

# Randy Colosky

**Secret Handshake**

**ampersand international arts**

**October 22 - December 10, 2010**

“The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Secret Handshake

At once retrospective and premiere, Secret Handshake celebrates artist Randy Colosky's lifelong decision to work free from the scaffolding of a signature style or specific medium.

The self-described “offspring of a long line of makers genetically disposed to create,” Colosky found his calling in junior high when he took up ceramics. Through building guerilla kilns constructed and fueled by the materials he could scavenge, Colosky's ability to master any process was born.

Colosky's path is not direct nor is it easy but it is definitely a chosen path. Fluent in art history as well as deeply embedded in street art, Colosky knows exactly what he's doing when he selects from his mental and physical toolbox. His confidence with materials would almost be taken as a swagger if it was not for the deeply romantic, darkly humorous and ultimately generous art he creates.

Often referred to as “an artist's artist” for his range and skill, Colosky relies not on stylistic consistency but on honesty of craft to reveal his serious intentions.

While the original objective of the show was to explicate an art practice that defies easy categorization, something bigger happened along the way. The process of revisiting old work uncovered themes, opportunities and issues that propelled Colosky to create a significant body of new work that, in and of itself, reveals the multivalent nature of his practice.

As to the title of the show, Colosky confesses, “the ‘secret handshake’ is your truth. The handshake is basically saying in the face of anything, if you follow your truth, you are going to survive.

- Tracy Wheeler, September 2010



*Secret Handshake - ampersand international arts  
Installation View - October, 2010*

## Older Works 1995-2008

*Untitled*, 1995

*They Really Built that Place in the Middle of Nowhere*, 2004

*The Myth of Living Green*, 2004

*Texas Tea Party*, 2004

*Lands Before Mans*, 2005

*The History of History*, 2005

*Listen*, 2005

*I Just Wanted You to Know*, 2007

*Meeting*, 2007

*Untitled*, 2007

*Untitled*, 2008

*Untitled*, 2008

*Celestial Ways*, 2008

*Just a Matter of Time*, 2008

*This is What You Get, This is What We Get*, 2008

*The Ocean Refuses No River*, 2008

*After the Floods Came the Snakes*, 2008

*The Process of Letting Go*, 2008

*Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, 2008



*Secret Handshake - Older Works*  
*Installation View (detail), 2010*

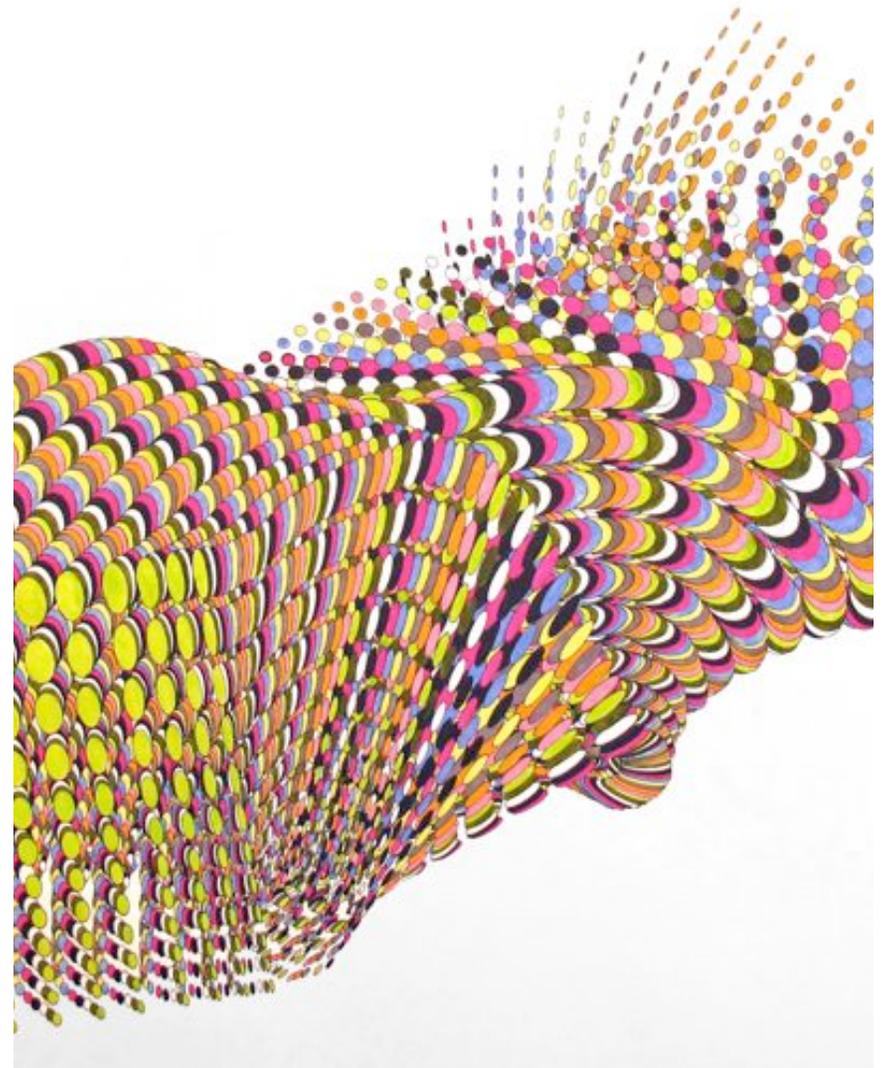
## Randy Colosky

Essay by Sarah Smith

Randy Colosky's diverse range of work speaks of his openness to consistent change. The drawings, sculptures, paintings and videos making up his most recent body of work are sometimes simple, oftentimes complex, mercurial and full of contradiction. It can really be all over the map, but that goes with the terrain. It's Randyland. He coined it himself years ago and it still applies. Randy has never been one to stick to a particular style, theme or genre, not to mention stick to any particular tool or medium. He is a skilled carpenter and continually finds inspiration from the tools of the trade.

In his solo show at ampersand, *Secret Handshake*, the new sculptures are made from familiar materials: bricks, lawn gazing balls, metal bracketing straps, cinderblocks and expansion foam. The array of low brow, off-the-shelf items that make up the raw materials of his sculptures are not exactly "objects of desire." Combining his sensibility as an artist and his skill as a carpenter, he takes these found objects to task. He interrogates them. He won't let them be just decoration. In *On the Shoulders of Giants*, 2010, he distills a brick down to its fundamental characteristics, its height, length and depth laid out before us in a grid, then cuts into it, divides the given dimensions and multiplies it across a blanket of bricks like a virus. He takes something rigid and uniform and gives it organic life.

In other pieces, Randy offers an old school challenge to contemporary versions of the readymade. A trip to Home Depot got him the elements for *Still Life: Cinder Block with Great Stuff™ Expansion Foam*, 2010 and a trip to the foundry sealed the deal. *Cinder Block* is a bronze sculpture, but the paint job fools the eye so well, most people aren't going to get it. Any credibility this humble cinderblock gained during its trip to the foundry, any elevation to high art through its material transformation from cast concrete to cast bronze has been subjugated with a wink of the eye and a wicked sense of humor. Randy negates any high-brow adoration for this bronze found object with a thin veil of faux calling it out for what it is: a double entendre of a sculpture with two ambiguous meanings. One of which feels safe and firmly embedded in the fact that it's a bronze. But his perfect trompe l'oeil paint job adds such the indecorous connotation. (continued on page 11)

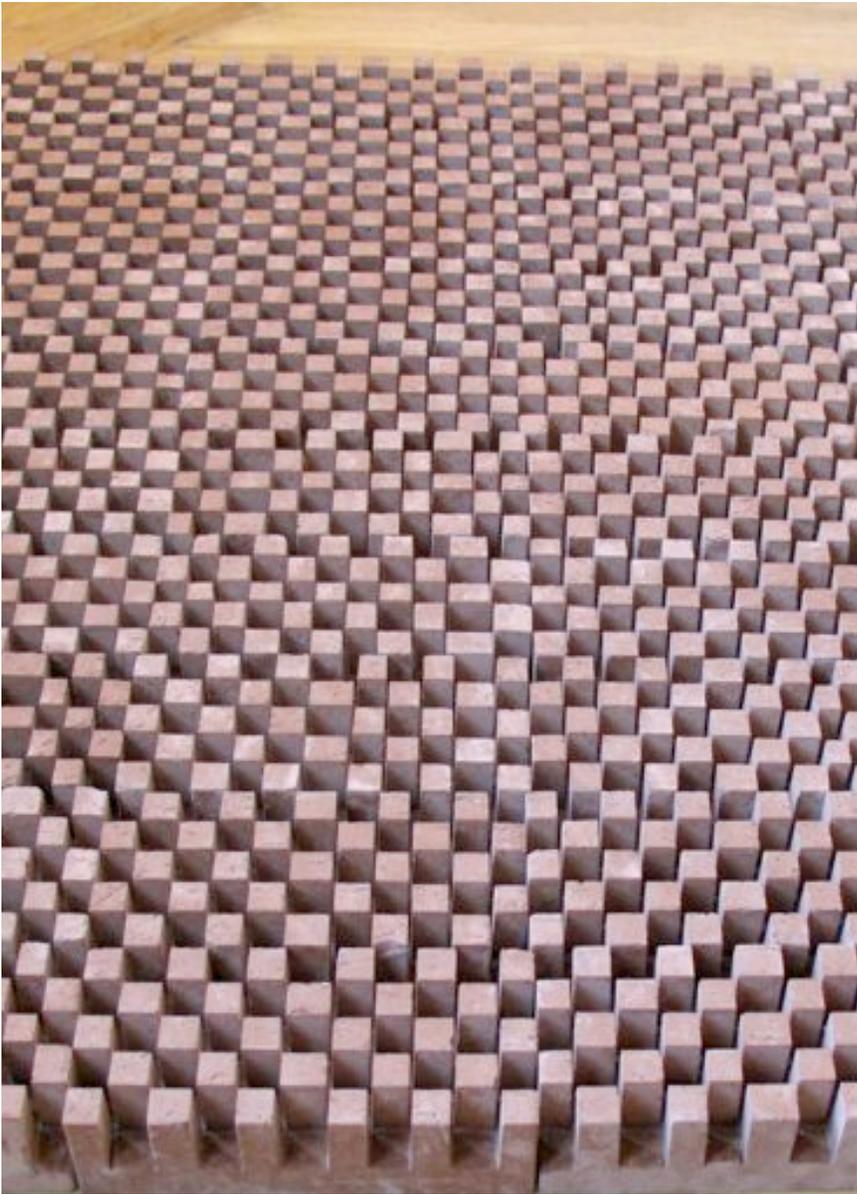


*Nondeterministic Algorithm No. 4, 2010*  
Ink on Paper 22"x 22"



*Still Life: Cinder Block with Great Stuff™ Expansion Foam, 2010*  
Bronze, Paint 16" L x 8"W x 14" H

(continued from page 6)



*On the Shoulders of Giants, 2010*  
Diamond Cut Brick 40"W x 43L" x 2.5H

Process and concept overlap. By daring to tread on that slippery slope between artwork and craftwork Randy opens himself up to constant challenges. Continually seeking out different ways to best reflect a concept he turns to unconventional mediums. The idea of using a 20-gauge shotgun as an art-making instrument in and of itself is replete with contradiction and complexity. Surprisingly, the gun was used to create some of his most subtle pieces. A series of delicate paper snowflakes titled *On Becoming Is* (2009-2010) was made at the Jackson Arms shooting range in South San Francisco. Inspired by fractals, the hexagonal symmetry of ice crystals and the idea that no two snowflakes are exactly alike, Randy chose a tool least associated with subtlety and one most likely to inflict chaos. The folded paper targets were fired upon, torn apart and fractured in an instant in one grand gesture. Unfolding the bullet-ridden papers back at his studio revealed sublime patterns that transcended the very nature of how they were created.

Transformation and transcendence are themes that weave through his art. His new series of ink drawings are meditations on these ideas. While reading a book about physics and string theory, Randy was inspired by scientific discussions about multiple dimensions of space-time (at least 11) interacting on an elemental level to give us forces, matter and form. The template he uses to make one of his *Nondeterministic Algorithm* drawings is a tactile symbol of a moment of space-time. It's colored and moved, colored and moved across the paper until a larger form emerges. This simple repetition grounds Randy in the idea that things are larger, more complex constructs of a far more basic system. "This is an area of great fascination for me because it dovetails with a lot of the spiritual principles I subscribe to, like the meditation I do. In meditation, the more I am able to discipline and calm my mind down and become more aware in the present moment, from moment to moment, the more I inhabit a space of simpler and greater awareness of what I am. Things feel more universal. There is no history or future to constantly have to navigate just being."

Observing, teasing out perceived realities, breaking things down to elemental pieces, and exploring through process the complexity of where we are—this is what continues to inspire Randy. Guided by intuition, experimentation and playfulness, with a myriad of tools at his fingertips, I like to think of Randy as a construction worker by day and a deconstructionist by night in his studio using materials poetically and symbolically with a desire to spark revelations.

Sarah Smith  
September, 2010



*Remnant of the Excavation  
Project*, 2005  
Turned *Ficus microcarpa nitida*  
30" diameter x 33" H

*The History of History*, 2010  
Bronze, Paint  
28" H x 26" L x 14" W



*Wizard Stick (detail)*, 2010  
Urethane  
64" H x 24" L x 22" W

*Of Man and Machine*, 2010  
Nickel Plated Bronze  
Standard 10" Pipe Wrench



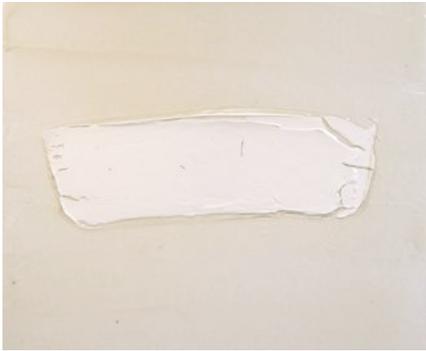
*The Shape of Things to Come*, 2010  
Hand-carved Engineered Ceramic  
12" diameter x 4.5" H

*Deepwater Horizon*, 2010  
Iron-on transfer, paper  
10" W x 9" H





*Torrit Triptych (detail)*, 2010  
Oil on Canvas  
12" x 12"



*Minus-Minus (detail)*, 2010  
Oil on Canvas  
12" x 12"



*What Is Is*, 2010  
Bronze, Paint  
7" L x 3" W x 3" H



*Simpsons in the XYZ Axist*, 2010  
Galvanized Steel 32" diameter by 6" off wall

**Randy Colosky - Artist**

Oakland-based conceptual artist Randy Colosky draws inspiration from life's contradictions. A BFA in Ceramics from Kansas City Art Institute in 1987 coupled with a keen interest in science and art history has led him down several exploratory paths to his art making. Humor and irony play a vital role in his deconstructions. Recent exhibitions include SYZYGY at The Lab, a solo show at Adobe Books Back Room Gallery and Vaguely Paperly at Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago curated by Chris Johanson.

**Tracy Wheeler - Curator**

Tracy Wheeler is an emerging curator, secret artist, keen art collector and a creative writer. Ms. Wheeler attended Douglass College, Rutgers University where she acquired a BA in Political Science. As the president of the Board of Directors of Southern Exposure from 2004 to 2010, Ms Wheeler was instrumental in stewarding the organization toward its present gallery space.

**Sarah Smith - Writer**

Sarah Smith is an artist and sometimes curator who lives and works in San Francisco. Recent curatorial projects include Alchemy at Southern Exposure and The Junk Mail! Show at The Soap Gallery, both in 2010. Her studio art practice combines deep interests in symbolism, poetry, and Americana with the techniques she's gleaned from years working as a faux finisher in private residences and as a scenic painter for theater. Her drawings and sculptural installations have been shown at Swarm Gallery, ampersand international arts and the Project Space at The Headlands Center for the Arts.

**ampersand international arts**

Founded by Bruno Mauro in 1999, ampersand international arts is a contemporary arts space in San Francisco's Dogpatch neighborhood dedicated to providing exhibiting opportunities to passionate, innovative and talented artists. By engaging with a number of independent curators, ampersand discovers, champions and nurtures emerging and mid-career artists and creates a critical dialogue around their work.

**Special Thanks:**

**For loans from their collections:** Aliza Rood, Brion Nuda Rosch, Courtney Fink, Diane Dec, Eva Shu, Jani Mussetter, John Dwyer, Julia Weinberg, Ken Colosky, Kristina Lewis, Leah Vermulen, Marialidia Marcotulli, Matt Reid, Paul Rauschelbach/ Tracy Wheeler, Phil McGuaghy, Sarah Million, Rita Delorenzo.

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