

SWEETWATER,

Bill Walton

September 13, 2023 – November 4, 2023

Bill Walton was born in Camden, New Jersey in 1931; his first solo exhibition took place in Philadelphia at Dianne Vanderlip Gallery in 1971. In the intervening years, he had served in the Navy, played drums in a band, gotten married and become a father, studied at the Chicago Institute of Design, and started a career working in commercial printing studios, focusing on offset lithography. In the late 1960s, Walton parlayed his print shop jobs into a part-time teaching position at the Moore College of Art and Design, an all-women's art school in Philadelphia. During this time, he also taught himself to weld and renovated his family's 200-year-old house in the suburbs, converting its garage to a studio and building kitchen cabinets from old floorboards found in the attic.

Between that first solo exhibition in 1971 and his death in 2010, Walton would have over twenty solo exhibitions featuring his sculptures, drawings, and paintings, works imbued with subtle wit and a peculiar minimalism which belied their heartfelt affect. Throughout his practice, materials appear in unexpected places, or unexpected ways: what appears to be wood may actually be metal, or what appears to be metal may actually be concrete, a fine wood grain may actually be painted, or a soft cloth may actually be rigid. Organic materials abound, or, at the very least, seem to; one constant throughout Walton's life was connection to nature. An avid fly fisherman, Walton would rarely vacation without his rod; according to his family, he fished just as he made art: with a detailed, intense, and specific process requiring concentration and devotion.

Very few of Walton's works are marked with dates; no gesture is burdened with the designation of being completed. Walton felt that freedom from this convention was a form of honesty: individual sculptures would be worked on, left to, in his words "vintage a bit", be rearranged or repositioned, be divided or combined, but never not be in process. And besides, how could Walton have dated materials grown or forged long before an idea for an artwork had even been conceived? He once recalled that certain works of his included timber of a tree already growing when the Magna Carta was signed, more than seven hundred years before Walton was even born. Titles served as more important references for Walton, allusions to people, to places, to sensibilities. *Sweet Lou and Marie* is a portrait of the owner of a local diner and his wife; *Spring Crate* works were made in his Spring Street studio; *Iron Creek* and *Swamp Creek* were fishing spots.

In a 2005 essay on Walton's practice, curator Christopher Youngs writes, "rather than being on course, we are led into the deep woods of the stuff that dreams are of, the world of make and believe... despite lies and illusions, we are made to believe in the improbable truth encapsulated in the lay of the land." Bill Walton's wood and metal and concrete (and oil paint and soap and baking powder) are referents at once both specific and infinite, they are arrangements at once both ephemeral and timeless.

Bill Walton (*1931, Camden, New Jersey, US; †2010, Camden, New Jersey, US) lived and worked in Philadelphia for the majority of his life. He realized more than twenty solo exhibitions during his lifetime, primarily in Philadelphia; posthumous solo exhibitions have taken place at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Drexel University, Philadelphia; Fleisher/Ollman, Philadelphia; JTT, New York; James Fuentes, New York; Adams and Ollman, Portland; and Frith Street, London. He held teaching positions at the Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia from 1969 to 1995 and Drexel University, Philadelphia from 1972 to 1974. Walton and his work have been featured and reviewed in numerous publications, including Artforum, Artnews, Art in America, The New York Times, The New Yorker, and Sculpture Magazine. His work is included in the permanent collections of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; the Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA; and the Yale University Gallery, New Haven, CT.