he boarded a boat and explored the city from the water. The perspective of seeing the city of New Orleans objectively from the constantly moving river led Stanley in 2004 to create a body of work called *Floating*. A series of clinically executed paintings of various objects silhouetted in black and red on wood panels, they are among the earliest of Stanley’s works to introduce images of boats, houses, industrial equipment, and other structural motifs.

This anecdote and the resulting artworks illustrate how painting for Stanley is not only a means of aesthetic investigation—that is, how specific forms, colors, and textures operate within a system—but is also a reflection of his own life experiences. *Floating* also incorporates elements of personal significance, including tools that belonged to the artist’s father.

The subject matter of *Floating* continually reappears throughout Stanley’s oeuvre. For example, he completed another series, titled *The Neighborhood*, 2005–6, after a visit to South Africa. His experience there made him ponder concepts like sustainability and infrastructure in paintings that feature black-and-white representations of wheels, utility towers, houses, and other structures. The artist’s forms are often simple ones—a house, for instance, combines a rectangle and a triangle, shapes that are not only fundamental to geometric art, but are also among the earliest shapes recognized by children. Other elements—including boats, towers, ladders, and wheels—are also simple constructions of lines and curves, and they also appear throughout his work.

Floating exemplifies Stanley’s working method in that he almost exclusively creates work in series. As seen in his *Vessels*, 2016, as well as his most recent output, *Houses*, 2017, the paintings function both on their own as distinct works but also together as part of a larger installation, much like his *12-Panel Drawing*, 2016. In his working method, he will often assemble an array of blank canvases, start the first one, and then move on to the rest, adding elements along the way, before cycling back through them. Usually eschewing any sketches or other plans, he improvises. Each painting informs the next, and the entire body of works can be seen as one overarching work of art itself.



The Neighborhood, 2005-06
acrylic on panel, 33 x 39 inches

The techniques and formal elements that Stanley uses may vary from series to series, but the core of his production includes basic two-dimensional forms in composition with a flattened perspective. While his color palette may shift between each series, it often remains muted, with only a few examples of vivid colors—the strong reds and deep blues of *Houses* is one example. Some of his works emanate a dynamic energy fostered by wildly meandering lines and a reliance on sgraffito, a technique in which a top layer of wet paint is scratched to reveal an undercoat. Usually, the bottom layer of paint is a different color, providing a particular contrast when it appears through the top coat of the painting.

Widely used during the Renaissance, especially in fresco painting, sgraffito is also found commonly in ceramics and is typically employed in decorative manner. Stanley, however, uses sgraffito to help him achieve volume in his ordinarily flattened compositions. In his series *Vessels*, 2016, he masses a substantial amount of sgraffito, with the effect of creating a background in opposition to the dark black vessel forms, which automatically become part of the foreground. Here imitating rushing water—a pictorial connection to the titular *Vessels*—the sgraffito constructs a stage on which the other forms in the painting exist.

In other works, like his *Red, White, and Black* paintings of 2010, Stanley uses sgraffito in a more limited manner. Instead of creating a background with large areas of it, he positions various forms drawn with sgraffito in specific geometric arrangements. The sgraffito elements may act as a foil to other, precisely painted forms—again creating a sort of pseudo-volume—but they do not establish a dichotomy between background and foreground as they did in *Vessels*. Here, the forms in which he uses sgraffito, whether created by thick, haphazard brushstrokes or fine needle-like lines, help instigate a rhythm, forcing the viewer’s eye to circulate throughout the allover composition and diminishing any focal points.



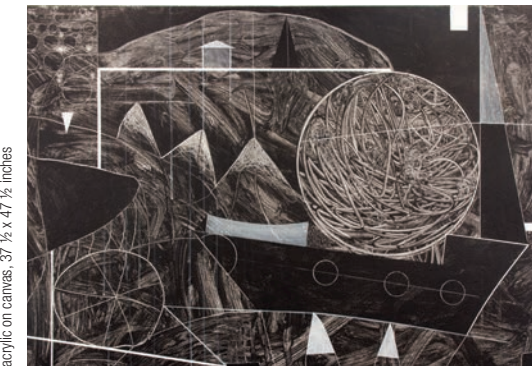
Untitled Drawing, 2013
acrylic on canvas, 47 x 47 inches

Stanley’s experimentation with sgraffito oscillates between these extremes, serving as either background or constituent forms, depending on the series. His *Untitled Drawings*, 2012, and *Drawings Across the Sea*, 2016, feature broad swaths that function primarily as a background. The *Houses* series and the *Road to Nowhere* triptychs, 2012, constrain the sgraffito to specific forms within each composition. As a technique, sgraffito

also provides a physicality to the paintings, a quality not quite present in earlier series like *Floating* and *The Neighborhood*. By scrawling through a layer of paint on his canvases, Stanley offers evidence of the artist’s hand, in contrast to the non-sgraffito areas that are clinically and meticulously painted, often using tape to create straight lines.

Such experimentation with sgraffito helps to connect Stanley’s methods with many key painters of the twentieth century. His careening lines and vigorous sgraffito are in sync with the automatic-drawing techniques of Surrealist painters like André Masson, and deliberate drips of paint apparent in the *Vessels* series, among other works, pointedly reference well-known action painters of the Abstract Expressionist period like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. The hard edges of pure color forms in paintings like *Red, White, and Black* canvases nod to post-painterly abstract artists of the 1960s and 1970s (see David Diaó and Dorothea Rockburne, for instance), and the stenciled numbers and letters in various works owe a debt to pop artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Certainly a student of art history, Stanley uses his art to process how painting has evolved over the last several decades.

Among the many connections to modern American painting that arise in Stanley’s work, an additional influence that has always been present is mechanical drawing. From his art school education and early jobs as an art framer, Stanley became comfortable using traditional drafting tools like compasses, straight edges, and T-squares. Such tools initially offered him boundaries, creative constraints that forced him to explore specific methods of painting, such as the machine-like precision in his *The Neighborhood* and *Floating* series. In more recent works, elements of mechanical drawing stand out: the sharp edges of the eponymous structures in *Houses* are neatly rendered; the circles and curvatures in his *Sketches*, 2011, are precisely drawn, as if done with a compass; and the straight lines and angles in *Red, White, and Black* point to the specific control that mechanical drawings maintain.



Vessels, 2016
acrylic on canvas, 37 1/2 x 47 1/2 inches

The aesthetic restrictions that mechanical-drawing methods have provided Stanley function much like the limits he sets in terms of color palette, iconography, or the number of canvases in a given series. Essentially, Stanley’s self-imposed limits are a hallmark of his career, and the reason that his creativity has flourished. With these

established constraints, sgraffito has become a natural contrast, offering him a way to subvert his own self-restraint with unabashed expression. Yet sgraffito also offers its own constraints: the only aesthetic outcomes depend on the colors chosen and the manner in which the scratching is employed. For Stanley, sgraffito provides a way to draw without thinking while maintaining aesthetic constraints at the same time.

Bryan Granger is the Manager of Exhibitions and Public Programs at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art.