

# DAVID ECKARD







*Cottage (the bishop and sailor)*, 2019  
Latex paint, spray enamel, charcoal, pastel, steel, fabric  
84 x 48 x 16 in  
Photo: David Eckard

*Previous page*  
*Quite Quite*, 2019  
Painted wood, fabric, leather, mirror, artificial hair  
45½ x 28 x 3 in  
Photo: David Eckard



*Sybarite*, 2018  
Acrylic paint, charcoal, pastel, spray enamel,  
graphite, colored pencil on wood panel  
48 x 48 in  
Photo: David Eckard



*Placards and Placeholders*, 2020  
Installation view  
Photo: Mario Gallucci



## A LUBRICATED GRASP ON TRUTH AND ARTIFICE

by Amelia Rina

David Eckard can't believe he's still here. At fifty-seven, he has survived everything from the AIDS epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic to growing up as a gay kid on an Iowan farm where he had to dispose of undesirable animals in the “kill hole.” All these experiences have given him an indefatigable curiosity and humor in his art making—a sensibility that combines survivor guilt, panic, activism, and a happy bewilderment to be alive in a strange world.

After studying painting and printmaking at Iowa State University, then experimenting with sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Eckard fluently employs a cacophony of mediums. Painting, drawing, performance, and video often complement semi-functional sculptures made of wood, leather, metal, lace, and various other unexpected materials. More recently, Eckard has been combining painting and sculpture to produce works that endlessly oscillate between flatness and volume, real and rendered.

In *Cottage (the bishop and the sailor)* (2019), the canvas lacks its lower right corner. The curved void is partially occupied by a coy drape of pale peach fabric extruding out of the canvas and onto the floor. Behind the fabric, a bent line of steel enters a fleshy brown shape painted with what looks like liver spots or sun damage. The rest of the painting-sculpture offers plump, green, succulent-like petals hanging down from a triangular shape that might be bone if it didn't seem so inflated. In the background, grey fields look like concrete walls with beams of light peeking out behind them. Altogether, the composition poses more questions than it answers.

Other works further amplify this lubricated grasp on meaning and understanding. Anuses abound in *Sebastian* (2019), *Totem (deep shadow magic)* (2018), and *Cornucopia (theatrics of worth)* (2020), which look like they could be set pieces on a magician-themed porno (in the best

possible way). “There's nothing wrong with chasing down the perversities,” says Eckard.<sup>1</sup> These works amplify the awkwardness and magic of having a human body—a fleshy machine that stutters, breaks, surges, and runs on empty.

Bodies also inherently carry politics, which Eckard continues to probe through his work. What does it mean to live in a privileged body (white, male, educated) that is also marginalized (queer, aging)? By playing with truths and magnifying his performed identity, Eckard makes room for the often painful, often lovely messiness of human existence. He asks: “what can the body do when it's both enhanced and restricted?”

Still, Eckard endeavors to make the sculptures believable objects: “my fantasy was for someone to find one of these things in a dumpster and not think it was art.”<sup>2</sup> Each work *seems* intentionally designed for a specific purpose, but that purpose is entirely unknowable. Part of that slippery functionality comes from Eckard's exquisite skill and craft. By pushing every medium, he challenges himself to find out how tightly he can render each imaginary object; how realistically can he depict unrealistic things? “I want the craft to be so impeccable, it goes unnoticed,” he says. Each work contains a multitude of bizarre little gems for viewers to discover—and are equally surprising to Eckard. “I have to give these things validity, but I have no idea what they are.”<sup>3</sup>

This impulse to seek out and celebrate the unknown takes on a theatrical, cinematic quality in Eckard's paintings, sculptures, videos, and performances. The works imply a narrative, yet never reveal the whole story. Inspired by the “bloated, raw potential” of heavy velvet curtains opening at a theater, Eckard embraces both scams and sincerity. “The swag of fabric spilling out of a canvas is just an extended gesture of the painting, and it's all artifice.” These objects and interactions become part of a larger performance in which we are all characters acting, reacting, fighting entropy, and searching for meaning.

Amelia Rina is a critic, writer, editor, and founder of Variable West.

<sup>1</sup> Conversation with the artist, May 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Gragg, Randy. *The Mirrors in the Machines: David Eckard's Raucous Rites and Passages*, 2003. Published in conjunction with *Tournament (lumens)* presented at The Art Gym at Marylhurst University, January 12–February 20, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Conversation with the artist, May 2021.



*Cornucopia (theatrics of worth)*, 2020  
Painted wood, turned wood, steel, mirror,  
fabric, wool, leather, sand  
35 x 56 x 45 in

Photo: Mario Gallucci





*Podium*, 2004  
Public performance

## DAVID ECKARD

*b. 1964. Lives and works in Portland, Oregon*

*2010 Hallie Ford Fellow*

Futility, function, authority, queer masculinity and persona are the primary notions investigated, critiqued, and exploited in David Eckard's work. Eckard fabricates fictive artifacts and enigmatic objects, with a variety of materials and techniques, existing as singular objects, installation components and performance props. Eckard has exhibited internationally and his work has been reviewed in *Art in America*, *Sculpture*, *Flash Art*, *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *Artnews*. He is the recipient of multiple fellowships and awards including an Individual Artist Fellowship from the Regional Arts and Culture Council, and the Bonnie Bronson Fellowship. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

**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](http://www.tfff.org).



## VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM

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