



THE LURE OF THE MECHANICAL

Gary Orlinky is a greedy artist, so he says. He's greedy about the number of elements he can include in his works, the variety of textures, surfaces, materials he can use, the complex stories he can tell—and not even begin to explain. He's also greedy about his audience, even though he may not think about it much. He does want to attract all sorts of viewers, from children to flea market enthusiasts, to those who might be able to take in more fully the complexity of his constructions.

He insists that the compelling visual quality of his works always wins. There may be occasional political references (Osama Bin Laden, nuclear disaster), social consciousness might rear its head (water, water; an evolution piece made just for A.P.E.), but he doesn't hesitate to throw out a favored mechanical contraption if it doesn't help create a thing of beauty.

So, you ask, what is beautiful about the stuff that he works with? And his answer: I can't begin to say what is so beautiful about the objects in my work except that there is something about the integrity of the design of each object—and he points to a set of finely honed compasses which he has embedded in a checkerboard surface topped with a tube of sea shells (where we all come from)—“what made it?” is the label.

Some art functions as a kind of retrieval system. The artist looks out—usually actually goes out—into the physical world and captures something, a landscape, a face, a play of light and color, captures it and then is able to make the rest of us more acutely aware of what he or she has discovered and felt. Our world is enlarged by this process, made more conscious. Gary thinks he sees mechanical objects more sharply, more purposefully than others. So he brings them back from a kind of treasure hunt, stores them, and ultimately joins them together to make them speak ingeniously among themselves and to the rest of us.

Language and math, the twin notions of description and measurement, are crucial to him. The human structures that have resulted from our invention of such skills have removed us from the natural world. We can't live without our machines, but they can also make our lives miserable. Gary is a proud Luddite. Computers enter his art on about the same level as terrorists. He loves to try to figure out the way things work, but that interest abruptly stops in the digital age. So he works hard to make his imaginary worlds look simple, and viewers might thus feel they get it when in fact they probably don't. And sometimes he doesn't know what his devices are, or do, either. He thinks a coiled wire issuing from the mouth of an animal skull ends in a box that measures radiation. And he worries that he began this piece two days before the Japanese nuclear plant erupted. Was he responsible? Again, he wants to wear his social consciousness lightly.

Sometimes formal issues weigh on him, as when he shows thin threads pulled from large spools apparently able to hold up a heavy rubber tire. Or then there's the humor, hard to carry off without appearing all too clever. But he's also not shy about calling himself something of a smart aleck. He sees an impressive combination of humor, pathos, and intellect neatly coming together in many of his works. Using his fairy tale worlds, he declares, “a Jungian could analyze me to death.”