

Bruce Wall, *Easton Irregular* Art Profile, December 2012/January 2013

Bruce Wall's garage roof got damaged in a recent storm and he's considering turning the space into an auxiliary studio. He has a longstanding interest in Indian Art, so I'm guessing Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and creation, must have been responsible.

In 1979 Bruce had just received his MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design when he was awarded a Fulbright Grant to study at the Kalakshetra College of Art in Chennai, India. There he photographed *kolam*, traditional Indian floor painting made at house entrances and in Hindu temples. Performed early in the morning predominantly by women, *kolam* making involves sifting dry rice powder, crushed stones and spices onto the ground to form organic, maze-like, line-and-dot patterns. The decorations welcome good fortune yet incorporate destruction as people and animals walk through the designs, or the rain and wind destroy them.

Since 1993, Bruce has taught painting and drawing at Northampton Community College. He collaborated with colleague Josh Miller on "The Art of Indian Kolam: Traditional Designs & New Media," a show that expands *kolam* through 3-D modeling and interactive software. The "Virtual Kolam" piece allows gallery visitors to draw any design on a screen and then see it copied and pasted around a center point, thus creating their own mandala. There was campus-wide *kolam*-making on walkways and at entrances in addition to Indian dance and lectures on Indian philosophy. The highlight of their collaboration was a virtual, 3-D rendering of a *kolam* in the shape of a cube.

Just like the garage incident, Bruce remembers his introduction to art as an unexpected jolt, a singular moment.

He recalls walking into the Art Department at the University of Texas at Austin in the mid-70s and thinking, What is this? Lacking any previous, formal exposure to art, the experience transformed him, and he threw himself into studying photography, film, printmaking, lithography, and eventually concentrated on painting. After graduate school and India, he settled in New York, participating in the Neo-Expressionist, 80s art scene. He exhibited in New York galleries such as Tony Shafrazi, Monique Knowlton, Andre Zarre, Dramatis Personae, B Side, the New York Academy, and Vox Populi, and also clubs such as: Danceteria, the Pyramid Club, and the Palladium.

He was included in East Village-themed shows at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Centre Saidye Bronfman in Montreal, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Connecticut, and at The Williams Center for the Arts here in Easton. In 1986, as part of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation's International Survey, Wall's work traveled from Paris to Switzerland, Portugal, Israel, Salt Lake City, and Tucson.

The *Boxes* and *Shaped Paintings* were expressive, colorful, painted sculptures--objects that straddled 2-D and 3-D space. The *Metro Freako* and *School's Out* series fully explored an aggressive, sculptural style. His painting evolved from using geometric forms and shaped canvases to carving and painting complex, protruding subjects in foam rubber.

Currently, he's working on *Consonants and Vowels*, arranging found objects and toys alphabetically on silver "splash" shapes that float over silver-filled buckets. Bruce is exploring semantics through sculpture, questioning the relationship between signs and their meanings, similar to Jasper John's *Numbers* and *Flags* paintings. Johns narrowed the distance between object and symbol and made them virtually the same (a painting of a flag is a flag--and patriotism). Bruce is achieving the opposite, just like Shiva destroyed the roof: he

shatters symbols that are considered to be concrete and lasting by pointing out their lack of inherent meaning. There is no meaning behind a letter of the alphabet, only infinite examples of its use.

—Elizabeth Johnson