



## 'Judgement Day' exhibit at Tang Museum worth seeing

Show reflects sensibility of collector Claude Simard

By William Jaeger, Friday, June 16, 2017

The late Claude Simard loved art and collected art, especially African art. In a beautiful homage, the Tang Museum's Dayton Director Ian Berry has created an exhibition of over 100 works from Simard's collection.

That's the short of it, and maybe "If I Had Possession over Judgement Day" in the large gallery upstairs should be seen in those simplest terms. This is a mixed bag of art and artifacts that one man, with a special feel and knowledge of the contemporary scene, has made whole. Berry's job might not have been simple, but it was made easier by Simard's own sensibility, which had an inner logic that you can feel in the work here, disparate as it is.

But who was Claude Simard? Indeed. Simard partnered with Jack Shainman in running a gallery in the 1980s that eventually centered in New York City, later adding an upstate

presence at the School in Kinderhook. Coming from a remote area of Quebec, he had a feeling for outsider art — or at least art outside the mainstream. A few of the artists he collected have also been commercially represented by the gallery, so there a lot of natural layers of influence and confluence.



Simard was very much inside the art game. This is personal, intimate, honest work, and the show has feeling. If some of the work here is straight from the mainstream, other pieces show compelling eccentricities, like the series of Bura funerary urns, over 1,000 years old, found in the Niger River in West Africa. These urns are striking, both formally as free-standing, decorated terra-cotta forms standing 2 to 4 feet high, and as reminders of tribal cultures and their artifacts, with their often evasive meanings.

There are collections within the collections. David Ireland's "Spanish Corner Cabinet" housing ordinary objects, keyed off by yellow and orange panels inside, reconsiders the readymade — a found object that becomes an artwork by context. A wall of 25 varied serpent drawings from late 19th-century India, and another wall of 55 late 20th-century photographic portraits from Mali with cardboard and string decorations by Malick Sidibé, are both partly about the act of grouping and comparing, beyond their nominal subjects.

We have moved from California to India to Mali. This is part of Simard's grace. There are spectacular works, like a colorful, playful soundsuit by Nick Cave that explodes in the back of the gallery, and there are intimate whispers like the three recent dark portraits by Nigerian artist Toyin Ojih Odutola. Most of the art is either directly figural or features the direct hand the artist, as in seven Bagh textiles from early 20th-century India.

Contrasts and intrinsic relationships preside. Hanging above a group of African heads and masks are several contemporary artworks, such as Brad Kahlhamer's primal mixed media painting of bodies. Across the room, Radcliffe Bailey's powerful and huge mixed media "Western Currents," an allegory about the slave trade, features African masks and stylized figures.

A student asked me recently what the current "ism" was in art, after post-modernism and neo-expressionism and so on. My first answer was "corporatism," meaning the disheartening big money trends (which are not evident here). My second answer was

**If you go**

**If I Had Possession Over  
Judgement Day: Collections  
of Claude Simard**

**Where:** The Tang Museum,  
Skidmore College, Saratoga  
Springs

**When:** Through Sep. 24

**Hours:** Noon to 5 pm  
Tuesday-Sunday; until 9 pm  
Thursday

**Admission:** Free

**Info:** 580-8080;  
tang.skidmore.edu

pluralism. I wish I could have sent people to this show to help make the point. It's not incidental that in contemporary art there is no current "movement." Rather, one of the many movements of our time is to be forcefully global, eclectic and open-minded to the point of casting off entrenched Euro-American biases.

This is, for sure, an exhibition of objects — paintings, prints, photographs and sculptures. But Berry does more than show off an art collection. He reminds us of what much of the contemporary art world has been embracing. Claude Simard, who died of a heart attack in 2014 at the age of 57, deserves this powerful, revealing tribute.

*William Jaeger is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.*