

“Still at it”

The Art and Schematics of Rich deCorse

July 17 - December 18, 2016



CASTELLANI
ART MUSEUM
OF NIAGARA UNIVERSITY



Rich deCorse demonstrating the wiring and attachment of a CD player to his *Fuge Alphonse* sculpture, Photo by Edward Millar, 2016

“Still at it” The Art and Schematics of Rich deCorse

The clanking of gears, the flowing melodies of a piano, and the etching of pen across paper: these are a few of the sounds you encounter in Rich deCorse’s workshop. Among the many tables and the many more tools that lay upon them, Rich melds his artistic and occupational repertoire to give life to his artworks.

Drawing on this assemblage of materials and ideas, pieced together as a puzzle into a coherent whole, Rich creates unique works that reference one another in the way each was designed and rendered.

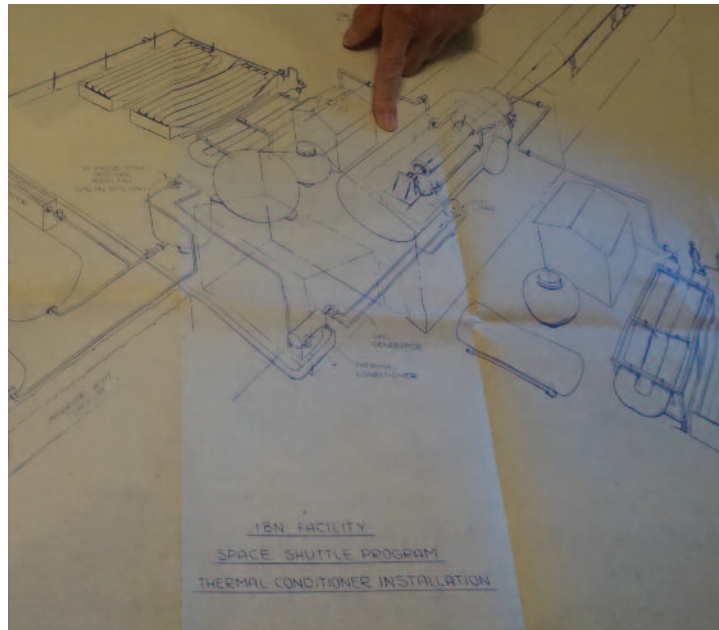
“Still at it”: The Art and Schematics of Rich deCorse explores the intersection of work and art: how the knowledge, skills, and techniques Rich gained as a design engineer at Bell Aerospace influence, shape, and relate to his artistic endeavors.

From drafting proposal sketches to building their three-dimensional counterpart, through designing assembly patterns to problem solving technical schema: the echoes of an engineering paradigm reverberate throughout.

In addition to these sketches and contraptions, Rich developed a background in painting and wood carving through both formal and informal instruction since his youth. Many of these paintings focus on local community life, especially of the jazz community in Niagara Falls and Lewiston to which he has been a longtime participant.

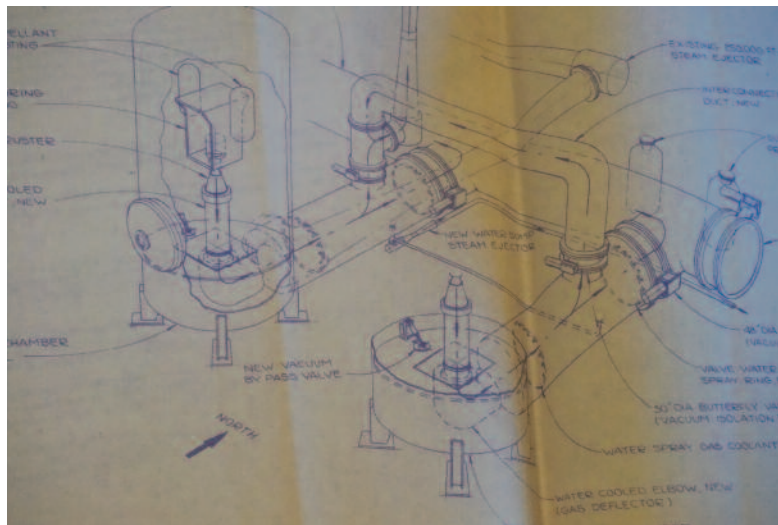
A playful undercurrent of humor runs throughout his works, reflecting the pleasure derived from creating each piece. It is in that blended artistic and occupational creative process—the research, the planning, the building, the tweaking—that Rich deCorse is still at it, and still having fun.

Edward Y. Millar, Curator of Folk Arts



1BN Facility: Space Shuttle Program—Thermal Conditioner Installation, Rich deCorse, 1976

Nicknamed the “Thunder Chicken” due to the incredible noise it produced when it started up, this proposal depicts the layout for the installation of a thermal conditioner supply-line to the 1BN facility. Thermal conditioners heat up the fuel stored in a rocket, providing the propulsion.



900 LB A/B Altitude Test Facility, Rich deCorse, 1974

This proposal depicts an altitude test chamber; a facility that simulates a space environment, used to ‘stress test’ how certain chemicals and equipment would function in zero gravity conditions.

SECTION 1

What is a Design Engineer?

A design engineer drafts a technical illustration: an image that depicts the different parts of a mechanism or structure, how they are connected, and how they interact with one another. These design proposals were an integral part of any project: providing a schematic layout for construction and an opportunity to analyze and modify individual components or their connections.

Technical illustrations or proposal sketches were originally done by hand, and later through a CAD (computer-aided design) program as drafting technology became more widely adopted in the late 1970s.

At Bell Aerospace, Rich was a design engineer in the Rocket Facilities division, drafting technical illustrations on a wide variety of projects, including proposals to the U.S. space program.

“I was a design engineer...but I wasn’t a graduate engineer... it just meant I did my own ‘figuring’ more or less... I did a lot of the preliminary design work, laying out a picture of what we wanted to do.”

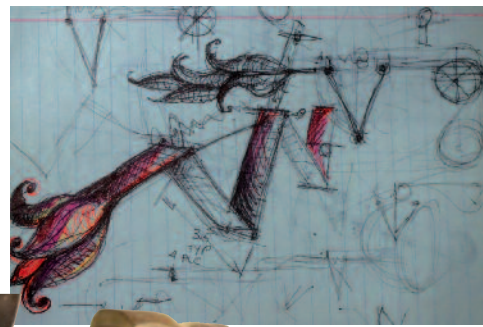
— Rich deCorse



Pretty Bird – Hat Jump
Mechanism Sketch,
Rich deCorse, 2010



Chimeric Canine
proposal sketch,
Rich deCorse,
ca. 1999



Chimeric Canine
launch mechanism,
Rich deCorse,
ca.1999



Mimi Bird, Rich deCorse, 2011



Chimeric Canine, Rich deCorse, 1999

SECTION 2

Work, Art, and Artwork

Rich deCorse continues to use the skills, techniques, and knowledge that he gained as a design engineer in much of his work, though most visibly in his kinetic and static sculptures. Using his occupational skillset as an aesthetic medium places Rich in a tradition of folk artists who uniquely draw on their work experience to create art.

In designing and building each sculpture, Rich focuses not only on how it will look, but also how it will work: how the specific components, mechanisms, or gears interact with one another and the sculpture as a whole. This compartmentalized design draws on his engineering experience: if a section breaks or malfunctions, it can be taken out and repaired without compromising the integrity of the whole piece.

A subtler influence can be seen in the creative ‘problem-solving’ process behind each work: the research, the proposal sketches, and—for the sculptures—their creation. Every sculpture, every sketch, and every painting is an exercise in exploration—to find both image and function.

**“What they
instilled in (me),
and showed me
out there,
hangover my
whole life...so
everything I build,
I still do it without
even thinking.”**

– Rich deCorse



Fuge Alphonse, Rich deCorse, 1982



Lou Custodi & Bourbon St. Jazz, Rich deCorse, 2005



Four up front, Three behind—The New Upstate Express, Rich deCorse, 2001

SECTION 3

Through Ink and Key

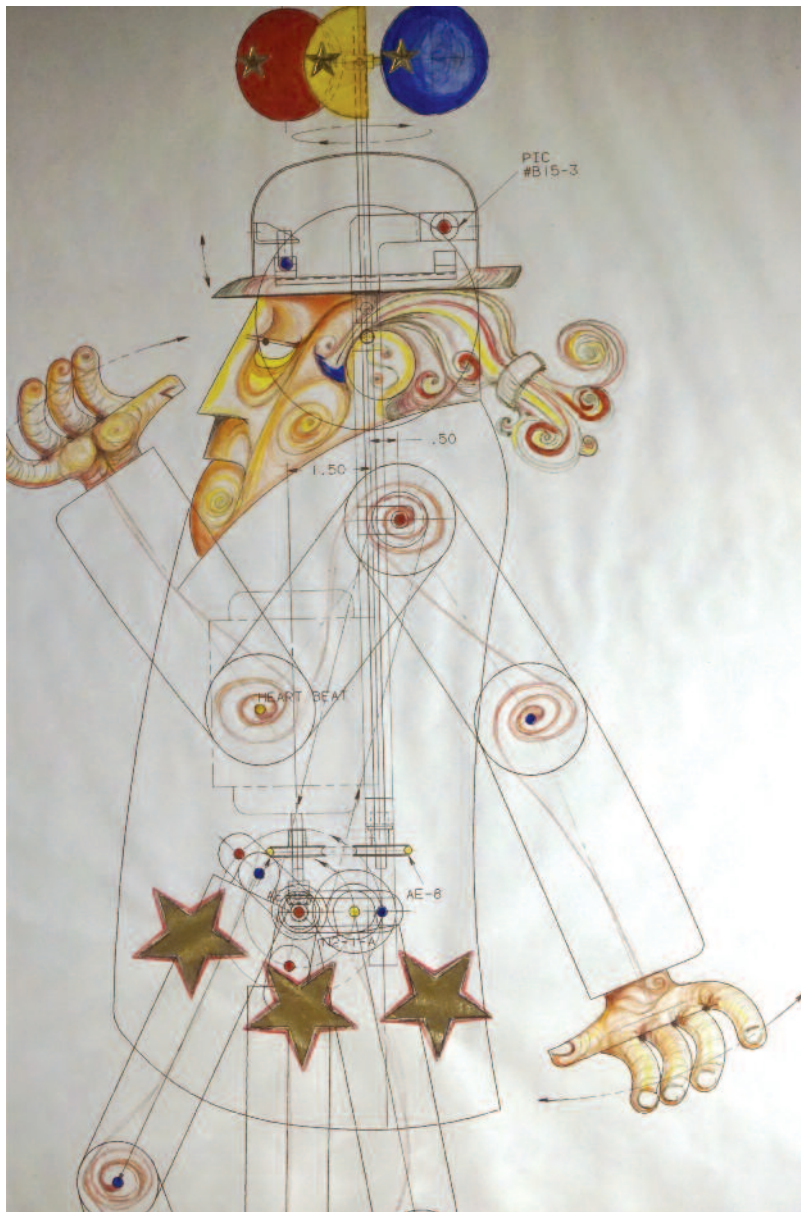
Rich's lifelong passion for jazz is reflected in much of his work: from the music emanating from the speakers of his *Fuge Alphonse* sculpture, to the instrumentation and imagery in fictional sketches, through to the depiction of local musicians. A jazz pianist himself, Rich has followed and participated in the jazz scene in the Buffalo-Niagara region throughout the course of his life.

By focusing on the musicians and community members in the local jazz scene in Niagara County—especially Niagara Falls and Lewiston—Rich provides a face to some of the individuals who have shaped and influenced the experience of the genre in the region. As a number of the musicians have passed on, that lasting image—whether in sketch or painting—preserves their legacy and role in guiding audiences through the many twists and turns of a jazz performance.

Whether through pen or piano, through ink or through key, Rich pursues the melody, improvisations, and distinct character of musicianship across his works.

“There were a lot of marvelous musicians from the Falls, especially guitarists...it was a lot of fun to paint and sketch all of the groups that came through—they were all so different (in personal style).”

— Rich deCorse



The Business of America is Business, Rich deCorse, 1990

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Curator: Edward Y. Millar

The Folk Arts Program of the Castellani Art Museum would like to thank Rich deCorse for providing an endless stream of knowledge and laughs in recounting and exploring his occupational folklife, art, and musical interests.

A special thank you to the rest of the CAM staff, work-study students, and volunteers for their assistance with this exhibition and programming.

Photographs by Edward Y. Millar



This exhibition and programming is made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.



**CASTELLANI
ART MUSEUM**
OF NIAGARA UNIVERSITY
castellaniartmuseum.org

Museum and Shop
Niagara University, NY 14109-1938
716.286.8200 fax: 716.286.8289
Tuesday to Saturday 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.
Docent tours available upon request. Call
716.286.8200 for additional information.

Castellani Art Museum at the Falls
Conference Center Niagara Falls
101 Old Falls Street Niagara Falls, NY 14303
716.286.8200 fax: 716.286.8289
Monday to Friday, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.