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## sculpture magazine

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## reviews

by Peter Selz

**OAKLAND**

**Cyrus Tilton**

Vessel Gallery



Left: Drew Conrad, *Dwelling No. 4*, 2012. Mixed media, 108 x 64 x 106 in. Below: Cyrus Tilton, *High Hopes*, 2010. Concrete and steel, 63 x 26 x 18.5 in.

Village in the '70s or Venice Beach without the beach.

Tilton grew up in the Alaskan wilderness near Anchorage, and nature remains primary in his work. A previous show, called "The Cycle," featured works using the locust as a metaphor for problems of overpopulation and conspicuous consumption. The innovative installation consisted of hundreds of kinetic locusts with whirring wings.

André Breton is reported to have called on painters and poets to "Surprise me!" "Absence," Tilton's recent show, assembled a range of surprises. Suggesting Magritte's

paintings with a 21st-century aesthetic, these sculptures form fantastic equivocations, prompted by the mysteries of life. *High Hopes* (2010), for instance, consists of the headless body of a horse rendered in cement — Tilton welcoming the challenge to mold the quick-setting substance before it dried. A steel armature rising from what was once the back of the impaired creature holds a section of earth, which in turn, supports several slender steel trees. Like Brancusi, Tilton considers his bases, including the square, transparent pedestal for *High Hopes*, as essential parts of the works. The title, *High Hopes*, indicates Tilton's aspiration to achieve the desired results during his working process. The craftsmanship of forming and making — absent from much current art production — is primary to him.

objects a few feet below unscathed. In Conrad's works, these persistent elements further the artifice while offering footholds of recognition in his nostalgic dreams.

While Conrad's concepts for and execution of his sculptures occurred before Hurricane Sandy, his aesthetics of disintegration were all the more meaningful in a moment when art galleries and studios across several New York neighborhoods were left devastated. It was astonishing to see powdered muck in shuttered Chelsea storefronts and then, in the Lower East Side, witness the poignant displacements of Conrad's ruins.

—William V. Ganis

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**Cyrus Tilton**  
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This is Cyrus Tilton's fourth exhibition at a gallery near downtown Oakland, part of a recent burst of art activity that started there in 2006, when a few storefronts began to display artworks. Now, nearly 30 galleries and mixed-use venues show works by young artists; there are art walks on Saturdays, and on first Fridays, busy Telegraph Avenue is closed to traffic, food trucks appear, and the place becomes an art party. It's a bit like the East



In *Silent* (2012), a human torso on a concrete base gives rise to bronze rods, which support a large bird nest made of cotton and papier-mâché. An emotionally provocative work of the same year shows two embracing torsos — one male, one female. Rendered in stark detail, these partial bodies bear scars and cracks in their skin. In place of heads, Tilton substituted two wrecked automobiles, created with skilled verisimilitude. With a sense of dry irony, he titled this work *Connect*.

*Vesuvius* (2013) tells another story. A nude female figure, in papier-mâché made to look like bronze, holds what appears to be a blanket when seen from below, but reads like a section of earth when seen from above. The double meaning adds mystery to a work inspired by research into the eruption of Vesuvius and destruction of Pompeii. A sculpture like this, blurring reality and make-believe and dealing with the stubborn fact of death, manifests the transformative potential of art. Tilton aims high, not only in terms of his process, but also in term of his aspirations. Citing the example of Picasso, he says, "I aspire to achieve a fraction of his fearlessness."

—Peter Selz

**High Hopes**  
Cyrus Tilton (2010.)  
63 x 26 18.5"  
concrete and steel  
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