

STEPHEN LAUB
ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My parents were born in Germany and lived in Berlin until 1940, when they narrowly escaped to America. Most other family members perished in the Holocaust. I am first-generation American, but my deepest personal references are connected to this history. My intense curiosity about this connection exists in large part because, while we spoke German at home, I was told very little of my parents' German past. What they eventually revealed, and what I discovered through my own research, has continued to influence my art: historical images and everyday objects are overlaid with personal memories, and mystery.

In my earliest art works, my family's photo albums, the only possessions of value my parents brought to America, were my archival resource. In one series from my early performance art, *Relations* 1972, slides from my family's photo album were projected as life-size images. Wearing white clothes, I walked into the projection and, using mirrors, aligned myself within each projection, adjusting myself until I "fit" into photographs of my mother, my father, my grandfather, or myself as a young boy. The use of photographs as documents of social history and personal identity evolved into a series of performances, videos and sculptures (*Silver* 1989-91 and *Gold* 1987-89) constructed as responses to specific historical photographs with broader historical associations. The shapes of each sculpture reiterated the shape of an essential object within the photograph, while serving as its gilded frame. For example, the shape of a railroad car frames a small photo of the site where France capitulated to Nazi Germany. Because of the scale difference, the viewer perceives the gilded object first; only upon closer inspection is the additional reference revealed. In another work, the shape of a gilded fountain frames a small photo of a segregated water fountain in Alabama in the 1950's.

More recently I have examined archival film as an even more resonant source of imagery. I have scanned dozens of films in search of a few frames that reveal gestures and situations that seem to resonate beyond the original contexts. In the *Tarred* 2001-03 series each sculpture's shape traces a trajectory of action within a film fragment or of the filming camera. The pieces are made of bent wood and coated with tar. Film stills are framed in sequence at points along the trajectory. Each shape forms a kind of calligraphic writing, a diagram of movement reconstructed from a few seconds of time. *Hats* 2005 is a series of sculptures that cross-examines objects and the images they host. Each hat is constructed of wood and surfaced with metal leaf. The hatband supports a film sequence as a printed "loop" of historical film, capturing a crowd at a fascist parade or political rally.

Hats, as personal articles, function as reminders of individual identity, whether as bystander or participant in a crowd, and are recurring images in my work. In the *Pulp* series (2007-08) I cast hats in handmade paper, from ground pulp fiction paperbacks, art history textbooks and other literature. In *Tip to Toe* (2008-09) actual hats and shoes protrude through mask-like openings in photographs of the same, in an examination of perception and projection that extends back to my early performances.