

Sleeping Giant

Some time around 2006 or so, my father Leo and I decided to make a series of works together, based partially on his own artworks—artworks I grew up with and which have gained iconic status for me in relationship to my own work as a visual artist. Works based on and including his polychromed bas-relief wood carvings took form, as well as a photo suite featuring “portraits” of his various work spaces and other motifs from in and around the Ketter homestead. We established a framework for the project, deciding that, instead of attempting some kind of democratic “togetherness” platform where we literally made works together—a set-up neither he nor I believed in—I would more or less appropriate his works and use them in the broader context of what grew to be “Sleeping Giant”. “Double Barrel” was the first completed work in the series, a folded *Rorschach* version of Leo’s painting of the Shot Tower at Winchester Western, New Haven, where he worked as an engineer for many years. He moonlighted, quite literally, for over a year, painting the motif he saw through his office window.



My father was an artist, but he didn’t belong to the art world. He belonged to the real world. Actually, the art world doesn’t exist. The people who think so are either delusional, or perhaps they are aware of its non-existence, while projecting a belief in the art world in order to survive, or even dominate, economically or otherwise. Today’s international contemporary art world of note enjoys a predominance based on a self-projected pedigree, backed by a broad consensus of affluence and academia. In art, there can be no consensus, there simply *is* no consensus. There are in fact so many different art worlds, based on so many different definitions of what art is, that they negate and cancel out each other until there is nothing left but the world itself.

My father left this world five years ago. He did not wake up Halloween morning 2012, after enduring hurricane Sandy. He never saw our project finished and exhibited, but he passed believing in its fruition.

During these past five years, I have continued our project, imagining a continuation of the lively dialogue Leo and I pursued, in order to avoid slipping into the form of *homage*. During these years I have also grown to understand how important it is for me to create works, bodies of works, out of my breast and out of my belly, out of my being and, most important, out of my dreams. And by dreams, I do not mean aspirations, certainly not ambitions, but rather that which becomes clear to me in the moments when I am both awake and a-sleep— lucid sleep, or hypnagogia, a halucinogenic state where I reach clarity. I am usually on my back, and in this state it occurs to me what I shall make, certainly why and most definitely how, and more or less how it will look. The rest is logistics. It has become clear to me that I shall follow as closely as possible the framework that is made apparent to me in this given state. The results of this process are increasingly in contrast to what the apparatus surrounding me and even my own concept of my body of work would otherwise dictate. I seem to be drifting away from what my otherwise receptive environment's, as well as my own vain and limited, idea of what "Clay Ketter's work" is, and I find this liberating.

It seems to me that, in order to truly enjoy the freedom of being an artist, one must strive after a self-emancipation from consistency; freedom, not only from established consensuses surrounding one's work, but also one's own wretched half-baked dogmas, embracing the liberty to contradict one's self. Allowing oneself this can result in a euphoric sensation of liberation.

And so, I make the thing that insists on being made.

As an artist, I work for no one, and now I don't even work for myself— I work for the thing. Over the past year, like all the years I have worked professionally as a visual artist, I have made a great many of these things. They are all sisters and brothers, nieces and nephews, cousins, wives, husbands and lovers. Some of them, the older ones, are similar to each other, while others, particularly the younger ones, and especially those from the past year, are quite unique. Despite this, they seem to shun their singularity in favor of their greater familiar context. Not that they are self-effacing in any way; they're simply longing for the not-so-annual family reunion clambake.

Singularity in art is a ploy. If there is to be an art market of any kind, singularity must be established and maintained. Works are plucked from their familiar contexts, polished and carefully lit, presented as "key works of exceptional quality". This phenomenon of singularity, of the singular sensation, the quest for the one thing, is of course archetypal. It is pursued in psychic self-defence, in the face of contradiction and complexity that we fear we cannot navigate. In light of a general human condition, this is perhaps forgivable, but in the context of art, it is not. Nothing should be allowed a given or self-evident status in art. I deem this to be one of the main purposes of art—to make sure that the questions, the conundrums, not only remain but are magnified, even celebrated.

This navigation of the vast myriad complexity of things is my quest, an on-going one I inherited from my father, and I dedicate this quest to him,
The Sleeping Giant.

