

Concentrating On Ideas

*FROM WHOLENESS
AND ORDER TO
UNCOMMON
ORDER—
CONVENTIONAL
MEETS
CONCEPTUAL*

Mike Shaffer

My work is about ideas rather than things but I use things to explain what it is I am interested in and from a historical perspective that has turned out to be lines and linear elements as well as a selection of objects. Granted, this covers a lot of territory or it doesn't depending on one's viewpoint. I don't think artists can force themselves to work in ways that do not feel natural to them and for me that means working in a number of different formats and usually on several different things at the same time. I like to build on previous work as I strike out in new directions. My recent focus is on unconventional ordering schemes integrating preexisting work with text, signage and video.

I don't usually start at the beginning and work until I have finished something. I might do a dozen or so similar works if I am putting together a show but I like to experiment with new materials and ideas, a practice that often leads me in unexpected directions. This means having four or five works underway and slaving away at some home construction project, (I used to work on my car), editing photographs and writing poetry. The downside of functioning like this is that it takes a while to finish things but eventually it happens. I have a very low tolerance for boredom and routine. Maybe this is the reason for what some see as

untoward variety in what I do but I can't help it. After concentrating on a project for a while I take a break by jumping into a different one. It allows me a fresh outlook and I don't get bogged down in some blind alley or suffer "writer's (artist's?) block." I am not bothered by rejection and I never find myself at a loss for ideas. I have notes about a lot of yet uncharted territory and experiments I want to explore especially in the way of installations and video projects.

Probably the greatest struggle of my career has always been deciding what directions to take, holding myself to a reasonable number of pursuits and not going off on too many enticing tangents, but I think I've managed.

Since the late sixties, a number of different types of work, characterized by their themes and formats has evolved falling into two broad categories: the Lines and Grids and the Objects and Entities. Within these two general classifications I have named over thirty different and well defined groups or series, some of which are described in separate Artist Statements. Each is a unified body of work and each is extensive enough to be an exhibition in its own right. While constituent elements ordered along the horizontal-vertical (height-width-depth or x-y-z) axis predominate in the "L&G" works and exist in both groups, elements in the "O&E" groups follow other ordering schemas, some based on the character of the objects themselves. Some series have been completed and to some I add new works from time to time.

Most of the linear work is abstract and involves orderly combinations of materials but in some, including the Log Cabins and the Towers Series, individual works touch lightly on the familiar. The three-dimensional grids and lattices involve uniform non-object components like pipes or boards in a generally regu-



The First Fourteen Ordinal Numbers (in Alphabetical Order), Design for inkjet print, 2008

lar crisscrossing format. In two dimensions lines of all kinds predominate. The pivotal Line Paintings Series, for example, is devoted to action abstraction, a la Pollock and de Kooning, not a popular area now but it does set my work apart from the fray. The Objects and Entities works are built up from predominately recognizable things but my ultimate goal has been abstract wholeness which I approach from object and non-object directions. I want viewers to focus on the work in its entirety and the ideas behind it but not on the materials. With the objects, linear or nonlinear, recognizable or not, including some of the photo-based digital work, relegated to the status of media, I can concentrate on the message and not the messengers, the madness and not the methods. □