



## Hiatus

Review by William Fogg

*"I do not intend to direct viewers to some pre-determined conclusion. My pleasure comes from the joy associated with the creative process. If some of that joy is transferred to the viewer, then so much the better." - Eric M. Olson*

In his debut exhibition, Eric M. Olson offers an elegant series of highly crafted art objects with intriguing titles. For viewers who care to engage in critical discourse, there is a wealth of opportunity for such in this work, but it is not required. The refinements of meticulous design and execution are indicative of Dr. Olson's commitment to his practice, and the individual pieces are extremely specific in their structural resolution. For those who are so inclined, these pieces may be enjoyed as invitations to quiet and personal consideration, in refreshing contrast to the prevailing trend of "challenging" work that presumes to "force the viewer" to revise opinions and viewpoints regarding various social and cultural issues. Of course, no work of art can "force a viewer" to do anything, absent the threat of consequent physical violence. This unnecessary presumption of intellectual leverage is entirely absent here. Instead, we are offered the concession that art can only present an opportunity for contemplation, and as such is limited in its ability to direct the nature of that contemplation. In fact, it is often the case that viewers respond to art in ways that have nothing to do with the intent of the artist, or the obvious elements of the work itself. Dr. Olson's explicit acknowledgement of these facts allows us to go wherever the work may take us, rather than limiting us to a narrow and prescriptive dialog. The carefully constructed titles create an apparatus of interpretation for each piece, while offering an aura of tantalizing ambiguity, thus deliberately providing an open platform upon which the ardent critical theorist may build any number of elaborate and personally satisfying disquisitions if so desired. Here we may find something for everybody who is willing to engage, no matter what their predispositions might be.

The work is thoughtful and engaging, but the fact that this is the first time that anything by Dr. Olson has been presented to the public brings another broad range of interesting considerations to the discourse, beyond the subject and content of the pieces themselves. At the age of seventy, Dr. Olson has created work that compares favorably to anything one might find in a high-end Manhattan gallery, even though he lacks degrees and an exhibition history. How does an artist suddenly emerge with a mature vision and sophisticated technical skills yet without the requisite pedigree normally required to validate his vision? The story behind the art is as interesting as the art itself. Here is a brief synopsis told in Dr. Olson's own words -



*"My father worked in every medium. I grew up observing him engage in the creative process, whether drawing, painting, carving, or casting. I was frequently pressed into service to help him. There were frequent visits to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where I experienced one epiphany after another. But I also saw that my father was unable to sell his work for anything approaching a reasonable return on his investment in materials and time, let alone the premium that should have been associated with his creative genius. The gold leaf on one piece cost more than he was offered for the complete work. So, I abandoned art in high school."*

However, Dr. Olson did not abandon art forever. In the early-mid 1970's he found inspiration from design and art history professors at Lewis and Clark College who introduced him to hard edged and shaped canvas artists of the time, most notably Frank Stella. For a decade post-graduation, he continued creating watercolor renderings of works in this genre as well as models of granite and steel sculptures inspired by climbing and hiking along the John Muir Trail. But upon entering graduate school in 1984 he pushed his artistic aspirations aside for the better part of the next four decades, dedicating himself to his studies, career as an academic, his marriage, and his children. Ironically, it was the university-imposed home exile brought on by COVID 19 that provided the opportunity to revisit his creative side.

The title of this exhibition is a subtle but accurate assessment of its significance. That such an event did not occur until Dr. Olson's 70<sup>th</sup> year is a testament to the fact that his drive to create art could not be suppressed by time or circumstance. At an age when many artists have ceased to be productive, he is finally being introduced to the art world. Rather than a swan song, this should be considered a milestone in Dr. Olson's practice and his life, and we look forward to seeing much more from him.

**About the Reviewer:**

William Fogg's meticulous portraits of American faces have been featured in numerous galleries, museums, books, articles, and catalogs. He has taught various art and design classes at prestigious institutions in the United States and abroad for over forty years. Visit his website at [williamfoggfineart.com](http://williamfoggfineart.com)