The Other Side of the Limit

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the destructible object
by Jim Edwards

It has been nearly a hundred years since Marcel Duchamp created the first found object art work by appropriating a manufactured object used to dry bottles and without any alteration simply renamed the piece a “readymade”. Nine years later, in 1923, Man Ray attached a photograph of an open eye to the pendulum of a mantel clock and labeled his piece Indestructible Object. Since these historic Dada and Surrealist gestures, the found object, and their juxtapositions have given artists opportunities to explore the aesthetic, cultural, psychological and ritualistic aspects of their chosen objects and in the process pose questions as to their associations and meaning.

The ability of assemblage art to disrupt and disturb our senses continues to the present day and in the art of Frank McEntire the commingling of secular and spiritual objects have earned him a unique position in contemporary assemblage art. It is his ability to integrate found objects he assembles, while providing his works with sacred, poetic titles- Inclusive of seemingly contradictory truth- that is so captivating.
the other side of the limit

by Scott Abbott

In his introduction to the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Ludwig Wittgenstein writes that the book’s whole meaning could be summed up somewhat as follows:

“What can be said at all can be said clearly, and whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

The book will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought). The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.”

Although Frank McEntire is supremely curious about what lies on the other side of the limit, approaches that limit with all the carenness of Newtonian/Liebnizian calculus, has no inclination to remain silent in the presence of limits, and is variously inclined to esoteric and infectious mysticism, he catches our eyes and ears and imaginations precisely because he (1) practices the honesty of clarity and (2) aims the knowledge that is vital at those of us who eschew clarity for occluding trivial mysticism.

McEntire’s works probe and tweak and celebrate the limits of what can and cannot be known. And, quickly, whatever else we say about the meaning of these works, there remains the sheer beauty of them: the singular beauty of polished obsolete machines is surprising, as are the bright splashes of red, white, and blue in and among the dominating muted colors of wood and paper and fabric and steel and tin and cinderblock. These works are, formally, simply breathtaking. And, as one expects from McEntire, the striking form is in the service of provocative content.

"Royal Script" (left) is a rather large crucifix being rolled into the carriage of a Royal typewriter raised up on a delicate wooden stand—a crucified Jesus Christ being wordprocessed into a text! The text, of course, will be a verbal replica of the crucifix which is itself a replica in wood and ivory of a religion-founding event. "Royal Script" lengthens this sitting of signifiers, Nietzsche’s “mobile army of metaphors,” as a sculptural portrayal of the act of writing that depicts Crucifix that stands for a story written in a holy text, itself a representation of a supposed event.

As if to emphasize this repeated and exponential distance from the “thing in and of itself,” McEntire has placed a bound and wax-sealed set of three books on a shelf beneath the typewriter. No matter how open and evident the text will seem, what it wants to mean remains closed and bound and sealed.

A work of incongruous beauty is McEntire’s “East Fork” (below). It looks delicate and deadly on a bed of cinder blocks. Four long, sharp steel tines curve down from a light wooden-stainless frame. It’s a salvaged “Jackson fork,” used to raise hay bales into a loft, and so the “East Fork” title has an agricultural flavor.

But under the tines of the fork is a dark bronze woman’s head, Japanese letters on the back, resting on a steel bow that was once a leaf spring. The effect is peaceful, Zen-flavored pure form. Conceptual art at its formal best.
And like the best conceptual art, the piece has an aftertaste. It leaves one who has read Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" in a cold sweat: "It is an odd apparatus, the Officer said to the traveling scholar as he cast an admiring gaze over the machine he knew so well." With the narrow pole over a flat bed, Kafka's steel-tipped creation inscribes a judgment on the body of any given prisoner.

McEntire's machine, with all its beauty, evokes (perhaps unintended) nightmares of guilt and harsh justice.

"Sealed Kali Upanishad" (below) continues McEntire's themes of beauty and hidden truth and subliminal terror. Suspended in a striking steel-slat receptacle/coffin lies a corpse-like and heavy 100-feet-roll Jackson-Pollock-splattered tarpaper, decorated with colorful Hare Krishna string and beads, resting on a pair of silver boxes. The pure beauty of the piece reminds one again of McEntire's uncanny ability to bring together found objects in awe-inspiring conjunctions.

As is the case in other works, the sacred text remains almost entirely hidden, sealed. The title identifies the black roll with the fierce black Hindu goddess Kali. Sunken between steel slats, tightly rolled, and named Kali Upanishad, this sacred text promises to sever heads and hands of unwary readers/viewers.

McEntire dips his work in red, calling up disturbing memories, improvisations on the chords of birth and extinction, creation and destruction, humans and machines, the exposed and the hidden, beauty and beast.

Formally striking, conceptually challenging, witty and wily, his work threatens to cut out our tongues while giving us tongues we never had.

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