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Transmutation: One Thing Becoming Another

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Artist's Statement : The Artist and the Art

“Why?” is the most complex question to answer, often only answered after everything else has been examined, but the answer here is simple. Art empowers me to answer the question, “Why am I alive here on earth now?” Beyond the attempt and struggle to be a decent human being, sometimes tough enough, art making is one of the important things I do.

I see my art as being one of the truly unique contributions I can make to Humankind. My gift to humanity, a positive contribution to the human record and an obligation due to those who are wired internally to be an artist of some kind. Perhaps the saddest songs are sung by people who have some unacknowledged talent yet do nothing to nourish or pursue it. This form of self-denial is quite human and very real problem still persistent in human thinking. Art is a vital, enriching nourishment to the advancement and evolution of human life and it is natural and healthy to embrace it to the fullest extent one can.

My personal philosophy is complex, I think everyone's is, and it is inseparable from my personal art philosophy. In a nutshell I believe that the best human response to the challenge of life is a creative one. Better to think of new solutions, new outcomes which have never seen the light of day than to react in fear to change, new challenges of an endless number of challenges, and the general adversity that wears against human life like gravity weighs upon us all. Out of the creative solutions comes new behavior and some of these may be so radical and effective as to nudge human development higher than before. This is the way evolution works, new adaptations prove to be an advantage and so become part of the larger group behavior.

In new thinking lies new solutions and sometimes it is the changing of the mindset which sparks actual quantifiable change. Because art embraces the new, the unique, that which has never before existed allows the chance of positive evolution to occur and in this occurrence I see home for humanity. My art speaks to fostering a new thinking, a new consideration for humanity to reconsider a new ordering of behavior in the face of critical environmental changes caused by old human behavior. A new human behavior must be articulated stressing global thinking and local action, the new goal should be to leave a minimal footprint environmentally in our lives while addressing in a positive manner the challenges we face as an overpopulated species fouling the nest of the world. My concepts and ideas as to how art will accomplish this is simple.

Human consciousness must be raised to the point where all of humanity understands the modern dilemma of compromised life on our crowded planet. As people reach this understanding they discover they have a personal investment in acting for the greater good, for the good of their own children, for the good of that humanity yet unborn. My art seeks to nourish this sense to act in a positive manner by increasing awareness of what it means to be alive in this place at this time. I use my own observations; creative, artistic, poetic, to communicate with my viewers to empower them to realize that they can be a positive agent to make human life better, really the entire point of all civilizations since the dawn of history. Since humanity has become so successful at survival the issue now is how to lessen our collective footprint, conserve finite resources and ensure that our progeny have a viable planet to inhabit. We are not worried about the catastrophic asteroid strike but rather an overcrowded world running out of the ability to support carbon-based life, which includes us.

My work has long sought to express the beauty I see through my eyes, sensitive to the aesthetic beauty of this physical place of the Earth and the ugliness of what has so often in history been termed progress. This planet, this Universe is a beautiful place, still, and out of the recognition of that beauty comes the individual investment of involvement, caring and positive action which can negate the negative, darker side of the human psyche and foster optimistic mindset which fosters positive behavior to balance the great life systems of the biosphere.

Art theories which speak through my work are those which speak to the raising of human consciousness. Contemplative aesthetic work can be beautiful, perhaps should be beautiful so as to entice, but mostly the work must spark thought within the viewer. Like the early artists who accompanied the explorers who mapped the surface of the planet, the task for the artist of today is to map reality so as to spark the human mind to create a new scenario, a new reality. The artist must reach his audience and then must spark his mind to think, to consider what lies before him and what meaning, what learning can be gleaned from this encounter with my art. If my art can do a bit of this I consider it a success and the more and the deeper this effect is within the viewer the more successful it is.

The subject content of my work is the one man's response, one sensitive man's response to the natural world. Beyond the beauty of the planet as a place lies the natural phenomena of the world we can experience with our senses. I believe that only while we are alive can we experience directly through our senses the stimulation of the world as a physical place. Even if the dead somehow walk the Earth in another dimension it is still only the living who can experience this kaleidoscope of stimulation directly. Only as a living being can we touch, see, smell, taste and hear the

bounty of life. My subject matter is the human mind opening to this realization, and upon opening and in that opening lies the only hope of salvation our species has for survival.

The methods and techniques I use are many and varied, indeed first comes the idea and then comes selection of material and techniques to serve this idea. As a sculptor, painter, poet, writer there are so many avenues of self-expression and all of my life as an artist I have felt the limits of the boundaries between various genres of expression. Now my goal is integration, to my message to the viewer with as much richness as possible, combining methods when such combination increases the poignancy of the message. As a painter, I paint, yet when I started combining text with paint I increased the power of my content. Mixed-media sculpture defines most my proclivity to marry different avenues of methods and techniques together. I am one man open to many directions and feel my art deserves the freedom to be multi-faced as well.

The idea I yearn to express is revelation and self-awareness, epiphany, self-discovery. Beyond merely sharing my aesthetic observations of my life in the world I want the viewer to become a little more empowered, a little more aware of the finite opportunities open only to the living, those of us who can solve problems, make things happen, improve the lot of humanity and the biosphere. I believe it is only through personal epiphany that once can achieve a greater sense of control over his own life and the life he interacts with.

The history of my work is a long one; really it is the history of myself as well. In the beginning I became empowered to make things, to make art. Of course I did not know what art was beyond something pretty to look at, a view out of the window of a fast-moving train. It was an important step for me to empower myself, to give myself permission to do this, to feel as if through the special act of making my whimsical objects of what I defined as art, often in the beginning those things that do not have a purpose beyond being beautiful. In the early stages of my art making I was an experimenter of techniques, trying many different ways of making things, many different ways of building the things I could even then envision in my mind which had never existed before. Now I feel as if I can do anything, any technique can be mastered if it seems to produce the effect I envision in my mind. It was very fortunate for me to follow the more traditional path of art technique learning, drawing, painting, sculpture of craft materials; paper mache is not much different than clay or any of the other materials of sculpture.

The artists who have influenced my work are many and the list grows longer every day. Living or dead I discern no difference as they speak to me through their work and the work is woven into the human record. I read a lot about

art and the related acts of creation, art making dominates my world and as this is the age of information there is more data available to the individual or artist today than ever before in history.

Nature. It is nature which is the source which fuels my work. The physical universe in all of its apriori sensations is the palette from which I work. In nature lies everything, the reasons we must act, the incentive to do so, the rewards for paying attention. My work fits within the history of art by reflecting the world as a backdrop for human life, reflecting our view of the world and the Universe as well as our vision of ourselves within this physical place of the known universe. To see the trappings of our world, the landscapes, the natural background of that which comprises everything we know in relationship to use as a species is what art has done throughout its' history. What changes is the accumulated human mindset which understands the physical universe and the relationship of all forms of life to each other within this sea of soup. Now we have a sense of our power as a successful species, indeed so successful that we are dominant and destructive due to overpopulation, but what is needed is further evolution which increases our understanding of the fragility of this complex house of cards which is our biosphere.

All of my art production has been fueled by my constant interest in the natural world, informed by the natural rhythms of a world larger than human civilization or the mindset of modern human thought. Landscape is an homage to the spirit of a place and as in every work of art lies the artist's hand so even between vast bodies of work familiar lines of correlation bind all of artistic expressions even over time. My work, *Corrugations*, represents a marriage of several distinct avenues of expression, poetry and visual/textural art. This body of work serves as a visual chapbook of poems to be read and encountered in no particular order, best or be drawn in by an emotional connection with the color, perhaps a deep red plum beckons the viewer in and then the discovery of a poem.

Cardboard as the field for poetry evokes the nature of our civilization, a machine-produced transitory material of commerce achieving the status of the page of a poem chapbook, the first transformation, another is realized when the planer shape of the cardboard square itself reshaped into the corrugated form which mimics its' internal structure. Its' purpose has changed and it has a new value which belies its' disposable nature. The poetry helps to carry a theme of reflection and my goal has become met when the work is consumed on demand and considered with reflection. The focused process of burning in the letters reinforces my poetic observations set down in the sparseness of Haiku, ever letter written in fire. The abstract nature of text as language becomes as much a part of the experience of the encounter as does the soft modulation of the stained and dyed panels. Staining the cardboard furthers the transformation of it to

support poetry, natural dyes extracted by hand recalling an earlier time when direct human work advanced culture. This work will age slowly as the pulp mixture exists through time but the incised burned-in text will be legible as long as cardboard protected somewhat by a sealer will retain its' basic structure.

A cohesion is felt when confronting the corrugations as a whole as if bound pages lost the organization of the book and became hypertext. As the text element has the cohesion of close writing so does the uniformity of size, each carrying seventeen syllables of consideration. Together I feel they harmonize becoming more powerful than the sum of their numbers, an interior space opened inside the book where words become burned visible to sight and their magic absorbed in new ways.

Informed heavily by nature, the natural world, indeed the physical universe which is the container which holds everything we cherish, my art seeks a balance between the reality of materials, their changes reacting to physical process in becoming art objects of contemplation, a mirror for individual emotional perception. For several years I have been interested in making art which represents a cohesion of artistic elements of myself as sculptor, painter, poet together into a statement of these somewhat disparate artistic voices.

The six pieces of "TRANSMUTATION : one thing becoming another "acknowledges the mechanics of physical process as it aspires to offer objects of contemplation which speak of human concerns of physical change with their lifespan while accrued knowledge increases and the hope of epiphany, even resurrection looms ever possible and attainable.

Ancient alchemists attempted to affect natural order, to achieve the secret of immortality as well as the transmutation of a base metal, common lead into the far more rare and precious metal gold. We now know that both of these goals are impossible but the hope of change within this finite lifetime remains strong. Resurrection to a higher state of enlightenment is strong with us still, indeed without the hope of positive change in the future the tedium of life progressing unchanging towards its end seems fated, irrevocable, even pointless.

These fabricated bas reliefs of cardboard bear the marks of the history of their making. They indeed change from the ubiquitous cardboard box, servant of commerce, through a transformative process into an art object of contemplation which speaks to the human condition. Physically ten single sheets of cardboard of varied and unknown history become permanently joined together becoming one and this new form, which assumes new shape and enriched

color serve a new and higher purpose. If physical objects possess a consciousness and could yearn to evolve in this transformation they would be happy.

I use cardboard because it cries out to be used for more than packaging of commodities. So common as to be almost invisible in our current state of civilization to see it transmuted into a higher function could be encouraging to humans who yearn to improve themselves aspiring to achieve a more enlightened standing within their own histories.

Fragments of my poetry, deconstructed from the order of the poem become loose groups of words burned into this constructed flesh of cardboard. These extracted lines of poem fragments are further deconstructed by freeing them from the horizontal line, rather the freed words seem to fall from the sky like drops of rain and become open to as much interpretation as the rain itself. Words are already abstract symbols of communication regardless of what they say and poetry assumes the freedom to speak to emotions which are hard to define, hard to select the words for. But when the human mind encounters words it strives to decode some sense of meaning and this struggle joins the viewers' quest to determine what this reformulated field of massed cardboard has to offer us.

Formed and permanently changed through natural processes these bas reliefs, which could be seen almost as pages of an ancient manuscript laid open to be read, are stained with natural dyes to further remove them once again from the homogeneity of cardboard. This anonymous material assumes definition and an individualism in its function as an art object carrying poem shards which is further accentuated by the unique influences that natural color brings to each of them. They assume unique personalities which seem to elevate their functional task, elevate their spirits and give them joy.