

DIRTY
SOUTH:

**EXP
LOS
IVE
ART**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN FULTON PHOTOGRAPHY

WRITTEN BY EZRA SALKIN



EXPLOSIVES, ROCKET FUEL, SUBMACHINE GUNS.
THE MATERIALS OF ART? FOR SAVANNAH ARTIST MATT STROMBERG,
THEY ARE.



Artist Matt Stromberg is literally creating a stir in the art world by using everything from explosives and rocket fuel to submachine guns in his volatile, nonobjective sculpture. He's careful to stress, however, that his unique art form is not really about explosives but kinetic energy—more specifically, the release of it. The result is somewhat unpredictable. What is predictable, after he conducts trench warfare across his many canvasses, is his ability to produce interesting and spontaneous mark making—marks created through applied texture that create volume.

“Really, my art is no different from other nonobjective artists,” Stromberg says. “I’m about process and exploring, just like them. My work is just more dramatic—almost like performance art. I enjoy the challenge of non-conventional materials.” One thing that separates him from other artists, he admits, is that he only has a

matter of seconds during which he has control over whatever combustible substance he happens to be working with. Consequently, there's a lot more exhaustive planning, beforehand, from acquiring his mercurial materials before finally using them. The next tempestuous force he wants to conquer is the ocean, hoping to manipulate its crushing pressure on steel and aluminum plates.

Stromberg draws inspiration from all around him, embracing everything from TV, movies, stories, to historic reference. Nevertheless, it's not hard to fathom that he always had an interest in pyrotechnics. Of course, he also looks back to the old masters. He references da Vinci, who he says was actually a kind of arms designer, drafting early plans for helicopters and tanks at the behest of kings seeking an edge in battle.

Stromberg is a foundations professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design. He reconciles his unique artistic vision with the rigidity of teaching by insisting that his students "play" instead of "work" because, in his opinion, that's the only way for them to truly find themselves in their art. "I tell them that there is no practice, only the process of making art itself. That's your practice right there: process. They either love me or they hate me," he laughs. He believes artists should strive, like practitioners from the Baroque period, to elevate the heart, mind and spirit, and to get people to ask questions. "That's what I try and pass on to my students. And that's what school is for: to teach them to communicate better."

He concludes with this final self-assessment: "It's all about a journey or adventure but always with a lot of testing, training and exhaustive research. When I complete a piece of work, it's not far removed from a traditional landscape, or a painting of a horse. At the end of the day, I have a document record." 📄



in situ

BETSY CAIN
AUGUST 6 – DECEMBER 4, 2011

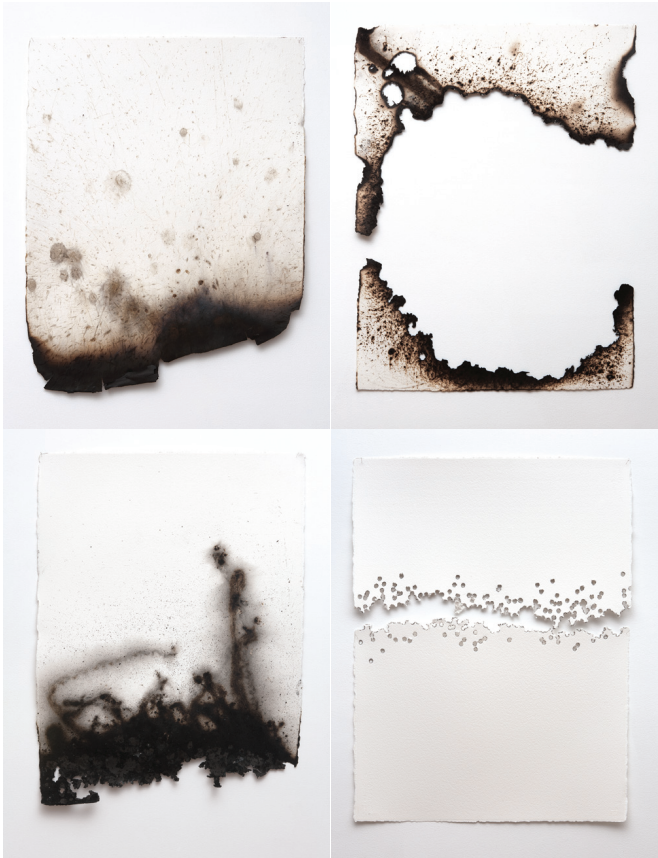
in situ, too, 2011; Courtesy of the artist

goicolea
Alter Ego: A Decade of Work by Anthony Goicolea

SEPTEMBER 2, 2011 - JANUARY 8, 2010

Search Party, 2007; Courtesy of 21c Museum and Collection of Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, Louisville, KY

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