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FEATURE:
"THINK RETHINK"

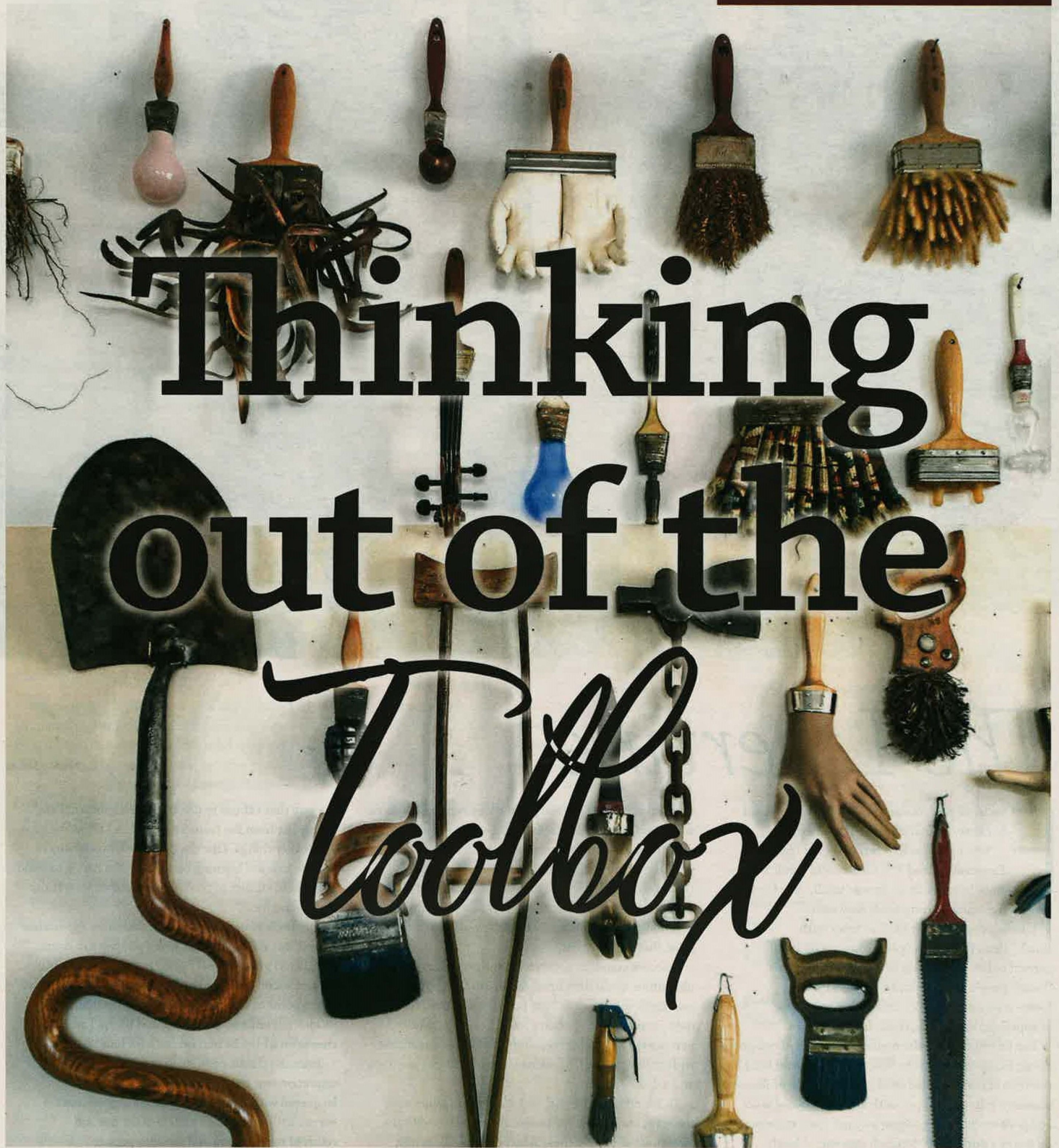


PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY



ARTIST HOWARD JONES REWORKS COMMON DOMESTIC TOOLS FOR A DELIGHTFULLY DIZZYING EXHIBITION OPENING TODAY IN THE DELMAR LOOP.

But for the bonhomie with which he discusses home and garden hardware – loosely, the inspiration for his new exhibition, “Think Rethink” – one might be tempted to suspect local artist Howard Jones of waging a vendetta against hammers, rakes and similar implements of destruction, to borrow a trope from troubadour Arlo Guthrie.

“Think Rethink” opens with a 6 p.m. reception this evening, Friday, Aug. 25, at the Craft Alliance Center of Art + Design’s Delmar Gallery and runs till Oct. 22. “We hope to feature 50 or more works,” says Stefanie Kirkland, the center’s director of exhibitions, of Jones’ “Think Rethink.” “His work is best considered as a collection or group, and the effect of each piece is magnified by their relationships to one another.”

In Jones’ hands, the quotidian turns categorically queer. Case in point – what looks like a 2-inch paintbrush begins with a dark wooden handle, extends through a battered brass ferrule and then ends not with bristles of one sort or another but with the left hand of a mannequin.

Now, Jones’ website, howardjonesartist.com, establishes his professional bona fides as a printmaker (and, not incidentally, quotes French literary giant Gustave Flaubert, whose 1857 novel *Madame Bovary* itself made many readers rethink many things). He modestly attributes to “careful craftsmanship” mind-boggling effects achieved for “Think Rethink” in materials far less malleable than paper.

“As a former journeyman printer, the trajectory from professional printmaking to object-maker may be straighter than it seems,” Jones says. “First of all, I have pretty much always made things. Maybe a bit more pedestrian in the further past, but some pretty rudimentary carpentry skills have developed just from owning an older home, for example.

“Printmaking – or the sort of printmaking I was doing – required a certain amount of knowledge, but more importantly, some discriminating work habits. My efforts in printing for other artists required an invisibility of my hand in the final product. It’s that sort of attention to detail and, again, modestly, invisible

craftsmanship, that informs the work I have done ever since.”

Beyond the Flaubert quotation and Jones’ self-evident embrace of French nonesuch Marcel Duchamp’s conception of the ready-made, the artist can lay claim to some heavyweight intellectual credentials.

His capsule bio on the center’s website, for example, notes that he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Gambier, Ohio’s distinguished Kenyon College and a Master of Fine Arts from Ohio University. Thereafter, Jones taught at Washington University in St. Louis, among other institutions of higher learning, and Ladue’s John Burroughs School, where he also chaired the art department.

Another case in point from the “Think Rethink” exhibition – four nailing hammers, their faces facing outward, bend backward toward one another so emphatically that their individual claws vanish into a common center, like Siamese quadruplets joined at their skulls’ dorsa.

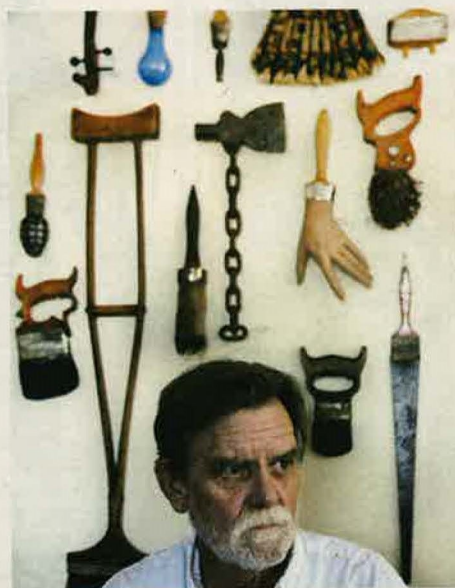
Outré? Indeed. Helpfully, though, Jones enlarges on the transmutations underlying his “Think Rethink” works.

“The original function of the object – hammer, brush handle, shovel – needs to be maintained while my adjustments may change its meaning,” Jones says. “I have great respect for these ‘tools’ in their first incarnation as extensions of human effort, so to imagine them filling another function, the transformation needs to be, in my mind, seamless and wholly believable. More often than

not, the two disparate elements to be joined determine the particular objects used. ...

“For *Hammer Cluster*, I welded together the hammerheads after cutting off their claws, and fashioned the handles imagining how such a thing might look, but also keeping the proper proportions of a handle for a hammer that size.”

The Craft Alliance Center of Art + Design, according to its website, seeks “to reveal the power of craft through bold programming that uncovers craft’s unique qualities, its evolving role and its full potential for innovation. Craft (the making of objects in woods, metals, fibers, glass and clay) is both an ancient tradition and a site for innovation, adapting to new materials and responding to



Howard Jones in his studio.



the ever-changing human experience.”

Such works playfully test viewers’ perceptions in various ways, and Jones reflects on the perceptual tests posed by “Think Rethink,” while also making an amusing confession.

“The most challenging piece, in my estimation, seems to be the one I’m currently working on,” he says. “That said, the works that have welded pieces in them were fairly challenging, as I think I need to become a better welder. I’m grateful for the support from the Regional Arts Commission in awarding me a grant to acquire welding equipment to make some of the work in this show.

“Currently, I’m working on a brick piece that I hope will be in the exhibit, so I’m reacquainting myself with shaping brick and tuck-pointing.”

Jones’ imagination, relates Kirkland, inspired the center to exhibit his peculiarly pleasant works.

“Many of his materials are staples for artists and makers of all disciplines, so his manipulations feel rooted in familiar truths,” she says. “All of us use tools in our everyday lives, and each craftsman uses special tools to manipulate their material. Howard, however, takes the everyday tool and adds a humorous, Dada-like twist, pushing us to think more deeply about the relationships between objects, their various uses and the act of making.”

Jones’ academic background almost perforce infuses his reflective conclusion about “Think Rethink.”

“I guess the reaction to my work that I would hope for would be some connection that I never thought of, and often, from children, I’ve gained some insight to my work,” Jones says. “For those of us less unencumbered, I’d hope for a visceral reaction to some part of each piece – and perhaps a rethinking of a new purpose for a familiar object.

“I’ll mention that these objects began their careers as functioning tools and, for the most part, spent their time satisfying an original purpose. I have suggested a different path for their future.”

Craft Alliance Center of Art + Design, 6640 Delmar Blvd.,
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