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.

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.
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 history of New Orleans: he boarded a boat and explored the city from the water. The perspective of seeing the city objectively from the constantly moving river led Stanley in 2004 to create a body of work called Floating. A series of acrylic paintings on canvas, Floating thematically addresses the amalgamation of black and red on wood panels, Stanley is concerned with the earliest work 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 articulating a sense of place, but also a way to process the passage of time—how a subject can be reimagined through the lens of history. Stanley’s Floating series, for example, broadly addresses the amalgamation of black and red on wood panels, Stanley is concerned with the earliest work to introduce images of boats, houses, industrial equipment, and other structural motifs.

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 House are one example. Some of his works emanate a dynamic energy forged by widely 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 in 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 paintings. 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 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 color palette and vigorous sgraffito are in sync with the automatic-drawing techniques of Surrealists 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 Diao 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 drafting. 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 a means to establish boundaries, creative constraints that forced him to explore specific methods of painting, such as the machine-like precision in his The Neighborhood/Floating series. In more recent works, elements of mechanical drafting stand out: the sharp edges of the eponymous structures in Hous, and 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.

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 unshackled 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 Haley Institute of Contemporary Art.