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Piecing It Together

by Lucy Yau

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Barbara Weissberger: Are we just going to stand and watch this?

Barbara Weissberger's pieces fall into two categories. Her wall installations are elaborate pieces which blend her own photographs, magazine cut-outs, and comic book insertions that are then digitally pieced together in collages. They are organized in mirror images inspired by the symmetry of Rorschach inkblots. These are then printed out as smooth and seamless images that allow her to affix them without the appearance of scissor cut-outs and glue. Some take up an entire wall of the gallery.

Her watercolors are more spare and minimalist, with a few humorous touches. In one work, a row of tires and mushrooms surrounds a leg teasingly sticking out.

The politics of food fascinates Weissberger, particularly how removed people have become from the sources of their own sustenance. As a result, her work is full of images of hamburgers and meat. For Weissberger, hamburgers are a low-end, American iconic foodstuff so entrenched in our culture that they've become part of the landscape, a shorthand for what represents this country, like apple pie.

Burgers and red meat are part of an industrial food production chain, Weissberger says: "They are a nexus for economical, ecological, philosophical lens of other issues." Movies and books such as Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* and Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* inspire her. She quotes Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*: "The hamburger is not so much a product of nature, as it is of culture." She adds, "Depending on how you feel about meat, I get various interpretations of my work."

Body builders, with their artificially exaggerated physiques, also figure largely in Weissberger's compositions. Tires, which have a natural history derived from rubber trees and have become artificial products that go with SUVs and pickup trucks, are another favorite topic of Weissberger. At the other end of the spectrum are butterflies and flowers—morning glories and roses add color and a touch of femininity to balance out the grayness and masculinity of her trucks and tires.

Mushrooms are also present in many of her works. Weissberger says, "They have a terrible beauty about them. Many are poisonous and grow out of dead and decaying things and are a counterpoint to the redness of the meat."

Her collages are reminiscent of Richard Hamilton's work, full of Charles Atlas types in domestic scenes, which are considered by many art historians to be the origins of Pop Art.

An all-consuming insatiable hunger that ravages the landscape informs her work. More food, bigger cars, larger bodies devouring unnatural foodstuffs. The spirit of the Buddhist Hungry Ghost, a mythological creature like an Eastern Tantalus meets Cookie Monster, whose hunger was never satiated, haunted Weissberger's earlier paintings. Its spirit is felt here in the vast depictions of manmade foods and products that never quite satisfy the soul.

Chambliss Giobbi: Time and Again

Chambliss Giobbi was once a welder and a machinist before becoming a musician and composer. He then switched to visual arts. When he decided to make the last switch, he cast about for subjects to inspire him. He knew his influences included Max Ernst and Joseph Cornell.

One day while he was browsing through the fine art section at the Strand bookstore in Manhattan, he came across an old book of black-and-white portraits of famous Germans. He bought the book, took it home, ripped out the images, and created collages of them. When he returned to find another copy to create more work, he was told that the book would be difficult to procure again as it was rare, archaic, and low in value.

To cope with the problem he turned to taking his own black-and-white portraits. He did self-portraits and enlisted people he knew such as his parents and



Small Head of Gina DePalma by Chambliss Giobbi

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his classically beautiful wife, Laine Valentino, to pose. He then set about the task of finding other models for his collages.

“Part of the process is getting these people to say, ‘Yes’,” he says. Giobbi will at times contact an object of interest for months at a time, persistently persuading someone until he or she is convinced of the worthiness of the project. This pursuit verges on obsessive, and Giobbi comes to know his subjects very well.

Once he has a hold of a model, he will take dozens perhaps hundreds of photographs and use those to create images with multiple angles. His portraits are reminiscent of Umberto Boccioni’s futuristic works. Giobbi’s pieces are also cubistic in that they compress multiple moments into one instant. They are an explosion of lost vanishing points. The viewer is always seeking the place where the images converge.

His subjects include minor celebrities such as biker Indian Larry, adult film actress Gina DePalma, Penny Arcade, and character actor Fisher Stevens—an actor you’ve seen before in dozens of movies or shows but whose name you can never quite remember.

Giobbi says, “I look for people with character. I don’t look for the conventionally pretty. Take Fisher for instance, he’s handsome in an ugly way which makes him oddly beautiful and he’s a great actor.”

Penny Arcade was a 1960s radical and activist, and is still a fixture in the East Village. Through performance pieces, she has protested for various causes throughout her career. Giobbi has captured Penny Arcade’s nude, aging form in *Electra Dances*, rapturously dancing like a Dionysian Maenad. There is a terrible sadness, desperation, and elation in her frantic movements. She is framed in the background by an abandoned Brooklyn Civil War era customs warehouse, which once stored tobacco.

Giobbi’s pieces have about them a frenetically charged energy. His works are monumental pieces, ranging from four-by-six-foot to six-by-eight-foot aluminum panels. They are largely black-and-white, which give them a noirish and formal appearance. Splashes of color are inserted now and again. Looking for a binder for his collages that would add sculptural interests, Giobbi asked his mother, a beekeeper, about the properties of beeswax. The substance plays a role in many of his compositions.

Giobbi says, “In music, time is an integral part of the composition. There is the memory of the past and the anticipation of the future. One never sees or hears the piece in its entirety.”

Giobbi has created a world wherein space and time are synthesized into a single, memorable moment.

Both exhibits are on view until May 30, 2008, at Hallwalls, 341 Delaware Avenue (854-1694/hallwalls.org).

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