

Art Notes: Roman de Salvo and Lael Corbin

The San Diego Art Prize is a cash grant which recognizes excellence in the visual arts. The prize is dedicated to the idea that the visual arts are a necessary and rewarding ingredient of any world-class city and a building block of the lifestyle of its residents. Conceived to promote and encourage dialogue, reflection and social interaction about San Diego's artistic and cultural life.

Notes by

ANN BERCHTOLD

Director of L Street Fine Art Gallery

The exhibition, Research will begin January 26th with an opening reception from 7pm - 9pm at the L Street Gallery and will be on view through April 19th, 2008. Roman de Salvo selected Lael Corbin from the "2007 New Contemporaries" show, as the emerging artist that he wanted to exhibit with in this exhibition. Research refers to a systematic investigation that one actively participates in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions. Roman and Lael selected this title because they share a strong sense of curiosity and a desire to understand "how things function." Their work is often not only a manifestation of the results of these curiosities, but an embodiment of the question that lead them there in the first place.

Notes on Roman de Salvo by KEVIN FREITAS, Arts Writer

Most heroics in art throughout history have been parlayed to us by word of mouth. Feats of grand architecture and even grander statuettes have made their way into the art history books by the residue of their lasting stain on our consciousness and imagination.

Roman history eventually turned itself into Modern history and brought with it, its slew of contemporary painters and sculptors. They too were championed from bar stools in the Cedar Tavern, from Greenbergian critics and more recently to the artist as curator, curator as collector and collector to member on the board of trustees in a major museum. Sometimes it's just the company you keep. Roman de Salvo appears to have always been amongst good company.

Back in 1999 at 34 years of age, de Salvo in an exhibit at the Hudson River Museum entitled "Drip, Blow, Burn: Forces of Nature in Contemporary Art" was already alongside the likes of bigger names such as Bill Viola and Dennis Oppenheim. De Salvo hasn't looked back since, exhibiting extensively in San Diego and abroad with public and permanent installed works in major institutions. Fame and fortune typically goes hand in hand with heroics whether in sports or the art world but you also need a fan base. That too de Salvo has had from the MCASD and Hugh Davies with continued support since co-curating de Salvo into the 2000 Whitney Biennial or new work into the Copley Building – the MCA's contemporary wing – with "Utility Filigree" a functional wall mounted sculpture made from electrical conduit and boxes.

There has been plenty said to describe de Salvo's artwork and the man: tinkerer, playful, engineer, conceptual which are for the most part adult words for work that is still very much childlike and fanciful. Since the current buzz words going around in curator fiefdom are linked to beauty and innocence, you might consider de Salvo's work as coming from a childlike innocence – not naivety – that is rooted in an insatiable boyish curiosity. By extension, it takes a certain amount of imagination and wonderment to conceptualize de Salvo's most current organic autobahn ("Nexus Eucalyptus") floating in the atrium of the Caltrans District headquarters to realize that play should be an integral part of every adult's life.

Play in the adult art world might have been contaminated over the years by speculation and playing to invest by galleries, collectors and museums based on an artist's reputation and hearsay for the most part, funneled by those same interest groups. It is thankfully, about the art (we believe) and while de Salvo's reputation and heroics may have preceded him and while a work like "Santa Ana" – a converted weather vane into a spinning magnifying glass – is far richer in metaphor and meaning than the over stylized decorative museum induced conduit works – the work is graciously, struggle between

a classic struggle between freedom and responsibility, leisure and work, no means and having the means and simply growing (up). Let's hope de Salvo doesn't mature too quickly.

Notes on Roman de Salvo by ELLEN PHELAN, Art Activist and Educator

Much of Roman de Salvo's art transforms the function of common items found in our environment, lifting them into the world of imagination and amazement. His unexpected combinations of materials and ideas show a brilliant usage of what we think of as ready made household items.

At times he chooses contradictory materials (i.e. fireplaces made of cord wood or cement chandeliers) to illustrate his ideas. At other times he will use elaborate mechanical deceptions, creating a surprising effect, (i.e. flushing a urinal which also activates a miniature geyser-like fountain from the central drain),

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or where the expected participation brings unexpected results, such as in a charming arcade piece where red rubber bands are shot at potted cacti, covering the green cacti and surrounding area, with soft red decoration.

Everything de Salvo works with has a twist, an “Ah!” about it. From his burning fire hydrant to his stone clouds he shows an intelligence behind what seems simple. His analogies and contradictions make one think twice (or more!) to re-evaluate objects in our daily lives.

Certainly this art is fun, but whether embellishing the insignificant or simplifying the complex, de Salvo’s art reminds us that throughout the ages the finest artworks have always evoked amazement.

Notes on Lael Corbin by DOUG SIMAY, Director, Art Academy of San Diego and Director of Simayspace Gallery.

Lael Corbin is a newly minted MFA from San Diego State University. He is appropriately considered a “New Contemporary”. I got to know Lael and his art process in curating the 2007 New Contemporaries exhibition for the San Diego Art Prize.

I believe a successful artist in this culture needs to be able to wear several hats. They need to be able to use materials. That means being aware of how things are made and what they are made of.

It is a skill set that can be lumped under the rubric craft. Being a skilled craftsman means that the art product is enticing in all the physical ways that art materials seduce our attention as well as being constructed with the consideration that the lifetime of an art object is long and physically hard.

The artist has to have some idea of what things mean. Why does he/she want to create? I think art that contemplates the dichotomies of life (love/hate, life/death, good/evil) enfranchises most all viewers. Important artists are those whose works find resonance across time and cultures.

Today’s successful artist has to be social and able to champion their ideas while meeting their audience in society with the social skills to help explain the art. The successful artist most usually must get out into the world and believe that they have something to say worth considering.

And finally, despite all, the successful artist must believe that their creative output is vital to their spiritual well being. They must hold their métier in high regard and be willing to work/struggle to maintain their shelter/sustenance/personal relevancy.

I believe Lael has embraced and demonstrated his ability to function in all these regards. That makes him an artist to watch.

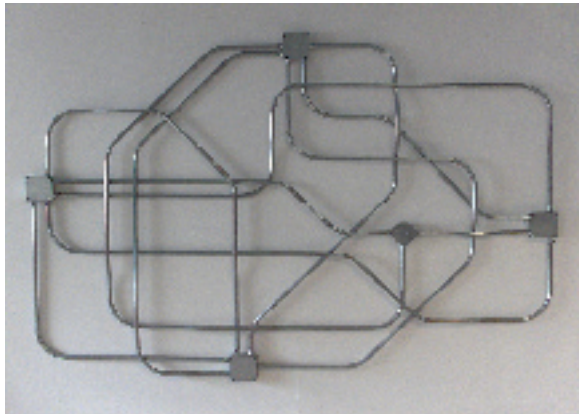
Notes on Lael Corbin by Roman de Salvo, Artist

Lael Corbin worked for me as an intern for about a year and a half when he was a grad student.

He helped me make the sculpture that hangs over the courtyard at the CalTrans headquarters. I put him to work on tasks such as cutting the tops of cast iron jack stands into pyramidal points, or maneuvering large tree limbs with a forklift to label and photograph them one by one. While Lael understood the purpose of these tasks, he also recognized that for the uninitiated there was something mysterious and intriguing about how the shop was set up for our unusual project.

Later, after seeing Lael’s graduate thesis exhibition, I would recall his comments on the curious qualities of that workspace. Lael’s show at San Diego State was an installation that divided the gallery into three rooms, each of which seemed to be devoted to different aspects of some kind of industry.

One room had a large bulletin board with a lot of diagrams, photos and notes pinned to it. It seemed to be a space for thinking, organizing, planning. Another room was a messy space where a lot of chocolate syrup had gotten on the walls and had then been ineptly cleaned in an effort that left a brown residue smeared above a utility sink. The last room, lit with infrared lighting, seemed to be for allowing a series of experimental brownies to develop in some way. The product of this workshop was peculiar if not ambiguous, yet the feeling of the space was distinct and somehow familiar. I was excited to see that Lael is having a fructifying romance with the shop/lab/factory/studio and such spaces where stuff is born. His work is a kind of poetry about the process of making things.



(Top) Roman de Salvo, Circus III,
(Bottom) Lael, Corbin, Albedo-Frame effect (Afe-77)