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## CHARACTER SKETCH

### Character Sketch (November 28, 2007)

By Robert Del Valle  
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## Ivin Ballen

### In the Time Capsule

What impressed me most about Ivin Ballen was his initial reluctance to talk to me.

Actually, reluctance is the wrong word, because that implies the cold and studied rudeness of an artist who cannot be bothered with such mundane chores as speaking to the press. When I managed a brief interview with him at the Susanne Hilberry Gallery, the opening reception for his show was in full swing. Musical guest, Honne Wells, had been invited to perform, and Ballen politely suggested that our conversation be delayed until the gentleman completed his set. That is what a previous generation called "simple courtesy."

Born in Philadelphia, Ivin Ballen attended the Rhode Island School of Design and the Cranbrook Academy of Art. He cites Thomas Hirschhorn and Judy Pfaff as early inspirations, and mentions his experiences in foundries with the same casual pride that journeymen do when recollecting apprenticeships. His previous stops in Detroit included participation in the Can We Borrow Your Spaceship? Exhibit at the CAID.

What is immediately eye-catching about several of Ballen's works is the deft way he has achieved in sculpture the illusory quality of space and texture generally observed only in painting. "I have always been fascinated with material as a whole. Whether it be wood, cloth, metal, cardboard, plastic, etc," Ballen explains. "I grew up with these things and am quite intrigued of a history without these materials. I also see a future where these materials may not exist, so I am taking it upon myself to archive them in my works."

A future where they may not exist? Is that an intuitive glimpse of the future? His own, perhaps? "My process of painting is more akin to keeping at a high level rejuvenation," Ballen says. "It is all developed with this intention. It's a series of conflicting emotions."

And it is with that dualistic prescience that Ballen poses a variety of questions within his works. Could that possibly be a cardboard canvas or duct tape awkwardly fusing the whole table of contents in the piece called Vas Deferens? Is there an incipient explosion planned within New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware? How could something like 16-Way remain static and unmoving on the wall? Is it ON the wall?

No, no, not sure and finally ... yes. It is, in the end, all a matter of perspective. Like most sculptors who fashion their own geography of the soul from unlikely material, Ballen revels in that careful hesitation that precedes decision. | **RDW**

*Ivin Ballen • 50/50 runs through 1/5 • Susanne Hilberry Gallery*

