

Remnants – The glove as icon

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Local artist Shawn Skabelund appropriates the image of the crucifix in this exhibit at the Matrix Gallery. By placing a workman's glove centrally in each drawing, and treating it with painstaking attention, Skabelund attempts to imbue it with some of the connotations of Christ. Using as his models actual gloves worn by farmers, loggers, or hunters, he gives them the dignity of a humble, hard-working person who has suffered and sacrificed.

Paradoxically, the work glove also symbolizes for Skabelund all that insulates and isolates us from nature. The glove represents "our destruction of the earth—our crucifixion of it," in his words. Since the late 1980's, Skabelund's work has often explored the parallels between environmental destruction and the crucifixion. In these works, the glove stands for both the creative and destructive hand, but especially the creative: it unites the famous icons of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes—God's hand and Adam's—into one.

Skabelund's gloves look so real you might mistake them for photographs, and in the eleven drawings displayed he often combines them with natural objects. In *Cottonwood Series #4*, the ubiquitous glove appears along with a cottonwood leaf. This glove once belonged to a logger, Ray Colvin, who helped Skabelund build an installation in Spokane, Washington. The leaf reinforces Skabelund's exploration of the sacred—the cottonwood tree has deep religious significance for Native Americans.

Skabelund's primary work these days is actually on a larger scale, creating huge indoor natural installations. The small, exquisite detail of the glove drawings contrasts with three large sculptures in this exhibit, one of which also refers to the Crucifixion—stained gloves attached to a cross made of Douglas fir.

The artist relies on explanatory texts, posted next to the artworks, to let viewers in on the often highly personal significance of his works. For *Scrape*, the artist explains that this glove drawing was inspired by his six month old son, who had just cut two teeth. It also recalls Skabelund's outdoorsman father, the blood on his hunting glove, and the bloodstains on trees left by deer when they scrape the velvet off their antlers. *Scrape* includes a neo-Dada fragment—a small piece of sandpaper, clotted with dark pickment, that was used to remove highlights from the drawing.