



by Frank Conrad Russen

Surreal Unions

The Sculptures of Artist John Carroll Long

Upon first meeting John Carroll Long at his downtown Naples atelier, I was instantly convinced that I was in the company of an artist from another time and place. I immediately sensed that John was an artistic genius, a dreamer and a modern day Salvador Dali. But most importantly John Carroll Long is a Renaissance Man.

After relocating to Naples from Ann Arbor, Michigan three years ago, Long expanded upon his fine art career as an award winning painter, illustrator and photographer. He brought together every medium he has previously worked in and began exploring and creating his mixed media, three-dimensional sculpture art works.



For years, Long has acquired the innate ability to combine and balance man-made and organic materials into diverse sculpture formations with bold geometric abstraction. His fascination with transforming the found object's appearances and textures allows the work to evolve into its own structure, space and form following the path to his vision. When Long unites cold and heavy metal with hot and smooth wood, it loses its coldness and becomes warming and sensual. Each expressive piece stands as a reminder of the connection and tension between life and death, fear and humor, architecture and nature, man and woman, even as the world around us becomes progressively removed from these needed surreal unions.

The imaginative freestanding and wall-mounted sculpture art creations of multi-faceted artist John Carroll Long impose respect while taking a humorous poke at logic and reason on the human experience. His sculptures are best approached by just simply viewing, calmly and without preconceptions.

I believe one of the most crucial qualities of Long's work is that it is so different from any other art that has been produced and shown in South West Florida. His majestic yet whimsical work can inspire a body of responses from empathy to laughter. His poetic work blends emotion with form, tantalizes the senses and challenges people's expectations.

For all these reasons, I invite you to discover the illustrations, paintings and sculpture of John Carroll Long at Up Art & Design Gallery, 340 8th Street South - Naples, Florida 34102.



Q & A with John Carroll Long

John, yours is a very interesting and varied art career, and it has often been said that you are an artist of many talents.

From the very beginning, I've had two main guidelines: 1) eliminate your expectations. 2) If it's been done before, do not bother. Eliminate your limitations means learn as many and become competent in as many media as possible. Learn etching, painting, colored pencil, ink, sculpture, metal work, found objects incorporation, woodworking, welding, sewing or whatever. When you're an immature artist, one or two of these items may serve your purposes, but when you reach that time in your career that you have some pretty important things to say - you will need every trick in your bag to make it as profound as it can be. When your concepts are simple, all an artist has to do is say which media will work best for this particular piece, say a realistic study of an antique toy. Well you can choose oil pastel or paint or ink or colored pencil or some combination and it will end up being all that you expect from that basic concept. But if you have a more complex concept, you have to think about dimension, texture, movement, time, power, balance, social comment and on and on. The more prepared the artist is, the more likely he'll go where others may fear or are not prepared to go. You have a better chance of being "original" and "new."

Many people would argue that there is nothing new in art. I would argue that that's not true. The reason I'm attracted to art is just for that very reason - when I do a major piece, I can say "if I hadn't done this, it would not exist in this world and it's the only one and the best part is that it says something that's important to me and hopefully the viewer." Even though I'm alone most of the time in my studio, I'm communicating constantly with everyone because my work is about us, it's about me and it's about you. How do I know this is true? Because in the gallery I've had people laughing in one room and people literally crying in the next room and down the hall someone is thinking about good or evil or dark matter. Art can be powerful and it's my form of communication with whomever wants to take the time and energy to see and listen. Having said all that, now I can answer your specific question about the different facets of my artistic and creative life. I've been a commercial artist, a syndicated cartoonist with the Chicago Tribune, Detroit News, etc.. I've shown my work at the major art fairs around the country and now I am an

emerging artist moving from galleries to museums with a little luck. I believe I've been able to do all that and more partly because of my two main galleries.

That was a great bit of history! So, how much formal education have you had and do you feel formal training is important for an artist's career?

Formal education is an interesting question and I can only answer it for me. Having a fine arts degree is fine but it's certainly not necessary to be an artist. You either have "it" or you don't. You do, however, learn lots of technical stuff like how to keep the plaster from sticking to your clay head when making a mold, etc.. On rare occasions, the instructors can make a big difference. In life drawing for example, my instructor wanted me to move along faster toward color, so when he saw me using charcoal, he would sneak up on me and hit me on the head with a stick. It worked and he was right. I was playing it safe - I haven't played it safe since.

I think it's safe to say that humor is very important to you. Your artworks usually have a humorous theme. Why is humor and laughter so important to you?

I am unusual because I have such a strong humorous side and a very serious side fighting for dominance. I have recently worked out an arrangement that seems to work. When I create a serious piece, I leave a little room for a serious twist just to make it a little more palatable. When I create a humorous piece, I like to throw in some rusty nails or broken glass just to grab your attention and make you think.

What advice would you like to pass on to young artists starting out as professionals?

I wish I had some good news for young artists but I do not. I love being an artist. I truly think it is the best gift one can receive. But, it is hard as hell to be an artist. If you are really an artist nothing I say will discourage you. You have my sympathy as well as my deepest respect. Be versatile and increase your odds. When you think of a concept and it is good, do not be satisfied, try to make it better and then when you do, take it a step further and then try to take it even further. Take it as far as you can before you even begin. Then simply trust your intuition, it wants to make good art.

If you see a painting or a piece of sculpture you created 20 years ago, how do you respond to it?

When I see an older piece of art I created, I am surprised by it either being much better than I remember or much worse. The best word would be that my older work looks "thinner" than my current work. Maturity adds depth, power and boldness.

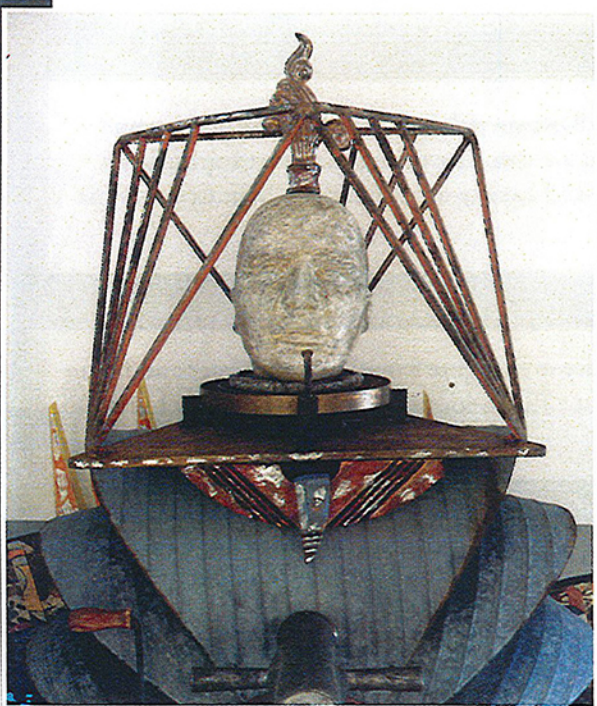


What is the nature of your relationship with your sculpture creations? Would you call it an obsession?

Since I work on between 8 and 12 sculptures and paintings at a time I tend to get less obsessed with any one of them. I want each piece I create to be as good as it possible can be, there is a lot at stake. Working on a lot of sculpture at once takes some of the pressure off as well as being a more effective use of time.

What percentage of sculpture have you created which have never made it out a public view? How many artworks have you completely started over?

I always finish my sculpture and they always get out to public view eventually, sometimes it takes years as it sits in limbo for various reasons. My most recent pieces, Mr. and Mrs. Icarus sat around unfinished for nearly two years because I just was not ready or able to finish them to my standards.





Does the body of your work mean something as a whole? Is it supposed to mean something for others, or is it mainly just for you?

This is a big question especially with fifty years under my belt. There is no difference between doing work for others or for yourself. Because work is about us, all of us. If I had to describe myself, I would say that I am one part sincere, one part spirituality, one part artist, and one part humanist. That is I care about us. I find us interesting and I enjoy communicating about us either in a humorous way or a serious way or a mix. We are all that we have.

If money and resources were unlimited, would your sculptures be different?

If I had more money I would own a huge warehouse, if I worked in a huge warehouse my sculpture would be even larger and I am positive one day someone would find me crushed by one of my creations falling on me. The serious answer is that it never hurts to have money backing your every need...just look at Jeff Koons.

What do you think about contemporary art in general? How do you see yourself in the history of modern art?

Just like every genre of art, there is some good, a lot of bad and just a few exciting things - artist Martin Puryear comes to mind. My general feeling is that too much of it is high concept and low aesthetics and in some cases low concepts and equally low aesthetics with a heavy reliance on shock value. The bottom line is that too many people think they are artistic. Real artists are a rare breed. As for me. I just keep doing the best work I can and the rest will take care of itself.



What progression or changes have you seen in your creative methods and subject matter over time?

My creative methods are just about what I thought they would be. I instinctively knew that I would eventually need to master as many media as I could learn. If I need a new one, I invent it, wing it or learn it as needed. I love the challenge of problem solving and engineering. For example, how do you design a twenty-foot sculpture that will fit into a modest gallery and then fit in a truck for transport and then hang it in a client's home. That is a whole different art form.

What has been your biggest challenge as an artist?

My biggest challenge is getting people comfortable with art that is bold and different in their homes.

What current projects or goals do you have in the works?

My next goals are publications. I want to be on the cover of the New Yorker, Sculpture Magazine etc.....Then a museum show or two would be nice.

You possess multiple artistic talents. Do you consider yourself to be any more gifted than most artists?

Pablo Picasso wanted to be a cartoonist, he could not do it. He was too self-centered.

What do you enjoy most about the quality of life as a professional artist living and working in beautiful Naples, Florida?

I love having a studio space where my wife works as an architect. It is great to have her input. We walk on the beach together, we go to work together and we go home together and we do it in beautiful Naples, Florida. Amazing !

Any last words? Is there anything you want to share, before this interview comes to an end?

What I want to share is my work, come view it, come ask me questions. I am always here working in my studio.

