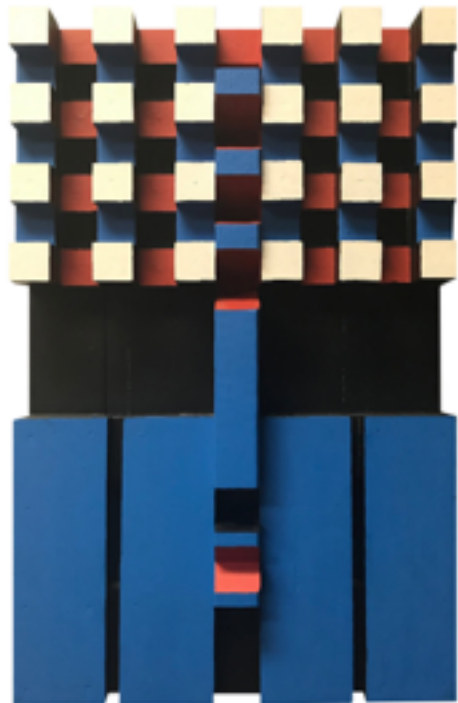


John Acorn

Masks, Profiles and a Chair

March 26 – May 9, 2020



Artist Interview

Q: What inspired your mask series?

“I have always saved the money I made selling my artwork to buy African art. Owning this collection of African art exposed me to a lot of masks and one day I decided to make contemporary masks. For me, this series is not about imitating African masks, it’s about referencing them in a contemporary way.”

Q: What inspired the profile series?

“One day I had this idea, and took a piece of cardboard and drew a woman’s profile. It was loosely based on a woman I knew but not in detail because I didn’t want it to be personal. I was fascinated by the idea of working with plywood because it was seldom used as a material to make art. That is the origin of the series and I can never keep count of these things but I probably have close to fifty heads.”

Q: What is your process for coming up with multiple renditions of a design?

“I don’t look to find ideas, they find me. I think of it as being informed rather than inspired and I’ve enjoyed having that relationship with my artwork. One day I was doing a jigsaw puzzle and thought to myself ‘I could make a profile in two pieces like a jigsaw puzzle.’ These designs are the result of working on one piece and halfway through finishing one, I think of what the next will be. In that way, each profile becomes suggestive of the next one.”

Q: What inspired the color palette for the masks? “Red, white, black...these are all colors often used in African art”

Q: Do you know when a series is complete?

“I never really know when a series is done. All artists have unfinished work and I still have five profiles that aren’t finished. Sometimes I go back into a series but only because it’s something I wanted to do. I never want to work a series to death.”

Q: What is the most consistent thing in your work? “Whenever people write about my work they always seem to have strong comments about the technical aspect of my work. I don’t call myself a perfectionist but I’m close to a perfectionist with woodworking. I’m not sure if this ‘exactness’ is intentional but it’s just what I do.”

Q: When did you first become interested in metalworking and woodworking? “It all goes back to 5th grade and the required manual training classes in school. These were classes in woodworking, metalworking, and even the front edge of working with plastic. I’ve never forgotten those first experiences and the excitement of making something and showing my parents who were always thrilled and very supportive of my work.”



On March 7th, 2020, during my senior year of college, I had the opportunity, through my internship at Hampton III Gallery, to interview John Acorn. As a young art student, I was honored to sit and talk with this artist who has such an incredible legacy as a maker and educator. Having grown up seeing his sculptures in downtown Greenville and his artwork at the local art center, I felt a personal connection to his work before I was old enough to fully understand the impact of his career. This privilege to talk with John Acorn, hear the personal stories that shape his work, and see firsthand his passion as a maker, was an experience I will treasure always.

Interview by Sarah Kunkel