



...is the book's title by John Turner, and a fitting mantra for book and author. John (class of 1965) and Richard (class of 1961) had (and still having)



illustrious careers in the creative arts and both “recognized” for their creations. John and Richard have an uncanny ability to engage with others, observe their lives and reflect that in their artwork. Recognition came to John in authorship and

an Emmy, and Richard in Fulbrights to public art commissions. Both have impacted art and culture, and we are nominating them for that category of the Okemos Alumni Hall of Fame. Click to read the autobiographical accounts of their rich and fulfilling lives.



Doug DeLind, class of 1965

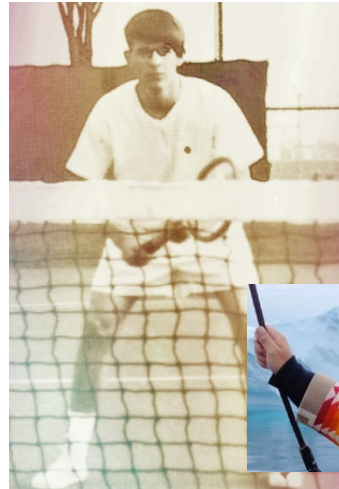
Chair of Arts and Culture Nominating Committee

For the Okemos Alumni Hall of Fame

Edited by Rod Ellis



Richard - 1959 Tomahawk



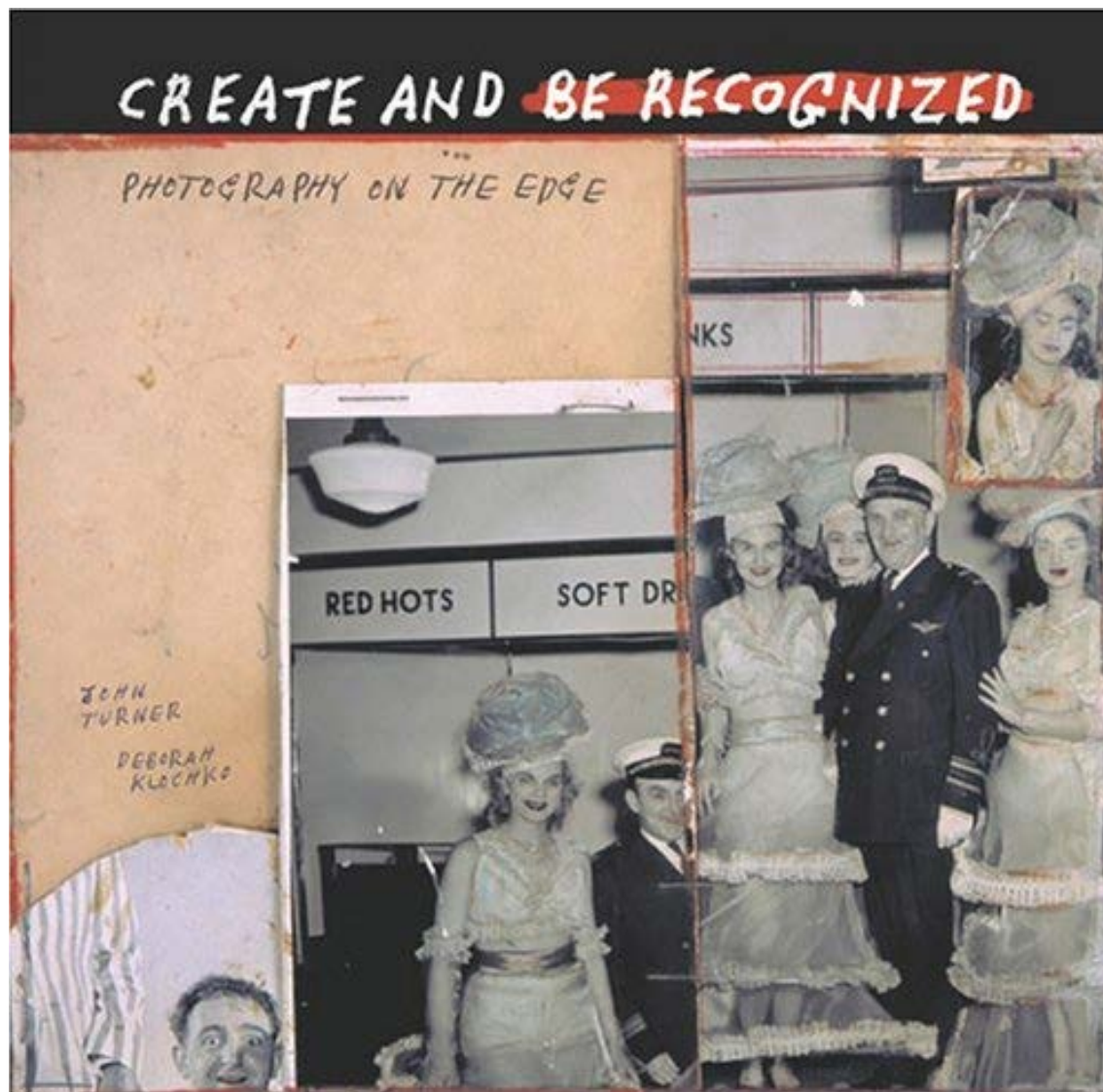
John - 1965 Tomahawk



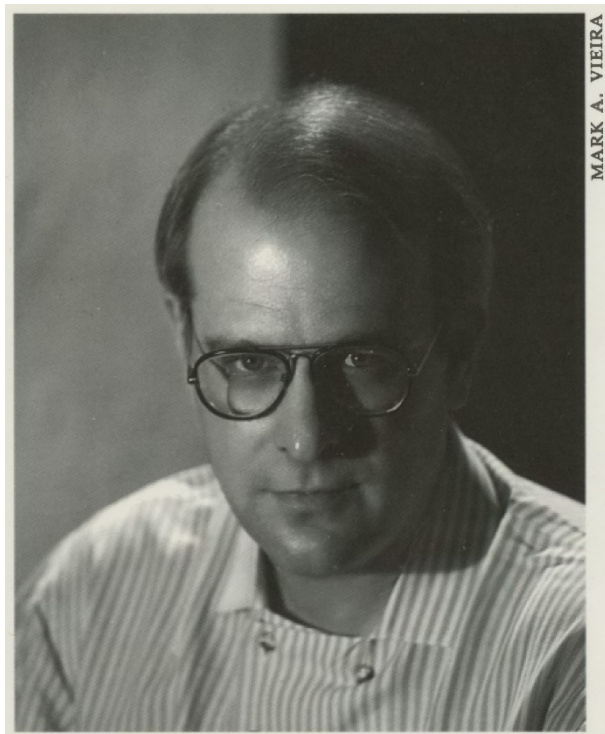
Brothers **Richard and John Turner** grew up in Okemos Michigan. In 1959 the Turner family moved to Saigon Vietnam where their father worked as director of the Michigan State University Group, which was a component of the U.S. government's support for the fledgling regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. The brothers' mutual interest in travel and the cultures of Asia, born in Saigon, was reinforced in 1963 when the family spent a year in Taiwan. In the course of the journeys to and from Vietnam and Taiwan, the brothers visited several of the world's great museums with their sister and parents. A shared interest in the arts has been part of Richard's and John's lives ever since. As adults, they pursued different passions. John became fascinated with popular culture, Outsider art and grass roots environments. He also travelled extensively throughout the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe. Richard's interests were shaped by his teaching. The arts of India, Southeast Asia, China and Japan inspired much of his studio work. All along the brothers shared their individual interests with each other. In 1997 Richard presented selections from John's collection of outsider art at Chapman University's Guggenheim Gallery. Both brothers have had exhibitions at the Huntington Beach Art Center. Should a Beatnik Drink a Martini? a survey of Richard's studio work, was followed by The Paintings of Edgar Leeteg, a show that John curated about the father of velvet painting. *Slow Dancing in Saigon*, their latest collaboration, finds them returning to their roots. It is a book that chronicles the parties that they attended as teenagers in Vietnam in the late 1950s.



John Turner, class of 1965



Collector - I've been collecting whatever caught the corner of my eye since I was a child roaming through the Central Market in Saigon, Viet Nam, 1959. The highlight of those wondrous hours, besides absorbing foreign sights and smells was the gathering of a collection of Filipino switchblades, Buddhist carvings and a pet monkey, that I later learned had a terrible temper. In college I started forging for pictures from the past, in the form of postcards. I also started collecting images produced from a camera I occasionally carried. This later led me, in the early 70s, to photographing "outsider environments", like the House of 1000 Paintings in Santa Barbara California - an older house on the wrong side of the tracks that was completely covered with memory paintings created by a retired oil worker named Sam Darling. This in turn, moved me towards collecting 20th century work by self-taught artist in the United States and from around the world, an interest that continue to this day. I also had the opportunity to meet numerous collectors of every stripe, a delightful but sometimes compulsive bunch, always on the hunt for their next piece of the puzzle.



John Turner 1989

One of a dozen souvenir jackets from the Viet Nam war that I purchased from thrift stores that are now in the MSU historical collections

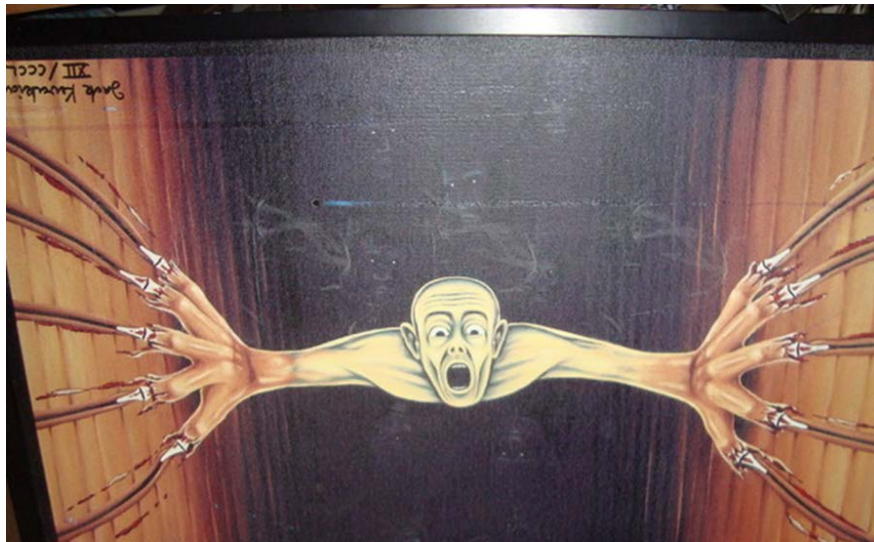


When word of my collecting habits got out, I started lending out pieces to over sixty venues, from the Smithsonian (Howard Finster paintings) to the MSU museum (souvenir jackets from the Viet Nam war), which cumulated in having several shows of just my collection(s), or as one, in 2013 was accurately titled “The Collector: John Turner and the Art of Acquisition”.

A collection of billy clubs and a blackjack. Some were given to my father, who worked in a police lab in Kansas City, Missouri.



Among the “art” in the Art of Acquisition show was work done by prisoners, an elephant, an herbalist, a clown and Jack Kevorkian. I also included magician ephemera and Cambodian war mine paintings, a collection of police billy clubs, thrift store paintings, safety posters, a palm reader's sign and some carved coconut heads.



Inkjet print of a painting by “Dr. Death” (Jack Kevorkian), that I purchased from a gallery representing him.



Drawings made by a Death Row inmate at San Quentin prison in California



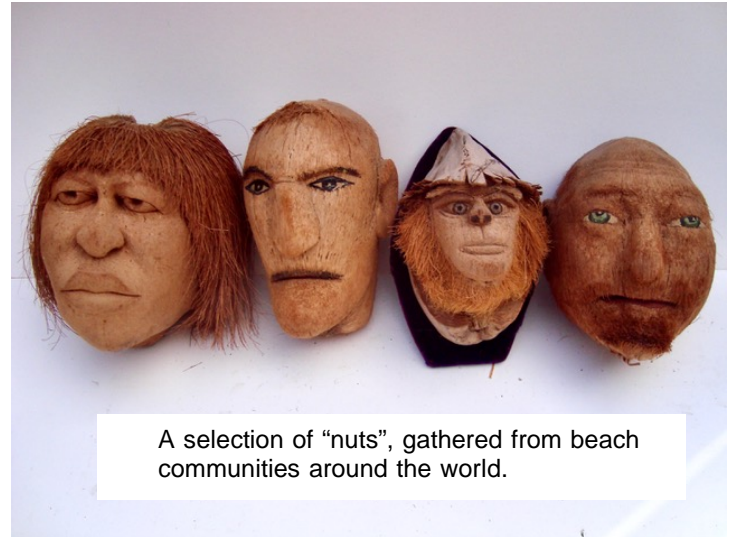
From a collection I assembled of magic ephemera/graphics. My favorites are the diagrams of stage tricks.

One of the best Tiki bars/
environments in the U.S., the
Mai-Kai in Fort Lauderdale. I've
been following faux 50s Tiki
culture for a number of years.



Another unheralded graphic art that I collect -
safety posters from the 40s and 50s - hiding in
plain sight

While many of these artifacts are not normally shown in a museum context, to me they reflected the words of Andy Warhol, who said “Art is what you can get away with”.



Posing with Andy Warhol at a Velvet Underground concert (The Exploring Plastic Inevitable Tour) in Ann Arbor, 1967

Film Maker - I’ve had an interest in film since the summer days when I watched 3rd run classics, like "Francis the Talking Mule" projected outdoors, on a sheet at the old Okemos High School. After college I got a job as an assistant film editor at a cutting house in New York City, which was followed by work at Rex Fleming Studios in California, which turned out safety and travel films.

From there, in the mid-70s I landed a job as a news editor and arts producer at Channel 7, an ABC owned and operated station in San Francisco. Fortuitously, I was able to hold gainful employment with them for 32 years, until my retirement in 2010. While there, I had the opportunity to interview numerous artists, (who also happened to be my friends) and interact with others following their creative impulses.

I also got involved in the museum, music and film communities. As a result, I produced or worked on numerous documentaries, from ones that focused on blues musicians to African American quilters to experimental artists.



Picking up an Emmy for one of the documentaries I worked on, San Francisco, 1996

When I left the station, I tried my hand at producing and directing one of my own projects, that being a documentary on an African American musician from Columbia Missouri named John Roland Redd, who migrated to Hollywood and reinvented himself as a mysterious organist from New Delhi India. This 2015 project, Korla, was a success, traveling the film festival route and ending up on with numerous plays on PBS. It is currently streaming on the Alamo platform.

<click this link to watch Korla> <https://ondemand.drafthouse.com/film/korla/>

Curator - Since I started collecting as a youth, and had the opportunity to visit many of the worlds' famous and not so famous (offbeat) museums, I had an interest in the workings of a museum - where ideas for shows came from, who organized them, what arrangements were made with the collectors etc.



Interviewing Thomas "Painter of Light" Kincade at his California factory. At the time, he was the biggest selling artist in the U.S.

By a quirk (a small S.F. museum was being founded, centered on craft and folk art), I was offered a gratis job as a curator of 20th Century American Folk Art.

Learning on the run, I was able, over the years, to curate shows on Black Folk Art, Primitive Funeral Markers, Circus Colleges, Ceramic Face Jugs, Paintings of Work, Folk Carvings, the Screen Painters of Baltimore and also one on the influence of folk art on celebrated Bay Area artists.



Tagging at the Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo Texas



Biking between dust storms at Burning Man, Black Rock Desert, Nevada, 2000



The Toilet Seat Art Museum, The Colony. Texas. Barney Smith has over 1,400 decorated seats in his collection

That type of experience gave me the opening to curate larger exhibits for other institutions, like the American Folk Museum in New York City, the Smithsonian (1989) and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco (2004).



The first folk art environment I photographed, Sam Darling's House of 1000 Paintings, Santa Barbara California. 1974.



One of the collage's constructed by a circus clown that I picked up at the Alameda Drive In Swap Meet. The piece has a wonderful surreal sense of balance

For complete fun, I have also put together small “on site” shows, like the art of matchbook covers (at a bar), John, Martin and Bobby Kennedy Prayer Rugs (at a hip 2nd hand clothing store), the playful patterns of Tepco china (at a breakfast restaurant) and well as one in Chicago on Thrift Store Arts and Crafts.



Having fun, out of this world

Writer - I can't even think of a time when I had designs on being a writer.

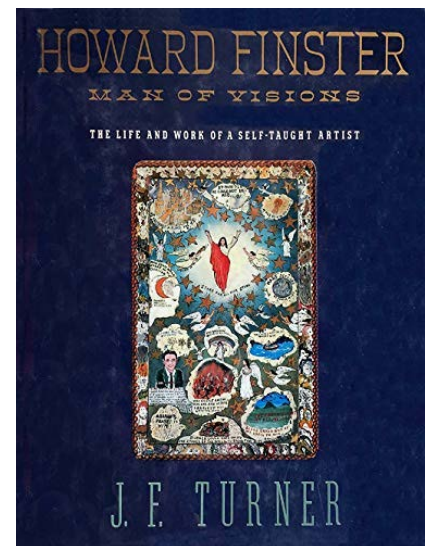
It just happened, when an amazing self-taught visionary artist from Georgia named Howard Finster ask me if I could write a biography on him. Three weeks after we had that initial discussion, two boxes of archival material arrived from him (via

Greyhound Bus), and my spotty career as a writer began. After years of additional research, numerous interviews, copious amount of travel and finding a surprising amount of self-discipline, I was able to complete that book for Knopf, Howard Finster, Man of Visions: The Life and Art of a Self-Taught Artist.



On the road, outside of Sant Fe.

After swearing that I would never touch a pen or typewriter again, I went on to co-author Leeteg of Tahiti: Painting from the Villa Velour, Create and be Recognized: Photography on the edge and another, just for fun, Unheard Conversations; A Wonderful Collection of Carved Coconut Heads.



Unheard Conversations



**A Wonderful Collection
of Carved Coconut Heads**

John Turner

In between those episodes, I was also able to write articles for magazines on folk art and travel, as well as short pieces for the news.



An original oil of the Jerry Lewis family painted by Margaret "Big Eyes" Keane. I interviewed Ms Keane at her Honolulu home and found out that she was a devout Jehovah Witness.



At the original Ripley's Believe it or Not Museum, St. Augustine Fla.



Artist - As a child, I wasn't interested in "proper art", as I preferred comic books, carnival sideshow banners (seen at the Mason and Detroit Fairs) and roadside attractions.

At Paul Gauguin's final resting place, Calvary Cemetery, Hiva-Oa, French Polynesia, 2012

As I grew older, my tastes in art didn't change that much, but while living in Taiwan in 1964, I became attracted to scrolls and Chinese painting. I was able to purchase some minor work, which included a modern abstract by a member of an avant garde group called The Fifth Moon.

With a satisfied customer at an exhibit of my "Painted Photography", Marin, California, 2019



All of a sudden, I was an art collector, although I remember spending my allowance on a carving of Buddha at a souvenir stall in Hong Kong at the age of 12. In college I bought my first piece of art by a recognized artist, that being an Andy Warhol's silkscreen titled Jackie, an image, taken from the newspapers of the First Lady, minutes before she lost her husband, Jack. That piece exposed me to the idea that art was not always just what was portrayed on the surface, but much more. After college, I started to paint, just to see if I could make something that "looked like art". I painted a large scale geometric, not bad for a first try.



Having a beer on the Bolivian salt flat, Salar de Uyuni, 2011

Although I also made attempts at small sculptures, I never invested the time to try to develop as an artist. Much later I took up drawing intricate cross hatched works. I discovered some interesting shapes, but in the process, developed carpal tunnel in my wrist, which put an immediate end to my designs in making art.

It wasn't until my retirement that I had the time and interest in making art again. From all the years I had watching and studying the sheer joy and imagination of self-taught artists, it gave me the confidence that I too could make art, without judgement or goals.



In 2013 I journeyed to India for the Kumbh Mela, the largest (religious) gathering of people on the planet, held every 7 years. Here I am being blessed in the polluted Ganges River.



The town of Cassadaga Florida, home to more psychic's per square inch than any place in the world.



Fortunately, for me, I didn't get horned or trampled at the Running of the Bulls in 2006.

For years now, I have made art on a daily basis, building unseen backyard sculptures, but preferring to work in paint or photography, often combining the two. I tend to follow where the art takes me, not planning, just doing.



One of the more isolated inhabited places on the planet. I was able to meet many of the Bounty decedents who still reside there.



One of my favorite sports is tennis and here in Shanghai I got to see some of the top players in the world.





This is one of the best-known photos I have taken. It was a performance piece called "Media Burn" by the Ant Farm at the Cow Palace in San Francisco, 1975.

Although I have had gallery shows, I'm not looking for a second career, but forward to upcoming years of creative exploration.



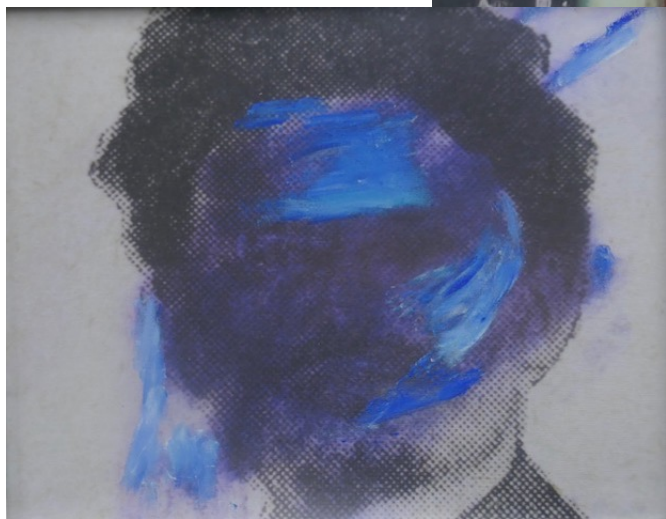
Watching the icebergs slip by in Greenland, 2005



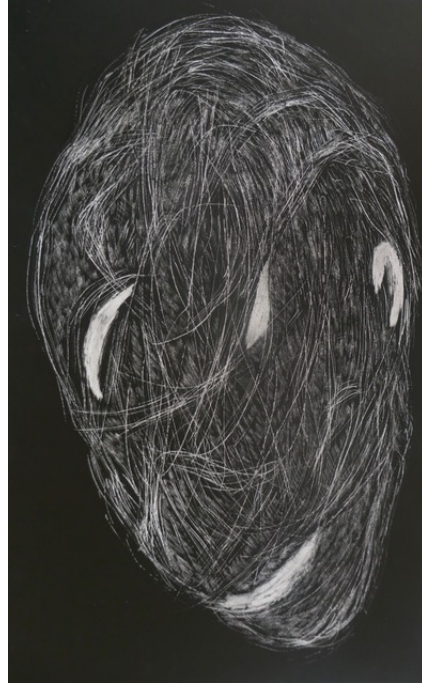
Travel is one of the most enriching experiences I have learned from. I've been fortunate to have traveled internationally every year since 1977.

Recent work by John Turner









Richard Turner, class of 1961
September 2020



I became interested in art when our family was living in Saigon Vietnam from 1959 to 1961. Absent all the usual distractions of a junior and senior year at Okemos high school, I took the opportunity to reinvent myself. The ingredients for the “new me” included James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause, the music of Buddy Holly and Chuck Berry, the exotic romance of The King and I, Jack Kerouac’s novel On The Road, Allen Ginsberg’s notorious poem Howl, the paintings of Jackson Pollock, Picasso’s collages and, of course, Salvador Dali. What

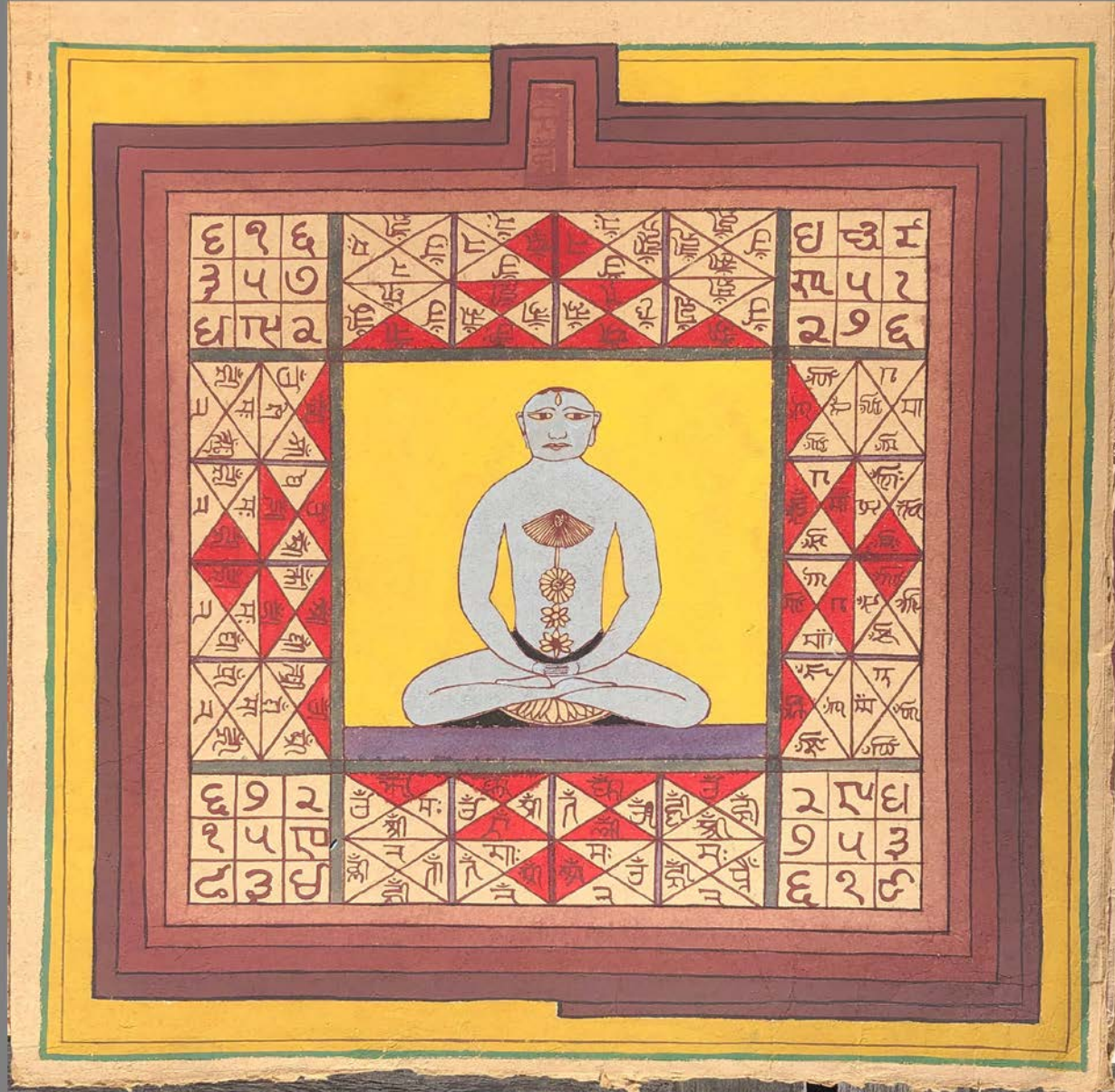
teenager could resist the allure of his melting watches? Here I was in The Pearl of the Orient and what captured my teenage imagination? The film, literature, music and art of America and Europe. This irony was lost on my young self. It wasn't too much later, however, that I began to understand that *where* my youthful awakening had taken place was as important as *what* had actually happened to me. In other words, the vessel in which this concoction was brewed was as significant as the ingredients themselves.



A year after returning from Vietnam I enrolled in Antioch College as an art major. A work/study program was at the core of the Antioch curriculum. My first job was in New York City. It was 1962 and works by the pioneers of Pop Art were in all the galleries – Warhol, Oldenburg, Rauschenberg, Ed Kienholz.



In 1963 I spent a year in Taiwan studying Chinese painting, calligraphy and language at Taiwan Normal University.



By the time that I entered graduate school at the University of Michigan, the die was cast. My studies in sculpture, film and Asian art history were the springboard for my first, and only, teaching job at (then) Chapman College in Orange CA. For forty-one years I taught the Arts of Asia, design and sculpture, and directed the school's Guggenheim Gallery where I curated over seventy exhibitions.



My first work of public art, a second one on the campus of California State University at Fullerton, as well as a piece that is currently under construction, was inspired by waiting out the rain under the corrugated steel roof of a shed in Myanmar. Memory's Vault, in Port Townsend, WA recalls a Japanese rock garden.





Two other pieces, A Bridge to Angel Island, 1986 and Weaverville Joss House, 1989 reference the histories of the Chinese in California. We Too Were Once Strangers is built on land once farmed by immigrant Japanese laborers.



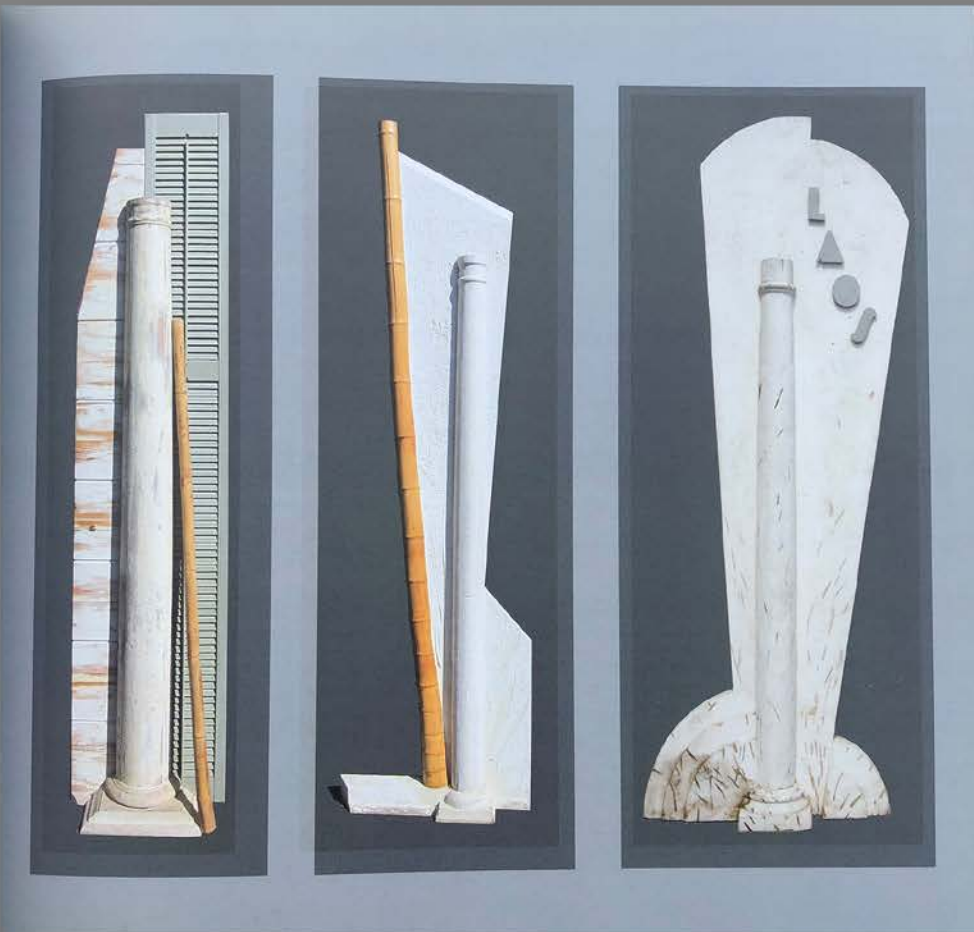
Not all of the twenty-eight pieces of public art I have created were inspired by my experiences in Asia. I have done work for public parks, convention centers, private businesses, a courthouse, a chapel and a community

center. I designed a site for a section of the Berlin Wall for the campus of Chapman University, a veterans' memorial for the city of Anaheim, a station for the Los Angeles metro system and a water treatment plant for the city of Santa Monica.





My studio work has followed a trajectory similar to that of my public art. Work from the 1970s and 1980s recalled the colonial architecture of Saigon and imagined encounters between Vietnamese and Americans.





The Ropetones

In the 1970s I briefly performed as a member of The Ropetones, an art band that made pre-MTV music videos. In the Backroom of A Chinese Restaurant, There Ain't Too Many Phones Here in Calcutta and Transcendental Texan were some of our non-hits.



Installations such as *Contempt Mandala*, 2008, employed sculpture, painting, film and literature in the service of a narrative that intertwined elements of my biography with the characters and locations of Godard's film

Contempt. Studio / Cities, 2012, proposed a similar fiction.





In the mid 90s, I discovered Chinese scholars' rocks and Japanese suiseki. Since then the bulk of my studio work has been an exploration of the possibilities that these traditional forms of connoisseurship offer the contemporary artist.



My research has included sculptures, drawings and photographs.









I have curated three exhibitions of viewing stones paired work by contemporary artists.

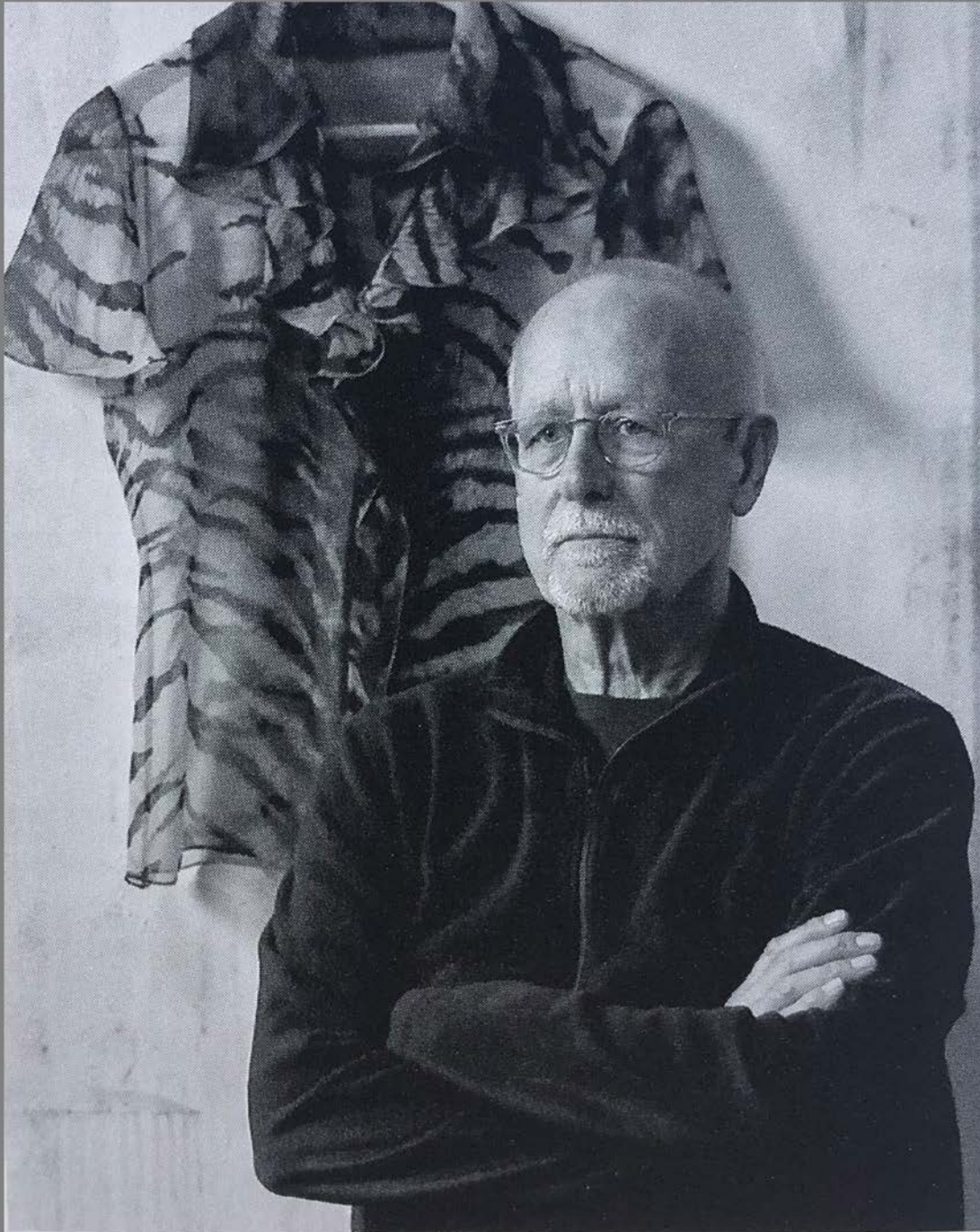
VSANA
VIEWING STONE
ASSOCIATION
OF NORTH AMERICA

CONTEMPORARY
VIEWING
STONE
DISPLAY

Richard Turner
Thomas S. Elias
& Paul A. Harris



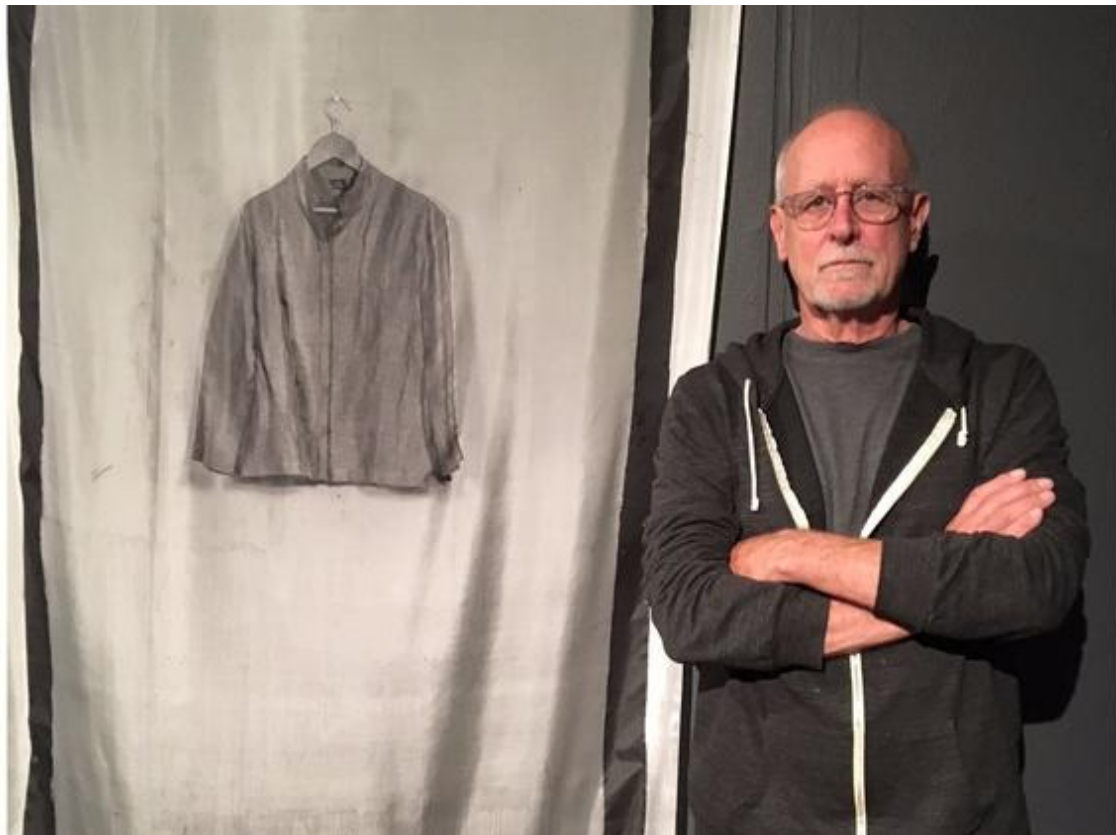
This year I co-authored Contemporary Viewing Stone Display, a book in which I share the results of nearly thirty years of my obsession with stones.



I live in Southern California I retired from teaching in 2011. I have twin daughters, Adrienne and Jennifer and three grandchildren. My wife Sylvia, passed away in 2016 (read next page). My work with stones as well as much of the other artwork mentioned here is documented on my website turnerprojects.com. Please take a look.

Richard Turner September 2020

Artist memorializes his late wife with 'Air Becomes Breath' exhibit



Artist and professor Richard Turner stands next to a work he created in honor of his wife, Sylvia, who died from pancreatic cancer. Turner conceptualized "Air Becomes Breath," an installation in her honor that will run till Thursday at Santa Ana College. (Photo by Richard Chang)

By **Richard Chang**

NOVEMBER 3, 2017, 4:00 PM

Artist Richard Turner has created plenty of memorials during his career but none has been as personal as this.

Turner's "Air Becomes Breath" exhibit at Santa Ana College's Main Art Gallery honors and remembers Sylvia Turner, the artist's late wife of 48 years. She died in May 2016, after struggling with pancreatic cancer.

Sylvia Turner was a longtime professor and dean at Santa Ana College (SAC). She served as the college's dean of fine and performing arts from 2008 to 2013. Before that, she served as SAC's associate dean of fine and performing arts. An accomplished professional dancer and choreographer, she also taught dance and chaired the dance department.

Sylvia Turner was known for her impeccable taste in clothing and chic sense of style. With help from photographer Mike Farrel, one of Sylvia's former students, Richard captured her best-remembered outfits and printed them in black and white on identically-sized banners of silk.

The result is an exhibit that's both somber and celebratory.

Two fans turn and intermittently blow air toward the silk prints, breathing life and movement into the works, and giving further meaning to the show's title, "Air Becomes Breath."

The exhibit title also comes from the book "When Breath Becomes Air" by Paul Kalanithi, which chronicles the neurosurgeon and writer's struggle with stage IV metastatic [lung cancer](#).

"So many of us have had experiences with the clothing of our parents when they've died, the clothing of a spouse," Richard Turner, 74, said during a recent interview in the gallery. "So this experience of what do you do with somebody's clothing after they die is a pretty widespread experience, particularly for people who are my age or even younger."

Richard Turner, an Orange resident, is a professor emeritus at Chapman University, where he taught contemporary Asian art history and studio art for 41 years. He also served as co-director of Chapman's Guggenheim Gallery.

"This is what I wanted to do — share the experience of Sylvia with friends and our daughters," he said. "I asked them to pick out the pieces of clothing that best exemplified Sylvia's sense of style."

Out of 50 original images, Sylvia Turner's friends, daughters and husband narrowed the selections down to 14, which are on view in the college's Main Art Gallery through Thursday.

The works include images of formal attire and casual outfits, including mother-of-the-bride dresses from Sylvia Turner's two daughters' weddings, dresses she wore to work at Santa Ana College, and an outfit she took while traveling abroad with Richard.

A simple, solemn composition by Philip Glass plays in the gallery on loop during operating hours. The gallery walls are painted black, contrasting naturally with the white silk banners.

"It's my hope that this piece is universal," Richard Turner said. "I hope it's accessible enough that people who know nothing about Sylvia, nothing about myself, our marriage, our children, could look at this and participate in their own way in the grieving or mourning process, whether it's something fresh in their minds or something that happened a long time ago."

Richard Turner is no stranger to memorial art.

d," which honored victims of the Cambodian
1 the SAC art gallery in 1984.

Get 12 weeks FREE
Hurry! Sale ends 11/13.

START TRIAL >

ies" (1986), "Memory's Vault" (1988), "Anaheim Veterans Memorial" (1999), "See Angkor and Die" (2009) and "We Too Were Once Strangers" (2015), a Japanese American farmers memorial in Santa Ana.

Richard Turner has crafted dozens of other public art projects as well.

Over the past two months, Richard Turner's latest exhibit at Santa Ana College has quietly drawn students, staff and faculty who remember the dynamic dean and champion of the arts, who served on the board of Arts Orange County and several committees for local arts organizations, including South Coast Repertory, the Bowers Kidseum and the Orange County School of the Arts.

"This really just hits home," said Phillip Marquez, chair of SAC's art department and gallery director. "I remember some of these outfits that she's worn. I feel almost like it was necessary for it to be here, especially the first show, because Sylvia dedicated her career to the school. It's very important that we honor her here."

Richard Turner hopes to take this show on the road, and share with others the experience of life, loss, grieving and acceptance.

"Some people say they feel her presence, and others say they feel her absence," he said. "So I feel like it works. It does what it's supposed to do."

If You Go

What: "Air Becomes Breath"

When: Through Nov. 9; hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesdays

Where: Santa Ana College Main Art Gallery, Building C, 1530 W. 17th St., Santa Ana

Cost: Free

Information: (714) 564-5615 or visit sac.edu/art

Richard Chang is a contributor to Times Community News.

Copyright © 2017, Daily Pilot

This article is related to: [Art](#), [Arts and Culture](#), [Lung Cancer](#)