

Susan Dunne, 'Pan-Tastic Paintings: the Art of B. Wurtz at the Aldrich',  
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## Pan-Tastic Paintings: The Art Of B. Wurtz At The Aldrich



"Circumstance," works by B. Wurtz, Virginia Poundstone, Ruby Sky Stiler, Elif Uras, Penelope Umbrico and Nancy Shaver, is at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum In Ridgefield until Oct. 25.



By **Susan Dunne** · Contact Reporter

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B. Wurtz makes art on bottoms of disposable aluminum cooking, serving pans

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When takeout food arrives in an aluminum container, most people just eat the food and then throw the container in the garbage or recycling bin. B. Wurtz used to do that, too. Then one day in 1990, he took a long look at the bottom of the pan.

"I saw this pre-designed pattern, an interesting readymade pattern that some anonymous person designed. I thought I could just paint it," Wurtz said. "I basically just filled it in like a coloring book. The pattern already made these shapes."

For the past 25 years, Wurtz has made hundreds of his quirky painted pan-bottom readymades. Currently, 250 of them are hanging in a gallery — salon-style, brightly colored, shiny and willy-nilly — at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield.

Wurtz said when he was younger, he used to make Joseph Cornell-inspired boxes filled with found objects. But he realized eventually that each of the objects in his boxes was visually appealing and did not need his artistic intervention to be interesting. So he changed his approach.

"I thought if I used really, really ordinary, overlooked stuff that tends to be ignored, it gave me more of an opportunity to add something to it," he said. "It makes it something else but it doesn't obliterate what it is. That is what I was striving for, honoring the things for how they serve us but making them look a bit classical and elegant so people can see them in a different light."



Flower Mutations, by Virginia Poundstone, at Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum. (Handout)

He went from using takeout pans to shopping in supermarkets for the pans, especially the big ones used to roast turkeys and do other large-scale cooking projects. "It was fun to start finding as many patterns as I could. A lot of the bigger ones have much more elaborate patterns," he said.

He paints the bottoms — never the insides — of the pans in blocks of solid acrylic colors, straight out of the tube. The only words on the pans, other than Wurtz's name, are the words already printed on the inside of the pans: "Caution: Remove All Juices Before Handling," "Always Support the Bottom." Since the paint is on the bottoms of the pans, these letters are inverted. "I just wanted to take whatever is there and treat it as a given," he said. "I thought it was kind of amusing it was backwards."

Wurtz self-curated the exhibit, and chose also to exhibit a long shelf full of other types of containers to contrast with his pan paintings: Danish modern Krenit bowls, Wedgwood Jasperware pottery and brilliant-cut glassware. "They just have sort of an intertesting formal relationship, like the solid colors, the enamel colors, the patterning and the glass imagery and the background of the Jasperware stuff," he said.

### **Works In Conversation**

The six new exhibits at the Aldrich, all up until Oct. 25, are collectively called "Circumstance." All were curated by their artists. All of the artists, like Wurtz, chose not only their own works but also works by other artists to have a conversation with their works and re-contextualize all the artworks.

Virginia Poundstone's "Flower Mutations" riffs on the history of flower imagery in art and design. Giacomo Balla's abstracted flower sculptures and tulip-pattern quilts are Poundstone's chief inspirations. A sharply geometrical sculpture, "Quilt Square (Tulip)," sits on the outdoor grounds alongside a field of vari-colored tulips. Inside, Poundstone's 20-foot-tall "Rainbow Rose," an image of a flower printed on adhesive vinyl and adhered to the wall, towers over Balla's sculptures. Another Poundstone work — a rose dropped into hot glass — sits next to slides of flowers taken

by Poundstone's grandfather and an early Warhol print of a bouquet. A Christo work around the corner shows flowers wrapped in plastic, like a corpse to be buried.

Curator Amy Smith-Stewart said Poundstone comments on flower imagery as well as the artifice of the flower industry. "So much time and money is spent on something that will perish," she said. "Flowers are a symbol of 'I love you forever,' but they're also a reminder of the futility of it all."

Ruby Sky Stiler's "Ghost Versions" places classical-style sculptures borrowed from the Bellarmine Museum in Fairfield in a gallery with Stiler's own plaster wall-reliefs, which borrow patterns and textures from those sculptures in their designs. Turkish-American Elif Uras' "Nicaea" honors the women of that Turkish city by creating ceramics with feminine imagery and shapes, including a vessel shaped as a pregnant woman's belly. A 16th Century Ottoman plate in the gallery suggests the origins of Uras' patterning. Penelope Umbrico's "Shallow Sun" explores how images of the sun and other forms of light have been affected by digital technology.

The piece features various permutations of light images on video and TV screens.

Nancy Shaver's "Reconciliation" takes inspiration from photographs of working-class families and their homes by Walker Evans — whom Shaver met when she audited one of his classes at Yale — and abstract fabric patterns by Sonia Delaunay. In Shaver's work, Evans' respect for the inelegant but heartfelt aesthetics of struggling people meets Delaunay's geometric aesthetic. In a variety of fabrics — some elegant, some bottom-of-the-barrel — Shaver creates multicolored 3D cloth sculptures in checkerboard or tic-tac-toe patterns.

"Nancy Shaver drew from two extremes. She was from a working-class family and was out of her element in the art world, but she also was part of that art world," said exhibitions director Richard Klein. "She found things in thrift stores and Wal-Mart, and some rarefied fabrics like Japanese kimono fabric. She turned found materials into a high-art commodity. If she makes something out of these fabrics, it's considered a sculpture."

**CIRCUMSTANCE: WORKS BY B. WURTZ, VIRGINIA POUNDSTONE, RUBY SKY STILER, ELIF URAS, PENELOPE UMBRICO AND NANCY SHAVER** *is at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 258 Main St. in Ridgefield, until Oct. 25.*  
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