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Terry Allen at Holly Johnson Gallery

[HOLLY JOHNSON GALLERY, JULY 17- JULY 16, 2005](#)

by Maria Sheets

It's Saturday night with a flurry of gallery openings in Dallas, I stop in at Holly Johnson's new space, pop open a Shiner, turn on *Blue Collar Comedy*, and start overwhelming myself with the stack of info on musician and artist [Terry Allen](#). In addition to a 20 x 12 foot cast bronze sculpture, *Wishbone*, to be unveiled at the DFW new International Terminal D this summer, his exhibit, *Early Bronzes and Sketchbook Studies* is showing at [Holly Johnson Gallery](#).



Terry Allen  
*Study for Notre Denver II*  
1993  
Mixed media on paper  
21 x 15 inches

*Pedal Steal & Rollback, on Sugar Hill Records.*  
-quote from Terry Allen

Born in 1943 with thick roots in Lubbock/West Texas, his recently published book, [Terry Allen: DUGOUT](#) is a series of 'poetic conversational vignettes' about his parents: his father, a former professional baseball player turned music and wrestling promoter and his mother, a honky-tonk piano player who had been kicked out of college for playing in an integrated combo. Though presently in New Mexico, he is still considered a Texas mainstay who "spews out one of these epic works every decade or so" according to essayist and musician [David Byrne](#).

*"I am currently just beginning a body of work tent, called Ghost Ship Rodez. It will eventually be a number of drawings, sculptures, music and a theater piece dealing with an event in the life of the great French theater/writer/artist visionary, Antonine Artaud. This project will be shown in Lyon, France next year. I am also working on several public projects and the re-issuing of two of my older cds,*

Allen offered up a group of possibly over 100 sketchbook studies of which owner Johnson managed to highlight 16 staggered behind 7 realized bronze

sculptures classically placed atop old school styled art pedestals made by partner Jim Martin. The studies similarly embrace the traditions of sketchbooks by [J. M. W. Turner](#), [Albrecht Dürer](#) and [Leonardo Da Vinci](#) in their ability to literally and figuratively bind a specific time and place in an artist's life. Traditionally, Allen is known for telling stories of the past. However, Allen seems to be, at least in the construction of these early works, almost clairvoyant.

*'Clairvoyance' doesn't rhyme with 'Annoyance' for nothing.*  
-quote from Terry Allen

Void of the music or performance fanfare that usually accompanies a good Terry Allen yarn, the sketchbook studies are engrossing surrounded by diagrams, notes, self-censure, quotes, names, numbers, poetry, humorous anecdotes and whatever else was going on in Allen's mind/environment at the moment. In this case, the moment was late 1980's. Several of the works are frighteningly in synch with politics of the present.

First, I caught myself looking up at *Enterprise* in bronze, representing, quite literally, the phrase "thumb up your ass" not placed where it would normally occur, at waist level, but about 8 feet in the air where the full graphic, shaped like the Star Trek mothership, could be appreciated. It is in *Enterprise*, *Guarding the Buddha*, and *Study for Shoe* in which "forced entry" on current cultural and political scales ring thematic. The "baggagargoyles", illustrated and eventually realized for the Denver Airport, and the study *Fuselage* give prescience to fears and obsessions we now have with "national security". The cash-green painted bronze of a businessman/politician in larger than life sized *Bust* is slashed violently by his own machete-like tie, slicing and doubling his skin and clothing layers about like shifting tectonic plates. Though closer in conception to the time of [George Bush Senior's](#) presidential inauguration, the likeness of the image intended to be anonymous, looks very much like the younger George, who was not even elected governor of Texas until 1995.



Terry Allen  
Bust  
1991  
Bronze, unique cast  
30 1/2 x 28 x 23 1/2 inches

Viewers are also introduced to a variety of yet unrealized studies (or after previous considerations, unrealized states?). *Two Mirrors* illustrates a proposal to place a monumental series of mirrors on each side of the Texas/Mexico border each facing the other. Of the slightly more interesting studies is *Car Cage* in which, free of passenger, a car is placed within a cage moving back and forth like a "trapped animal". While another study, *Road House* creates a covered bridge/tunnel from salvaged vehicles proposed in more of a *Bridges of Madison County* effect. With the open research and development of the themes, one can't help but help creatively elaborate and perhaps on this project, want to see it realized on an I-35 scale.



Terry Allen  
*Enterprise*  
1991  
Bronze, unique cast  
10 1/2 x 15 x 19 inches

Most of the studies take into consideration Allen's various ideas for possible sound, light, geography and movement. As might be expected, many of the works have images on both sides. According to Johnson, people spend a lot of time in the gallery reading the text. Though fairly tame in content, one is still perversely intrigued as though privy to something quite secret. Because the sketches in mixed media are so technically consistent, richly illustrated and inviting to read, the bronzes, though helping in the realization, seem to fight against what one's imagination develops from Allen's fascinating descriptions. The two lone pastel's seemed even less necessary after Johnson offered me

a peek at the quality back stock of sketches and photo studies. Fortunately found in his intense, chaotic scribbling, is plenty of that west-textured humor and depth that Allen is appreciated for. Fun to view and read, this collection of works done mostly in the late 80's also makes a variety of eerily accurate statements about our current obsessions.

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Maria Sheets is a writer living in Dallas.

Images courtesy Holly Johnson Gallery