

Mind - Twisters

The San Francisco Bay Area has been a hotbed of remarkable sculpture ever since Postmodernism began. My introduction to this work was a sudden shock. When I was a young curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York I had heard about exciting goings-on in the Bay Area but had not seen them. When I joined the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco in 1970 one of my first jobs was to install the sculpture section of the San Francisco Art Institute's Centennial Exhibition in the de Young Museum.

The jurors for that invitational were Richard Diebenkorn, Maurice Tuchman, and Carl Andre. As a radical political activist, Andre decided that ALL the sculptural entries would be accepted. That was all very well as a blow for democracy in an elitist world, but it made a museum installation impossible. I proposed a compromise. A photograph of everything submitted would be published in the catalogue, while the actual exhibition would include only those pieces selected by Diebenkorn and Tuchman. As I began the very crowded installation in Hearst Court, I was struck by the diversity and the quality of Bay Area work. It ranged from robust "funk" pieces, which were happy near the floor, and Robert Arneson's ceramic humor, to Stephen De Staebler's elegant metaphysical figures that mysteriously reached for the sky. The collective power of that gallery of sculpture was strong, so strong that I decided to work to change the policy of this Old Master museum which prohibited regular exhibitions of contemporary Bay Area art. Five years later a new open policy finally was in place.

"NO FOOLING WE MEAN IT!" presents us with the work of a new generation as represented by Jeff Schomberg from Marin, Doug Thiel-scher from Oakland, and David Middlebrook from Los Gatos. The greatest influence on Bay Area sculpture during the '60s & '70s was the Dada-Surrealist tradition, the same tradition that inspired the San Francisco Beat Poets of the '50s and '60s. These three artists provide vivid testimony that this rich tradition is still alive in the Bay Area.

Dada and Surrealism set out to twist your mind. The purpose of this tradition has never been merely to be clever. The intention, as with Zen Koans, is to shock you out of ordinary reality so that (at least for a moment) you will stop relying on your over-used left-brain rational side and open up your right-brain intuitive side so your spirit can take flight.

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