



Clear blue tubes, a vintage 5-gallon water bottle and stainless steel are the central components of *Illuminated Fountain*.



Underside of *Illuminated Fountain* showing mounting structure and backlighting tubes.

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Illuminated Fountain

by JOHN HOLODNIK

"WHAT ARE YOU GOING to do with those?" my wife asked quizzically, when I purchased some old 5-gallon glass water bottles at a garage sale. I had no idea, but thought they were beautifully colored, and I had always liked wavy, vintage glass. The bottles sat by the back porch for over a year, and I periodically tried to think of a good use. Maybe they would just stand on their own as decorative pieces.

After signing up for Lili's *Neon Workshop*, I racked my brain for possible projects. The concept that stood out was a fountain created from one of the bottles using neon illumination in place of actual water. This was definitely the most technically challenging and complicated of my ideas, but it was the most interesting to me. So it was time to start creating a buildable design. I wanted something natural and soothing, like a "real" fountain.

How to incorporate the bottle was the first issue. I decided to cut the bottle into two sections, with the portion containing the spout "pouring" into the basin-like portion. Clear blue neon tubes would be placed within each of the two sections to give the impression of pooled water. A krypton crackle tube would mimic running water from one section to the other. Darker blue tubes would be used to backlight the mounting structure.

First order of business was cutting the bottle in half. With my glass cutting knowledge next to nonexistent, I contacted some glass professionals about getting the bottle cut. After two unsuccessful attempts and thinking I would have to switch to another project, I started researching glass cutting techniques.

One article on cutting glass blocks mentioned utilizing a ceramic/porcelain tile saw which then led me to another article on cutting wine bottles with the same equipment. After purchasing an inexpensive tile saw and building a fixture to hold the bottle steady and straight, I successfully cut the bottle.

Now it was time to construct the mounting structure. I considered wood, concrete, and even stone before deciding on stainless steel. Since the crackle tube would have a 90-degree bend and go through the spout of the bottle, the structure would have to be made in two sections so I could assemble it sequentially. Plywood, painted silver to match, was used for the substructure and then covered with stainless steel. The stainless steel was sanded to achieve a matte finish, and a gentle, wave-like pattern added with an angle grinder for a more natural appearance. Off-the-shelf tube supports would not work in many of the places, so I fabricated some out of clear acrylic. Special standoffs with adjustable legs were installed on the bottom and back of the structure so the backlight would be more visible. Special brackets were then made to mount the bottle and the pieces of the structure together.

After a trial fitting, the clear blue tubes within the bottle sections were too harsh. So to better communicate the idea of pooled water and for a more soothing appearance, I used a special paint to frost the glass inside the appropriate portions of the bottle. A stand was also built for my piece since it would be too cumbersome to mount on a wall.

The patterns for the neon tubes were made and all but the crackle tube were promptly completed. I was then informed the delivery of the crackle tube might take more time since only a few people with special equipment were capable of their fabrication.



IT WAS NOW THE WEEK before the student exhibition, but I was still missing what was one of the main focal points of my whole piece: the crackle tube. It was delayed numerous times, but thankfully, with Lili's help, the tube was finally ready less than 48 hours before the showing. I had been putting long hours in for several weeks, and I was extremely relieved to finally have all the pieces. Final assembly was started and going more or less as planned until it came time to test fit the crackle tube. It was longer on both sides than the pattern. After making modifications to account for this discrepancy, the next problem made itself apparent. The protrusion used to fill the tube with gas was at 90 degrees to the tube and would not fit through the spout of the bottle!

It was now the day before the exhibition and I was sourcing special sandpaper to sand down the tube enough to fit through the bottle spout, without breaking the tube or sanding too far and releasing the krypton gas. By that afternoon the tube just fit through the opening. But the spout wasn't uniform and the protrusion became stuck. After spending considerable time attempting to free the tube, I heard the sound that is still stuck in my head: "CRACK!" The crackle tube was in pieces in my hands.

After staring in disbelief at the disaster in front of me and seeing it was 3PM the day before the show, I realized my only hope was to substitute a standard tube. After numerous calls back and forth between Lili, me, and various tube benders, we found a local bender literally minutes from me. Without much hope of success as it was now close to 4PM on a Friday, I rushed to his shop and explained the situation. To my amazement, he said, "Come back in an hour and pick up your tube."

True to his word I had a replacement tube in hand by 5PM. By late that night I was relieved the project was finally complete. My wife was the first to see the finished piece and thought it might be better without the crackle tube because it looked more serene and calming. I still wasn't convinced and continued to lament the broken tube.

I was still slightly dazed the day of the show as I carefully loaded it into the truck and brought it to the studio. After hearing feedback at the show, and living with it at home since then, I think the standard tube does reflect my original idea better than a crackle tube. Maybe everything does happen for a reason.

CARHOPS

by LILI LAKICH

WITH MUCH OF THE ART WORLD stuck on stupid, I am pleased to have the opportunity to return to those thrilling days of yesteryear when a pictorial neon image would fire up my imagination and leave me enthralled.

Last year, I sold a 9-ft tall Ruby the Carhop (at right) to Aaron Weiss for his Flying A garage in Pasadena filled with his collection of V-16 Cadillacs. This month, Aaron commissioned me to create a companion carhop, this one on roller skates.

She will be 11 ft. tall with neon tubing mounted to a shaped painted metal cabinet. While many think that neon is on the decline (I've been down this road a few times), there are other indications that neon is being resurrected by groups like Pentagram which just branded a new fried chicken restaurant in Austin, Texas that will be franchised nationally. Check out Lucy with her animating leg (scroll down for the video) at: [Lucy's Fried Chicken](#). But why oh why didn't they light up her face?

Link to some of my favorite neon signs at: http://www.lakich.com/New_Visual%20Memoir_Website/Signs_of_Art.htm

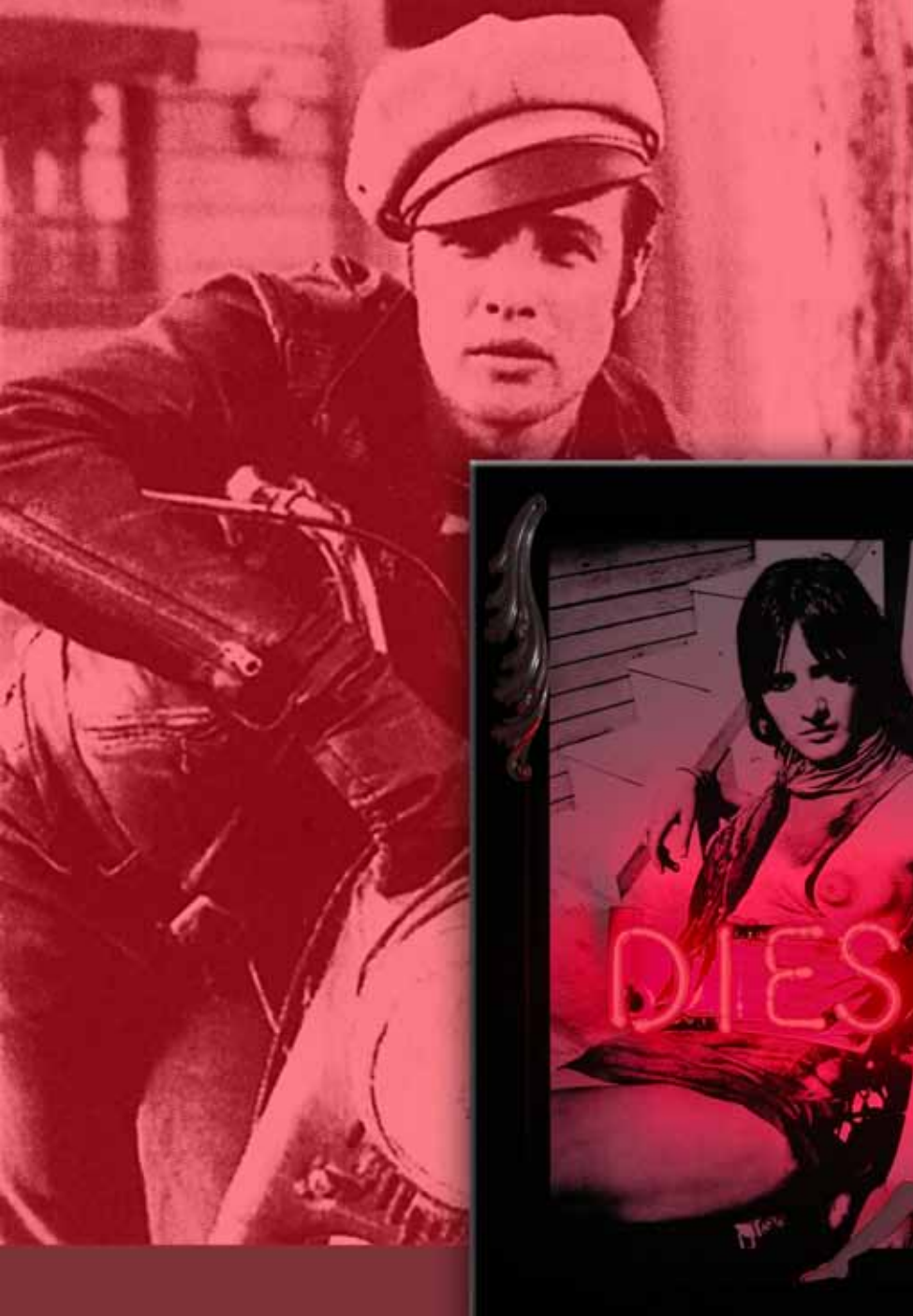


FLYAWAY WORK ILLUMINATED FOR 3 YEARS



On March 9, 2009, we completed the 17-day installation of *Flyaway*, my 114-ft. public art commission for the Van Nuys Flyaway at 7610 Woodley Ave. in Van Nuys, CA. It has 700 feet of neon tubing powered by 200,000 volts and operates 24/7. Link to a YouTube video of it at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKEYVZ0Red4>

Photo by Kenna Love.



DIESEL

Lili Lakich
2011
Photo printed on aluminum, Corning ruby red neon, wood frame, found objects
23 x 19 x 4 in.

IN 1968, HAVING RECENTLY moved to California from New York City, I visited some friends in Laguna Beach and found this photo of a woman sitting on the back of a motorcycle with one of her breasts exposed. It was an iconic image of a contemporary Amazon printed on a torn scrap of paper that had come from an Israeli newspaper, now taped to the wall of a bathroom.

I need this, I said to my friends, and I peeled it off the wall and put it in my bag, not waiting for any protest.

Empowering images of Gay people are rare. And empowering images of Lesbians far less visible. We are force-fed our heroes from movies and magazines—almost never from our own lives. And the most visible out-of-the-closet Lesbian (Ellen Degeneres), at 54, still dresses like a pre-pubescent boy.

I don't know whether the woman on the motorcycle was gay or straight, but she has empowered me. And I have used her image a number of times in the more than four decades since I found it on a bathroom wall. She is the female equivalent of Marlon Brando's portrayal in "The Wild One"—MY very own Diesel Portrayal.

Check out the dates for the 2012 Gay Pride Parades at: ForeverGayRainbow