

NOTHING IS TO BE DONE FOR WILLIAM T. WILEY

June 12–August 6, 2022

Parker Gallery is proud to present a group exhibition in tribute to the late William T. Wiley (1937–2021). The exhibition features a constellation of artists near and dear to Wiley, as well as those without a direct relationship but whose work features surprising connections to his enigmatic art and curious, soulful spirit. The artists include childhood friends (William Allan and Robert Hudson), fellow professors, colleagues and co-conspirators (Robert Arneson, Mike Henderson, Ed Kienholz, Peter Saul, Carlos Villa, H.C. Westermann), and former students (Deborah Butterfield, Mary Heilmann, Bruce Nauman, Maija Peeples-Bright), alongside contemporary artists representing several generations of kindred spirits (Melissa Brown, Ann Craven, Jimmie Durham, Llyn Foulkes, Piero Gilardi, Peter Halley, Hugh Hayden, Christine Sun Kim, Calvin Marcus, Ree Morton, Laura Owens, Nancy Shaver, Sue Williams, Amy Yao).

What is to be done for William T. Wiley? The question was originally proposed by the artist himself, as an invitation to others to create an artwork on his behalf. Not an artwork that he would ascribe his name to, but one with his name inscribed on its surface. The artworks he requested were to be “a plaque or plans for one...which would read ‘Nothing is to be done for Wm. T. Wiley.’” At the time he wrote to his peers, Wiley was seeking a new approach and perhaps anticipating a fresh perspective from an outsider’s point of view. Of the three works received in response to Wiley’s proposal (from Robert Arneson, Bruce Nauman and H.C. Westermann), those by Westermann and Arneson are included in this exhibition, shown together for the first time.

The artists who responded to Wiley’s provocation included: a colleague on faculty at U.C. Davis (Arneson), a recent graduate student (Nauman) and an older artist that Wiley greatly admired (Westermann). Wiley’s laid-back, anything-goes, pun-riddled approach to life and art left an impression on those he encountered. And his influence continues to resonate. This exhibition also features works realized specifically for the occasion by artists who did not know Wiley personally, such as Melissa Brown and Peter Halley.

It is helpful, possibly essential, to locate the work of William T. Wiley to its point of origin— regional (San Francisco Bay Area), yet emphatically site-specific (a cabin-like studio, framed with windows looking out into the woods of Marin County, alongside a sliver of a creek). The proximity of the studio space to its natural setting was so close and dependent as to be somewhat interchangeable.

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Branches, logs and rocks are not uncommon materials in Wiley constructions, just as depictions of the studio, strewn with the same organic materials and an occasional view to their origins just beyond the doorway can be seen in several watercolors and paintings. A reverence for the natural world and the humility of our place within it is echoed in works by William Allan, Ann Craven, Jimmie Durham, Piero Gilardi, Calvin Marcus and Ree Morton.

Wiley's studio was a place of chance encounters, puzzles and streams of consciousness. Public talk radio could be heard most of the time, interspersed with blues and bluegrass music, all of which enter the actual work at various intervals, in the form of snippets of hand-written text posing philosophical questions to a future viewer, or reflecting his own personal musings on current events. Wiley's work constitutes a wryly reflexive, political and social art that can share space with Christine Sun Kim, Bruce Nauman, Carlos Villa and Sue Williams.

Wiley constructed fluid, open-ended riddles; curator Harald Szeeman once referred to his work as "situations." Beginning with a gesture or feeling, a work would meander to a particular point of profound mystery, while holding on tight to an intimate secret. Like that of Llyn Foulkes, Mary Heilmann, or Nancy Shaver, this is work that emphatically resists simple interpretations or resolutions. There is often a loose narrative in their work (sometimes related to the process of its own making), which becomes gloriously discordant, a proposal with many possibilities and no right answer.

& so, what is to be done for William T. Wiley after all? Nothing is to be done, nothing has to be done and nothing can be done— but the question lingers.

William T. Wiley (b. 1937, Bedford, IN; d. 2021, Novato, CA). Recent solo exhibitions include *William T. Wiley and the Slant Step: All on the Line*, curated by Dan Nadel, Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, Davis, CA (2022), *fort phooey: wiley in the studio*, di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa, CA (2021), *Real Eye on Change*, Parker Gallery at Gordon Robichaux, NY, (2020), *Con-Fusion-ism*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA (2020) and *What's It All Mean: William T. Wiley in Retrospect*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; travelled to Berkeley Art Museum, CA (2009–2010). His work is included in the collections of the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Philadelphia Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Walker Art Center, and Whitney Museum of American Art, among many other public institutions.