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PETER REGINATO: ART MASTER

Peter Reginato is a brilliant artist who creates intriguing, stainless-steel, wiry looking sculptural works www.peterreginato.com. They really speak for themselves, but I wanted to know what inspires Peter so here's our cool chat.

MICHAEL: Hey Peter, First off, I LOVE your sculptural installations. They look like a mixture of various materials: wire, wood, plastic, metal? In any event, they're the very definition of art and expression. They're fun and quirky. I'm sure I'm oversimplifying. How do you view them?

PETER: Thanks Michael, I don't really see the sculptures as installations, but I'm not ruling that idea out either. I've used a lot of different materials over the years: wood, fiberglass, even clay. I sort of invented a "material" that I call my, "Rubber Pieces." I showed them at Sideshow Gallery in 2007 <http://www.peterreginato.com/SideshowFrontRoomView1.htm>. I create steel armature with foam-like sheeting and acrylic paint. Lately, I've been making work out of mostly stainless-steel round rods trying to capture what a drawing would be like if you really could translate the looseness of a sketch in 3D. I guess my older work could look FUN but I like the word JOY better. Something that's been rattling around in my mind lately is "No more toys for the rich," but the pieces are visually "jazzy," very animated and complex both with the shapes and design. I don't really like the word design, but I can't think of anything else. A lot of the times - and this applies to older stuff also - I'm almost destroying shapes with paint, but picking and choosing what I want you to see. I'm seeing how far I can take that before it's not working for me. My last piece, "Freak Flag" pushed this as far as I've gone. It's not that it's the end, but I'll see where it goes. Also the extended "antenna" on the top is somewhat a "No No?" Maybe more with the formalists than the youngsters, but it's pushing some compositional ideas.

MICHAEL: We shouldn't deprive the rich of their toys, should we? It's really about everyone having access to the joy of toys ... like a Peter Reginato original work. Am I wrong?

PETER: Yes you're wrong.

MICHAEL: Hahahaha.

PETER: The rich will have plenty of toys to play with and better toys than art: cars, electronic gadgets, homes, boats and aggressive kitchen equipment will keep them satisfied. I just don't want the easy influence of object-making in my art. Anyone can see the beauty of a shiny, well designed Ferrari. I want people who look at my work to understand the visual intelligence that goes into making one of my sculptures. It doesn't always come easy. It may take knowledge of what came before and also being able to think more like an artist. For me, I'm really more interested in someone, rich or poor who will put in the time, think past present trends and get a deep understanding and appreciation of what I'm trying to accomplish.

MICHAEL: What do you mean by the easy influence of object-making?

PETER: It's not just object-making, but most art being shown in museums and galleries takes the "judgment" out of the art-making process. It's looking for a formula that guarantees success. It's why over the years, from Andy Warhol to various Dadaists, you have heard them say they want to be a machine and only with a machine can you guarantee success. Some critics applaud this idea because they get to run the machine. Collectors love it because it fits right into

success. Some critics applaud this idea because they get to run the machine. Collectors love it because it fits right into their thinking about how a good business is run and it tends to be flawless which really makes it more about craft.

MICHAEL: Your work inherently and joyfully makes me stop to consider it. All art does that for me, but your work really raises curiosity about what's going on in your head. Does it matter to you that people understand your view of your work or do you really just want them to think?

PETER: Thanks Michael. I like that the work "stops" you and you take a good look. I never really think about making the work "fun." I think that comes out of trying to make something that's visually exciting, even a sense of mystery and to some degree a criticism of present culture. What's going on in my head? Good question. LOL. That I'm not so sure I know, but there are times while working when I do have an idea of what the structure might be like. The piece I sent a photo of, "Freak Flag," I thought - while I was working - that IF the opportunity comes, I'm going to let one of the rods really hang out, possible straight up. It never did, but I went ahead and made the "antenna" out of shapes. I'd see this "idea" a few times while working on other pieces, but wasn't so sure about it - mostly because the strength of the rod wasn't enough for my sensibilities. So there's lots of stuff going on - sometimes just the simple idea about how I'm going to get it up or not and then there's what looks good, dynamic and exciting? With this new work, I'm not really sure what looks good, because many times, I've done something that I have no reference to (looking like something I've seen before) and it takes a walking away from the piece and coming back fresh. With the paint, I'm always thinking about the light, sometimes bringing out a form and sometimes destroying a form and lately taking real liberties on how I'm applying the color. I'd like it if everyone "totally got" what I'm up to, but I know that's impossible. It has been hard to even get other art types and artists to "get" what I mean. Mostly I don't expect the public to be that sympathetic toward my work. I would more like to end up with a reputation or understanding of my accomplishments closer to an artist like Diebenkorn who I've always admired, but understood that certain factions in the art scene didn't get him because of their one-sided view of "idea" as all.

MICHAEL: I feel that your work is a conglomeration of things from life and culture that you put together into a whole and art is the finished product. By the way, how do your sculptures actually hold together? Glue, wire? I would imagine that transporting them is quite a project especially if you use heavy materials.

PETER: Well, I feel everything I see, even stuff I'm not that fond of, plays into what I make of it later. Mostly, it's welded stainless-steel, but I've made work out of wood, clay, plastic and even casting bronze, but I've found that steel in general is the material I like best. You can pretty much do anything with it, but I like to work with it in a direct honest way, plus at the end of the day, you have a shot of it lasting. All of my plastic pieces are destroyed and only one fiberglass piece still exists. Then there's the paint which is another material in itself. That's one of the reasons I did the fiberglass pieces; great color, but wouldn't hold up. Right now and I'm saying right now because I've painted my pieces on and off since the mid 1960s, I see the paint as the ancient Greeks did. It's not finished until it's painted.

MICHAEL: Are you a native New Yorker? What was your life like growing up? Are you from an artistic family?

PETER: I grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area. I first lived in Richmond, California, then Oakland and moved to San Francisco for about three years and attended the San Francisco Art Institute, but I've been in SoHo since 1966. California is a great place to grow up and at the time, the Oakland School system was very encouraging to artists. My first scholarship to what was then called the "California School of Arts and Crafts" was given to me through an annual group show that all the high schools in Oakland participated in. There were many things about California that I can't say were direct influences, but they certainly played a part in what I've been up to for the last 50 years. First, the car culture, especially the hot rods and custom cars from George Barris and Ed "Big Daddy" Roth have had a special interest for me. Even the fact that Disney was in Los Angeles was important and the whole "teenage" culture from surfing to music. In those years, you didn't have the same records being played on the west coast that were played on the east coast, so being in Oakland I heard lots of rhythm and blues plus jazz. There was the Monterey Jazz /Monterey Pop and the Fillmore on Fillmore in the Fillmore district in San Francisco way before any west /east coast thing. But the artistic legacy of the SFAI was why I applied for a scholarship and received one. Artists like Clyfford Still and Richard Diebenkorn were the two that attracted me first, but there are so many great artists that have gone through that area. Some not so well-known like Carlos Villa who I knew of while I was still in high school and admired. Also, there's a group that at one time was called SF Funk School that sort of comes out of Still through Frank Lobdell into Robert Hudson and Bill Geis and then the hard edge painters like Ron Davis and Ronnie Landfield. Ronnie, who came from New York, I met in 1964. What I saw in the Bay Area really needs to be documented. I'm thinking of the period around 1957 to 1963. I don't think too many artists or art professionals are aware of painters like Joan Brown's early work or for that matter Alvin Light or the sculptor Arlo Acton. I'm sure very few know. The list goes on, but it was an important group for me. I think the earthiness and organic have stayed with me - not always, but it's in there.

MICHAEL: And are there family influences?

PETER: My great aunt was an art teacher and world traveler from Dallas and my father was a life insurance

salesman/general agent. His first ambition was to be an architect from what I've gathered from his draft papers and documents from the University of California at Berkeley. He died young so I never had the chance to speak with him as an adult.

MICHAEL: I bet you've seen the art world change greatly over the decades. What do you think about it today?

PETER: I'd say the "art world" reflects the culture at large in too many ways. "Pay to Play" is getting out of control and like the financial situation in America, the top galleries and the rest are a huge gap with so many ideas turned upside down like originality to the idea that collectors are more comfortable with an edition of three than one of a kind because there's two others that approve of the piece. The good news is I'd say there are more possibilities with the electronic media. The dominance of one style isn't as strong, but I still see the desire to be part of Andy Warhol's "I'm a machine aesthetic" which morphed into the "Corporate Model" as a sad comment on the need to be accepted and "make it" with the academics.

MICHAEL: Absolutely.

PETER: I know every older generation says this about the present generation, but the post-modern sensibility is shallow with the emphasis on the most superficial aspects of modernism. What's depressing is most of these Warhol types - and I'm including the critics too - would happily agree with me in true Warholian fashion. The notion that in post-modern thinking that there's no truth in art seems to have been embraced by the conservatives in politics and that says it all. For those of you who think I'm kicking a dead horse, it's so pervasive you hardly notice it anymore.

MICHAEL: What you've just described also makes it very difficult for gifted and highly-professional artists to survive. Everyone continues to focus on Picasso and Warhol (nothing against them) and the general public doesn't know anything else. How do you think we can help living artists?

PETER: **KILL THE DEAD ARTISTS.** Look past the pre-approved influences for starters and what I mean is right now if you can't find a way to show your "ANDY" influence you're dead in the water. At least with the big money crowd - which only sees art as money and nothing else and I'm not being cute - THAT'S all they see is the money there is no art, it's not art, it's money. Look at the show at the Whitney right now with the ink jet guy. It's not about the art. There is no art, it's about the money. The work is boring but he's a machine and Andy would approve. This isn't anything new. It has been accelerating for the last 60 years, starting with artists from the mid 50s like Stella doing Jasper Johns's stripes from the flag paintings or the formalist camp taking Frankenthaler's stains from Pollock, but the problem now is the pre-approved influences have become so narrow now that the Ducampians are in control of academia. With the media focusing on these artists, they then have influence which is seen as the best but it isn't. All I can say is "Fight the Power."

MICHAEL: You know Peter, the general public has been so brainwashed about art. Too many people believe that they have to have a PhD to relate to art. They buy into the mystery of it all. Do you ever find this frustrating?

PETER: I'm not sure I really agree "the public needs a PHD," but I do think the art establishment and schools think that way... not really frustrating more completely naïve about art.

MICHAEL: Finally Peter, what are your hopes and goals for the future?

PETER: I'm working on a very big piece right now and I thought once it's done, I'll have a little viewing party here in the studio. I hope you can make it.

MICHAEL: Haha. Thanks for the invitation. This has been great.

Check out Peter Reginato at www.peterreginato.com.

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