

# Ironworks exhibitors show interpretation of mankind

## Showing is set for Friday night

By Michael D'Onofrio  
Staff Writer

This week in the Valley Arts District, the identity of man is the topic of interest. Through photography and sculpture, two local artists are combining their efforts to offer viewers a modern take on where meaning can be discovered.

In an exhibit, "Image — Identity, Looking for Who We Are," West Orange photographer Bill Westheimer and Maplewood sculptor Larry Dell will share gallery space on Friday evening at the Ironworks studios in Orange.

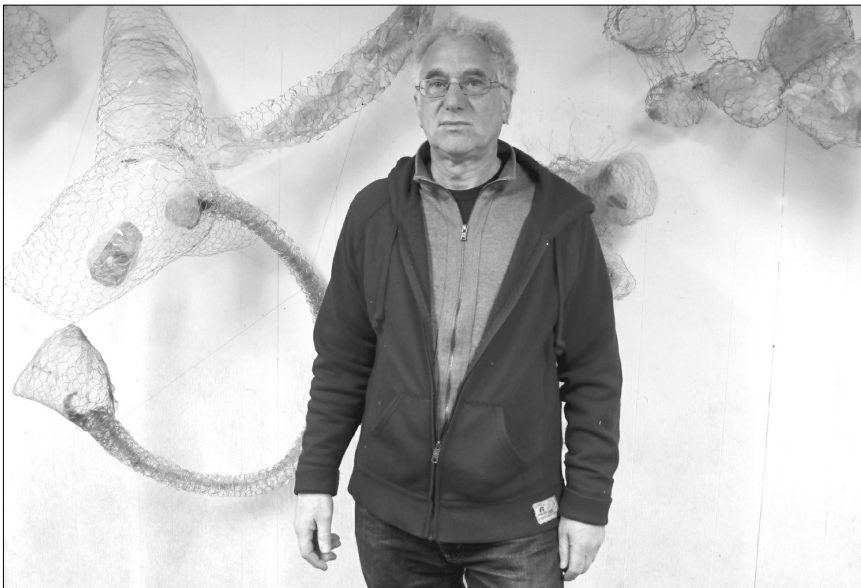
Westheimer, who was raised in Cincinnati and moved to West Orange 11 years ago from New York City, will display numerous prints from a project he began in 2005, "The Manual Project." The project focuses on the human hand.

"Our hands carry evidence of the lives we've lived, and are reflections of our lives," said Westheimer.

One of the main objectives of an artist, continued Westheimer, is to take the mundane and everyday and show it to a viewer in a new way. To do this, Westheimer not only forgoes the face as a source of identity, but also presents an individual's hands using two not-so-modern techniques and placing the resulting photographs side by side.

On one side, Westheimer used a 19th-century photographic process called wet plate collodion, which produces a crisp, detailed photo in a sepia tone. Here, Westheimer takes the photo and is in complete control since the image is taken from his perspective.

On the other side, he used a photogram which in fact doesn't use a camera at all. Instead, an image is created by placing objects directly onto a surface of photosensitive material and then exposing it to light, which results in a negative image,



Maplewood sculptor Larry Dell will be one of two artists whose work will be featured Friday night during an exhibit at the Ironworks studio in Orange.

similar to an X-ray. Areas of the paper which receive no light appear white, while those areas exposed to light appear in varying shades of gray.

Westheimer also collaborated with each person in the darkroom while using the photogram to produce an image of how that person wanted to represent his or her hands. Here, each photogram image is more of a personal perception of each individual's hand.

These two images — the wet plate collodion and photogram images — are placed side by side. The third and final component of each portrait is a message

written by the person in their own handwriting, which offers a mental perception of how each person perceives himself or herself.

In addition, Westheimer will also be displaying a number of salt-print photographs he made from the glass-plate negatives used in "The Manual Project," which offer yet another perspective.

The hands of the individuals Westheimer photographed range in age from 1 to 102 years old. Among them are local people, Billy Gibbons from ZZ Top, and those he happened to run into while he stayed at various artist residencies in New

York City and Scotland.

On the other side of Ironworks will be Dell's work, offering viewers a polychromatic theater of abstract sculpture that contrasts with Westheimer's monochromatic prints.

Dell, who grew up across the Hudson River in Brooklyn, pursued and learned the arts by attending Pratt Institute and graduate school at Hunter College. He moved into Maplewood about 16 years ago.

His studio is in Maplewood and is a think tank littered with finished and unfinished works using different materials and spanning years.

Although having done painting in the past, Dell said he has concentrated on sculpture lately, having found a new level of comfort in it. More specifically, he uses metal chicken wire and colorful fabric in a series he has dubbed the "Ghost" series, which will be his pieces on display at the Ironworks.

Dell will also be displaying pieces from another series of work titled, "(My) Lost Identity: A Reflection on Dishonesty, Secrecy, Politics and Love."

Dell's fountain of inspiration for the both series primarily flows from the fact he recently learned he is adopted. "For me, it's an emotional thing," said Dell.

He draws on imagery that comes to him instantaneously that communicates a single, powerful idea, such as the moment of his birth or the idea of relatives he has never encountered.

"How can I come up to something that has some meaning or some reference to relatives that I have never known?" said Dell. "They are sort of ghosts to me, because they are somewhere out there."

The seeming weightlessness of the chicken wire and fabric used in Dell's Ghost series invoke that ethereal theme, and Dell's use of abstract forms draws on that sense of ambiguity of attempting to picture something one has never seen. Dell's other series, My Lost Identity, also plays on this same idea, but utilizes forms of foam which communicates more of a sensual and flesh-like feeling.

While they are two contrasting views of the human form, Westheimer's and Dell's pieces nonetheless work in concert to give viewers a sense of where meaning can be found and how it can be expressed.

"I think our exhibits complement each other because they are both investigations of individual identity, and different ways of looking at a person's identity," said Westheimer.

The gallery reception will be Friday from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Ironworks Studio, 406 Tompkins St., Orange.