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A Conversation with Roger Sayre - June 2006 - Via e-mail

M *The manipulation of light and shadows, not necessarily through the medium of photography, is a recurring theme in your work –can you elaborate?*

RS: I guess my mind works well in “photographic mode”, meaning, when an idea that deals with light and shadows or positives and negatives comes to mind, it blossoms and mutates and I can’t help but to mentally explore all of the possibilities. Then I take my favorites and explore them physically. However, sometimes the most exciting idea makes the most boring art.

What I like about photography is that it’s imagery is base in the physical world. By nature, the medium captures, be it light, movement, or pixels and knowing that, the viewer always feels a sense of foundation, even in the most abstract work, that the images are based in some way, on something real.

M *A segment of your work seems to be concerned, makes reference, sources and/or experiments with the concept, engineering and or science of toys (Jacob’s Lawn Chair, “Woodpecker”, Flight Series), illusionism (Aesop’s Dog, Urban Contact), mind games (Abstract Strategies), and the camera, essentially an optical toy, is a important tool in your work- is this iconographical research of inventiveness conscious on your part? Where does this mechanical fascination stem from?*

RS: Those are good questions. Yes, I have always loved toys, especially clever ones, and I have always loved illusions; and both are recurrent sources of inspiration for my work. I remember as a kid trying to recreated Disneyland’s Haunted Mansion , where we drew lightning bolts around our room with flourescent crayons that only showed when we flashed a black-light on them. Ooooooh, scary.

Though I am fascinated by the way things work, as a child, my brother was (and still is) the guy who can take apart a toy or car, or computer, understand it and put it back together. I never was very good at that. I LOVE taking things apart, but then they usually stay as a pile of parts.

To get back to your question though, I think my fascination with science is really basic. I

like it when things are explained in a way that you may not have thought of before, or shown in a different light. I enjoy it when life's simplicities are revealed.

This line of thought is also one of the things that has drawn me to the kind of "primitive" photography that I do. As a kind of side effect, I hope that the "magic" of photography is revealed or at least can be more deeply understood. It's all really simple on one level. It may be why I have not quite fully embraced digital photography. The simple process of light hitting a surface and that surface changing is a little more removed, the magic a little harder to get at.

M I found the pairing of "objets trouvés" and the theme of recycling in both *The Brunswick Window* displays and your current work *Missing* (now on exhibit at the Jersey City Museum). Is this a comment on the excesses and wastes of consumerism? Can you reveal your thought process in the development of these works?

RS: Well, you may have misunderstood the Brunswick Window. Typically I show 8- 12 different artists in my exhibition spaces each year. I show my own work once a year there. What you saw was not my work, but that of Nyugen Smith. I do curate the spaces though. That said, I do like art that lifts, recycles and reassigns meaning to existing objects and images. Found objects certainly fall into that category. I am rarely interested in the expression of emotions and political concepts in my work, though sometimes my work is interpreted that way and I don't mind. Rather, I am more intrigued by the expression of ideas, play and discovery, and finding art in an unexpected material certainly meets that description.

M Can we talk of an engaging art? *SITTING: One Hour Portraits*, (PhotoNewburgh Gallery, 2005,) dealt with the process of slow-exposure, in some instances, the end result in this case the printed photographs- transpired a sort of effluvium from the sitters. Since not all sitters could stay still for 60 minutes, each portrait is distinct in terms of facture. The sitters, traditionally in a passive role- perhaps unsuspectingly, become active participants in the creative process, and perhaps unknowingly, alter their mirrored image.

RS: (One of the definitions of effluvium is "a gaseous waste" Its like you were there!) With the exception of a child who couldn't sit for the full hour and a journalist who had a busy schedule to keep, everyone did sit for an hour, its kind of crucial to the piece. One thing I have learned about myself is that I think my art is successful when the viewer has an "art experience" when in the presence of the art. In some cases it is an "aha" moment, or a when a piece reveals more about itself under closer scrutiny. In the case of *SITTING*, actually sitting for the portrait is the experience. Probably unlike any experience a person has had before, sitting still and staring at a reflection of yourself in a

mirror for an hour. It is a unique personal experience, and encounter with oneself, requiring patience and endurance.

M *A great deal of physicality, construction and engineering goes into your work-often with the result of either inadvertent or voluntary movement. Did you always work with the notion of dynamics and the possibility of chance i.e. having an object in an uncontrolled environment in mind?*

RS: What I am interested in is setting up parameters, or circumstances, and working within them to see what happens. I like to set the stage and let the art make itself and surprise me. Sometimes that is very easy to do, other times, the set up requires a lot of effort.

M *Can you explain your latest work, Abstract Strategies (currently on view at the A.M. Richard gallery)?*

RS: The newest work in this show, the chess games, are a good example of this what was referred to in the last question. The images are based on the movements of chess pieces from famous games. I make a lot of choices as far as the aesthetics of the work goes, but the placement of the pieces was already done, years ago. Maybe chance is not the right word, given the fact that a lot of thought was given to the placement of the chess pieces when the games were played, but I have no idea what kind of configuration will appear when I chart out the moves visually.

M *Thank you Mr. Sayre.*

