



## ART feature



Gregory Barsamian's "Lather"

## Realizing His Dreams

### GREGORY BARSAMIAN PHYSICALLY REPRESENTS THE SURREAL IN HIS WORKS

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Gregory Barsamian's exploration of technology is refreshingly low-tech — and a breath of fresh air coming to the Wood Street Galleries. After its two most recent shows that took on animation and the Internet with works that were at times so technologically difficult that most lay art viewers found them impenetrable, Barsamian's *About Time* manages to speak eloquently and simply with complex sculptural installations that nicely blend concept, medium and craft.

This is not to say that Barsamian's art lacks sophistication; the Brooklyn-based artist makes conceptually and mechanically layered pieces that resonate with humor and personality. Barsamian will use lights and motors to visually represent his dreams — which he has been documenting with a tape recorder since 1983 — in a way that also suggests, three-dimensionally, cinematic motion. Meaning, he adheres images in mechanistically intricate ways by constructing mobiles, helixes and other moving structures, so that

the images themselves move. In this manner, viewers can watch these still images pass by as one would in a flipbook.

Barsamian's scenes seem to have stepped right out of a nightmare or horror film, or that place in your mind that sews together the bizarre and the cute, so that his art works are like dreams themselves: full of strange juxtapositions and fragmented narratives.

For example, "Forty," a sculpture that will be on display at the Wood Street Galleries, consists of a hanging carousel of small green

goblins, with heads full of snaked hair, each imbedded in a birthday cake. In true dream-like fashion, the hair particles morph into birthday candles, and the entire piece spins from the ceiling of the gallery. It's just the kind of thing one might remember the next morning, though only your dream analyst will know why — or actually care.

But Barsamian makes the details of the mind that generally don't make sense interesting, and in the context of art, they seem to mean something. And even if they don't, these moving sculptures hold up well as structural and visual components: "Orphan," another piece coming to Wood Street, is a head that morphs into a teddy bear, and "Postcards from the Fringe," resembles a reversed magic lantern, ensconced in images of highways, implosions and other familiarly eccentric images.

His early works were based on pure mechanics: "Dipping Digits" is a tabletop sculpture composed of a round primordial form with 16 sets of protruding arms and hands that dip into open but illegible books. As the hands literally scoop up the text, a lizard suddenly emerges from each book only to slip through the hands. To this end, the technology he employs is simple, though his use of it suggests something much larger than the movements he creates here.

*About Time* also represents a trend in this year's Arts Festival that might not simply be a coincidence: Festival curator Katherine Talcott seems to have brought to Pittsburgh a diverse group of conceptual artists who make art that transcends their own concepts — from Jeremy Boyle's installations that play on sight and sound (at the Three Rivers Festival Gallery on Penn Avenue, Downtown) to Cat Chow's sculptural garments she makes from non-traditional materials like dollar bills and metal chains to Patrick Dougherty's site-specific outdoor structures made from only natural materials. One doesn't need a manual to read it; nor do the artists provide one at the expense of the art itself. ☞

*About Time* opens on Fri., June 6, with a reception on Fri., June 13, from 5:30-7:30 p.m., and runs through July 26 at the Wood Street Galleries, Downtown. 412-281-8722.