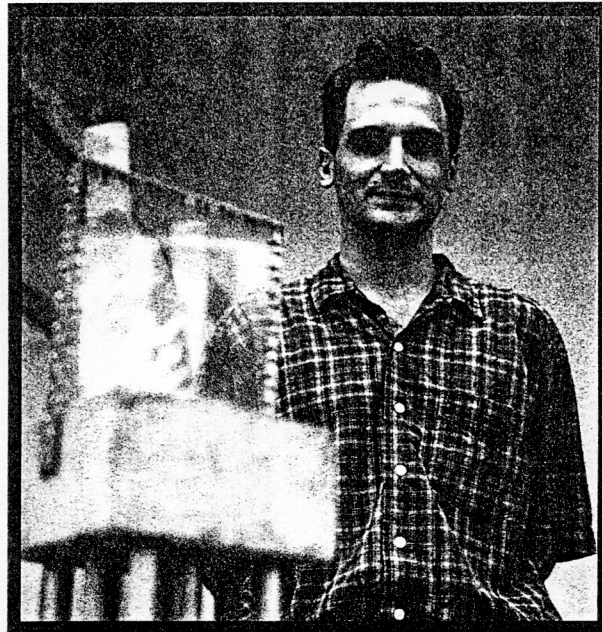


**Matthew
Garrison ('86)**



While I was at Parker I WAS TAKING A LOT OF PRE-COLLEGE COURSES AT THE ART INSTITUTE, AND THE COMBINATION OF THE CREATIVE ATMOSPHERE AT BOTH PLACES WAS REALLY IMPORTANT TO

me in terms of getting a sense of what all of this would involve. It got more intense after that. I guess it's just because the stakes get higher and higher.

Matthew Garrison graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1990 with a B.F.A. in sculpture, having spent his junior year in Rome studying Italian art, culture and language as part of the school's European honors program. He also studied at the Aegean School of Design in Paros, Greece.

A partial list of his exhibitions includes shows at the CDS, Spring and Amos Eno Galleries in New York; the International Fine Arts Center in Higashi Hiroshima City, Japan; New York University; and the San Diego Art Institute.

He is now completing the M.F.A. program at Hunter College in

Manhattan. "I'm trying to make it last," he says, "because this studio is so nice. But since I only have this one semester left, I'll have to leave soon."

Other than a collection of Kipling stories, a copy of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, a few art books and several issues of *Artforum* on a small bookcase, Garrison's studio is spare and utilitarian, without windows and with concrete floors and walls.

Perhaps in keeping with this austerity, the materials he uses are contemporary. "I always try to use the materials of our time," he says, never working with bronze, for example, because "it seems like such a traditional material." Rather, he works with "what you see in your home, in the city, behind your drywall or in your car."

The piece that probably best represents this idea is "Fear of Falling." The

exterior dimensions of this house-like structure are approximately 7' x 7' x 7'. Two-by-fours rise up from the floor and across the top, suggesting walls and a ceiling. Since the drywall only comes up four feet from the floor, it is easy to look in from any vantage point. To Garrison, however, "It's almost like a cage, since there's no place to enter or exit."

Inside, Garrison has positioned a gateleg table that has been painted black. It sits on a small burgundy rug, which Garrison describes as "just another reference to residential space."

Both the table and rug are held three feet off the floor by stretched fishnet that has been painted blue ("to indicate either sky or water," Garrison says. "That kind of falling reference.")

The floor is covered with kitchen linoleum that has been painted black, "representative," Garrison says, "of a void or something unknown."

He feels that "artists use what they've experienced directly in their own background. I've traveled, but this is really my background, a residential space. This is what I reflect on—roaches and linoleum."

The principal character in "Fear of Falling" is only inches high—"a little guy riding a skateboard," is how Garrison describes him. Powered by two AA batteries, he skates about the surface of the table, usually around the perimeter, coming perilously close to the edge, but never falling.

Except this once. "It's never fallen off until this evening," Garrison explains. "Because I was having company, I dusted the table. I think it's slippery now, from the Pledge."

The rest of the pieces in his studio are radically different, being much smaller and utilizing higher-tech materials. Perhaps most striking are a series of face-like masks that have been immersed in foot-square blocks of Plexiglas. Slightly tinted and off-axis, the faces look tormented, riven.

Garrison constructs the faces using an oil-base clay, from which he makes a plaster mold. The mask itself is made from a pastel-hued translucent plastic resin. "Each one is unique, because I destroy the mold when I chisel it out."

In some instances, the Plexiglas is encircled by stainless steel window

screening. In addition, industrial screws have been driven into the sides of the pieces, further violating this perimeter. To Garrison, there is an "obsessive quality that results from the stretched screen and all those screws. I think it adds tension to the faces."

Garrison's materials are not entirely contemporary. One earlier piece in his studio is an approximately six-foot-long horizontal half cylinder that has been constructed from strips of timber. Over the top is an inch-thick sheet of Plexiglas into which a figure has been etched.

"The inspiration for this piece," Garrison says, "is something I saw in a Shaker village in Massachusetts. They would make cradles for their elderly; the cradles would eventually become their coffins. That full circle was fascinating to me, and I wanted to do something that stemmed from having seen that. I tried to make it more contemporary with the materials [the Plexiglas], but still suggest a certain amount of history by using an older wood."

Even though he's sold several masks, "it's always such a long shot in the arts. I've been fortunate," he says, "to have exhibited as much as I have and to have worked as an assistant to several artists."

He assisted Ellsworth Kelly for three years, working in Kelly's "beautiful studio in upstate New York." Garrison's primary jobs were to "stretch his canvases—these huge, shaped canvases—and to keep the studio running, essentially."

He also worked with Judith Shea on "The Other Monument." Situated at

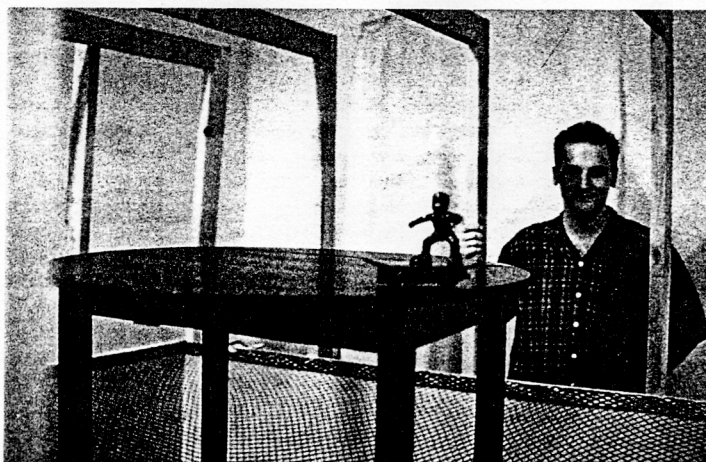
the southeast entrance to Central Park, Shea's 18-foot-high piece plays against the monumental gold-plated statue of General Sherman made by Saint-Gaudens in 1903. Shea's piece depicts an African-American male—"It's like a haunting shadow of the Saint-Gaudens piece in front of it," Garrison says.

He currently works for the sculptor Petah Coyne, assisting her with the substructures of her 200- to 900-pound pieces. "They can't be put on the floor because their own weight would crush them," Garrison says. "They're all suspended from chain hoists. I've become very good at moving them without ever putting them down."

Even though assisting other artists takes considerable time away from his own work, "I'm at least working in the field," Garrison says. "So many of my friends do construction in order to survive." In either case, "It's really a challenge to support a studio and have a place to live and buy materials."

"The arts are such a strange environment. You try to make the work and you try to get shown and you also have to support yourself—in my case, by working for all these artists. It all just adds up to a kind of intensity, focusing on a lot of things all at once. Hopefully I can make the work in the studio the sole focus at some point."

For now, he says, "I work pretty much full time for other people, and then I come to the studio at night. In a way it's like moonlighting, to do what's most important to what I eventually want to achieve."



Matthew Garrison with "Fear of Falling."