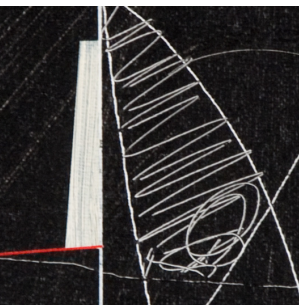
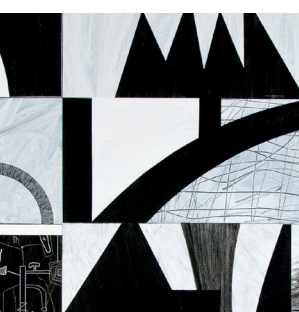




Paintings

Tom Stanley



Tom Stanley Paints Himself Out of a Corner
by Barbara Schreiber



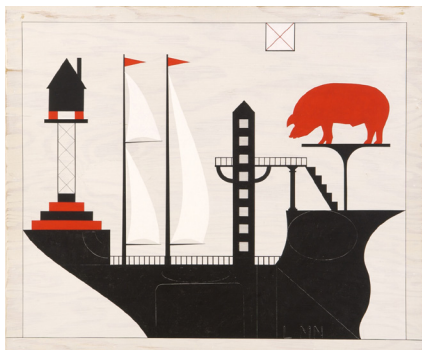
From Final Hamlet Paintings, 2003
Acrylic on canvas, 48x48 inches, private collection

Tom Stanley is a prolific and relentless maker of art. Somewhere on a high shelf in his studio, there probably resides a forgotten stack of paintings that are far superior to many other artists' best work.

All of Stanley's work is done in sets. Each new body of work seems like a summation of everything before it. Images and icons pile up. Towers, houses, pigs, tools, boats, small trees, geometric shapes and the occasional screaming head are components of a hermetic language that sometimes even Stanley cannot translate, but he persists in using these elements to create inscrutable narratives. He often questions his reliance on these forms; however, to suggest that he abandon them would be like asking a writer to produce a text without using words.

Stanley's writings (unpublished, and that's a shame) reveal a family background of quiet, small-town chaos and drift, something he sought to corral and control in part through the discipline of mechanical drawing. There is something mystical about these writings, which are rich but incomplete, episodic, enigmatic. People die or commit crimes or disappear and reappear for no apparent reason. Often, it seems as if there is no dependable reality except the one Stanley creates in his work.

And, that reality is one of quiet contradictions. His work reveals both a sense of place and a restless yearning to be somewhere else. While his paintings are often crammed with imagery, he favors a simple, minimal palette. His use of black, red and white conveys quiet—but it's a foreboding quiet, not a peaceful one. Because of this stripped-down palette, everything but form and meaning falls away.



Floating, 2004

Acrylic on plywood panels, 20x24 inches each, private collections

Anyone engaged in art-making over the long haul eventually winds up with a big mess of influences, interests and other stuff that migrates into the work. Perhaps Stanley's most abiding concern is the imagery that exists in everyday life, be it folk art, the industrial landscape or pop culture. This seems to be at the core of what otherwise looks like disconnected experiences—his study at the Institute for Industrial Archeology; his involvement with the Collection de L'Art Brut in Lausanne, Switzerland; his time spent working in the wall accessory industry, where he became familiar with the tools and processes of mass production.

Most of Stanley's recent work is heavily disciplined, but there are the occasional outbursts of small improvised paintings that seem to come out of nowhere, like a litter of feral kittens. Doubt seems to be one of Stanley's core motivators. Although he has long employed certain specific icons and a rigorous, pure technique, he constantly fights to remain fresh and avoid complacency. One strategy is to make spontaneous paintings on sometimes unforgiving surfaces. While these paintings are necessary and in fact compelling in their own right, Stanley is never quite sure what to do with them. It is as if they exist to be stored, forgotten and rediscovered later, when their secrets finally reveal themselves.

As an artist you reach a point in your career where, as if in religious thrall and exhaustion, you surrender yourself to the work you cannot help but make. While Stanley has achieved a deep and rich acceptance of the precision that drives his work, he still must occasionally make these less controlled paintings.



Painting, 2008-09

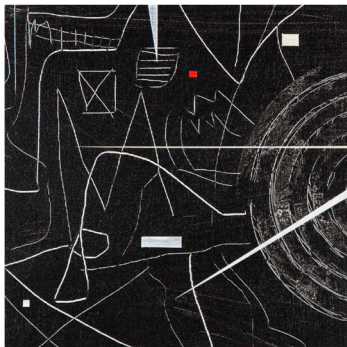
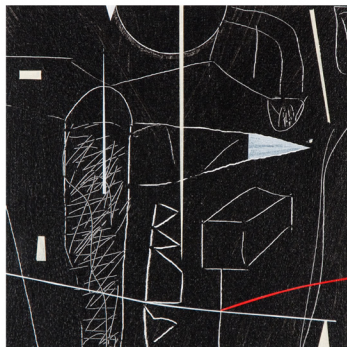
Acrylic on paper, 21.5x32 inches (paper: 25x38.5 inches)

Notable are two recent sets, one from 2008-2009 and another from 2011. The 2008 acrylic wash drawings utilize familiar imagery, but are done with a messy sensuousity reminiscent of Phillip Guston's late work. The 2011 pieces, quick sketches in wet paint with sgraffito elements, are executed on 12" square discount-store canvases, obviously a less than optimal surface; these paintings look like little windows, offering a glimpse into a pulsating, random world.

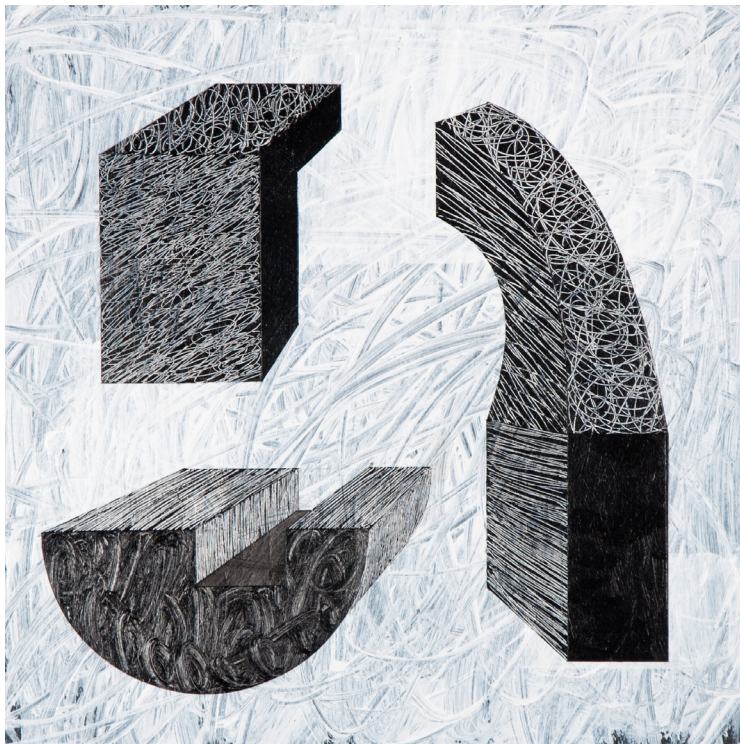
Stanley uses periodically planned trips to the site of Black Mountain College for the META Gathering, the creative think-tank originally organized by Mark Sloan, Michelle Van Parys and Roger Manley, as an opportunity to establish a problem and solve it in a limited period of time. In 2008, in a desire to make sgraffito the subject of his work, he wound up with paintings that are characterized by random perspective, intense mark-making and asymmetry that evoke uneasy relationships and visual disequilibrium, as if the various elements and the spaces in which they exist are competing for primacy.

In dramatic contrast, his 2011 Black Mountain paintings have an ethereal, spare quality, yielding to the surrounding environment. These quiet, pastoral works are unusual for Stanley in that they incorporate found objects such as leaves and strings, elements over which he has little control.

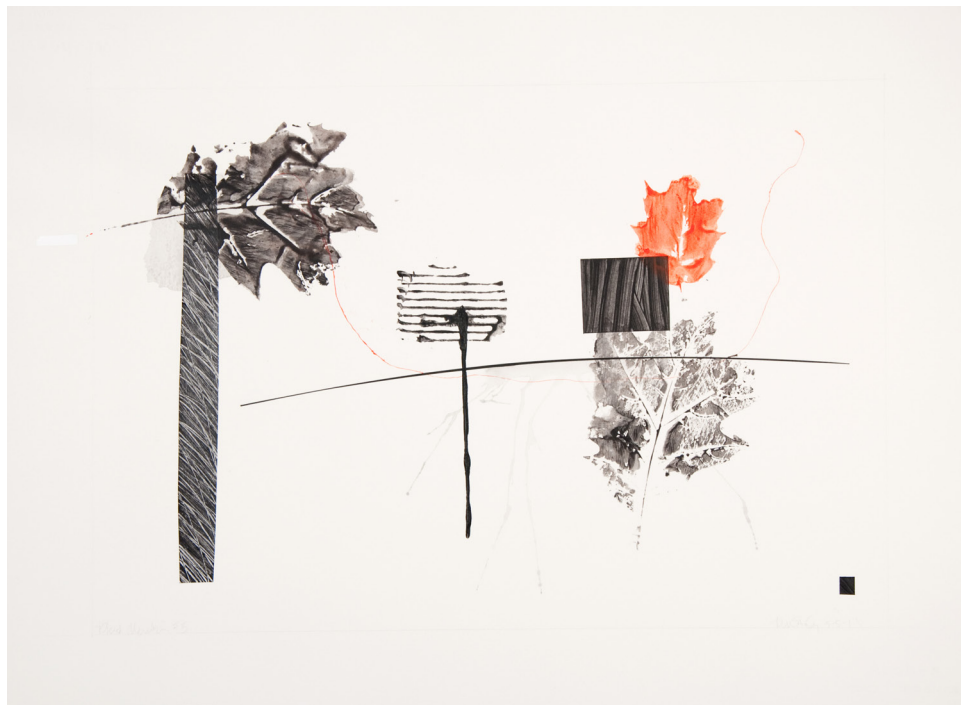
A 2010 set of paintings on salvaged plywood are exemplars of economy. Each painting consists of a richly pigmented Monopoly house; the grain of the old wood appears almost painterly or moire-like and the knots are like suns. These small, gorgeous, iconic works are precise in execution, but have an evanescent quality.



Big Lots Paintings, 2011
Acrylic on canvas, 12x12 inches



Black Mt. Painting, 2008
Acrylic on paper, 11x11 inches (paper: 25x19 inches)



Black Mt. Drawing, 2011

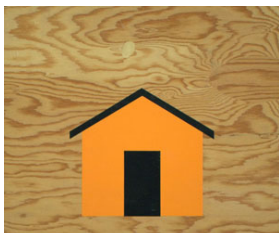
Acrylic on paper, 17x25 inches (paper: 22x30 inches)

In 2009, Stanley and colleague Shaun Cassidy created a series of laser-cut aluminum wall pieces for an exhibition at the Sumter Gallery of Art. As their collaboration progressed, Stanley realized that the works on paper he was producing alone in his studio were deeply influenced by this creative relationship. These small red and black paintings are remote and dreamy, with a sparseness that emanates from a place of lightness and purity. They have the stark elegant forms of the aluminum pieces, but are intimate rather than imposing.

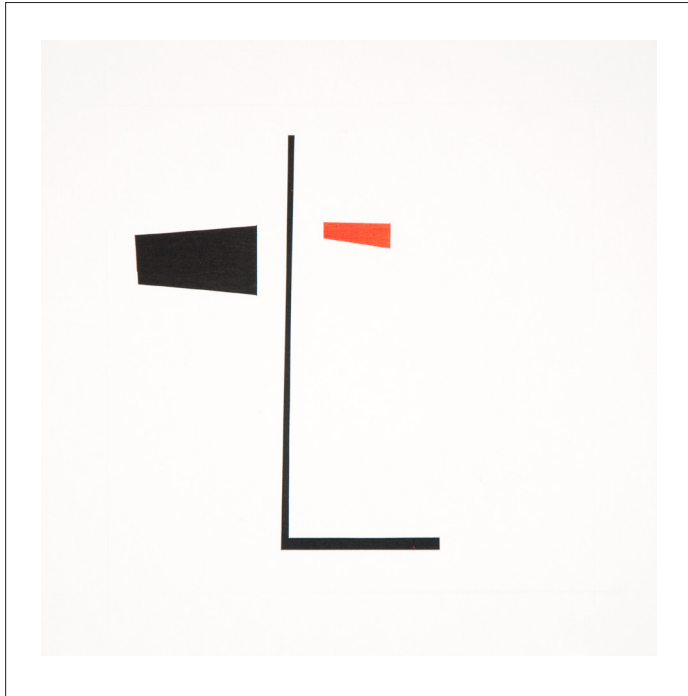
The effects of this collaboration persist in Red, White and Black, four large (48"x68") acrylic on canvas paintings. These are dense, intense works, devoid of recognizable objects. But they are rich with allusions to signs, stairs, refraction, and who knows what else. They seem to be slightly hallucinogenic journeys through collapsed churches. The space is impenetrable and difficult to navigate—it is hard to determine if it is deep or shallow.

The black-and-white Sketches were completed in 2011. There is a bit of irony in the title, because these paintings are large, imposing and deeply worked. They range from image-dense works with ominous silhouettes of boats, towers and stairs to extreme close-ups of those same forms, so that only an array of geometric shapes remain. In keeping with the conflicted, questioning nature of Stanley's work, they are both nostalgic and apocalyptic.

Barbara Schreiber is an artist and writer in Charlotte, North Carolina.



Plywood houses, 2010
Acrylic on plywood, 10x12.5 inches



Fragment Drawings, 2009

Acrylic on paper, 9.5x 9.5 inches (paper: 12.5x12.5 inches)



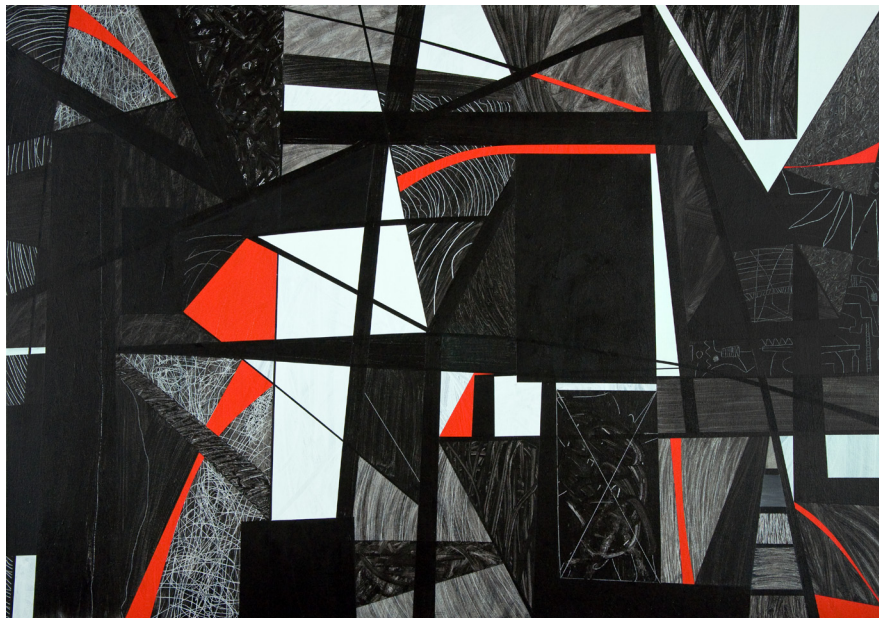
Red, white and black #1, 2010
48x68, acrylic on canvas



Red, white and black #2, 2010
48x68, acrylic on canvas

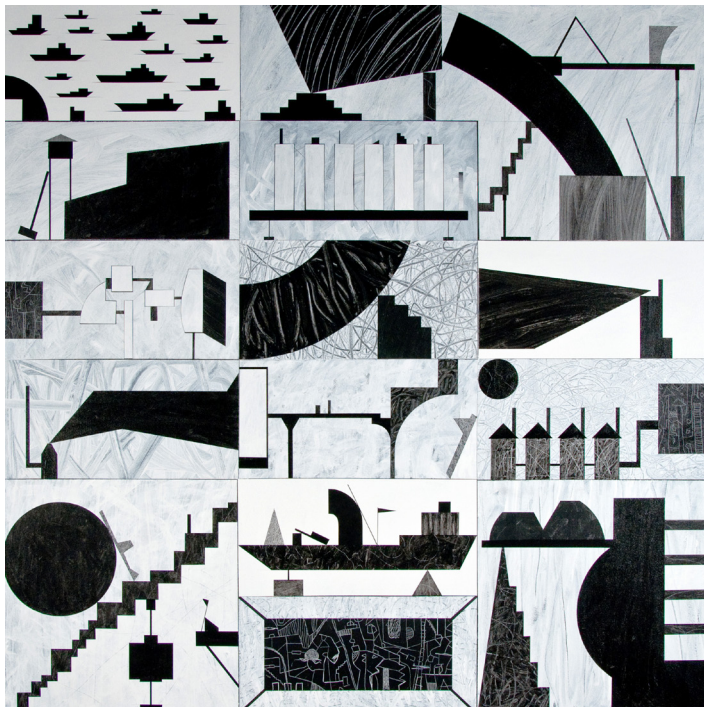


Red, white and black #3, 2010
48x68, acrylic on canvas

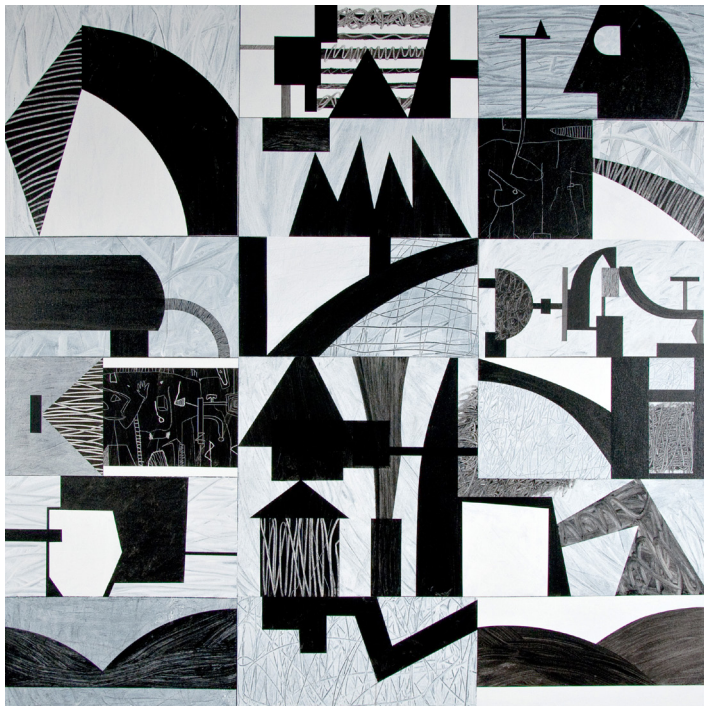


Red, white and black #4, 2010
48x68, acrylic on canvas

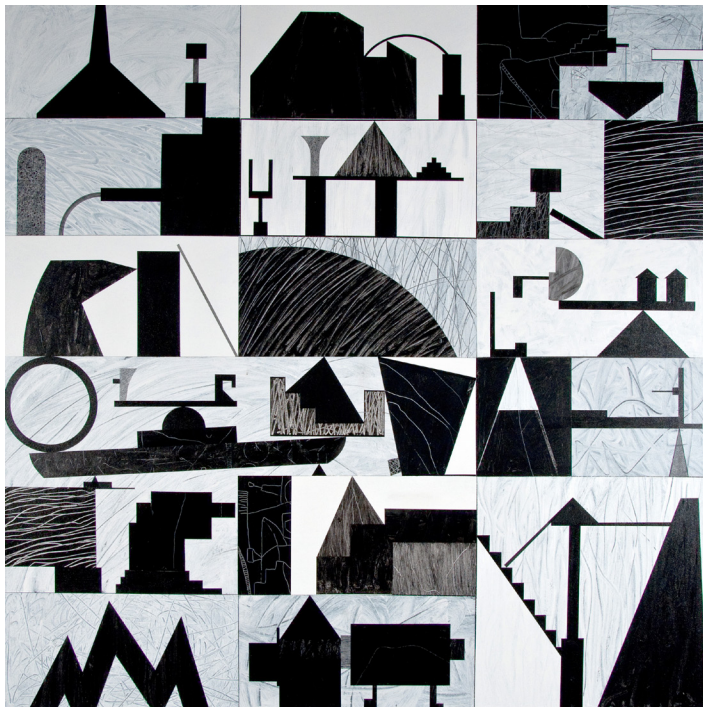
Stanley is an artist and chair of the Department of Fine Arts at Winthrop University, Rock Hill, S.C. Born in Fort Hood, Tex., Stanley grew up in Concord, N.C. In recent years his work has been exhibited at Artspace in Raleigh, N.C., 701 Center for Contemporary Art and IfArt in Columbia, S.C.; Barbara Archer Gallery, Atlanta, Ga.; the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, N.C.; and Gallery twenty-four, Berlin, Germany. His Floating series was exhibited at the South Carolina State Museum's Triennial Exhibition, Columbia, and at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, La. He has exhibited at La Galerie du Marché in Lausanne, Switzerland; Hodges Taylor Gallery, Charlotte, N.C.; Musée de la Halle Saint Pierre, Paris, France; and the Halsey Gallery, Charleston, S.C. In 2006, he had a solo exhibition in the Gallery at Carillon with his series entitled The Neighborhood. Over the past few years Stanley has teamed with colleague-artist Shaun Cassidy on a number of collaborative projects including the exhibition Collaboration of Fragments at the Sumter Gallery of Art and public art commissions including Balancing Art in Simpsonville, S.C, for Provident Community Bank; Journey in Raleigh, N.C., for the North Carolina Local Government Federal Credit Union; and Five Installations for the University of Nebraska Medical Center, in Omaha.



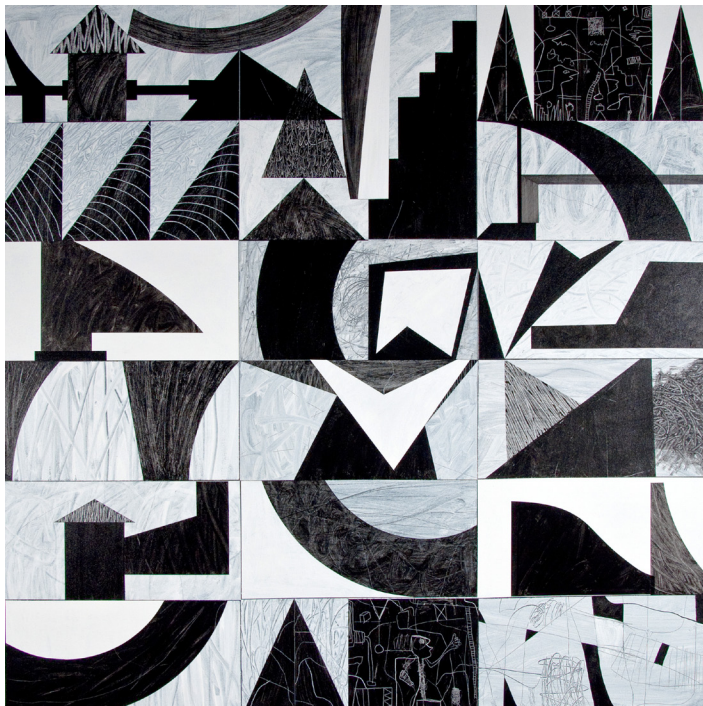
Sketches #1, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 72x72 inches



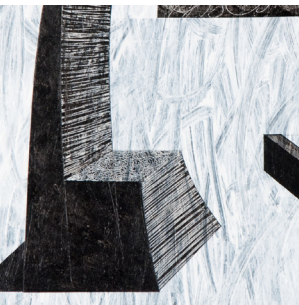
Sketches #2, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 72x72 inches



Sketches #3, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 72x72 inches



Sketches #4, 2011
acrylic on canvas, 72x72 inches



Design: Bridget Kirkland
Photography: Dustin Shores