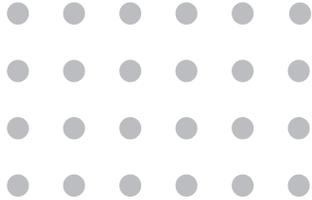


# Wit on Wry

November 28 - January 27, 2008 Curated by Karen Shaw

Islip Art Museum



## **Wit on Wry**

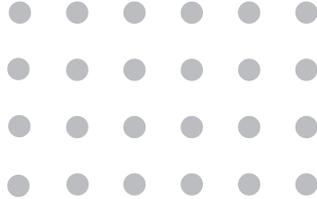
November 28 - January 27, 2008

**Allen Barber**  
**Roz Chast**  
**Linus Coraggio**  
**Bill Cravis**  
**Ron Hutt**  
**Jimmy and Dena Katz**  
**Lindsay Packer**  
**Lance Rutledge**  
**William Stone**



Curated by **Karen Shaw**

## Wit on Wry



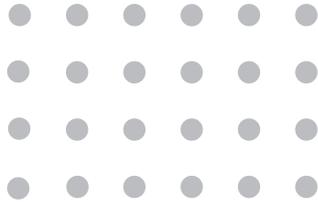
Humor is a serious subject and a tricky one. Just look to Sigmund Freud who wrote an extensive treatise on the subject. What one person finds light-hearted, whimsical, wry or hysterically funny another looks at with blank stares and possibly with disgust.

So for better or worse, the work of the ten artists in *Wit on Wry* represents some aspect of my own sense of humor. In this year's holiday exhibition at the Islip Art Museum, I hope our visitors will find something to laugh about—or at least cause a smile—but above all, something to think about.

**Roz Chast's** wry take on the world is well known to all readers of *The New Yorker* magazine. Her cartoon narratives portray the everyday annoyances of family, friends and pets, the daily interactions of hapless “everyfolk,” and issues of anxiety, aging and guilt in a unique way that tickles many a funny bone.

The late **Allen Barber** had a darkly whimsical take on the world. His drawings and paintings of monsters remind me of an adult version of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, a popular children's book.

**Bill Cravis** makes sushi of a wry and non-traditional sort. Sushi is a funny food when you think about it—raw fish sliced by sushi chefs that train at the art for years and years. The inherent absurdities in this particular food are made even funnier by Cravis's comic take on it. His vehicular sushi would make a perfect snack for Allen Barber's monsters.

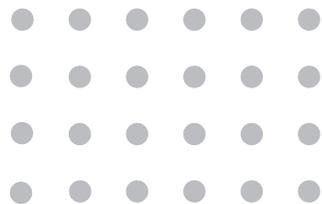


**Ron Hutt's** work is a spoof of Greek red figure painting on pottery. With a nod to the classics, he creates his own mythology set in modern times. In one of his paintings we see Aphrodite after a rendezvous with her lover Ares calling her husband Hephaestus on her cell phone telling him she will be late getting home. In another Demeter encourages a pair of endangered polar bears to destroy a gas guzzling Hummer.

The photographers **Jimmy and Dena Katz** have made a series of work in northern Utah's famous Salt Flats. This desert is a bleak landscape that is a haven for both those who want to "get away from it all" and race car fans who mob the flats during high-speed contests. The photographs in this show depict the debris visitors have left behind. None of the pictures are arranged; all are authentic documentations of litter *in situ*. The daffy debris the photographers found became the source of a body of work called *Salt Dreams*, now available in a book from Powerhouse Press.

**William Stone** uses visual puns and sight gags as his motif. His genteel watering can called *Economics* is a literal representation of the "trickle down theory" and his noisy, vibrating *Shaker Cabinet* does just that. They both make me laugh.

**Lance Rutledge's** paintings are strange signages in even stranger colors. His sentences and non-sequiturs tumble onto the canvas in a heap of jumbled words and equally jumbled meaning. He paints curious phrases that make one wonder how they came to be—these peculiar words that miss the mark when it comes to clarity and commu-



nication. What could they possibly mean? What was the artist thinking about?

**Lindsay Packer's** collages juxtapose all manner of found pictures with some paint or cut outs to create quiet, humorous pairings--usually between man and beast or child and nature.

**Linus Coraggio** welds found objects together to make chairs that may or may not be functional. The idiosyncratic items he culls from discarded materials create funny furniture for amusement rather than comfort.

There you have it—a mix of work that will make some smile, some frown in puzzlement and some laugh out loud. I know I did.

**Karen Shaw**

Curator

December 2007

## Artists Statements

## Allen Barber

Allen Barber (1939-1994) literally saw the world differently. His perceptions are just enough skewed from the predictable to catch us off-balance and disrupt our workaday version of life around us. The usual response to such a disruption is to laugh, and that is what Barber's paintings often make us do. But it is an uneasy laughter because this man knew too much of the darker side of humanity and invested his art with humor directed at our folly. He cherished humanity as he saw it—ludicrous, tragic and marvelous— and he left us a unique record of his caring.

Works by Allen Barber are in the public collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, Philadelphia Museum, Yale University, the American Embassy in Lisbon, the Binational Center in Lima, the Philadelphia Free Library and the Patten Corporation.



**Allen Barber**  
*Tea for Two* 1993  
*Dog After Radiation* 1993  
Acrylic

## Roz Chast

Roz Chast is internationally recognized as a pioneer of a new type of cartoon making which emerged in the 1970's when she became a regular contributor to the *New Yorker* magazine. Since then, nine collections have been published of Chast's work, most recently *Theories of Everything*, a 25-year survey. Roz Chast is known for her cast of recurring characters—generally hapless but relatively cheerful “everyfolk.” In her cartoons, she addresses the issues of our time: guilt, anxiety, aging, families, friends, money, real estate, and as she would say, “much, much more!” The editor of the *New Yorker*, David Remnick, has called her “the magazine’s only certifiable genius.”

Chast grew up in Brooklyn, where her parents (a high school teacher and an assistant principal) still live. She received a BFA in 1977 from Rhode Island School of Design with studies in graphic design and painting, but returned to the cartooning which she had begun in high school. Less than two years out of college, she was added to the 40 or so artists under contract to the *New Yorker* in January 1979. The *New Yorker* has continually published her work for 25 years, from black and white cartoons to color spreads, back pages and covers. In addition she has provided cartoons and editorial illustrations for almost 50 magazines and journals—from *Mother Jones* to *Town and Country*. She has illustrated several children's books and contributed to many humor collections, lectured widely and received several prestigious awards including an honorary doctorate from Pratt Institute in 1998. Chast has exhibited in numerous group and solo shows. Roz Chast lives in Connecticut with her family and several parrots.



**Roz Chast**  
*Fred Philpot (statue)* 2000  
Ink on paper

## Linus Coraggio

The bulk of my creative output since 1982 has been about 65% welded steel sculpture and about 25% metal furniture. The rest is drawings, paintings and prints I make of people, landscapes or abstract subject matter.

Because my language for expressing ideas springs from manipulating mostly found material, I am very discerning about what I choose. It must intrigue me. My material presents itself in empty lots, abandoned buildings, recycling areas, dumps and construction sites. I think to a minor degree that certain metal junk has a soul or at least some kind of quirky historical continuum and that is one of the things that inspires and motivates me to use it as my main medium.

When I make art I'm guided internally and innately by a subconscious flowing set of compositional, proportional and structural personal laws (which I sometimes break for the hell of it) and up until the decisive weld is laid down, I am immersed in a 3-D overview of what I think all the spatial variations and possibilities are. This process is loaded with unpredictable tangents and dynamics at every turn, yet what I roughly envision beforehand will generally manifest itself later in a satisfying manner and in a surprisingly evolved state.

The joy of having done this type of art for as long as I have is that the physical flow of energy improves with age. Economy of movement, focus and intent become clearer and stronger.



**Linus Coraggio**  
*No Parking Meter Chair* 2000  
Welded steel, plastic, aluminum

## Bill Cravis

*Models of food were first made in Japan in 1917. Six years later, a restaurant in a famous Tokyo department store displayed some imitation food in a glass case, and then enjoyed a big jump in revenue. In those days, the imitation food was made the same way as wax plants and anatomical models. In 1932, Iwasaki Pyuzo set up a business to make and sell food models. The company, Iwasaki Co., Ltd., did very well, and is now the top manufacturer of plastic food.*

*The plastic food is not always made for restaurant show windows—for example, the company has made imitation ice cream for a TV commercial. Real ice cream would turn to mush during the filming, but plastic ice cream keeps looking inviting. As you can see, plastic food has real value.*

From: [web-japan.org/nipponia/nipponia29/en/topic/index.html](http://web-japan.org/nipponia/nipponia29/en/topic/index.html)

What does a fleet of Ford F-150 pickup trucks have in common with a deluxe, combination sushi platter? This is one of the questions posed by my current series, *Food of the Gods*. The answer lies beneath the surface: post WWII prosperity in America signaled the onslaught of full-scale consumerism, a legacy of which we are the beneficiaries in the 21st century. Empirically speaking, images of ever-newer automobiles, electronic gadgets and myriad other consumer goods stimulate a patterned corporeal response that closely resembles our natural desire for food. There is evidence that even facsimiles of food, rendered in plastic, can bring on this hunger.

Our tastes change as we age, of course. Yet the desire is still best expressed in the words of an average three-year-old:

“I WANT!!!!”



**Bill Cravis**  
*Food of the Gods* 2007  
(Triptych)  
Mixed media

## Ron Hutt

These works are my personal ruminations on the amazing cultural life of the Greek city states and the profoundly beautiful site of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, which I recently visited. The Greek's integration of scientific inquiry, community building, artistic production, respect for the physical self and the natural world—all held in balance by the classical ideal of harmonious living—seems to me an important template for our current complex condition of conflicting global and local values.

In these paintings, I am establishing a process for the distillation of my intuitions, images and ideas on contemporary culture. Stylistically, I am inspired by the Greek tradition of enraptured prophecies, the personification of nature and the human experience of being alive in this amazing world. The Greek narratives have a unique ability to contain and creatively express the conflicts inherent in life and offer to anyone who takes time to read and contemplate them the rich reward of a humanized imagination.

Ron Hutt is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art/Digital Art and Design at the University of Rhode Island. He is also a cofounder of the 3D Group for Interactive Visualization at URI. Hutt holds an MFA in Art and Technology from the Art Institute of Chicago.

The works on exhibit are hand-painted pastiches of the narratives, traditional colors, drawing and painting style found in “Red Figure” Greek vases. The narratives have been updated to reflect contemporary times and current social and cultural practices.



**Ron Hutt**  
*Aphrodite -01.2.painting* 2007  
Acrylic on canvas

## Jimmy and Dena Katz

In 2004, after living and working as photographers in New York City for over 10 years, we returned to Northern Utah where Jimmy had spent more than a decade in the 1980s. This time away in an urban environment offered a fresh perspective on the high desert landscape. We had always been interested in how human activity interacts with the natural world, but what struck us now was the way the activity had become assertive and bizarre enough to create its own statement and subcultures. Standing on the shore of the Great Salt Lake with a stark, almost surreal view stretching ahead, we came upon a trio of plastic pink flamingos abandoned in the water. Inspired by the odd juxtaposition of timeless and transient, we drove around the lake seeking other such moments—and then on to the Utah Salt Flats on the border of Nevada. Again and again we discovered human possessions and personal obsessions flung onto the salt surface against undulating mountains and boundless sky.

Although transient beings, humans—whether through organized events, personal obsessions or casual litter—are boldly creating their own new landscapes in what was once considered inhospitable desert. Americans are turning these seemingly boundless stretches into their own personal playgrounds, their own backyards. Their activities have a poetic absurdity, surreal against the stark natural canvas.

We worked with a large-format camera and a formal esthetic to accentuate the strange and surreal. Often the heat reached 110 degrees. We apply both the compositional and improvisational skills we developed after a decade of photographing musicians in portraits and “in-the-moment” situations. The images in this exhibition are featured in our book *Salt Dreams* (Powerhouse 2006). We continue to explore Northern Utah to find the unfolding tension and drama between human beings and the natural world, between the transient and the eternal.

Website: [www.jimmykatz.com](http://www.jimmykatz.com)



**Jimmy and Dena Katz**  
*Cow* 2004  
Photographic print

## Lindsay Packer

*Onstage he grapples with a grizzly bear  
the deadlier for not really being there.*  
—from *Bodybuilder's Contest* by Wislawa Szymborska

I investigate the line between what we know and what we suspect about the things we see. In my work, children, animals and other “beginners” attempt to understand the world, each other, difference. Informed by fairy tales, science textbooks, and language primers, my collages examine entry-level curiosity. Utilizing found and original imagery, I often paint or cut away contextual information, leaving human and animal characters directly vulnerable to each other and to interpretation. Will the dog bite or is it laughing? Will the boy fall or is he jumping? Depending on what you think you see, things could go either way.



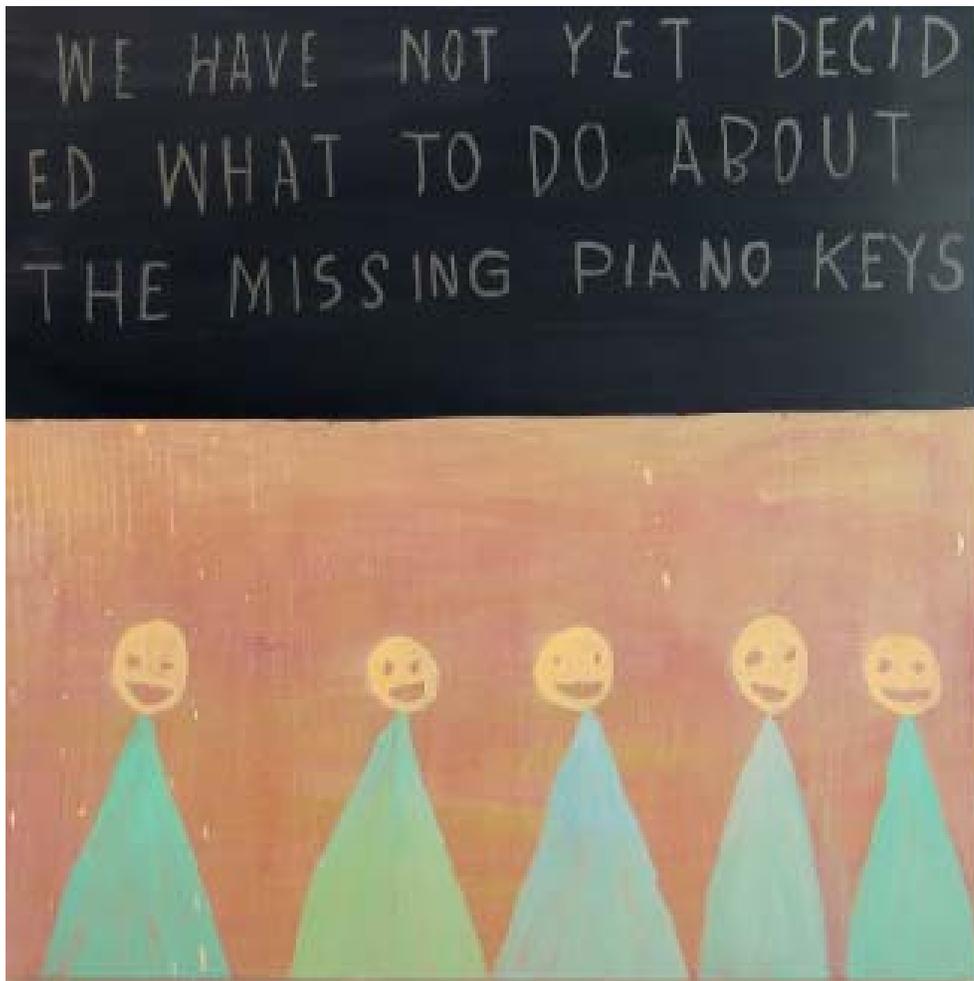
**Lindsay Packer**  
*Mother of the Universe* 2004  
Collage and gouache on paper

## Lance Rutledge

I don't normally like to say too much about my paintings. Even a little might be too much. But here's a little anyway.

The paintings that succeed for me are the ones that continue to surprise me long after they are finished. They make me ask: How did I ever get that green? How did those letters tumble onto the canvas so well in that painting? Why can't I do it now? Why is that phrase still so amusing to me? Is that painting just the result of some good luck on a lucky day?

For me the words are both literal and abstract images on the picture plane, like Chinese calligraphy. And the relationship between the images and words operate in the same realm. But what's important is that, altogether, the painting draws you in, but keeps its secret. And that is what might just bring you back again.



**Lance Rutledge**  
*Untitled*  
Oil on canvas

## William Stone

Humor and art is the subject

Let's see.

Every piece I make is an attempt to be funny, whether consciously or unconsciously.

The subject probably first requires a definition of humor.

And that's a tall order.

It's the most difficult thing to define

And defining it is no joke.

If humor is defined as the experience of getting it, being surprised, incongruity, absurdity, remembering anxiety in tranquility, ludicrousness, being pleasantly surprised, experiencing strange juxtapositions, etc., then a very broad swath of contemporary art is either funny or trying to be funny, consciously or unconsciously.

All humor is culturally based to various degrees.

All my pieces, jokes, are strongly culturally based. Some are more narrowly culturally based than others. I am always searching for the purely visual joke that transcends culture.

I call it the "suchness" joke. It never wears out. I don't know how to define suchness but I know it when I see it.

Someone once said to me, "Why does everything have to be funny?" I was at a loss for words.

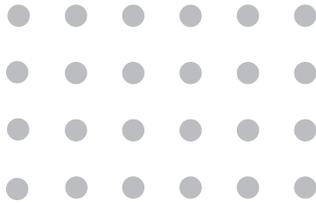
I finally said, "I don't know, and why *doesn't* everything have to be funny?"

Actually I prefer the British spelling: Humour.

It's funnier.



**William Stone**  
*Wares and Unawares* 2007  
Mixed media



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Slate of the Arts



NYSCA

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