



MNEMONIC DEVICES

VARGAS GALLERY
OCTOBER 4-30

ABOUT THIS SHOW

Every good art exhibition should have three goals—and when it’s held at an academic institution, fulfilling that obligation is even more important.

Inform—show people something new, or something they may not know much about.

Excite—show what happens when you exceed the standard lines of that field—here, contemporary sculpture.

Educate— show how that was accomplished; what mindset, steps, and tools were needed to effect innovative results.

Welcome to *Mnemonic Devices*.

—Paul Baker, *Artist*

Brass strip
on top, hold

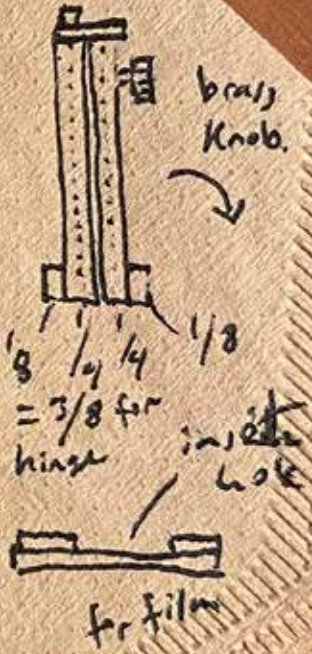


1/8 brass,

soft thin - under 1/4!
Fork mag.

1/8 mahog.

brass
strip
inlayed
E micro
router
need
1/4"
1/8 buried
in wood



for film

groove,
cut &
same galv.
time steel
E micro set
router below
suff. exoside in
brack.

• drill 2 1/2 hole
together
• sand together.

ARTIST'S NOTE

INTRODUCING A NEW SCULPTURE FORMAT

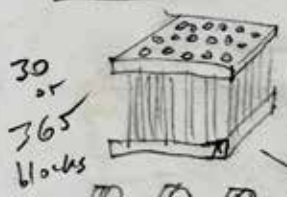
C-Clamp Studios is dedicated to pushing the norms of assemblage art. Most work in this genre is about 80% found objects and 20% built—that is, perhaps making a frame or shadow box.

In contrast, I call my pieces *constructed sculpture* since they are about 80% built from scratch. The rest is comprised of carefully selected objects that bring with them a patina of use and lost history. My approach is to blur the boundaries of what's found and what's made—it's often indistinguishable, and immaterial.

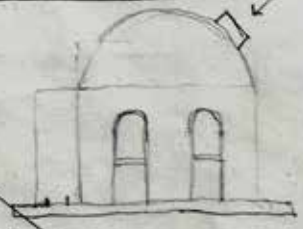
An essential part of my creative process is producing sketches, notes, and build diagrams. Usually these are quite casual—coffee filters and post-its serve just as often as drawing paper. I thrill to the challenge of combining disparate materials in surprising ways that seem inevitable once effected. Using these methods, my larger pieces may take up to four years to build.

Part 3: ARCHIVE UNIT

April 5, 2005



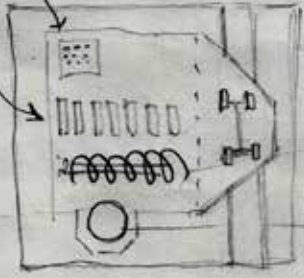
30 or 365 blocks



Back - 2 tall thin windows
 "floor to ceiling"
 - Frosted safety glass
 - wire on ding
 (see - matches bolts)

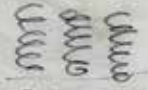


slices?



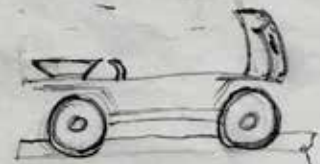
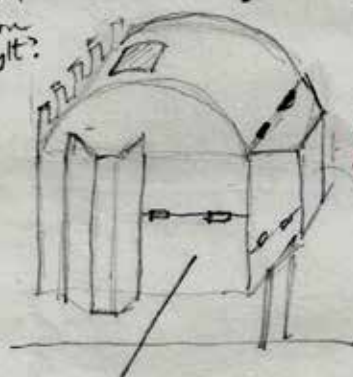
Like DNA
 Spinning turbine

Edison Spool
 stored vert.



knurled
 black on
 alum, or
 st. steel
 ones.

* Peek inside
 thru
 skylt?



Data Shuttle
 on old roller
 skate

• runs on
 L track.

Edison core sample
 on Field Unit



1/2 side flips
 down.



like person?
 "key" to open
 Unlock memory?

Edison Recording
 cylinder
 ebay?



2, plus DNA?



Alum
 L track.

DO NOT BEND

SCOTT SCHRYVER ON PAUL BAKER

If a single image is worth a thousand words, Paul Baker's work may be worth a thousand more. His beautifully constructed sculptures delve into the senses and ask the viewer to take part in a journey of understanding and recollection. To utilize one's own memories and be an active, equal participant with the artist. Paul builds accessible, non-pretentious works of art for everyone to enjoy and only asks that each participant bring themselves fully into the picture.

Look at a piece like *Strata Thesis* from 2000 (pages 21-23), a sculptural triptych that harkens

back to the 1950s with its use of period materials like rotary dials and vintage lab equipment, and you have the makings of a time machine that brings back memories of Nifty Fifties TV, technology, and design. These are three-dimensional snapshots of a bygone era and it's Paul's curiosity and imagination that keep them alive and well in 2023.

In November of 2013 I had the pleasure of participating in a two-person show with Paul at The Chop Shop Hair Salon in San Francisco. What I thought would be a typical dual show was anything but. Because like Paul's incredibly detailed



works, the show had to present something interactive, something that challenged and kept participants fully engaged. *ART MEN: A Show and 60's Happening* did exactly that.

Conceptually, it was fun plus genius (*page 6*). Turn a working hair salon into an art museum complete with uniformed guard, gift shop, bar with signature cocktail, iced champagne in the shampoo sinks, and a DJ and you've got yourself one heck of an opening night! For me it was an opportunity to see Paul's full and unobstructed focus on his craft up close and personal.

Fast forward to March of 2014 and Paul and I are back at it presenting a two-man show at Float

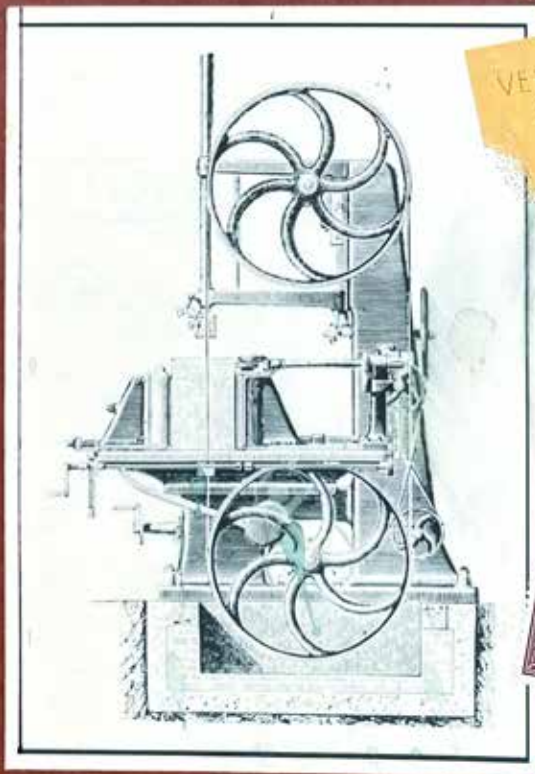
Gallery in Oakland. The gallery is swamped and Paul holds court around his large sculptures, ushering attendees closer so they can fully engage. This is a rarity—people are taken aback at the artist's willingness to let strangers touch, smell, and play with the works. Literal hands-on attitude is generally taboo in the arts where works are fetishized and put behind plexiglass and velvet ropes. Paul's sculptures are inclusive in a world that all too often feels preclusive and removed from experience.

But there's more to Paul's oeuvre than packed shows and champagne-fueled Happenings. Two examples will suffice.

DO NOT BEND



DO NOT BEND



First, I should mention that DO NOT BEND is the bold stamp we see on mail containing photographs and other delicate ephemera being sent through the postal service. In this case, DO NOT BEND appeared on Paul's retro-bound Artist's Manifesto from 2018 (*page 8*). This Manifesto speaks to his unwavering discipline and dedication to his craft, for which I have had a front row seat for 10 years.

As another example, I often find myself staring into the intricate Joseph Cornell-esq shadow box that Paul gifted me as an art trade in 2018. This hermetically sealed time capsule of a

world-within-a-world always makes me ask one simple question: what's he going to do next?

In celebrating Paul Baker's creative vision we also celebrate the next generation of young artists here today. The young people who will challenge the way we think and see. Who will soak up the present and ask questions in the future. For this I am excited.

Scott Schryver
August, 2023
East Oakland, CA

BEAUCHAMP A. PETTIBONE, ESQ.

(b. 1872, d. 1959)

Only child; born to an upper middle-class family in London; his father, a bank manager with Barclays; his mother, a homemaker after an early successful career on the Paris stage. Two years into university, he becomes ill with consumption for 10 months and withdraws temporarily. He doesn't get around to returning and starts to lose direction in life.

His parents and his uncle Rexwell come up with the perfect solution: the Grand Tour for a couple years. Somewhat of a mama's boy yet eager to break free, Beauchamp enthusiastically agrees and in 1893, age 21, he departs for Constantinople, Turkey with letters of introduction. On the steamship one of his two monogrammed travel trunks is stolen; the one in the show is the remainder, hence its 2/2 designation.



One of the few known photographs of him, taken his first week in Constantinople, 1893, and mailed back to his parents

CRAZY DETAILED:

BUILDING THE WORLD BEYOND BEAUCHAMP

Paul Baker, in interview

(We caught up with Paul in his converted garage studio in San Francisco. Around us are a table saw, bandsaw, drafting table, tool chests, and box after box of carefully labeled raw materials. In one corner is a Tivoli Model One radio; there are no clocks or computers. He pours coffee.)

Tell us about your most recent piece.

It's titled *Beauchamp A. Pettibone, Esq.* and consists of a full-size travel trunk, built by me, packed with unusual gear. On the left are five cameras, also made by me; each is a miniature sculpture in its own right. The piece took seven years from inspiration to completion.

Wow, long time. How did you start?

I'd wanted to do a sculpture about the Grand Tour—the Victorian version, that is—for quite a while. One day I came across a small tintype (*page 10*) of a young man, c. 1890, and realized that was a good way into it. Once I made up the perfect

name for him I was off and running. I'm not sure he's British, but he looks it.

Seven years...How did you sustain the creative spark?

Well for starters, it's not seven years solid. I was holding down my day job as an advertising copywriter, plus I completed two major pieces in between. But down to specifics—I stayed fresh by inventing his world. Everything from his parents and their background, Beauchamp's motivation for the journey, his parents' motivation for it, to anecdotes about his life in Constantinople; that's current-day Istanbul, Turkey.

I had a chance to visit the city while in graduate school for Art History. Though only 10 days, the trip made a huge impression. And of course, Beauchamp is me.

We'll talk more about that soon. But it sounds like things could get pretty far-fetched, you just “making stuff up” and all.

(Laughs) Yes, I've heard that before...yesterday, I think. The key is to hang things on actual history...real facts and events. For example, my sculpture is set in 1893 to 1895. In 1885 George Eastman—of Kodak fame—invented flexible roll film...as opposed to the individual glass plate negatives used previously. This unbreakable, portable, convenient film revolutionized amateur photography, and travel photography in particular. Beauchamp's five cameras are "real" in the sense that I designed them to use this new creative medium.

OK, I can see that about your main character, so to speak. But what about his mother, his uncle, and others...that seems getting pretty far from the source.

In fact, they *are* the source. Their early experience put this whole trip into motion. It turns out his mother, Vivian Bourne-Westcott, finished school at 18, in June of 1868. She wanted to be an actress—a dubious occupation in those days. Her parents went along, reluctantly letting her go to Paris for two years. To everyone's surprise except hers, she became a big hit and something

of a celebrity in that city. The Parisians even honored her with a nickname, a play on her real name. It's La Vie-Vie, which means *life, life*. Her older brother, Rexwell Bourne-Westcott, was sent from London to bring her back before she went native, so to speak.

It was supposed to be only a two-week trip, but Paris got caught up in the Franco-Prussian War (started July, 1870) and the two of them ended up traveling all over Europe for six months—occasionally telegraphing their parents, as a ruse, that "the trains were very bad" and they were stuck in Europe. Tough, right? Well, they had a grand time. La Vie-Vie flirted with counts and princes, Rexwell came out in Berlin (no surprise to his sister), also flirting with counts and princes. In general they thoroughly enjoyed themselves and reluctantly returned to London in December, 1870. Like my sculpture, the history all fits together tightly.

How do Rexwell's experiences bear on this?

He funds Beauchamp's whole trip. He hopes the young man will have life-changing adventures abroad as he did himself. Not necessarily coming out, since Beauchamp isn't gay, but rather, feeding

B's imagination and lust for life. You can see all this in the family history (*pages 14, 15*) that's been worked out for everyone.

Yes, speaking of that. With its tiny lettering, disregard for hierarchy, words right up to the edge of the page...got to say, looks as if it were written by a crazy person.

(Laughs) Well, that was me! And it's also why for this interview I suggested the title of *Crazy Detailed*; seemed appropriate.

I think you nailed it. Now, did you create the same level of personal detail about Beauchamp, and if so, how?

You can do it by extrapolating from the tin-type, the photograph. You can tell he's tall from the picture, so what does that mean? That he stands out at the tea parties held at the British Consulate in Constantinople. He's noticed and remembered. Thanks to his mother, he speaks fluent French—which means he can chat with diplomats from any country. This means with his photographic skills he's often hired to make portraits of the city's movers and shakers. And so, he soon decides to have

a business card printed up, letterpress...of course (*page 17*).

Wow, I almost feel as if I've met him at the Sultan's recent yachting luncheon up the Bosphorus.

There's a good chance you did.

As a final question, can you tell us something about the piece that may not be evident to even the most observant viewer or ardent Beauchamp fan?

In college I took a class in B&W dark-room photography, learning how to develop and print film. Getting my master's degree from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, I wrote my thesis on Byzantine mosaics. Well, later I drew a parallel between the individual silver crystals that make up an image in black and white film, and the individual glass pieces, or *tesserae*, that make up the image in a mosaic. The entire Beauchamp piece is based on this idea.

Hmm, you made that up also, right?

Certainly.

Headmaster heads of press for school he says: "Fair play". Cap. kept in locked box on stand; he wheels it out to work. Dad has key - only key - cap. work on it. He is 44 in 1873. Realizes they peaked already. All this while they glue up a dozen blocks/wood. H.M. sets up the ar will keep price

He looks up to Rex, the Rex only 1 yr. older. Admires him for his "dash" & willingness to take risks. Not wood master. He is neutral party. Me - have the key. Dad wears key on neck on leather string. Mom b. 1850 1 yr. younger than Dad. A little unusual (only 1 yr.) like dog tags.

TRIP: 1893-95
 B. is 73
 b. 1872
 finished boarding school age 18 Not Cambridge!

Is 43 when B. starts trip. This - all in late Jan - Feb. Deep winter. Wood master gives him key to shop. No outdoor sports. (snow)

Univ. for 2 yrs. - Univ. London
 18-19 Has friends in arch. school
 19-20 2. Gets sick - out for 1 yr.

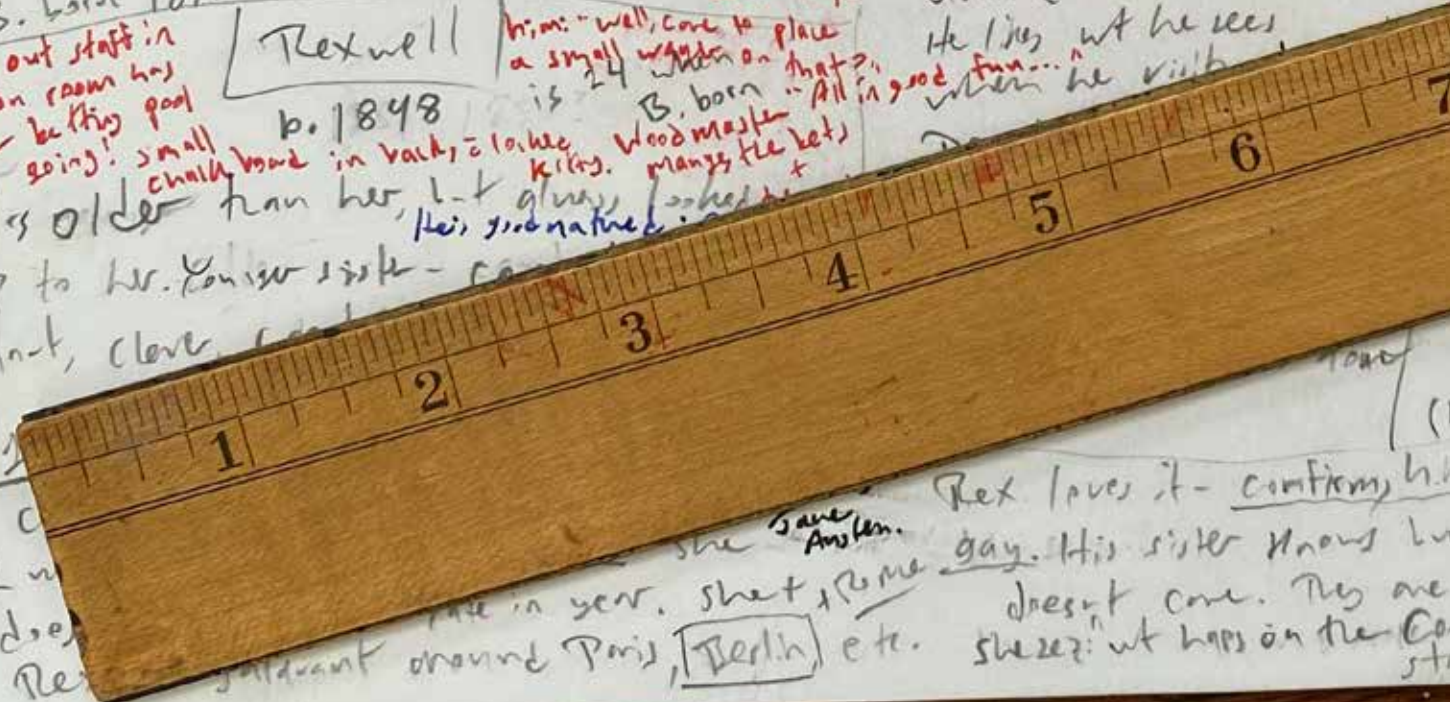
1850-1868 till 18 in school. She wins "declamation contest" medicinal when was 1868-70. Part for 2 yrs. stage. She's not conventionally pretty - but has great frame. (Age 18-20) By smart + witty & tall, French teacher. She's out by 1872. After 2 wks. Also, her slaming. Frst. age 20 = 1870. Meeb + Murty, Dad 1871. B. born 1872 ✓ she is all of 22!

Gets sick - out for 1 yr. Like me, the 2 yrs. of Univ. did not make big impression. He was marking to

* Turns out staff in common room has whole betting pool going! small chalk board in back, 2 loche Kilby. Wood master manages the bet. Rexwell b. 1848 is 24 B. born 1872. 2 yrs older than her, but always looked up to her. Younger sister - smart, clever

He lives w/ he sees when he visits. All in good fun...
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

she same Anstern. Rex loves it - continues his gay. His sister knows but doesn't care. They are shrewd: w/ hops on the coast



... Navy. War ends 1945 - he's 29. - Sister is 27
guy gives him £100
case: mind if we see
if doesn't work out! At week 2, is clearly going well; bring in carving this?
Nice → Trunk in corner of B's study. G. gambles in

x is
5. He helps
and it. They
will go with
is 21, Rex
and 22 when
he went
abroad)
They like it.
Find name/
that school my
name... against
ent to.

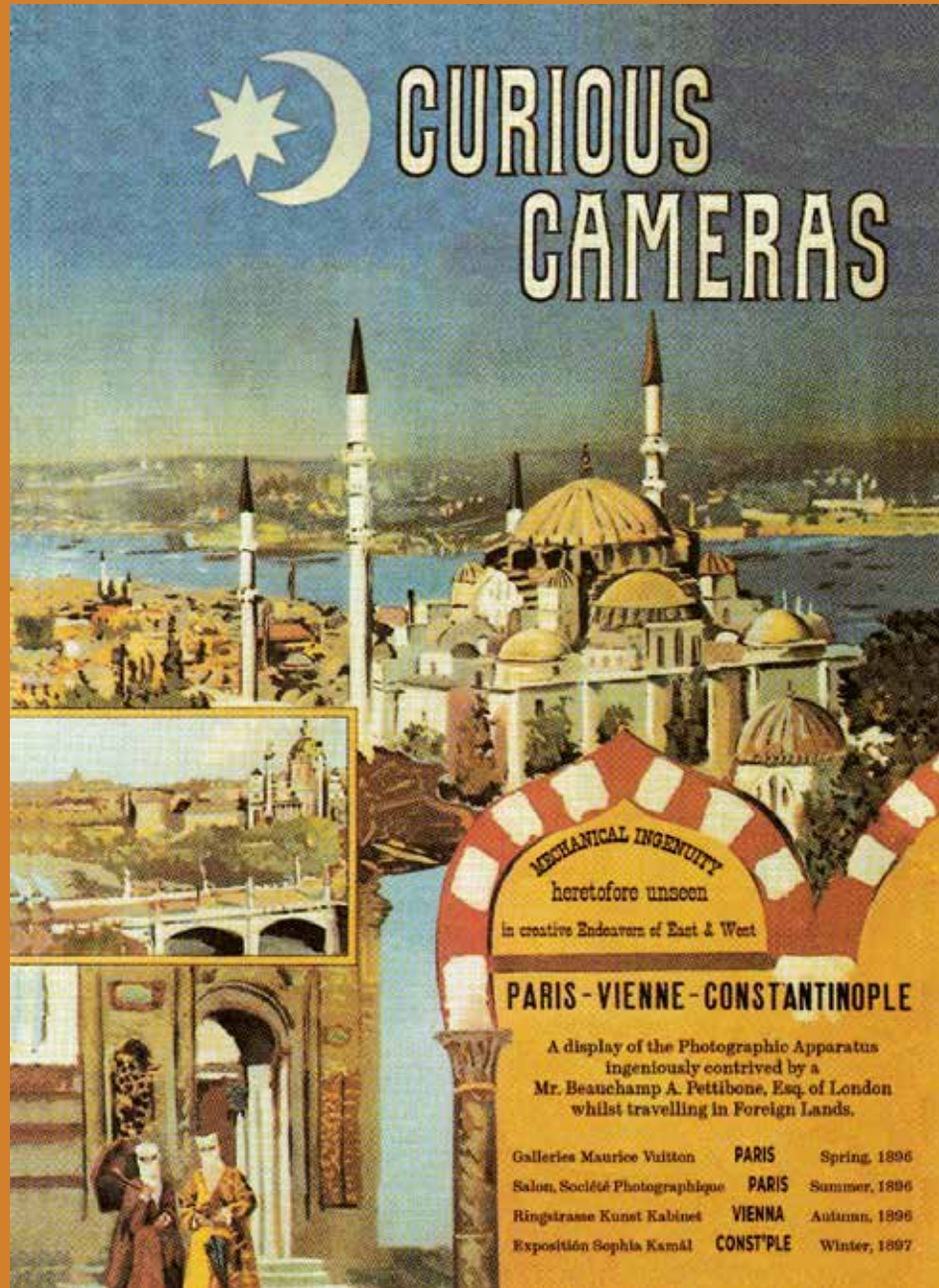
5 yrs. later: is 1950 Life going well
No. say 7 yrs. to 1952. ~~son~~ 36; daughter = 34
son is 34 daughter is 32
* their kids, cousins: boy (to son) + girl (daughter)
B is 78. Still coherent but kids decide
we 16 + 14. 80. They love the stories. B. doesn't mind
telling them.
to record all into white he's still alive
B. dies age 87, in 1959 - me born "Strange"! And he
year 3
Hence - most of documentation is
Perfect - fine box
The it goes on. 1952-1955 folder

White Album

Seneca Rulers

John:
... 68, from
the White Album. Want
fill 10 yr. drv. in 1978. Must stick
only
White cover.

... 22 years. B. is approx 15 in school (1887) = 1912
v. successful international biz man/banker/financier. He decide wt.
All the contacts he made page 22 he stays
in town. By age 30 (38 yrs) he's v. approx
wealthy. Total playboy; man abt town in London
is 1878-01/1880
he travels to continent. See p. 213 of Atlas
no competition in his ind. Impr'd/exp't?
Mum & Dad don't need know everything



Beauchamp's curious, hand-built cameras proved so popular he was offered a show by Maurice Vuitton (Louis Vuitton's younger brother). True to Parisian kiosk style, a huge poster was created, and plastered across the capitals of Europe as the show toured.

Title: Beauchamp A. Pettibone, Esq.

Year: 2020 and 2023

Dimensions: 52”W x 44”H x 20”D

(includes both sides)

Materials: Mahogany, inlay, gold leaf, silver and copper vessels, velvet, vintage camera parts.

Built from scratch, a full-size travel trunk for the fictional character of Beauchamp, embarking on the Grand Tour in 1893 from London to Constantinople. The piece is about exploration—of both foreign lands and oneself.





Fig. 1 Beauchamp, an avid amateur photographer, builds himself five cameras from parts scrounged during visits to the Grand Bazaar. He has converted his remaining travel trunk to a custom camera storage unit.



Fig. 2 He explores local ruins, drinking tea and making measured drawings with surveying gear. An accomplished draftsman, his sketches capture mood and memory—another theme of this piece.



Fig. 3 The Duck Foot Camera. One of his most popular creations, it's made from a nickel-plated music box found in the bazaar. The container flips open to hold sheet film for a single shot.

Title: Strata Thesis, Lab Unit

Year: 2000

Dimensions: 54"W x 27"H x 34"D

Materials: Marble slab, laser, prisms, slide rule, Erector Set pieces, plexiglass, magnets, embroidery thread, mineral samples

This colorful device represents laboratory equipment built by two Massachusetts Institute of Technology geology students for their joint MA thesis, submitted 1954. *Lab Unit*, the central piece, has three parts—my first sculptural triptych. It deals with core samples from both geology and people.

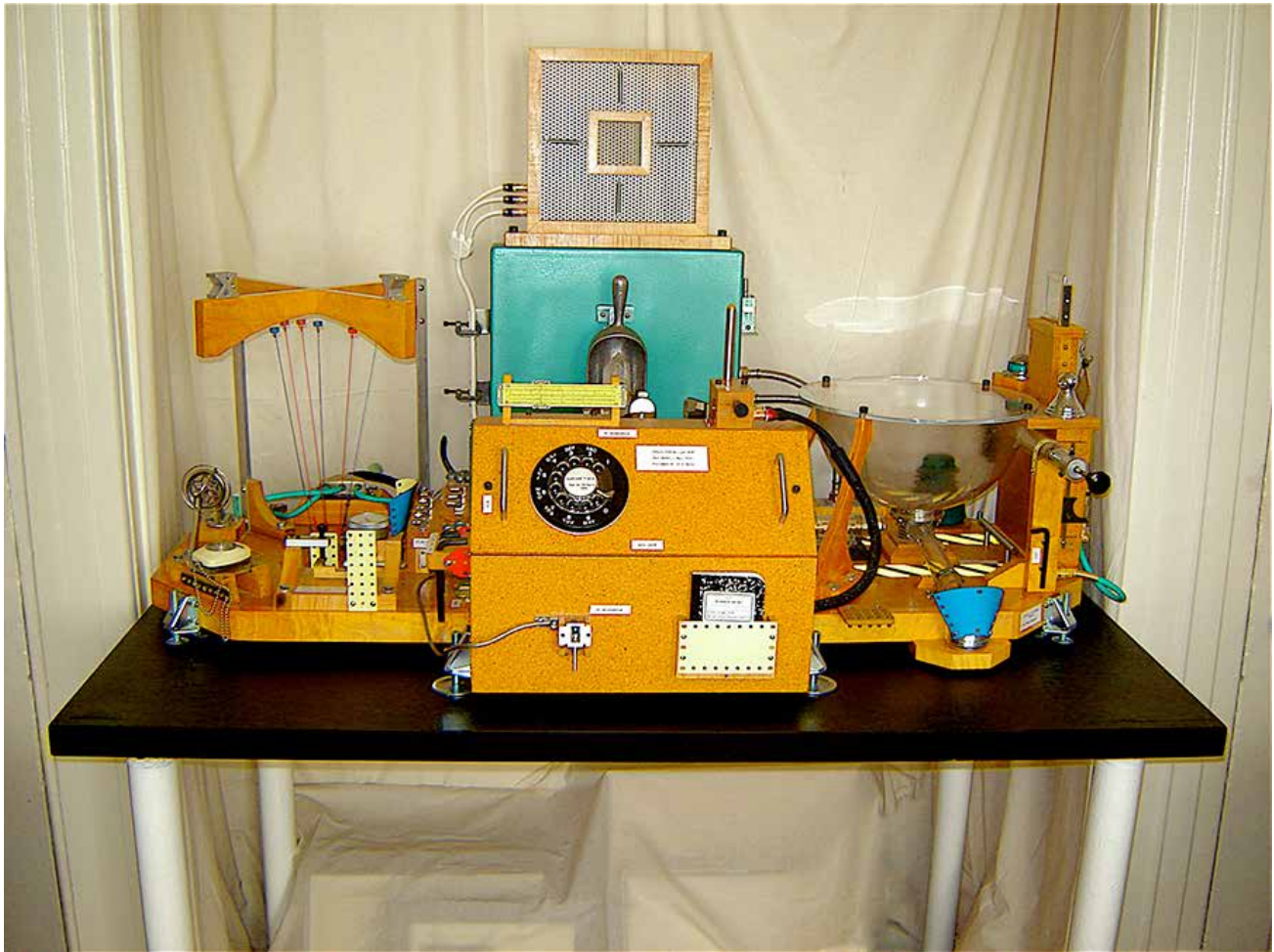


Fig. 1 Materials and colors are period-correct to the 50s. No pushbutton phones back then, so a rotary dial enters all data. The piece is built of inexpensive chipboard, not even plywood—the students would cut costs where they could. Its golden finish is a few layers of amber shellac, straight out of the can. Displayed on a custom-made table recalling a slate-topped lab “bench”.



Fig. 2 The entire *Strata Thesis* piece is itself a triptych. Flanking the *Lab Unit* (center) is the *Field Unit* (left, 2001) and the castle-like *Archive Unit* (right, 2002). With its wheels and articulated arm, *Field Unit* recalls a Mars rover, gathering samples and memories to be sent back and analyzed by *Lab Unit*. Insights gained about life are then cataloged and stored in the massive *Archive Unit*.

Title: Landing Alignment Computer

(Aztec Station)

Year: 2006

Dimensions: 86”L x 28”W x 28”H

Materials: Jade, copper, leopard wood,
mica, abalone inlay, marble, feathers,
petrified mammoth tusk, laser

Ostensibly about aliens building pyramids to help land their flying saucers. Actually about communicating with whatever is alien—or foreign—to us in any sense of the word. This can include signaling between men and women. The theme refers to Erich von Daniken’s (possibly) pseudo-scientific book titled *Chariots of the Gods*, published 1968.

Fig. 1 Another of my sculptural triptychs: ball court, plaza, and pyramid—the three distinctive elements of Aztec civilization. Jade rings help with correct alignment before any craft's descent.





Fig. 2 In addition to drawings, I often make full-size styrofoam models to help work out building details. Here we see the ball court with hand-cut dovetails clearly indicated. The cast aluminum Art Deco found object (right) is tightly integrated with my construction.

Fig. 3 Viewers will generate slight air currents as they move around the sculpture. These are caught and amplified by the feathers, then transferred via lever to the circular signaling device. Messages are sent up—though possibly never seen or understood.



LATEST WORK

Not all my pieces are large. Some can fit into the palm of your hand—and in fact, are supposed to. My most recent creative direction involves cameras. Not as working devices, but as a sculpture, and one that happens to look like a camera. I build each from scratch using lenses, knobs, and other material salvaged from vintage photographic gear bought on eBay.

CONNOISSEUR'S COLLECTION

Camera varieties are as endless as they are fascinating. Pieces in the Connoisseur's Collection represent standard types—such as a twin-lens reflex—but expressed in a completely non-standard way.

Fig 1 *Jazz & Blues Club Camera*, 2021
4.5"W x 3.5"D x 5.5"H

Down in the packed basement venues, jazz and blues spoke from the heart. This new kind of intimacy called for a new kind of camera--one with a huge, light-gathering lens to handle dim stage lighting. Indeed, some music historians maintain that the jazz and blues genre would not have reached the popularity it did without the stunning, personal photographs caught by this night-shift gem.



Fig 2 *Twin-Lens Reflex, two-tone model, 2021*
6.5"W x 4.5"D x 7.5"H

This camera was originally built by a former car dealer. In the words of its inventor: "Two-toned cars, right? Sold a lot of 'em. Very big in the 50's. Thinking one night over a beer. Why not a two-toned camera, right? You know—the two lenses and all. In a TLR. Very funny. In the dealership machine-shop, took apart an old Argus. And I used the handle from the shop's pencil sharpener. Fastest film wind I've ever seen."

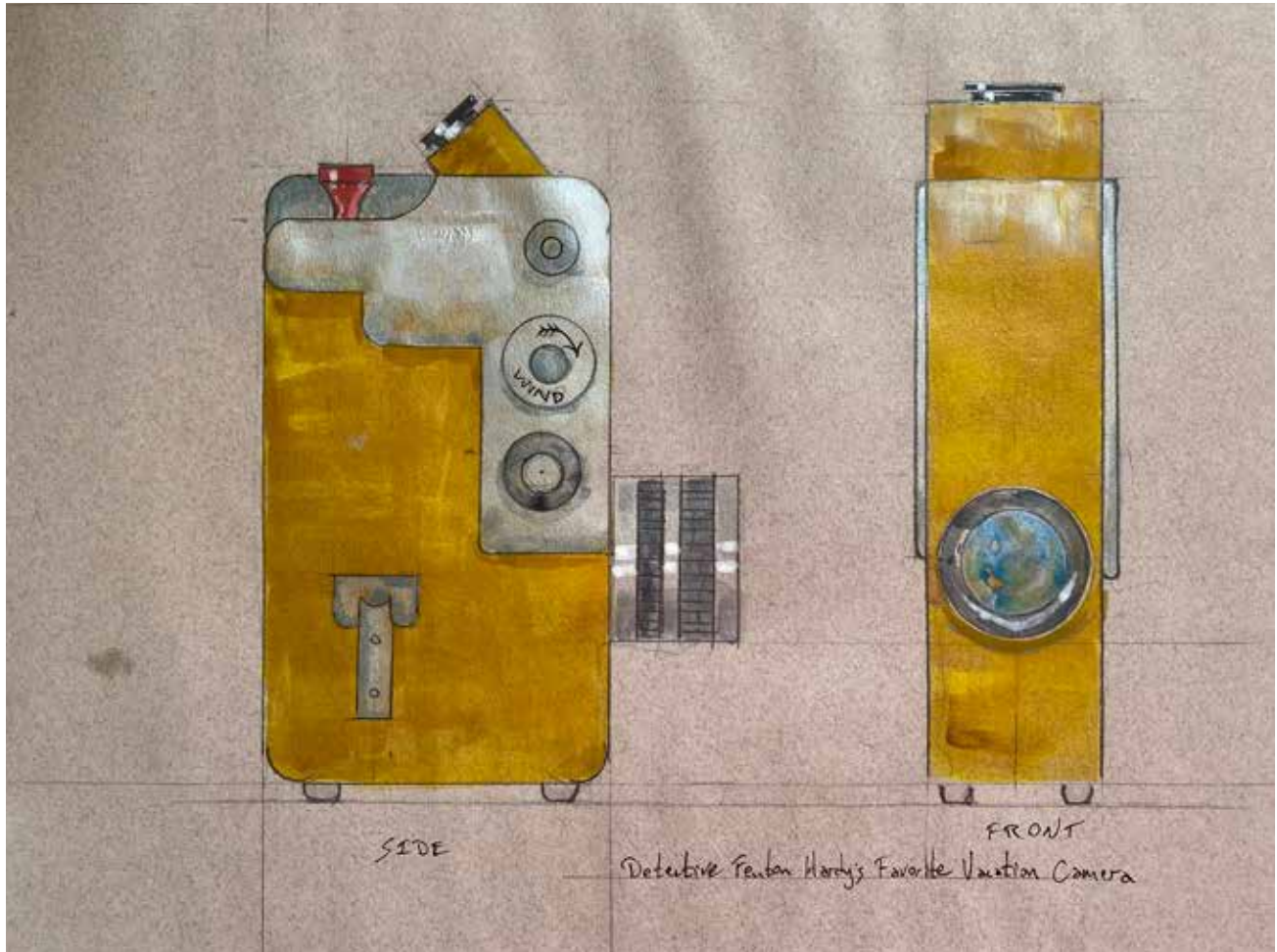


THE HARDY BOYS' CAMERAS

Avid readers will remember the 1950s book series (48 volumes) about Frank and Joe Hardy, America's top teen sleuths. The boys, their friends, and a stream of scheming ruffians populate a bell jar-like world set within the tree-lined streets of Bayport, USA.

I designed and built a camera for each of the series' ten main characters. The twist? To create each persona I blended two sources: information drawn (verbatim) from the text, and a rich back-story invented by me.

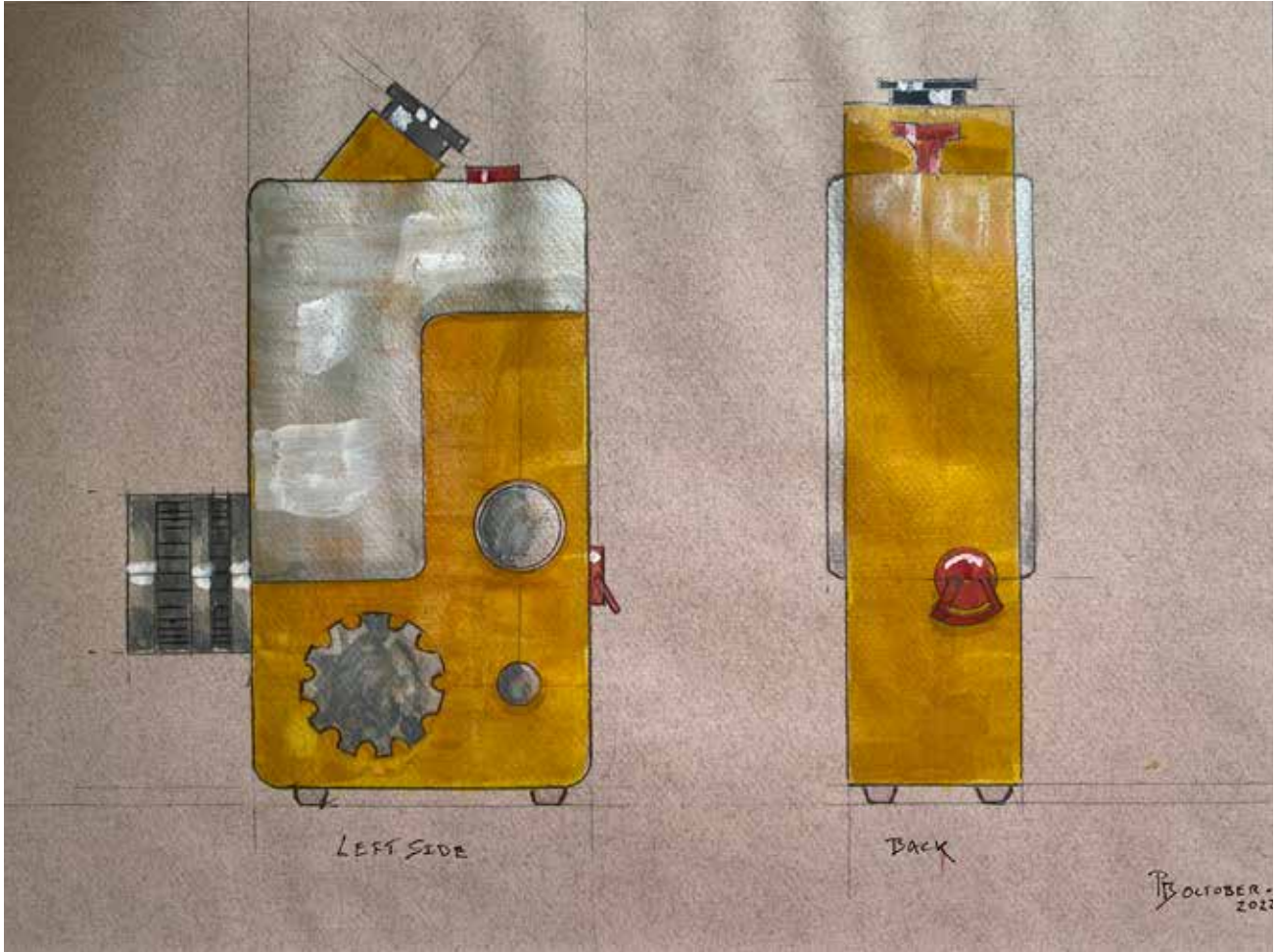
In short, we have a real object in front of us—a camera (but it's a sculpture and doesn't work) that's based on the imagined thoughts and emotions of actual people, who are fictional characters constructed with millions of words.



Figs. 1, 2 *Detective Fenton Hardy's Favorite Vacation Camera*, Gouache, 2022
16"W x 11"H, each sheet

A classic 50s look sporting an un-ironic deep gold finish. In a vertical format, it recalls home movie cameras of the time. The title raises an interesting question--what is Fenton's

second-favorite vacation camera? This stylish gear adds some quirk to the detective's generally muted presence in the Hardy Boys series.



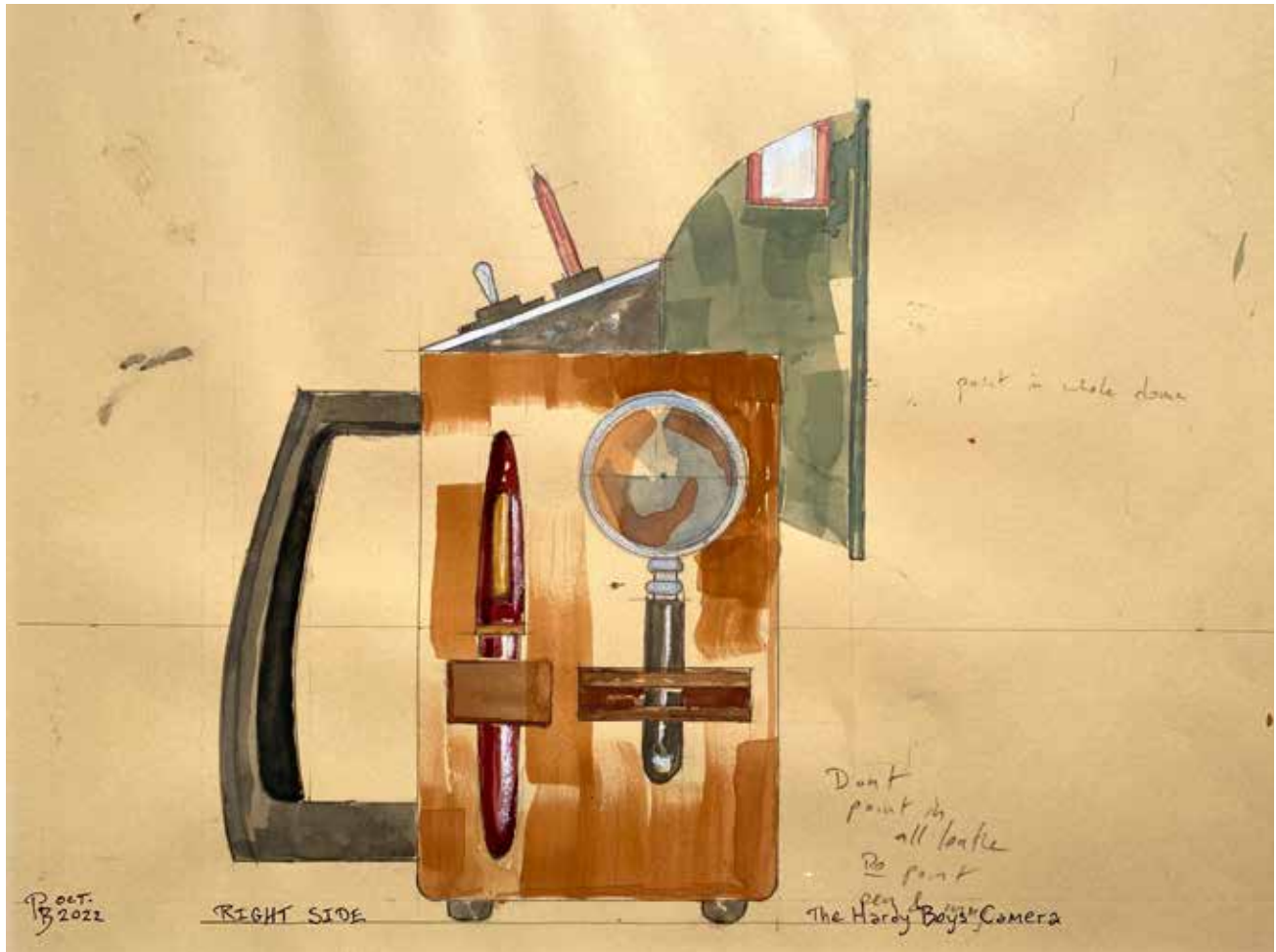


Fig. 3 *The Hardy Boys' Camera*,
Gouache, 2022
16"W x 11"H, this sheet

It would sound improbable that a camera packed with the following features could look so cool. Combining as it does a flashlight, magnifying glass, fountain pen to take down

confessions, percolator handle as a grip, and a special lens for infra-red capability, this striking do-all camera could belong to no one but Bayport's keenest high-school detectives.



Portrait of the artist in 5th grade by
James J. Baker, Paul's father, M.I.T. '54.
Taken in Cambridge MA, 1969.

ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

A native of Boston, Paul moved to San Francisco 25 years ago. He has been producing art in different mediums for the past 40 years. In 1990 he settled on assemblage sculpture, perhaps latently influenced by a boyhood passion for collecting shelf after shelf of what his mother inexplicably called “junk”.

His background includes exhibit design at the Cleveland Museum of Art, art instructor, hardware store clerk, advertising copywriter, retail sales (as needed) and mixing paint at Home Depot. His education encompasses travel abroad and a master's degree in Medieval Art History from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Even at age 6 his father let him use real tools, and Paul has been expanding his wood-working skills since then.

MNEMONIC DEVICES:

THE CONSTRUCTED SCULPTURE OF PAUL BAKER

Presented by Vargas Art Gallery
Gillmor Center, Mission College

October 4-30, 2023

Both Scott, the Show Curator, and Paul, the Artist, extend a warm thank-you to Prof. Cheryl Coon, Gallery Curator and Art/Art History Co-Department Chair. The show's striking look was conceived and designed by Scott, who also oversaw its installation. Plus a tip of the hat to in-house personnel for assistance in painting and set-up. This catalog designed by Annie Maley of Gringo Starr Productions.

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