

# FORT GANSEVOORT

**AlphaSixty**

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In the Studio with Sam Stewart

By Jenny Bahn

The domestic world is rife with convention. The formula, long established, can feel static and staid. Sit here, sleep there, use this for that. For North Carolina-born, New York City-based artist Sam Stewart, the work is about upending our expectations. His efforts transform space, giving new life to the too familiar. By lending otherwise utilitarian objects uncanny details and characteristics, Stewart alters our expectations of what four walls can contain.

Before moving into the conceptual space, Stewart worked as a freelance carpenter for residential and commercial projects. The world was one he was familiar with; growing up, Stewart's dad was a carpenter. His proximity to traditional fabrications has only helped him in his upending of the household paradigm. Today, Stewart creates work for both gallery spaces and for client homes.

While his commissioned work must, by necessity, straddle the line between function and creativity, in his own work, Stewart has free reign. In *Cryptid*, a show running until April 7 at NYC gallery Fort Gansevoort, Stewart has transformed the floor of a townhouse into an abode for a mythical inhabitant (think Bigfoot or the Yeti). Blending sci-fi and folklore, Stewart has created stunning objects of a world that amplifies New York City's reality. Luxury, gym culture, opulence: it's all here, translated through Stewart's lens.

Before the show closed, we got a chance to meet Stewart in the space he's created. (Make it there, if you can, though we're sure he'll be transforming plenty of other rooms in the near future). Below, Stewart talks unruly lamp cords, early Monet encounters, and bouncing around Queens in a van



*Former occupation and your most notable memory there:*

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Art handler/installer for Punch Designer Services. My most notable memory is when I spent an entire day “tidying” lamp cords in an extremely large vacation home in Rhode Island. Cords didn’t simply hang free in this home; they needed to be subdued with tape, twine, twist ties, you name it, so that they would be as “invisible” or as least “obtrusive” as possible. I actually really liked this task — such a simple gesture spoke volumes about the inhabitant.

***Your first experience with art/design as a child:***

My mom took my brother and I to Paris in 1999. I was 11 years old. We went to the Louvre, Rodin’s sculpture garden, and did a day-trip to Monet’s gardens and home. Seeing Monet’s home in the countryside was very impactful. I remember how his study looked like he had just left it only moments before. I took photographs of the lily pond and painted from these in the Impressionist style. My mom made a calendar from these paintings.



*What did your parents do for work? Were they interested in the arts or design?*

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My mom was a vocational rehabilitation counselor and worked both privately for herself and also for a large insurance company. My dad was a carpenter and contractor who built custom homes. They were both very interested in art and design. My mom was an English major, and both her and my dad read a lot. So many books and magazines in our home growing up. They made a big effort to expose my brother and I to as much art, literature, and culture as possible.

***Describe your childhood bedroom in detail:***

Which iteration!?! I changed my room all the time—including painting the walls different colors. The last iteration was this: flat dark blue walls, white ceiling, white semi-gloss moulding, blonde maple hardwood floors, built-in bookshelf recessed into the wall. Closet next to the bookshelf. Windows facing west along an entire wall with a door exiting the room out onto a patio extending into the back yard. Antique four-poster bed that was given to me by my grandmother. Handmade patchwork quilt covered the bed. Capel-brand Southwestern-themed rug on the floor that ended about 6” from each wall, exposing a strip of hardwood flooring all around the room like a frame. Art Deco-inspired maple chest of drawers to the left of the bed. Dark walnut nightstand with decorative floral brass pulls on each side of the bed. A heavy metal desk from the military surplus in the corner looking out the window into the yard.



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***Can you describe the process of how a piece of yours typically gets made, from start to finish?***

The work starts as an idea, and I turn that idea over and over until I've fully realized the work in its entirety only in my mind—like down to almost every detail. Then I usually create a rendering on Google SketchUp and sometimes Adobe Illustrator. I meet with my fabricators and we work together to realize the work. I work primarily with a cabinet maker and an upholsterer. Material decisions are more subject to change during the process of realizing a work; however, formally, things stay pretty much the same as I envision them from the start.

***Is it difficult finding a fabricator who can realize your designs?***

I've been very lucky to have rather easily found fabricators that really understand what I'm doing. I can't even begin to tell you how thankful I am for their patience and skill.

***How does fashion influence your work?***

I look at fashion for material and color combinations. I don't read too much into the themes or trends—more just on a utilitarian level, I will pull from things that I like.



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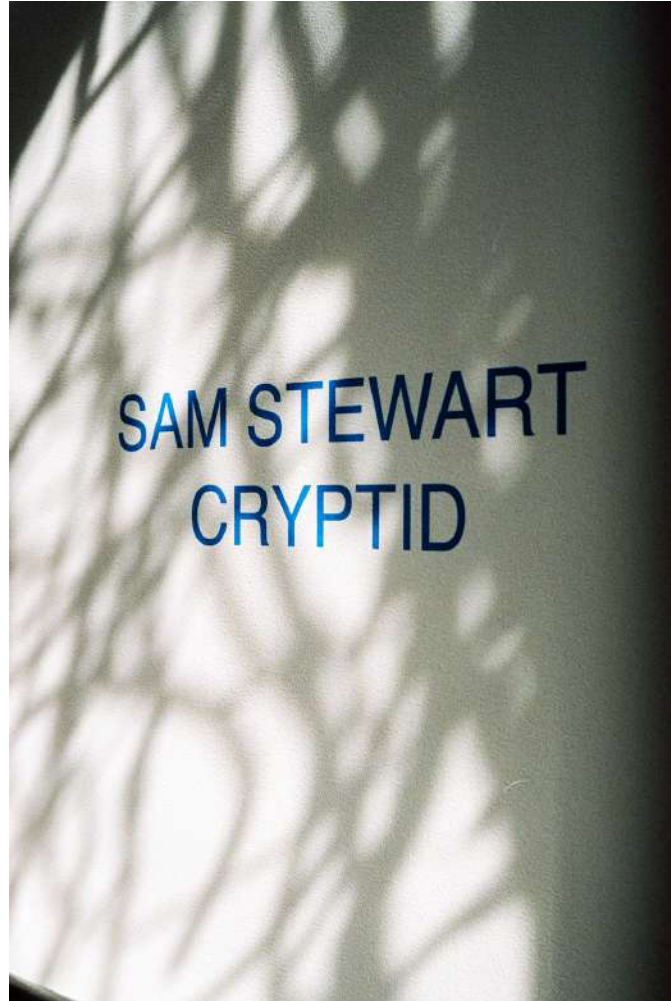
***How did you find your current workspace and where is it?***

My home/computer is my primary workspace; however, my fabricators will lend me a little space in their shop to work on things on a more hands-on level when I need to.

***What do you eat for breakfast?***

Just coffee with milk from the deli. I go to the same place every morning and pay in change. \$1.

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*What's a day typically look like for you, from start to finish?*

It really depends on the day, but largely I'm out and about checking on things with the fabricators and purchasing materials. Because I've recently had a solo booth at Collective Design Fair while also having a solo show up at the same time—both with Fort Gansevoort—I've had the added daily discussions and emails with the gallery regarding press, sales, walkthroughs with friends, clients, and curators, etc. The gallery also manages my commissions so, largely, I've been communicating through them with most of my clients/potential clients. I'm really lucky if I have a chance to work on something with my hands. Most days are at the computer or bouncing around Brooklyn and Queens in my van.

*Do you listen to music while you work? If so, what?*

When I'm working at the computer, I will sometimes listen to music—mostly at night, though. My tastes are always changing, but recently I've been listening to Arvo Pärt's "Fratres for Piano and Cello."

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*What are you currently working on?*

There are a few commissions in the works that aren't fully 100% certain so I won't go into too much detail, but having finished all of the work for both my show at the gallery and the fair booth, I'm only just now shifting gears to other things. One in particular is a large brass sectional sofa and daybed that I designed for a really amazing apartment in Brooklyn Heights. There are a few small architectural interventions that I'm also designing in the space—one is a mouth-shaped stained glass light box recessed into the wall behind the sofa.

*What material do you or your fabricator go through the most of?*

MDF or Formica.

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*What medium/ tool/ color are you most interested in presently and why?*

Combinations of materials in the same color but with slight tonal variations are really interesting to me right now. Burlwood veneer. Vinyl. A lot of these materials appear in my show. I think that they relate more specifically to our time than a lot of the more sleek and less ornate materials associated with contemporary life. I feel as if we are living in a new Victorian age and the materials should somehow better reflect this.

*What book/ film/ work of art most recently captured your attention and why?*

*The Virgin Suicides* (book). It is the kind of book where I feel as if I've entirely entered another world or life and that I can perfectly picture every little detail. It's atmospheric and sinister.

*What's the best piece of advice you were ever given?*

Be patient.