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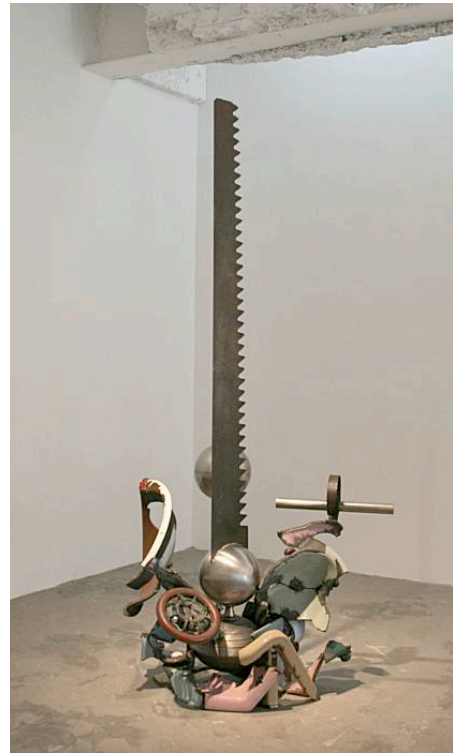
A Hudson update:

by Kenneth Baker

Robert Hudson first claimed his place in West Coast art history at the turn of the '60s as a member of the so-called Bay Area Funk tendency of antic assemblage.

The goofiness of that early output persists less in Hudson's art than in that of his cohort and sometime collaborator, William T. Wiley. A happy coincidence has Wiley's retrospective at the Berkeley Art Museum running concurrently with Hudson's show of recent sculpture at the Patricia Sweetow Gallery.

Hudson's recent work looks mature in all the right senses: seasoned, confident, even wise in a way difficult to explain.



"Cross Cut" (2005), mixed media sculpture by Robert Hudson

Funk art benefited by a cultural context - the hangover of '50s conformity - in which zany juxtapositions of found and doctored objects produced what probably felt like liberating shock effects.

Today's world of hyperlinks and mass recycling may have anesthetized us to such shock effects, but it provides a background against which the poetics of Hudson's art shine.

Hudson's new pieces seem to touch the whole history of constructed sculpture from Picasso to David Smith, John Chamberlain, Anthony Caro and Mark di Suvero. Several Hudsons on view pivot, given a little push, as many di Suveros do.

Studying one of them or a fixed piece such as "Cross Cut" (2005) involves you in looking for an opening where analytical understanding of the work might begin.

Few appear. Instead, little jolts of recognition - of such items as the saw blade, a spring, a brake wheel - punctuate a drifting awe at Hudson's intuitive power as a composer that will carry you from one end of the show to the other.