

# DeWeese's Legacy

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David Dragonfly

Wes Mills

Neil Parsons

Jerry Rankin

James Reineking

Markus Stangl



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October 28–December 30, 2006  
Holter Museum of Art  
Helena, Montana

DeWeese's Legacy has been  
generously underwritten by  
Miriam Sample, Gennie DeWeese, and  
the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.

## ■ Acknowledgments

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Two companion exhibitions at the Holter Museum of Art, *Robert DeWeese: A Look Ahead* and *DeWeese's Legacy*, tell a story about modern and contemporary art in Montana and beyond.

*DeWeese's Legacy* is an homage to Bob DeWeese and to the exchange of energy and ideas that happens in the relationship between student and teacher. Including work by three of Bob's students (Neil Parsons, Jerry Rankin, and James Reineking) and three of their students (David Dragonfly, Wes Mills, and Markus Stangl), the exhibition reflects diverse artistic styles and personal journeys, all flowing from Bob DeWeese's generosity as teacher and friend.

As professor of art at Montana State University in Bozeman from 1949 to 1977, DeWeese, along with other key figures—Frances Senska, Jessie Wilber, and Bob's wife Gennie in Bozeman; Rudy and Lela Autio in Missoula; and Isabelle Johnson in Billings—encouraged younger artists to experiment with new ways of seeing and doing and to find their own voices. And some of these students became teachers themselves, passing this freedom and calling on to their own students.

Generous support from Miriam Sample, Gennie DeWeese, and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation made it possible to include important new work by James Reineking and Markus Stangl—who traveled from Germany to create sculptures for the exhibition—and to produce this catalog to document DeWeese's role as teacher and, more generally, the contributions gifted teachers make to artistic development. We also extend special thanks to Steve Dykeman at Pacific Steel (Missoula, Montana), Monette Esterly of Tumble Stone (Hayden, Idaho), and Kim Reineking for their fine work on Reineking's and Stangl's projects. The Holter Museum is indebted to Terry Karson, who first suggested presenting this exhibition to accompany *Robert DeWeese: A Look Ahead* and who went on to guest-curate both exhibitions.

Finally, we thank the six artists of *DeWeese's Legacy* for their singular and remarkable work. Their teachers encouraged them to challenge themselves, ask their own questions, and be responsible for, as James Reineking puts it, "getting up each day to go to work." For all this we are very grateful.

—Liz Gans, Holter Museum of Art

## ■ Curator's Statement

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I am indebted to my father for living, but to my teacher for living well.

—ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Bob DeWeese was a talented, enigmatic soul with a fervent curiosity for life and art. He was a rare artist who successfully pursued his art while making a living in the demanding profession of teaching. This is a notoriously difficult task to achieve, as each requires a full commitment, time hard to find. Had he his duffers, he would have just been an artist, but for the rest of us, and for generations to come, we can be thankful that he was a teacher as well. But more than a teacher, he was also a progressive thinker, a beguiling provocateur, and a seminal figure in the spread of modern art and philosophy in Montana. He provided more questions than answers for his brighter students, the ones who strived to reach their highest pitch, but he knew that the spirit of knowledge is not in its facts and information, but rather in its poetry. He was an eager participant in this search for ideas who befriended like-minded students along the way, some of whom are among the finest artists and teachers Montana has ever produced, most famously Peter Voukos, who taught at the University of California–Berkeley, and Rudy Autio, who taught at the University of Montana.

Bob's teachers included renowned educators Hoyt Sherman at Ohio State in the early 1940s, and, later, Mauricio Lasansky at the University of Iowa. Both of these men's views of art were in tune with those of the great expressionist painter, Hans Hoffman, by far the most influential art teacher of his day. His ideas and concepts permeated the atmosphere of post-World War II America, his school on 8th Street in New York producing such luminaries as Helen Frankenthaler, Allan Kaprow, and Larry Rivers. Sherman, Lasansky, and Hoffman were important role models for young artists like Bob DeWeese; they were thoughtful intellectuals, committed teachers, and accomplished artists. It was a new day for art, and a new teacher/student relationship was dawning with it. The master/pupil approach was being abandoned for a more egalitarian style. Irving Sandler, in his book *The New York School* (Harper and Row, 1978), said of Hoffman, "As a man, he was robust and warm; enthusiastic, expansive, and assured; able to play a commanding paternal role and simultaneously to treat his students as colleagues." These were

heady times with a steady stream of new, exciting ideas flowing through Bob's early life as an artist/teacher and he brought this exuberance with him to Montana as a young professor in 1949. As fate and good fortune would have it, here would thrive fertile, eager minds responsive to his teachings, hungry for new ways of thinking and seeing.

This companion exhibition to the Holter Museum of Art's Robert DeWeese: A Look Ahead exhibition honors Bob's legacy of teaching and how his influence has affected those who followed him. It explores the shared aesthetics and unique visions of six artists and how their work relates to, or differs from, each other and how informed it is by Bob's work. Represented are three of his former students: Jerry Rankin (1952–1956), Neil Parsons (1956–1964), and James Reineking (1962–1964). These three artists went on to become teachers themselves for various lengths of time, "passing the torch" along to their own students: Jerry to Wes Mills; Neil to David Dragonfly; James to Markus Stangl. Each of these artists was asked to reflect on the teacher/student relationship for this catalog and their comments are insightful, poignant, a bit melancholic, and sometimes downright funny. Fortunately, Bob's writing "On Painting," included here, was saved many years ago by another of his former students, Russ Greenlee. A rough, unpolished, unedited, off-the-cuff draft written in haste, steeped in his core beliefs and peppered with his frustrations, it was never intended to be shared. It was a venting, rescued by a student. But if ever there was a document that could be read between the lines, this is it. It is printed here with all its flaws and all its raw beauty because contained therein is Bob DeWeese and the wisdom of a life well lived.

—Terry Karson, Bozeman, Montana, 2006

## ■ On Painting

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A teacher student relationship in the field of painting is artificial and false. They should be considered as equal participants in the excitement of painting; the one with greater experience which the other draws upon.

There must be a philosophy of painting or there is no painting. There must be equal earnestness and drive; there must be hard work. A teacher must stimulate by fair means or foul, but don't ask him to spoon feed or hold your hand. Grades are stupid and useless in painting. Don't take them seriously. Don't feel bad if you get a "C"; don't feel good if you get an "A." After all, "C" means fair. What's wrong with that? The teacher who doesn't believe in grades goes through a private hell when he has to grade in order to keep his job. Don't be indiscreet—it is bad taste to talk about grades. How would you like to have had to grade Cezanne in 1870 rather than 1970?

Such a system makes a teacher an authority that he doesn't want to be—it separates him from the student—he holds a banner over the student and sometimes misuses it—forgive him—human frailty.

Apple polishing takes many subtle forms—don't kid yourself—get involved in the work. You will be suspect if you agree with everything, but meet him half-way. If he teaches by presenting limited problems do them as thoroughly as you can, even though you may hate them and him. Remember he is hired to try to get something across to you—respect this experience, whether you personally like his work or not. Remember he has been personally deeply involved in this stuff for many years longer than you—and he may never have sold a dime's worth of painting. Saleability is only a criterion on Madison Avenue these days.

A painting is a visual statement—no more—no less. Like a verbal statement, it can be clear, concise, and to the point; or it can be muddled, befuddled, wandering, weak, and beside the point. Painting can be an exciting experience, or it can be a drudging, drawn out bore.

This to me is the primary criterion—secondary and unimportant criteria such as craftsmanship, fancy framing, tricky

techniques, mysterious materials, confusion of traditions, or style often cloud the primary ones—and lead the statement into boring and unadulterated confusion. The language of painting—size, shape, position, and color—is simple, but it takes many paintings to learn the language—to feel and sense it—to make it part of you. Don't be precious with your painting—you must gradually learn to see and operate in these terms.

Think of painting as the experimental laboratory where you learn to do this. As in many scientific experimental laboratories, most of the things that emerge will not be understood by the man on the street. Don't cry about it. Expect it. Remember everyone and his dog is an art critic. It's a national pastime like baseball. Only the artist stays after the game to find out what it's all about. If you're doing a painting for your grandmother, don't do it here. Don't even do it. Give her some paints and brushes instead—she might out-paint us all.

Know the traditions your field grows from. Remember there isn't a Russell in the Montana State University art faculty. This is because the State of Montana saw fit to hire teachers from all over the country and from many different schools and universities and traditions.

Charlie Russell was a good storyteller and in his younger days, a pretty fair painter. He was authentic, but he's dead and his era is over. His imitators may be sincere, but they are just as ambiguous (beside the point) as the Chamber of Commerce Pioneer Days.

If by the time you are a sophomore you do not recognize instantly in your mind's eye (when these painters are mentioned) the lift and feel of Giotto, Masaccio, Duccio, Titian, Michelangelo, Tintoretto, Leonardo, Breugel, Van Eyck, Dürer, Rembrandt, Rubens, El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, Delacroix, Ingres, Daumier, Corot, Manet, Courbet, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Degas, Cezanne, Van Gogh, Seurat, Gauguin, Matisse, Picasso, Rouault, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Modigliani, Pollock, and possibly Wright, Gropius, Eames, and Voukos (a Montana potter now teaching at the University of California), to name a few of the greats, go find out. They are your teachers and mine, too. In the last two decades those men have changed the face and curricula of every art school in the world.

Again—painting is a visual statement. It may range from a shock to something downright pretty and be a good painting if it hangs together as a total entity.



There is no such thing as a realistic painting—as Dave McCooch said, “the only way to get a realistic painting is to hang an empty frame on a wall that has been painted.” A photograph is not realistic, but only a mechanical way of recording the infinite value range in nature. Therefore, it’s detail—which we have come to accept as the criterion of the real.

All painting is abstract or non-objective, and abstractions may be based on a single point-of-view of a field of vision whether seen, remembered, or imagined; a multiple point-of-view; or a scrambled arrangement of objective forms in space.

Non-objective painting uses the qualities of nature—space, color, movement, and space relationships; but the source is within the artist or in the painting-action itself. It is an invention with no recognizable object—it is pure painting—and in this sense the most realistic painting. It makes concrete such ambiguous, non-objective terms as delicate, heavy, slow, fast, hot, cool. These might be descriptive qualities, but they are not denotative terms.

—Robert DeWeese, Bozeman, Montana, 1970



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Robert DeWeese, Self Portrait, n.d.  
ink on paper, 11 x 8½"

COLLECTION OF THE HOLTER MUSEUM OF ART

## ■ David Dragonfly

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My thoughts and feelings of my mentor Neil Parsons reflect Neil's look at the ordinary, traditional, and sometimes mundane way we (as Montanans and myself Native American) perceive image and content and relate to the art audience what we are trying to reveal to the viewer. Mr. Parsons is a special artist who has revolutionized Montana's art scene, and has gone beyond the ordinary.

One thing I look back on, when Mr. Parsons was a teacher, is how he showed his students that being accepted as an ordinary artist or person is not always acceptable, but being free with your ideas and images is. Another thing I learned from Mr. Parsons is that being Native American on the reservation we have stereotypes written all over us. But being free to accept who we are, #1, and proud of who we are, can be shown in our artwork.

—Browning, Montana, 2006



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David Dragonfly, Untitled, 2006, collograph, 19 x 19"

## ■ Neil Parsons

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What can one say about the magic of Bob's teaching . . . that chuckle, marked by an utterance of criticism, ever so gently telling . . . great words of wisdom, appearing to be nothing more than what Matisse had for breakfast. Indeed . . . a great teacher, a fine draughtsman, and a wonderful friend.

—Blaine, Washington, 2006



Neil Parsons, Blue Bird Dress, 2004  
acrylic on paper, 39 x 26"

COLLECTION OF THE HOLTER MUSEUM OF ART

## ■ Markus Stangl

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It is strange; I reminisce about individuals, and later teachers, who helped me on my way to becoming an artist, but I find it difficult to explain, despite my best efforts, how it all happened.

Perhaps this is bound up with the nature of art. Art seems to be a much deeper human need than most are willing to admit, and everything that artists produce is quintessentially the result of human relations. Thus the most important capability an art teacher can impart, aside from artistic qualities, is familiarity with human nature. Thank God I had such teachers.

—Munich, Germany, 2006



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Markus Stangl, Birthday, 2006  
travertine and paper, 54 x 48 x 48"

## ■ James Reineking

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CHURCH STREET, BOZEMAN, 1961–63

I knock on the screen door; it's sagging a bit. A little girl opens the door. "Watch out for Mackie, he's pregnant," she lisps. It's Tina. I say, "Isabelle Johnson sent me to see Bob DeWeese. She said he could help me." I look around; the walls are full of paintings, prints, drawings; the shelves, tables, and floor are full of pots, sculpture, furniture. There's a kid goat bouncing off the wall onto the couch and homemade beer on the back porch exploding. I meet Bob and Gennie and think I'm home.

I move to Bozeman. Bob shows me his studio above the VFW. There's a huge wooden chair with red velour covering that looks like a throne. (Is Bob the king of painting?) The studio is full of art—floor, tables, walls, everywhere. It's wonderful. At some point there's a production of *The Three Penny Opera*. So much enthusiasm, so many people, the sets, the music.

Bob calls me one day and says, "Gennie's going to have a baby." I say "Call me. I'll babysit the kids." Bob calls; I race to Church Street. Actually there's no reason; Cathy, Jan, Gretchen, and Tina are school age or at the hospital. However, there are always the horses, cats, Pepper, and homemade beer. I'm beginning to see why Isabelle sent me to Bob.

I meet Neil Parsons, a graduate student. We bond. He has the most expressive hands I've ever seen. Herrich Hall: Neil has a key to the graduate studio courtesy of Cy Conrad. We buy a lot of beer, get drunk, and paint all night. Cy is angry and threatens to take the key back, Bob says, "How many paintings did you guys make?" Bob loans me his VFW studio. Peter Voulkos comes to Bozeman and Bob sends him to see my work. Pete says, "Kid, you should get outta town. Come to California." I talk to Bob and he says, "I can't TEACH you any more." It's time to move.

SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE, 1964–69

I move to California and go back to Bozeman as often as possible and talk to Bob and Gennie too many hours about Art and Scene, what they're doing, what I'm trying to do. In San Francisco there is so much going on, Haight Ashbury, Fillmore, Viet Nam, Berkeley, LSD, Speed, etc., plus the Art Institute which is full of wannabe Artists. I'm not too sure why Bob sent me West.

I can't paint anymore and start making sculpture and call Bob to tell him and he says, "Well, your Dad's a gunsmith." Point well taken. Bob and Gennie build a new house and move to Cottonwood Canyon. I get my M.F.A., living the good country life in Santa Rosa, teaching in Hayward and finally SFAI. California's laidbackness is getting boring; it's time to move again.

NEW YORK, 1970-80

I decide to move to New York. On my way to the BIG APPLE, I stop in Bozeman. I have a buffalo skull wired to the front of the van. Bob asks me "Are you taking Montana to New York?" and I say, "I think so." He says "good." I call Bob and tell him I have a great studio on Greenwich Street and from my fire escape you can see the World Trade Center being built, Bob makes some remark about "liking APPLE PIE."

Bob and Gennie call and ask about selling the Gabo they inherited from Helen McAuslan. Who would be interested, what museums, etc.? I ask around and give them some names. After some months Bob calls back and says, "We got an offer, what should we do?" I said, "Sell the fucker."

Bob retires and comes to visit; we see almost all the galleries and museums in SoHo, Midtown, Uptown, plus many studios of artist friends. We go to Max's Kansas City and Jasper Johns is holding court, lotsa famous artists. We're both pretty impressed and exhausted. Bob's leaving tomorrow so we buy fresh lobsters from the Fulton Fish Market and pack them in ice, sort of a Bozeman homecoming party. The next day we flag a taxi to the airport. I've got Bob's luggage, Bob has the lobsters. He puts the box of lobsters on the roof of the taxi, opens the door, throws his bag in and jumps in. The taxi takes off and I run after screaming "Stop! Stop!" The taxi stops, I catch up and take the lobsters from the roof and hand them to Bob. He gives me a puzzled look and I say, "You forgot the lobsters."

GERMANY, 1980

After a couple of shows in New York and Europe, a gallerist from Hamburg asks me if I would like to come to Germany for one year. His job: pay for everything. My job: make the art. I call Bob and he says, "Take the money and run." I think I will stay as long as I can work and live from my sculpture. I'm still here. I call Bob and Gennie from Germany a lot, wishing Gennie Happy Mother's Day (she is the only artist I know with five children and still making dynamite paintings) and trying to keep up with the ever-growing family.

In 1990 my mother calls and says "Bob's in the hospital and it doesn't look good." As I can't travel, I call the hospital, Tina answers the phone and says "Dad's in a coma but he can hear us." I ask, "Can I talk to him?" She puts the phone to his ear and I say, "Hey, DeWeese, it's me, Reineking. I just called to say I love you."

Chronologically there are probably inaccuracies in this account, but the moments Bob shared with me are accurate. Every exhibition I've had, Bob was somehow there; he still is. Perhaps this is a travelogue. I've known Bob and Gennie my entire adult life as an artist. I'm not sure of what he taught me, but I'm very certain of what they gave me.

—Munich, Germany, 2006

Addendum: The year Bob died I was appointed Professor of Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. I've never thought that making "ART" was a competitive sport. It was, for me, always trying to find out what I didn't know, or an attempt at surprising myself, or seeing what I've never seen. If Bob taught me anything, it was this. I've tried to pass this on to students, a sort of "Passing the Torch." In art, success or failure are not measurable components.



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James Reineking, *Spiral Stack for Bob*, 2006  
four-inch plate steel, 17 x 30 x 30"

## ■ Wes Mills

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Drawing has often lead me to the question, Where does one begin? Is there such a thing as beginning or a beginning? Or is it when we occasionally find ourselves in a space between or perhaps near the edge of a thing that brings us to this thought. Still as much as I want to believe or not believe, I cannot deny that either way this feeling connects me to my past and future.

If there ever was a beginning for my mentorship with Jerry Rankin then it has resurfaced as many times as it has faded. Through the late-1970s at Great Falls High School, Jerry inspired numerous students to follow their own paths. For me, Jerry has been a life-long mentor; he is a living example of what an inspiring and creative mind is truly about: considerate, patient, elegant, trusting, and forgiving. During these years he would constantly remind us that the space between a thing is as important as the thing itself. In his often unorthodox approach Jerry inspired students to explore the world in ways one never could have imagined.

On my first day of class at Great Falls High School Jerry Rankin showed us this space between; perhaps a place to begin. It's a place I have returned to again and again. On that day, Jerry Rankin was about ten minutes late to the room and by the time he arrived the class was in chaos. There he stood, looking somewhat disgruntled, perhaps already intimidated by the previous class. He asked the students if we could move the tables and chairs towards the edges of the room in order to make a pathway down the center. The chaos of the room was suddenly quieted when we saw Jerry lie down on the floor. There, he began to roll himself slowly across the full length of the room. At each turn the room became more and more still, quieter and quieter. The students were transfixed. When he finally reached the back wall he stood up, walked back down the aisle and out the door.

Jerry left us alone for the remaining period. My first thought was, I had heard about this guy. Not only was the room quiet but in those short moments we all came to feel immediately present in that place. It was from this place, this beginning, Jerry taught



us to ask questions. Now, as the years pass, those thoughts and memories often run through me as reminders to be considerate, patient, elegant, trusting, and forgiving. And that in beginning, always beginning, we find meaning.

—Victor, Montana, 2006



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Wes Mills, *To Straighten My Back*, 2004, graphite and colored pencil on paper, 7½ x 7¾"

## ■ Jerry Rankin

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When I think of Bob I first hear his flute obbligato from Afternoon of a Faun. He always warmed up with that before our afternoon musicales. There was a direct link from music into his painting—and always that rhythm of that line!

He was never pedantic. His simple statements embodied huge ideas. He kept us busy with the job of seeing. With a few deft lines over our misfires he could resolve the composition and unlock the mystery of space. He insisted that we be true to our own impulses.

Once, when we were shipping artwork to the Henry Gallery in Seattle, we got a call from Greyhound in Butte. Our clumsily bundled work was shedding its duct tape shrouds. Bob's belief was that the energy of the work within provided strong enough glue to ensure its safe passage.

He was my friend.

—Bozeman, Montana, 2006



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Jerry Rankin, Babylon, 2006, oil on canvas, 63 x 72"

## ■ Artist Biographies

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Robert DeWeese was born in 1920 in Troy, Ohio. He received a B.S. degree from Ohio State University in 1942. After serving in the U.S. Air Force, he returned to Ohio in 1946, married artist Gennie Adams, and received an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa in 1948. He joined the art department at Montana State University in Bozeman in 1949, retiring as professor emeritus in 1977. DeWeese died in 1990. He was honored posthumously with a Governor's Award for the Arts in 1995.

David Dragonfly, a Blackfeet/Assiniboine artist, was born in 1956 in Kalispell, Montana, and raised in Browning, Montana. In 1988 he received his B.F.A. from the University of Montana, where he studied with professor Neil Parsons. Dragonfly furthered his education at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. As a featured artist of the Northern Plains Tribal Arts, Dragonfly continues to exhibit throughout the United States. Dragonfly resides in Browning, Montana, where he is the curator at the Museum of the Plains Indian.

Wes Mills was born in 1960. In 1979 he graduated from Great Falls High School, in Great Falls, Montana, where he studied with art teacher Jerry Rankin. Mills has been featured in over fifty publications, both nationally and internationally. His individual and group exhibition history is extensive. Currently, he is represented by the Peter Blum Gallery, New York, New York; Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Los Angeles, California; Richard Levy Gallery, Albuquerque, New Mexico; Galerie Haus Schneider, Karlsruhe, Germany; Dwight Hackett Projects, Santa Fe, New Mexico; and the Susanna Albrecht Gallery, Munich, Germany. Mills lives in Victor, Montana.

Neil Parsons was born in 1938 in Browning, Montana, and raised on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. After receiving a B.A. in 1961 and an M.F.A. in 1964 from Montana State University, Parsons was invited to join the founding faculty of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, thus beginning his extensive teaching career. Parsons continues to exhibit his work throughout the United States and is represented in collections such as the Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona; Whitney Gallery of Western Art, Cody, Wyoming; Missoula Art Museum, Missoula, Montana; Hockaday Museum of Art, Kalispell, Montana; and Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe. Parsons lives in Blaine, Washington.

Jerry Rankin was born in 1934 and raised in Glacier National Park, Montana. He graduated from Montana State University with a B.S. in Applied Art and received his M.F.A. from the University of Montana. An artist and an educator, he spent many years teaching in Washington, Alaska, and Montana. Since 1985 he has been working as a full-time artist. His work is included in the collections of the Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, Montana; the Pritchard Gallery, Moscow, Idaho; the Missoula Art Museum, Missoula, Montana; and the Holter Museum of Art. Rankin's work was featured in an exhibition that toured across Szechuan Province in China in the 1980s. He was the recipient of Montana's 1995 Museum and Gallery Directors Association (MAGDA) Traveling Arts Grant. Rankin lives in Bozeman, Montana.

James Reineking was born in Minot, North Dakota, in 1937 and raised in Billings, Montana. After serving in the U.S. Navy, he attended Eastern Montana College and Montana State University, graduating in 1965. Two years later he received his M.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute. His work has been the subject of numerous individual exhibitions, publications, and films both nationally and internationally and is included in the collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; National Galerie, Berlin, Germany; and Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna, Austria. Reineking is a retired professor of the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany, where he lives.

Markus Stangl was born in Dachau, Germany, in 1962. After working as a stonecutter for many years, Stangl began his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, where he began working with professor James Reineking. Becoming a master pupil, he earned his diploma in 1994. Stangl's selected exhibitions include the Urban Gallery in the Cordonhaus/Cham, the German Museum, and the District Museum of Dachau. The European Patent Office in Munich and the Bavarian State Chancellery exhibit permanent, outdoor sculptures by Stangl. Stangl works and lives in Munich, Germany.

## Holter Museum of Art

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Published on the occasion of the exhibition *DeWeese's Legacy* at the Holter Museum of Art, October 28–December 30, 2006.

*DeWeese's Legacy* has been generously sponsored by Miriam Sample, Gennie DeWeese, and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.

Published and distributed by the Holter Museum of Art, 12 E. Lawrence Street, Helena, MT 59601, 406-442-6400, [www.holtermuseum.org](http://www.holtermuseum.org).

ISBN 978-1-89169-510-X

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Photography by Kurt Keller, Helena, MT.

Printing by Allegra Print and Imaging, Helena, MT.

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ISBN 978-1-89169-510-X