

Gregory Perkel Manuscripts of the Cardboard Culture

For the *Manuscripts of the Cardboard Culture* Gregory Perkel has disassembled and then reassembled ordinary cardboard grocery store boxes. He takes these lowliest of objects and transforms them into perfectly honed objects of the kind we call high art. As such these works are not only uniquely conceived and crafted but the artist has assigned them a role in his passionate discussion about the significance of context in art. Context; historical, socio/economic, philosophical, ideological - is essential in understanding art from any era and here it is taken to a new level of social critique, moral outrage and fantastical humor. Perkel's symbolic content is hinted at in the titles for his four large groupings: *Web Site*, *Gift Certificate*, *Coupons* and *Advertising*. It is more clearly delineated in the sentences that accompany each work and in the stories that he wrote for the five large single pieces in the exhibition.

The accompanying text for each work explains its place in Perkel's *other world* – Corporaria Land – a complex, satirical and humorous *world* where the only language is that of commodities and it is written only with reconstructed food boxes. It is important to note here that the artist uses only the cardboard from these boxes for his materials. There is no added paint, ink, or other materials of any kind. Despite the fact that the full extent of the language is strictly bound to the boxes Perkel has discovered an entire universe of alternate thinking hiding in our commercial logos. He has rearranged them to form whole new meanings about love, death, rules, and religion, to name only a few.

In deconstructing the language of our product boxes Perkel has also found a way to pay homage to the country he loves - the United States. When Perkel left Russia in 1977 to come here he knew as an artist that he wanted make something unique, something very *American*. The boxes literally spoke to him about many of the things he loves about this country. But that alone would have been too simple. Every society has its weaknesses. So satire and humor are deeply woven into Perkel's *Manuscripts*.

The *Manuscripts of the Cardboard Culture* are, for Perkel, also about democracy. So much art today feels elitist to a majority of the American public. Perkel, in the tradition of Andy Warhol, who's *Campbell Soup Cans* are now icons of our culture, wanted to make art that spoke to the life most Americans know, not an obscure, inaccessible version of it. Perkel wanted to make art that, like Warhol, uses American mass culture, but he wanted to do it differently. Warhol mostly left commercial culture as is, only altering it superficially. Perkel wanted to completely recreate it. Unlike Warhol, he wanted the artist's intellect and skilled hand to be integral to its message.

The level of precision in Perkel's technique is awe inspiring. It is the precision found in the work of ancient craftsmen from a time when time itself was valued for the quality of the excesses it could produce. Perkel's carefully cut strips of box cardboard vary in size, are placed in symmetrical compositions and provide various shades of cardboard color which are interspersed with pieces of the bold graphic design of the brand names. The strips are placed in repetitive or free flowing patterns, depending on the subconscious state of the artist at the moment. Perkel creates his compositions spontaneously, as he works,

relying on an aesthetic inner self, the accumulated visual knowledge of a life time, to guide the moment and decide when the piece has reached its conclusion. The patterns in the more abstract works undulate unpredictably like *new* music does, abstract and unreadable but no less enticing. The content in the narrative work is laced with the humor of a sorcerer.

Gregory Perkel has created a viable visual world for his intellectual forays and aesthetic skills using the most modest of materials. He has given his humble yet alternate universe the air it needs to breathe. And breathe it does. The *Manuscripts of the Cardboard Culture* are part of the moral and philosophical stance the artist takes with regard to the world around him and so they are integral to the artist's shaping of his own existence. Luckily we are all part of the context that surrounds that existence. However, without text or context of any kind these works of art stand on their own as simply miraculous contemporary creations, there for ALL to enjoy.

Kristen Accola, Curator
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