

## Steven Siegel: The Sculptor from Planet X

February 14, 2011 by John Perreault

SCULPTURE Steven Siegel ART Starn Twins ROBERT SMITHSON global warming GARBAGE Matthew Barney  
Black Mountain College BURGESS SHALE Marlborough Chelsea STEPHEN JAY GOULD Penland School BLACK  
MOUNTAIN COLLEGE Barbara Gladstone Twin Peaks Landfill PACIFIC GARBAGE VORTEX

Unsolicited Photo Gains Artist Blue-Chip Gallery!



What makes Steven Siegel's site-specific newspaper sculptures so special? What is so wonderful about his series of wall sculptures called "Wonderful Life"? And — now — what is the extra ingredient in *Biography* (at Marlborough Chelsea to Feb. 26) that allows me to claim we have a major sculptor on our hands?

Siegel has been showing his sculptures for at least 30 years. But most of his work, until just this moment, has only been seen outside New York City

This may be because his work has usually been site-specific. But if truth be known, there is still a silence here — in galleries and the magazines — about art that is in the boondocks. Maybe an image here and there or an excellent interview in [Sculpture Magazine](#) — which, let's face it, is not seen by all that many power-brokers or theorists, curators or collectors. Mike + Doug Starn can get a lot of attention for their photogenic but middling effort last summer on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum of Art — a shaky, gimcrack lookout made of lashed-together bamboo — whereas a sculptor as innovative as Patrick Dougherty, who for years has used the snagging of locally harvested saplings to make his "nests" and "lookouts" all over America, is unjustly neglected. Proximity is all. Proximity to power; proximity to media. Proximity is hegemony.

Sculpture, by which I mean the actually physical mode of three-dimensional artmaking, is too cumbersome, bothersome, and troublesome. Takes up room;

takes time. I love sculpture. And everything in between.

But sculpture, in fact, has lost out to painting since the rebirth of same in the gruesome '80s. Or was it the '90s? Painting was reborn, or so goes the legend, in Germany or somewhere in an art department in Upstate New York or perhaps California. Actually, in hindsight this was the death of painting, but no one was watching. They were too busy investing.

And why was sculpture lost? Unless it is super-cumbersome and super-troublesome like the work of Richard Serra — who brilliantly seems to have cornered that particular market — sculpture is not worth its weight in gold. It is not yet traded like stocks and bonds. Sculpture likes to stay put. We are not talking about the trinkets people once placed on their mantels or end-tables. We are talking about the big stuff.

