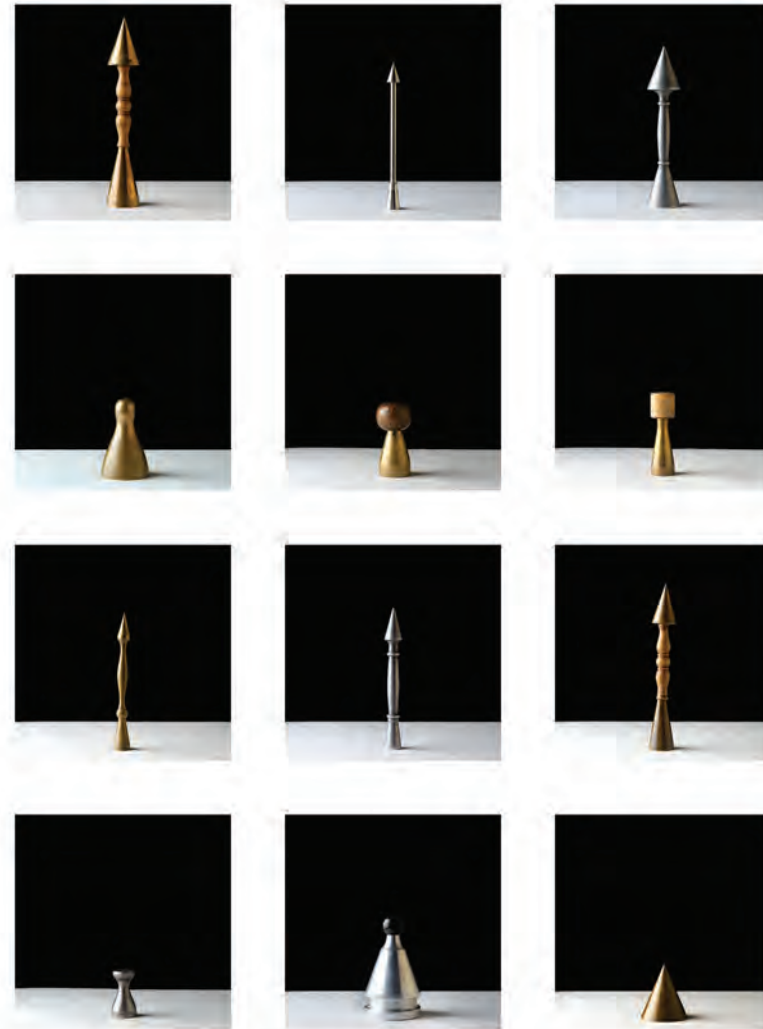


VOICING · THE · WOODS



Jeremy Adams, Instrument Maker

OCTOBER 22, 2016 – FEBRUARY 26, 2017

CAPE ANN MUSEUM



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Jeremy Adams, Instrument Maker

Photographs by Paul Cary Goldberg

SOME CONTEMPORARY artists bring old and new together to make sparks fly. Some do it to provoke thought, some to disorient, some to comfort. In the work of Jeremy Adams, the bringing together of old and new feels more like an extended and intimate conversation—one that, figuratively and literally, we have the good fortune of overhearing.

Jeremy Adams's creative life began with a twist on the classic theme of childhood piano lessons. The family had no piano, but did have a melodeon, so the five-year-old's first lessons, prompted by a fascination with the instrument's sounds, were in effect organ lessons.

Adams went on to study piano as well, eventually enrolling at the Longy School of Music

in Cambridge in 1958. It was the head of the school, Melville Smith, who became Adams's first mentor. In his office in the ornate former residence that Longy occupied, Smith had an 18th-century harpsichord, and he responded to Adams's curiosity by showing him how the specific sounds of the instrument helped bring out certain qualities of the music. "Melville taught me how to listen," says Adams. "He'd say, 'How are you going to exercise your *bon gout* if you don't have any?'"

After Longy, Adams remained in Cambridge, but a very different part of it. In a well-worn industrial building near Lechmere, where generations of artisans had created the elaborate carving and paneling that graced so many Harvard Square buildings similar to Longy's, Adams became an apprentice to harpsichord maker William Dowd, a leading force in America's rediscovery of this long-neglected instrument.

The whimsical side of Adams's nature, slyly evident in corners of some of his more serious work, takes center stage in his ink and watercolor sketches. Meticulous in execution, spontaneous in spirit, they reveal a well-defined, highly personal style that effortlessly blends erudition and satire, to delightful results.



Arriving with almost no hands-on experience, Adams was a consummate craftsman and harpsichord voicer by the time he left Dowd's. In six years, he had become not only a virtuoso woodworker but a master of the elaborate and arcane art of transforming a pile of wood and wire into an instrument that, under the right hands, could make ancient music leap to life.

Still restless, Adams followed his curiosity to the workshop of Charles Fisk in Gloucester, taking a job in the related though quite different discipline of pipe organ building. It was characteristic of Adams that he was attracted to the most exacting and enigmatic of organbuilding's many skills: the voicing of reed pipes, in particular the French classical type. These pungent, powerful sounds would become one of the hallmarks of his pipe

organs. Within two years, Adams had mastered not only reed voicing but all the other special skills of organ building. In 1969, he set out on his own, renting a small space in East Gloucester.

Adams's first contracts were for harpsichords. Designing and building a harpsichord is by definition an act of historical reference; the harpsichord's currency as a living instrument ended with the French Revolution. For Dowd and other founders of the "Boston school" of harpsichord makers, the focus was historical authenticity. What interested Adams was a different type of authenticity: the authenticity of the builder's vision and voice. In the great gulf between ancient and modern, Adams saw fertile ground for deeper questions of aesthetics and artistic identity, and possibilities for a dialogue and collaboration across time.

Adams's curiosity and spirit of adventure have remained the driving force in his work. He cites many influences, from Roland Dumas, a friend and maker of reed pipes, to American cabinet-maker Wharton Esherick to the De Stijl furniture designer Gerrit Rietveld. "At one point I became fascinated with studying the buildings of Le Corbusier," says Adams. "I didn't like them at all. But I wanted to understand how they worked."

In modest ways at first, then with increasing sophistication and boldness, Jeremy Adams has pursued a vision of the harpsichord in which, inside and out, Baroque and Modernist aesthetics intertwine and shade into each other in subtle and supple ways. A comparable vision is also evident in his pipe organs, especially that in the Annisquam Village Church.

The most audacious expression of Adams's vision is the large harpsichord he recently completed for his own use, which is the centerpiece of this exhibition. Both visually and musically, it is as if a traditional harpsichord had been possessed from the inside by a spirit that encompasses aesthetic influences from across the entire period since the harpsichord went into eclipse.

Adams says that "a harpsichord, even an organ, is like a big cello or violin. Every part of the construction matters — how it's made and what it's made out of." In his work, a deep love of history, an ear for music, an eye for proportion and detail, the skills of a wizard, and an abiding spirit of adventure and imagination all combine to produce objects of unique character and resonance.

—JOSIAH FISK

Josiah Fisk has written about classical music for numerous publications and is editor of *Composers on Music: Eight Centuries of Writings* (Northeastern University Press, 1997). He worked as an organ-builder with John Brombaugh, A. David Moore, and with his father, Charles Fisk. He is founder and president of More Carrot, a communications company.

THE FURNITURE OF JEREMY ADAMS

In becoming an expert maker of harpsichords or organs, one becomes an expert furniture maker in the bargain. Creating wooden objects—exquisite or merely functional—is a universal avocation for those who work in these fields. Yet Adams appears to be the only keyboard instrument maker ever to achieve professional distinction as a furnituremaker as well.

As with his entire career, his furniture making grew out of a combination of opportunity, curiosity, and necessity. Visitors to his home, seeing the things he had made for himself and his wife, Kathleen, offered commissions, sometimes on the spot.

As an adjunct to this exhibition, a selection of Adams's furniture is on display in the Captain Elias Davis House at the Museum. The pieces appear alongside period furniture, much as they have been designed to do in Adams's own home and in the homes of many other collectors—another example of how Adams has succeeded in creating a quiet yet complex dialogue between present and past.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF PAUL CARY GOLDBERG

Since harpsichords and pipe organs do not travel easily—even less so the builder's own workshop—the Museum enlisted the help of noted Gloucester photographer Paul Cary Goldberg. Goldberg visited Adams's Danvers workshop as well as the organ in the Annisquam Village Church and several harpsichords in private collections. Goldberg's images, which appear as part of this exhibition, help to complete the story of Adams and his work by giving us evocative glimpses of several different worlds that otherwise would remain beyond our view.

Born in New York City in 1950, Goldberg came to Boston to attend Boston University, settling in Gloucester in 1995. Self-taught as a photographer, he has exhibited extensively in the Northeast and beyond. He is perhaps best known on the North Shore for his photographic series *Nightwatch: Gloucester Harbor, Tutta la Famiglia* and *Farm Project*.

—Josiah Fisk



ABOVE: Stopped Diapason pipes, Jeremy Adams Chapel Organ; Maple Street Congregational Church, Danvers, MA. **LEFT:** Keyboard, Jeremy Adams Chamber Organ; Annisquam Village Church, Gloucester, MA. **FRONT COVER:** One Dozen Assorted Pipe Tuning Cones and Pipe Toe Cones. Tuning cones and toe cones like these have been used by organ builders since the Middle Ages. Three of the nine shown here—first row middle, second row middle and right—were designed and made by Adams; others have been handed down from builder to builder over generations. **BACK COVER:** Soundboard Detail #3, Jeremy Adams Harpsichord, 1975. **INSIDE FRONT COVER:** Jeremy Adams in his workshop, a former church in Danvers, rebuilding a Pleyel harpsichord from the early 20th century. Photographs by Paul Cary Goldberg, 2016.

EXHIBITION RELATED PROGRAMS

- Saturday, October 22** 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. *Voicing the Woods* Opening Reception
- Friday, November 4** 7:00 p.m. Concert on the Adams Organ and Clavichord at the Annisquam Village Church: Performance by Kevin Birch
- Saturday, November 5** 11:00 a.m. Midday Mini-Concert & Instrument Demonstration with Kevin Birch
- Saturday, November 12** 2:00 p.m. *Voicing the Woods* Gallery Talk: Photographer Paul Cary Goldberg
- Saturday, December 3** 11:00 a.m. Midday Mini-Concert & Instrument Demonstration with Kathleen and Jeremy Adams
- Saturday, January 7** 11:00 a.m. Midday Mini-Concert & Instrument Demonstration with harpsichordist and organist Frances Conover Fitch
- Saturday, January 14** 2:00 p.m. *Conversations with Contemporary Artists* series: Photographer Paul Cary Goldberg
- Saturday, February 4** 11:00 a.m. Midday Mini-Concert & Instrument Demonstration with harpsichordist Carolyn Day Skelton and organist John Skelton
- 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Middle Street to Annisquam Organ Crawl: Voices of Four Cape Ann Pipe Organs
- Friday, January 27** 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. CAM*afterhours*: "Dancing the Woods"

Programs are subject to change. For details and updates please visit capeannmuseum.org/events.
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With additional support from the Umberto Romano and Clorinda Romano Foundation.

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