

Noah Becker's

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Interview with D. Dominick Lombardi



PreRaphaelite Premie, 2000. Acrylic on Plexiglas (reverse painted), 28 x 22 inches.

By RUPERT GOLDSWORTHY, August 2019

High+Low, A Forty-Five Year Retrospective of the art of D. Dominick Lombardi, is a career survey organized and curated by T. Michael Martin for the Clara M. Eagle Gallery in Kentucky. The work featured begins with figurative art in the realm of science fiction dating back to the 1970s, before moving on to sculptures related to Pop Art and the Funk Art movement in the late 1980's, and then to stickers and Appropriation Art in the 2000's.

There is a wide mix of media and type, including a large number of oil and acrylic paintings, mixed media sculptures (some kinetic) and a number of collages and works on paper. Seen as a whole, the exhibition reveals a diverse range of practices and subjects addressed in Lombardi's oeuvre over a near half-century of this New York based artist.

RG: Dominick, can you tell us something about the genesis of this career survey exhibition?

DDL: The title of the exhibition: *High+Low* points to my career-long interest in mixing the high brow, foundation Modernist art found in museums with low brow kitschy, humorous or satirical art that embraces popular culture.

As time has passed, my work has become more political, especially with the *Post Apocalyptic Tattoo* series where I look at the affects of pollution, transgenics, hot metals and the like. On the other hand, there are some important early paintings like *Lemurs in Space* (1978) where I express my concern with the shrinking domain and possible extinction of the many types of lemurs in Madagascar. At that time, in the late 1970's, I saw the lemur as the global equivalent of the "canary in a coal mine".



Cyborg Sunbathers, 1975. Acrylic on canvas, 51 x 33 inches.

RG: Let's go back to the beginning of the exhibition. Can you say something about your early work and what it was inspired by?

DDL: The *Cyborg* drawings, paintings, dioramas and fun house-type sound booth of the mid 1970s were very much about my interpretation of the future – how there would one day be a dominance of beings that are half flesh and blood and half robot. I grew up and came of age with books like *Brave New World*, 1984 and *Flatlands*; films like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Soylent Green* and *Fahrenheit 451*, so the future was the most intriguing draw in my thinking. I was captivated by it. The result was to present my thoughts by re-imagining the world as I knew it, populated solely by cyborgs.

This gets back to the basic premise for any dedicated artist: art is an escape mechanism, a way of dealing with the most troubling aspects of our personal lives, our ailing planet, and the more concerning aspects of human behavior. So I escape to my subconscious, I look to pull from the collective unconscious – I draw as often as I can, automatically and freely, to pry away the endless lines, colors and forms that flood through the objective psyche.

RG: How do these ideas impact your more recent work?

DDL: That process I just mentioned, is basically how the *Post Apocalyptic Tattoo* series came about – my imagined channeling of some future tattoo artist who was chronicling the world around her or him – documenting the mutations and the behaviors in some distant time and space.





Street Urchin #10, 2009. Sand, acrylic medium and objects, 19 x 10 x 9 inches.

RG: Interesting! Can you talk to us a bit about the sand sculptures you include in the exhibition? When were they made - what they concern and their materiality?

DDL: The *Street Urchins* (2008-2013) are very much about the downturn in the economy, and in some instances, more specifically about the drug wars in Mexico. In this series I represent dire situations, loss, some redemption and periodic happiness, but always there is that sense of being completely disposable and thoroughly unimportant. That's why the substrate, the armature built from found and forgotten objects and materials, is the foundation for the ensuing shapes and gestures in the people and animals. I've always made sculptures this way, repurposing as much as possible, but in this instance I am showing much more of the underlying debris to emphasize that point about disposability.

RG: Your most recent work is related to stickers and tattoos. Can you say something about what this work means for you?

DDL: This last *Cross Contamination* series is very much about lowbrow culture, specifically the sticker craze in the inner cities. I've studied the ubiquitous emergence of the tattoo, graffiti, and other cultural phenomenon, but the sticker more directly allows me to draw from the collective unconscious. As life, of living peacefully and safely gets more complicated, more problematic, more dire in the world, my practice of free minded drawing, that basic escape mechanism helps to keep me centered, sane, and dare I say, happy.

High+Low, A Forty-Five Year Retrospective opens August 15, and runs through September 22, 2019. The Clara M. Eagle Gallery is located at Murray State University in west Kentucky. **WM**