



## ***Mark Fox*** ***In the Anderson Collection***

Mark Fox  
*Black Sawhorseman, 2007*  
Oil and ink on paper with linen tape, metal pins and wood  
81" x 65" x 30"

Mark Fox has long been interested in familiar, everyday materials. Born in Cincinnati in 1963, Fox received his BFA from Washington University in St. Louis and his MFA from Stanford University. In Cincinnati he worked for eight years with a performance ensemble called Saw Theater, which blurred the boundaries between theater, visual art, music, puppetry and installation. Fox now works primarily with paper, creating projects that explore the unexpected sculptural qualities of this ephemeral medium.

Fox's free-standing sculpture, *Black Sawhorseman* from 2007 is exemplary of this interest. The sculpture is part of a series of "sawhorsemen," collectively titled *The Four Sawhorsemen of the Apocalypse*. In the bible, the coming of the four horsemen collectively signify the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. Each has its own symbolism and is associated with a particular color: the red horseman carries a sword and signifies war; the black horseman carries scales and signifies famine and plague; the white horseman carries a bow with no arrows and symbolizes conquest; and the pale green horseman symbolizes sickness and death. A whimsical reinterpretation of this biblical narrative, Fox's series draws both on personal allusions and on Fox's long-standing fascination with apocalyptic, utopian and mythological imagery. The result is a series of sculptures that exist at the intersection of the legible and the illegible, the controlled and the chaotic, the sacred and the profane.

Fox began the *Four Sawhorsemen* series with the *Red Sawhorseman*. The piece emerged out of his recognition that a continuing interest in apocalyptic scenarios ran throughout his daily drawings. Deciding to pursue these interests both thematically and formally, Fox began to do research on the apocalyptic imagery of Northern Renaissance artists Brueghel and Bosch as well as on more contemporary instances of apocalyptic thinking ranging from the Branch Davidians to the war in Iraq. Drawing on this research to create more ink and watercolor sketches, he gathered together a significant stockpile of images which he then cut out and meticulously reassembled into a cloud-



Mark Fox,  
*Red Sawhorseman, 2007*

like cluster of images that form the “body” of the horseman. The tangle of brightly-colored images includes devil-like faces, swirls of smoke and words like “Messiah” and “Left Behind.” A highly chaotic structure full of references to mythic, historical and contemporary allusions to violence and war, Fox’s primary interest in this piece was in addressing the way these long-standing ideas continue to have an on-going presence in and impact on contemporary life.

The *Black Sawhorseman*, the second sculpture in the series and the piece in the Anderson collection, both builds on the model of the first and also moves the series in a new direction. In this piece, Fox reduced his color palate to black and white and culled his source material this time not from images but from text. Discussing this decision, he cites an interest in exploring the creative possibilities that develop out of a decision to work within limits as one of the key motivating forces behind this development in his work.<sup>1</sup> The resulting sculpture is characterized by the long flowing lines that, on first glance at least, lend it a far less visually chaotic appearance than the tangled array of images and text that make up the body of the red sculpture. When understood relative to the larger context of Fox’s working process, however, the same interest in striking a delicate balance between chaos and control is just as apparent.

Fox’s *Black Sawhorseman* is constructed not only out of words and word fragments but also out of letters and letter fragments. The cloud-like constellation of cut-out markings that form the body of the sawhorseman are quite literally extracted from Pope Pius XII’s 1950 text “The Doctrine of the Assumption.” Growing up in a strict Catholic family, Fox had long been confused by this dense document, which solidifies Mary’s assumption into heaven as unquestionable truth. To make this piece Fox scripted the text out in full calligraphic long hand before cutting it into pieces. He then painstakingly rejoined the fragments of both words and letters into the new form, only occasionally retaining the integrity of the original words in the process. (The words “bountiful” and “God,” for example, are still visible in the final sculpture.) Though the cutting apart of the text might seem like an act of violence towards it, Fox considers it instead to be a form of homage – one that inserts an element of levity into the document’s complex and weighty syntax. A second reading might point to the way, by rendering the text illegible, the sculpture literalizes the mandate of unquestioned faith that Pius XII’s document was first written to enact.

Fox has continued to work with text in the third sculpture in the series, the *White Sawhorseman*, this time using a section of the biblical account of the Immaculate Conception as his source material. Put together, the series continues a long-standing interest in his work in situating his work at the intersection of high and low art forms. The series title *The Four Sawhorsemen of the Apocalypse*, for example, not only makes a biblical allusion to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, but also references Fox’s past work with the “saw” theater, and the rough-hewn wood sawhorse that forms the base of the sculptures. A clear reference to carpentry, the sawhorse itself also has biblical connotations and might be considered a reference to Joseph, who was a carpenter. Read in this manner the *Black Sawhorseman* in particular takes on an added dimension, making a three-part allusion to Mary (The Doctrine of the Assumption), Joseph, (via the sawhorse) and Jesus (through the reference to the Apocalypse and the second coming of Christ). At the same time, however, Fox’s use of the sawhorse might be read in more self-reflexive terms. Like carpentry, after all, Fox’s work is also a form of construction, if one far more delicate and ephemeral than the kind of building done with plywood and hammers.

Karen Rapp  
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<sup>1</sup>Information from Chad Longmore at Larissa Goldston Gallery.