

High Coup Journal

Thursday, March 24, 2011

Five Questions for a Rolling Art Gallery: Axle Contemporary

We've got a super secret bonus interview this month with some more folks [doing a Kickstarter.com project](#). They're Matthew Chase-Daniel and Jerry Wellman of Santa Fe, NM, and they are the brains behind Axle Contemporary, an art gallery on wheels.



The gallery embodies aspects of sculpture, installation, and performance art, all in the guise of a commercial art gallery. Anyway, their Kickstarter project involves buying this old sign...



...and displaying a different haiku on each side of it every week for sixteen weeks this summer. Basically, there are two kinds of people reading now: those who think this is the coolest thing they've ever seen, and those who are lying. Let's see what the guys have to say... [but first, help 'em out!](#) They've got about \$1600 to go on the project in the next 37 days, and you could be the one to put them over the top.

1. How did a 1970 aluminum stepvan go from delivering Twinkies to delivering art to the people? (As a side-question, how do the people now get their Twinkies?)

The van has been around for over 40 years, and we can't tell exactly where it has been all that time. We do know that it was owned by a former Secret Service agent and Colorado Springs' foremost Elvis impersonator in the 1980s. We bought it last year from a guy named Chris, a stepvan aficionado in cutoff military fatigues. The idea of a mobile art gallery sprung out of our minds before we had a chance to censor it, a whim as much as a serious idea. Then somehow we bought the vehicle (so big, so shiny) and built the thing. As for where to purchase a Twinkie, well, not at Whole Foods.

2. The whole operation has a very gonzo/"Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test" feeling to it. Any inspiration there?

The two of us grew up in different places and times that both intersected the road traveled by Furthur. We were not directly inspired by The Merry Pranksters in this project, but did look extensively at the Hippie School Bus Conversion as a model for vehicular renovation. We also looked at Haitian Tap Taps and ornate Central American buses. There was something about the shiny minimal old/new look of the van that seemed to emit a difficult to locate timeless glow. We haven't had anyone juggling sledgehammers in the gallery yet, but we are certainly open to the possibility.

3. So are you guys on the bus or off the bus? (Or maybe the van, in this case.)

We are always on the bus, not on the wagon yet, and most often in the van.

4. What're you doing with the sign after the haiku exhibition is over?

In our "Kickstarter" fundraising campaign we have offered it to the first person who pledges a donation of \$1,200. (There are more affordable pledge levels there too). Otherwise, we'll use it for a future project or just have it out in the backyard for a while to enjoy the visual feast it offers.

5. How do you feel your taking the art to the people is different than taking the people to the art, like in a traditional gallery?

With our wheels and axles we have access to a much more diverse audience. Many people are too busy, too lazy, too intimidated, or too uninterested to breach the threshold of an art gallery or museum, or to open a book of poetry. By bringing the arts to the street we can use our gallery as a vehicle for creative engagement in the social sphere. We've become a driving force in the arts in Santa Fe, and seeing art in our van or poetry from your car always promises to be a moving experience. We want to playfully break down boundaries around people and art. The people can become inspired, engage their innate creativity, and become works of art themselves.

MATTHEW CHASE-DANIEL (né Chase) left New York City in 1970 for the Berkshire Mountains where he raised tadpoles, minnows, and a raccoon, learned to fall off a horse, and hunt morels, wild violets, and rainbow trout. In the early 1980s he made his way to the Ojai Foundation where he spent a year studying Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Lakota Sweat Lodge ritual, and Northwest Coast carving, while growing his hair into ragged dreadlocks, eating macrobiotic food, and wearing bedsheets in the style of a South Indian ascetic monk. Later in the decade, Chase-Daniel studied at Sarah Lawrence College (B.A.) and in Paris, France, where he studied cultural anthropology, photography, and ethnographic film production (Ecole

Pratique des Hautes Etudes & Sorbonne). Since 1989, he has lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, renovating old houses, growing green chard, and making family and art. His photography and sculpture have been exhibited across the U.S. and in Europe and Japan. He has created public art projects in New Mexico, Colorado, Florida, Italy, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. His photography is represented by Craig Krull Gallery in Santa Monica, California. He is the co-founder, co-owner, and co-curator of Axle Contemporary.

JERRY WELLMAN grew up near the Menominee reservation in frigid north-central Wisconsin. He left a not so promising job with a traveling carnival to go to school in California eventually graduating from CALARTS with an MFA. He works in many arts media. His documentary film *Fairy Tracks*, in search of the spirit in nature, played in film festivals throughout the world. His paintings have been seen in many museums and gallery exhibitions. He has also published several books including *Shadows* and *What to do with a Dead Pinon*. Along the way, pursuing his life as an artist, Wellman became a firefighter in the Yukon Territory, a woodsman in Alaska, an ordained minister, an Indian trader (one who represents American Indian arts and crafts), a ceramic tile manufacturer, a teacher, a husband and father, and lately co-founder, co-owner, and co-curator of a mobile art gallery; Axle Contemporary. For Wellman, it's all art, or else art fodder.