

JunkFarm Redux

I remember the first time that I saw Robert Rauschenberg's combine sculptures & paintings. I was 10 years old in 1968 when I came across an exhibition catalogue on the shelf at the library. I didn't read much of that book, but I was amazed at the images. I thought, WOW, so art can be made out of junk. I thought that this art was beautiful, funny, intriguing, unique, and more real than any art that I had ever seen. I wanted to make things like that.

Fast forward to April Fool's Day 1991 ... that's when I moved into a rental in Los Angeles, where I would live for the next 4 years. The rental was a large house, on 2 acres of property, mostly secluded from the street and neighbors by lush vegetation. Also on the property was an abundance of worthless junk that the landlord stored there. I soon named the property The JunkFarm, and spent the next 4 years transforming the property, inside and outside, into an art installation. I utilized much of the existing junk in this process. I considered The JunkFarm to be sort of a roadside attraction of abject art.

This exhibit will attempt to evoke the atmosphere of The JunkFarm. Some of the pieces are from The JunkFarm, and others are more recent work.

Besides Rauschenberg's art, other influences are Dadaist readymades, cheap Chinese manufactured products that fill dollar stores, flea markets (especially the stalls in the back of Happy's ... those cubes constructed out of 2x4s and chicken wire filled with one of everything), roadside attractions like Grandma Prisby's Bottle Village, Voo Doo Village, Bullwinkle Land, and The Unknown Museum.

There are numerous reasons why I choose to make art out of junk. Its a cheap or free material. I like the idea of recycling instead of creating trash. I like the economy of utilizing an existing piece of junk, and with a simple gesture, change it, instead of fabricating something from scratch. The world of objects is bizarre, and with a little manipulation can be made even more bizarre.

The game that I like to play is to make the familiar unfamiliar. To recontextualize a functional object into a art object can affect the way that we perceive the ontological. The ideal effect would be to catch a glimpse of the Real. Jacques Lacan's concept of the Real, as distinct from reality, is the state of experiencing consciousness beyond the interpretive filter of language, thus revealing raw ontology. I think that that ineffable state of consciousness is a fascinating place to visit.

One will also notice the use of stuffed animals as a dominant material in my artworks. The series, titled Cured Teddy Bears, began during my tenancy at the

JunkFarm. The title refers to curing the teddy bears of their cuteness. Theoretically the teddy bears represent empty signifiers to me, like Jean Baudrillard's simulacrum or Guy Debord's spectacle. Their exterior cuteness is a fabricated image, and the interior is meaningless fluff. Although not all works are part of the Cured Teddy Bear series, many of the works that I've made since then have incorporated stuffed animals as a material. Theoretical interpretations have deviated from the original ideas as conceptual tangents, as have formal usage of stuffed animals as well.