



## Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson

Dave Sayre

*How to Kill a Marvin Gaye Song*

MOCA Tucson

October 4, 2013- February 2, 2014

To say Dave Sayre's *métier* is cartoons is both true and only the tip of the tip of the iceberg. If as a child hours passed hypnotized by the "color and chaos" of the small screen, in adulthood he transposes topsy-turvy televised unreality onto canvas, and more recently into unruly, bumptious three-dimensionality. "How to Kill a Marvin Gaye Song" delineates the artist's rampaging id-driven cartoon cosmos wedded to painterly sophistication and exhilarating material and formal experimentation. Highlighting progress conflated with continuity, this exhibition starts with site-specific installations and sculptures that bring household products, moving images, and unorthodox effigies together, culminating with recent forays into rendering onto wildly patterned and bold single-hued fabrics that are draped, folded, bent, cut and brought off the wall, producing a vibrant, forceful emergence into the space of the room. Taken as a whole, along with clenched fists, disembodied legs, and gestural squiggles on these no-longer just canvases, a boisterously comical, captivating, and anarchic *mise en scène* vividly emerges.

"My subject matter is generally cartoons. After Saturday morning I would sit and draw for hours. They made me want to learn to draw." Acquiring that skill, prodigiously, he now brings what was sown during pre-adolescent fugue states in the glow of cathode ray tubes to a grown-up childlike exuberance merrily lacking in restraint, spilling out at MOCA into and onto preparatory drawings, paintings, squashed and inebriated wood and metal characters, and textile wall coverings. Sayre explains the evolution to using cloth as a mix of serendipity and newfound aesthetic attraction. "Fabrics did come from a trip to buy canvas. I looked up and saw rolls of all sorts of patterns and colors. Before I knew it I had a couple of boxes of all sorts of fabrics. From there I started patching them together to see what would happen. It really opened my mind, so the next thing I know the fabric was on the ground, which lead me into thinking about installations."

White polka dots on a swath of pink covers one whole wall, while across the way the collateral damage-inducing ("I am a hero who never fails; I cannot be bothered with such details") Underdog's legs protrude after a head-first crash into

solidity next to the break-out silhouette of the dastardly criminal escaped out of the bricks, who after hastily dropping his pilfered money bags magically bursts out of the building to freedom. To the right, a blood-red room, an ominous glow, a hapless mouse sucked into a whirring Bissel Promax Plus, while five 1970s-era TVs generate a cacophony of caricatured mayhem, assaultive, blaring, but also rib-tickling, a slightly nightmarish funhouse.

Once initiated into Sayre's homegrown, freewheeling introductory Gesamtkunstwerk, the viewer encounters a suite of pencil drawings, a jaded octopus contemplating a prismatic slide emanating from two massively elongated breasts, and a horse sliding down a rainbow. Magic mushrooms and swirls of color abound. Erupting with innuendo, unleashed repression, and just plain unrestrained hilarity, these lead to a hungry and possibly salacious wolf head in triplicate, *Wonderful's* vagina-faced Pinocchio vying for attention with Snow White and powerfully-built Mangiafuoco, and a field of bracing lavender containing an incomplete mouth, nose, and hand in an apotheosis of pictorial economy. A bunny, an arm ending in a candy apple red glove, orange circles on a blue ground, and seriously psychedelic whirls also make appearances. Associations and, one suspects, usually accidental echoes of Sigmar Polke and John Wesley wrestle and tussle in Sayre's works, with surprising cameos by Kenneth Noland's concentric circles and Blinky Palermo's monochromatic strips.

The animated cartoon's central and oft-deplored role since the 1950s as a primary and, some would argue, dominating early childhood shaper of behavioral norms, specifically in relation to gender issues and the construction of masculinity and femininity, is obviously relevant to Sayre's entire undertaking. Though, at least superficially, his attitude seems to favor celebration over condemnation. And while previously the artist dealt overtly with masculinity as symbolized by astronauts and racecar drivers, supposedly heroic though unattainable ideals, now there's a deeper take on men and women both that's not only about the problems and inherent absurdity of maleness but the universality of humanness, with animals and cartoons as unsuspecting surrogates. Whether the underpinnings of these works are psychological or more indebted to a sort of rapturous happenstance, an appreciation of the farcical ludicrousness of existence is transmuted through astounding color deployment and formal invention. With the "Marvin Gaye" series the textiles come to the fore, some with motifs, some with stripes, some solely hot pink vinyl (the quizzical, probably irritated dobbie in *My Better Half*), while pig's heads and Abstract Expressionistic touches compliment and clash with the underlying Watteau-esque pastoral scenes. Compositionally complex yet somehow everything in the right place, smart, blending and balancing the raw popular "lowbrow" subjects (featureless clowns, short-pants wearing roughnecks) to dots, bands, and a bizarre flat "space" quite unlike any other. Strange gestures proliferate, by not real characters that have become real in our consciousness and by extension in society. Here, menacingly and humorously in the installations, or impetuously in

the paintings, our idiot box childhood comes to life, untamed but corralled into these amazing pictorial fantasias of gloriously realized slapstick burlesque.

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### Corridor

*The Ambitious and  
Always Self-gratifying  
Life of Walter Beagan*  
2013  
Satin, polyester fiber  
filling, drywall, paint,  
cloth

*Untitled*  
2013  
Fabric

### Video Room

*Not What I Meant*  
2013  
vacuum cleaner,  
wood, vinyl, polyester  
fiber filling, metal, rug

*With You Me*  
2013  
Television sets,  
DVDs, vinyl, metal,  
lamp

### Central Gallery

Clockwise from stairs:

*Trouble with You*  
2013  
Wood, vinyl, shoes

*My Better Half*  
2013  
Acrylic on vinyl

*Nobody Told Me*  
2013  
Acrylic on vinyl

### Southwest Gallery

Clockwise from door:

*Jack Ferguson  
Unusual, Yet  
Somehow Ironic, Ploy*  
2013  
Acrylic on fabric

*Misunderstanding*  
2013  
Acrylic on fabric

*Moving On*  
2013  
Acrylic on fabric

*Here Not There*  
2013  
Acrylic on fabric

### Southeast Gallery

Clockwise from door:

*This Time without the  
Parade*  
2013  
Acrylic on fabric

*It's a Wonderful Life*  
2013  
Acrylic on fabric

*What's The Story*  
2013  
Acrylic on fabric, cloth



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### Drawing Room

Clockwise from door:

*The Unexplained and  
Often Misguided  
Voyage of Jane's  
Labia*  
2011

Acrylic on fabric

*Honey Hole*  
2011

Acrylic on fabric

*With Me You*  
2011

Acrylic on fabric

*Untitled drawings*  
2011-2013  
Pencil on paper

### Northwest Gallery

Clockwise from door:

*Wolf*  
2012  
Acrylic on canvas

*Wonderful*  
2012  
Acrylic on canvas

*From Here to There*  
2012  
Acrylic on canvas

### Northeast Gallery

Clockwise from door:

*Untitled #16*  
2013  
Acrylic on biology  
chart

*Investment Ideas*  
2012  
Acrylic on canvas

*Untitled #19*  
2013  
Acrylic on biology  
chart

*Untitled #20*  
2013  
Acrylic on biology  
chart

*Untitled #17*  
2013  
Acrylic on biology  
chart