

BRUCE BURRIS



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Mixed media on canvas
39 x 50 x 4 in
Photo: David Paul Bayles



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Photo: David Paul Bayles

LYRICAL MAGICAL HISTORY TOUR

by Patrick Collier

What is the optimal environment for viewing a Bruce Burris collage/ assemblage? In a gallery you can just stand back as one normally would and let yourself be drawn into his buoyant brilliance of colors, the bright-shiny psychedelic eye candy. It will be an immersive experience, almost overwhelming. You'll be there for hours.

Instead, I would argue for experiencing his work on some unhurried weekend morning as you slowly stroll around your house. A cup of coffee in hand, you stop in front of your large-scale Burris piece to closely examine the details of a quadrant of the work. I liken it to a time when music only came on LP albums. Excited with your purchase of a band's new release, after putting the vinyl on the turntable, you'd pour over the album sleeve's cover art and lyrics. And not just one time. Burris' artworks require such involvement.

We are said to like art that challenges, and if that is the case, it would follow that a deeper dive brings reward. This is certainly the case with Burris. He inundates us with snippets of conversations, headlines and captions, and photographs, not to mention drawings, baubles and weaves, more to demonstrate the complexity rather than cacophony of a pressing environmental or societal malady. More urgent than manic, his end result is not a diatribe or screed. Instead, we shall call his works of art “conversations,” and these conversations Burris presents are necessarily multifarious and multifaceted.

The vernacular voice he adopts, as well as photographs he cuts out of magazines and his use of art materials from a hobby store, signal the degree of humility with which he approaches a given topic, whether it be issues of class or the treatment of people with mental disabilities. Like many people of a certain age whose formative years (the 60s) were spent during a time of social uprising, Burris brings that time's idealism with him into maturity. Yet he is careful to avoid any particular ideological echo chamber, instead applying a rigor in his thought and deed, and does so because he wants to thoroughly represent both sides of an issue, all to ask a bigger historical question: How did we get to this point?

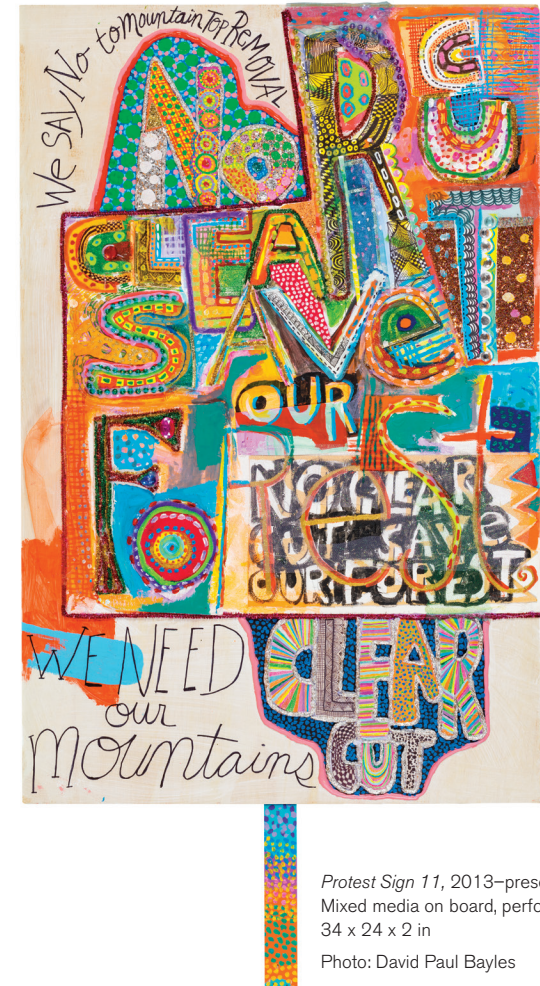
For his *Hippiewannacigarette* (2019), Burris draws on his own history growing up in Delaware and blends it into a timeline that includes the recent history of Oregon. A large hand is central to the piece, yet it is less a hand than a stage for a series of vignettes. On the palm we find Jesus wearing a crown of thorns and what appears to be a t-shirt that says, "Shrug it off." From a speech bubble he commands, "Light up." Surrounding this image of the Christ is some commentary: "This Dude Sure Knows His Wounds;" and above that, "one sad Ol Rock n Roll Opry UHHH." The thumb is garlanded and is attached with velcro. The pointer finger proclaims "This Space tis Your Reason." The middle finger is cut away, showing bone, and is topped off with a smaller red, white and blue peace sign hand as one would have seen on a bumper sticker in the Sixties. Portions of this same finger read "Ol Bandaid" and "Fuck ya Orygun The Curtin Has Risen." The "opry" reference (Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ, Superstar*) as well as a rising "curtin" let one know that this piece is indeed intended to be like a rock opera, and the four long-haired, cigarette-smoking dudes who form the elongated ring finger could very well be cast/band members.

From there, *Hippiewannacigarette* explodes, both visually and textually. To transcribe all of the text that is on this particular piece would put me way beyond the word count I am allowed, but I can tell you my take on the piece. It is a story about a Vietnam veteran who falls on hard times, and who, like so many others, falls through gaping cracks in our society. Yet, *Hippiewannacigarette* is just one chapter in Burris' body of work about the divide between the entitled and the victims all caught up in a greedy, uncaring world.

Burris' work is ebullient in the fullest sense, both exuberant and boiling, which may be a wholly appropriate response to the intensity of issues like mental illness, mountaintop removal for coal mining, and the Malheur Occupation. Absent a society that seems able to find a collective will to find remedies, an alternative is to respond, transcendently, with a panacea of psychedelia. And in that it is a familiar headspace for the seekers among us, whether charismatic evangelical or diehard hippie, it may just work.



Protest Sign 11a, 2019
Mixed media on board, performance element
31 x 24 x 2 in
Photo: David Paul Bayles



Protest Sign 11, 2013–present
Mixed media on board, performance element
34 x 24 x 2 in
Photo: David Paul Bayles



10 Years So Clean, 2018
Mixed media
53 x 33 x 5 in
Photo: David Paul Bayles

BRUCE BURRIS

b. 1955. Lives and works in Corvallis, Oregon

2018 Hallie Ford Fellow

Bruce Burris is a practicing artist and director of several community initiatives: Artworks – CEI, OUTPOST1000 and In Visible, that assist individuals with mental or emotional disabilities, many of whom are artists themselves. Burris' practice stems from observations of class and philosophical divides. He has exhibited in Oregon and throughout the US, including the Portland2016 Biennial, curated by Michelle Grabner and presented by Disjecta Contemporary Art Center. Burris has been awarded fellowships or awards from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, the Kentucky State Arts Council, the Delaware State Arts Council, the NEA-SAF, Puffin Foundation and Vermont Studio Center. His work is included in numerous private collections. Burris attended the San Francisco Art Institute and Nasson College.

Hallie Brown was born in 1905, outside of Tulsa, in Indian Territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. She supported herself as she earned a bachelor's degree at East Central University and taught in Oklahoma before her parents moved their family to rural Oregon. In 1935 Hallie married Kenneth W. Ford and together they established Roseburg Lumber Company in the midst of the Great Depression.

Hallie Ford was drawn to art all her life, specifically the accessibility of artmaking. She took classes with the painter Carl Hall at Willamette University in Salem, and painting became a central part of her life. Her philanthropy established and supported key Oregon visual art museums and universities.

After Hallie's death in 2007, The Ford Family Foundation's Board of Directors honored our co-founder by establishing a Visual Arts Program. The first element of this program was the Hallie Ford Fellowships in the Visual Arts, awarded since 2010. Through these unrestricted fellowships, we seek to make significant awards to visual artists who have worked to establish their voice and craft.

Another of our goals is to help support the ecology that builds connections and capacity in the visual arts community of our state. As the Fellows become the focus of exhibitions throughout the world, they bring more attention and support to their Oregon peers. We are certain that Hallie Ford would be pleased to see how both individual artists and the visual arts community in Oregon have flourished since the establishment of this program in her honor.

We could not be more excited each year to bring new Hallie Ford Fellows into this family, and to share their work with you.

Anne C. Kubisch
President, The Ford Family Foundation

The Hallie Ford Fellowships are the flagship element of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program. The Foundation commits to an ongoing relationship with our Fellows through exhibition support, convenings, and professional development opportunities. In addition, the Visual Arts Program offers grants to visual artists for unanticipated career opportunities; supports artists-in-residence programs in Oregon and nationally; brings curators and arts writers from outside the region to Oregon for studio visits and community dialogue; commissions arts writing and publication; supports exhibitions, catalogues and other forms of documentation for Oregon artists; and awards grants to enhance exhibition spaces.

The Foundation is pleased to partner with the Oregon Arts Commission, University of Oregon, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Portland State University, Reed College, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, United States Artists, and the artists and visual arts organizations of our state.

The Ford Family Foundation was established in 1957 by Kenneth W. and Hallie E. Ford. Its mission is "successful citizens and vital rural communities" in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Foundation is located in Roseburg, Oregon, with a Scholarship office in Eugene. For more information about the Foundation and its Visual Arts Program, visit www.tfff.org.



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