

The background of the cover is a textured, abstract painting. It features a dominant red field in the foreground and middle ground, with numerous vertical and diagonal brushstrokes in shades of yellow, green, and blue. A blue and white checkered fence runs across the left side of the image. The sky is a mottled teal color. The overall style is expressive and painterly.

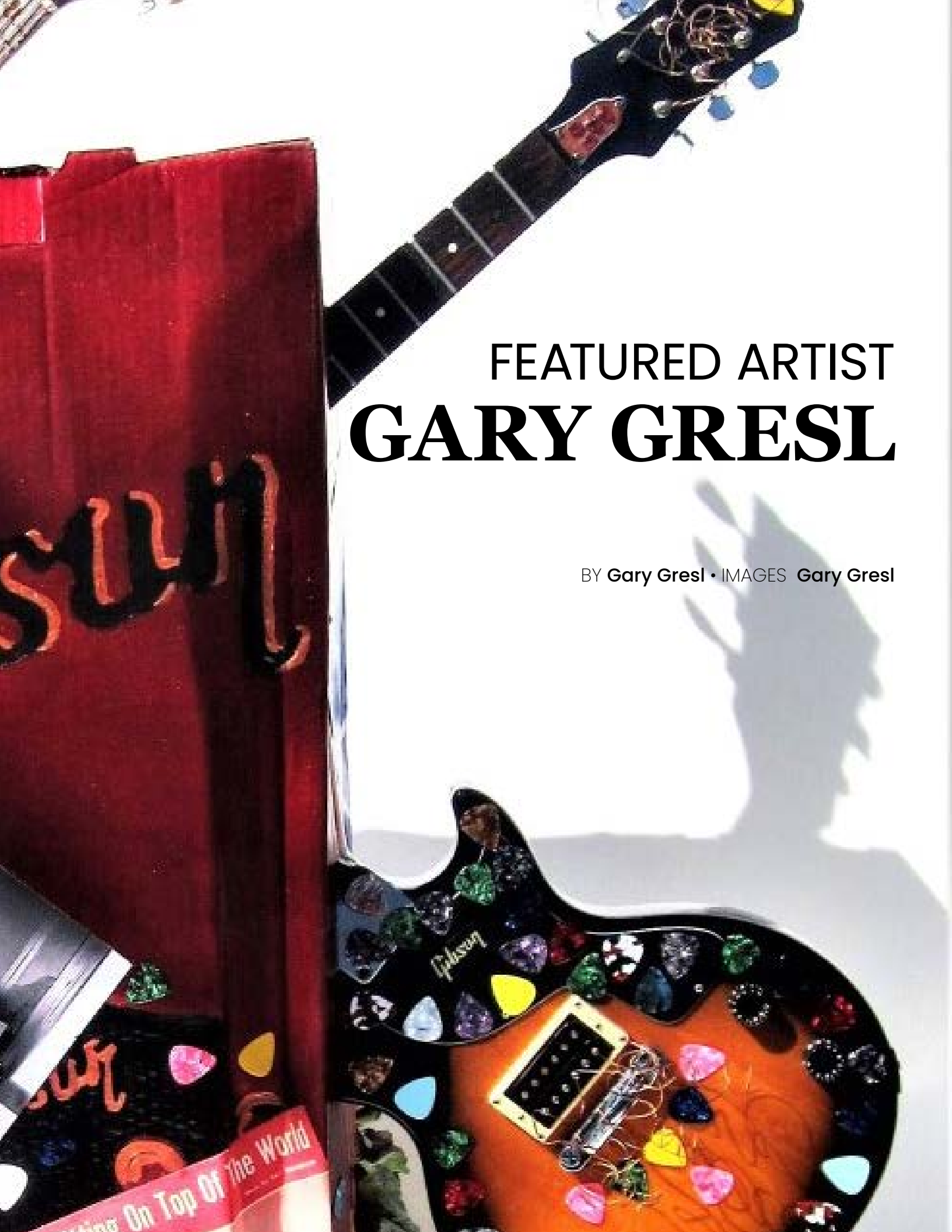
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SKIN' BIRD HILL
MADE BY FADON BOSTON



FEATURED ARTIST
GARY GRESL

BY Gary Gresl • IMAGES Gary Gresl

A LITTLE PHILOSOPHY

There will be people who consider the assemblages I make to be junk, just arrangements of objects having little value. I am also lucky that there are others who sense that there is something more significant happening, that the choice of materials has meaning, the associations of objects within the assemblages have significance, relationships, and importance in my life.

I respond to shapes. There is appreciation for the surfaces of materials, patinas, that have evolved due to Nature's elements and forces. Objects have been either:

- (1) designed by humans, or
- (2) made manifest by a myriad of "natural" processes which have formed them, manipulated them, forced them to change and appear as they do.

On one hand the artist is a human being motivated to create, mold, build, express, and on the other hand Natural Forces have done the creating, molding, building, expressing. Humankind, which has been given life and evolved over eons by Nature, is therefore an expression of energy and an organization of matter.

We extend the Life Force by procreation, and by use of our minds, senses, feelings and hands. It is an extension of natural processes for us humans to create and "make things". We don't need art classes to create artful objects. Aboriginal people around the Earth have been "naturally" motivated to enhance common goods with decoration, to use what is available to embellish, adorn, and express feelings, thoughts and ideas. It happens that in "advanced" human cultures art-making has become an intellectual, and often specialized activity with requirements, habits, histories, categories, dogma and expectations. Art has been departmentalized within, and too often excluded without.

GROW WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED, BUT LOOK BEYOND

My absorption of art from childhood to elder, has come from the visuals, examples, theories, the seriousness and follies of schools, the plans and structures that were to be expected. It was my individual responses, gut reactions and empathy, that have seemed as much or more important. My art-making is due to the little piece of sparkling red granite picked up on a gravel driveway; the clarity and shape of

rock crystal quartz; the form and color of Luna Moth wings; the yellow striped bodies of perch and the camouflage patterns of Northern Pike; the hay bales lying in a field; the streamlined shapes of 1950's rocket space ships; the odd and amateurish Henkelmann's Museum in Woodruff, WI.; the comics and Pop Culture of my youth.

Around me as examples and motivations that "gave permission" for me to choose my materials and subjects were fellow artists like Rauschenburg, Joseph Beuys, Gunther von Hagen and his Body Worlds, assemblers like Cornell and those more adventurous, plus artists working around me in Wisconsin, like John Balsley, Bob Curtis and Estherly Allen.

I have found enjoyment as a collector and dealer in antiques and collectibles, BUT it should be understood that my interest in assemblage began long before I became an antique collector and dealer. I attended UW Stevens Point in the 60's where I got a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, a music minor, and a concentration of Art and Art History. In my 3D Sculpture class about 1964, I drove out to an old country farm site where I found weathered cast offs in a midden heap. The shapes and aged materials had allure, so I made my first large assemblage using a house window frame, burlap, and cast-iron oddments. My memories of being on farms, in rural and rustic places, as well as fishing and hunting, were replayed in strong feelings and memories.

In the 70's I returned to school at UW Madison, the School of Family Resources and Consumer Sciences, in their Related Art program. There I took more classes in Art History, the History of Interiors (Interior Design), history of

textiles and clothing, Museum Training and Connoisseurship, and wrote my short Master's Thesis about Harvey Littleton, the "Father of Studio Glassblowing".

In the early 1980's, after an enduring sense of having a hole in my life...missing something intangible, I began working with acrylic painting. My recall of art history's early geometric abstraction, as well as Mid-Century Abstract Expressionism, played out for a couple years... until one day, I looked at an old unused wood door, an antique folk art wall hanging cabinet, some other miscellaneous items, and I created 3 separate wall-hung assemblages, one about 78 "L, combined with neon that was included in a Madison Biennial at MOCA. I was satisfied.

EVOLUTION AND MOTIVATIONS CONTINUE

Objects themselves often spark an idea (maybe a feeling.) After an undefined period of thinking, searching, and gathering of more materials goes on.

I learned that what I create is not commercially viable because of the size, weight and unwieldy nature of most items I create. I had to accept that if I wanted satisfaction in the process of creating, that I would have to forgo hopes of selling these things. Eventually I accepted that what I created was "ephemeral" - lasting from a few hours to a few weeks. After a while, more and more temporary assemblages were built, with photographs being taken to document their brief lives. I started a series of photo portfolios called "Document Ephemera", many of which were exhibited successfully.

After nearly 40 years evolving to this point, as an old man, I am taking my time, being more careful, producing fewer works. Recently I was one of the Lynden Sculpture Garden's Artists in Residence, and over the course of 3 years I created 15 temporary/ephemeral site-specific works, all of which were dismantled in the end. Among these pieces was a 3-part project I titled "The Lynden Body Farm", in which I created 3 separate 15"x15" outdoor spaces. The theme was to create large assemblages using objects, human and Nature made, and allow

Mother Nature to alter them over time. This meant giving up control and allowing them to deteriorate, to change, to become things that I myself did not initially imagine...to photograph them as they dissolved and broke down. There is beauty in decay.

Right now, I have no definite plans afoot. I am keeping my eyes open to find a not-for-profit space in which I can build another large assemblage, and/or combine several for a viewing. If that does not happen, I will continue slowly shaping objects into larger assemblages that fulfill personal ideas, provide the satisfaction of completion, and which are documented in the form of photos.

A quote of mine remains applicable today:

"We have the Life Force burning within us. We extend the natural process through thought and artistic expression. Let us each speak to issues we find significant. We grow and explore at the tip of life's evolution, and we bear responsibility for notifying others of what we have considered". ■

(From a composition titled: Synthesis; Mind, Culture, Art, Gaia", written in 1989, published in Art in Wisconsin.)

Check out the book, "Palimpsests and Middens, A Midwest Assembler", authored by Gary.

www.gresl.com [Youtube](#)

