

## *In Memoriam Jack Fisher, Jr. (1954–2006)*

René Westbrook

Jack Fisher, Jr., lived life large, made art, nurtured creativity from his students, and danced his way through forty-nine years of exuberant giving to his family, friends, and community. Jack died in the early morning hours of February 1, 2006, of cancer.

Jack was born in Spokane Washington, on March 31, 1954. His family moved around a bit, but eventually settled in Great Falls, Montana, where Jack graduated from Great Falls High School in 1974. He went on to study art and education at Montana State University and returned to teach in the public schools, eventually to become chair of the art department at Great Falls High. His teaching, his creative impulse, and his infectious laughter will sound in the ears of everyone he came in contact with for years to come. Jack simply was life, and the world seems much lesser with his passing.

Jack was a brilliant educator, good friend, and beloved family member, as spoken of eloquently at his memorial service on February 5, 2006. Nearly five hundred people attended this service, and family, friends, co-workers, students, and art collaborators lined up to speak of Jack's amazing ability to help everyone to Just Be Themselves. He invested his students with the courage to put aside any expectations, loosen up, have fun, and create from the heart. He had real ability to give people a sort of permission to bravely experiment with their creativity and just enjoy themselves.

Jack's art was lively, entertaining, and thought-provoking. Humorous in appearance, he brought people to his work by using colorful mixed media and found objects in witty and visually



*Jack Fisher, Jr. (1954–2006), Home Is Where the Heart Should Be, serigraph, n.d.*

interesting ways, and once you were really looking at his art, the serious underlying themes became evident. He used repeated images to create his own vocabulary: peanut butter sandwiches were not only about home and childhood, they were about poverty. The images of his animals were joyful and playful, but look closer and you notice that flames surround them and some have angel wings or halos; Jack lost his home, his possessions and most of his beloved pets in a terrible fire one year. Jack repeatedly used the theme of the sanctuary of home in his work. One of the last large mixed-media pieces Jack completed is entitled *Home Is*

*Where the Heart Is* and featured images of himself with his animals, under a sheltering roof, with an escaping Peter Pan shadow-self climbing out of the image. He had this persona that was generous, gregarious, and public, but he also had his home and his well-tended privacy. For Jack, the unconditional love he got from his pets became the peaceful place he could count on to regroup, so he could go back into the world and be the warm giving person he was so well known to be.

Jack was a vital part of the collaborative contemporary artist group known as the Caravan Project. Jack loved the Caravan Project and its mission of bringing contemporary art to rural and isolated Montana communities and interacting with people without the constraints of formal art gallery settings. Jack would disappear into his animal-print contact-paper-decorated RV at night and emerge in the morning with new outfits for his “performing dogs.” His laughter would ring out across the Caravan’s camping and show spots, and kids would flock to his display. He was a fun magnet.

Jack empathized deeply with everyone he came in contact

with and connected with the human core in people he met. He was the opposite of intimidating. His emails were entirely done in capital letters with too many exclamation marks to count; exactly the same way he talked and lived.

Jack had numerous solo and group exhibits during his career and will be honored in 2007 with a show at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art in Great Falls. Curator Jessica Larsen is mounting this show and seeks loans of Jack’s art for the exhibition. For more information or to arrange a loan, please contact her at 406.727.8255.

Jack is preceded in death by his beloved brother and leaves behind his family and very special friend in Caroline Street. If you have thoughts, memories, or condolences you would like to share with Jack’s family and Caroline, please write:

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Fisher, Sr.  
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