

The Centrifugal and Other Forces of Walter Redinger

“He was wasting ideas all day”, wrote Walter Redinger in a song for his slightly trippy sometimes grinding *Walter Band*, and he was obviously not writing biographically as Redinger has probably never wasted an idea in his whole life.

This is not to deny though, the presence of Walter Redinger as the subject, the hero, the villain, or the lover in his various media which, not incidentally, includes drawing, painting, poetry, music making in general, and of course the form which began his international career in the 1960's, sculpture. In fact, Redinger has a remarkable relationship to his life and his work. Acutely observing, listening and moving through life, he considers himself in the third person, grafting sights and sounds that resonate with his earthy, oddly psychedelic sensibility onto a personal mythology so multifaceted that it takes all that he's got to make it real.

Growing up one of 6 children of an immigrant German tobacco farmer imprinted on Redinger an instinct for process of a certain nature, namely, one that is subject to external forces, is cyclical, and it is slow, it could, he says, “be measured in billions of years.” He works with complete trust in the relevance of his intuition because it is connected with the ground beneath his feet. Not the clay soil of Collingwood, but the sandy soil of Elgin County. His motivations and his materials are fixed to the thin strip of communities along the North shore of Lake Erie and the cycles of life there. This is where Redinger learned viscerally Schopenhauer's description of reality: “This world that appears to the senses has no true being, but only a ceaseless becoming” (1) For Redinger this lack of certainty in the realness of things is not a cause for self deprivation but rather a source of wonder to be explored.

Always one to address the vast questions of life with the solid foundation of common experience Redinger has framed two of his most recent works in specially constructed rooms. “Rooms are interesting to artists” Redinger pronounces with such authority that

it seems indisputable. Certainly Louise Bourgeois is fascinated with rooms configuring her *Cells* with the same strong sense of intuition that is at once deeply personal and universal as Redinger. As vessels, if the elements within are as deftly calibrated as Redinger's, rooms can be crucibles of galactic reactions.

Fifteen minutes south of Hwy 401 between woodlot and tobacco field in West Lorne Ontario, Redinger's cinder block studio barely contains one of these rooms. It is so thoroughly paint laden it reads as if it is constructed out of its' black and white pigments slapped on with the unerring expediency of a carpenter driving in nails. The room has a primitive musicality to it. It visually pulses in time with imagined ancestral drum beats -- despite the fact that Redinger plays guitar -- but both the imagined music and the music he makes with the *Walter Band* are punctuated with occasional screams from deep within the "Redinger Melancholy", which he says his father brought with him on The Boat from Germany.

In this mindscape of a room one senses the genetic matter for bones with which his driftwood and fiberglass sculptures, *God Seekers*, the *Ghost Ship* and the *Formes*, may be constructed. On the painted walls is the dot and line that he will marginally civilize into drawings and prints. In its' three dimensions it is the acoustic chamber for his *Walter Band* experiments, and in its texture is the mix of Redinger Melancholy and piss 'n vinegar that would be his oeuvres' primordial soup -- if it had come first. But that is part of the distinction of the artist hitting full stride. Forty years of experiences arc in his mind to chase down the new thoughts and in the resulting swarm of ideas energy of such centrifugal force is generated that work fires out of his will in all forms of media. It appears that these spawn of Redinger's form a cast of characters recognizably connected to Redinger's maelstrom that have the potential of engaging in a single far out narrative.

Redinger's grand scale installation in St. Thomas Ontario, *Apparition*, if not dependent on, is certainly enhanced by its location in the historic Italianate Canada Southern Railway Station. As the hallmark of placements and displacements, the origin and

terminus of journeys the location couldn't be more sympathetic to Redinger's revelations. Within the station is a freestanding open topped room which provides context for the creatures, the *Formes*. Looking like the remains of some genetically modified beings in a David Cronenberg film –not surprisingly, Cronenberg was a regular at Redinger's openings at Isaacs Gallery in Toronto in the '60's, the *Formes* hang perilously about the space. Like phantoms from the ether, they seem eerily familiar from those moments when we seem to partake in the collective subconscious like the dreams you have when you're half awake or the foggy moments before you yield to anesthetic before surgery; and yet, they are unconditional discoveries.

One look at the *Formes* and you sense that when they had the guts for digestion some were carnivorous, while others were herbivorous. Some have been bleached by the sun, others ravaged upon reentry to our atmosphere after mythic space treks, while others still have been wretched from the time of early human history. No longer bound by flesh, their souls gone to where ever souls gather, what is left of their bodies persist, carrying the stories of their lives in their hobbled skeletons. Who are the *Formes* and why do they persist? Surely one expects the sole consolation of death to be freedom from the relentless search for meaning that is life – but, to consider that this pursuit may be eternal is to cast everyone in the role of Sisyphus, doomed to repeat the same impossible task for eternity.

In this place of chance meetings Redinger defines the line between telling his own story and provoking us enough to discover our own. Transitions of place and of state are more pertinent here than pinning down absolutes. This is part of the quest to understand what it is to be born and to live and to die in this world -- an unhinging of the door to these mysteries of life where the specifics of time and space are irrelevant. It is a spiritual endeavour that has taken hold of Redinger since his *Caucasian Totems* and *Sarcophagus #1* of the 1970's. That he does so with a sense of wonderment that never attempts to triumph over the mysteries of life exposes the erudition of his exploration.

Like Susan Rothenburg who wondered what the colour of breath is, and understood almost simultaneously that it was pale lavender (2), Walter Redinger knows the structures of the incorporeal world with similarly impossible confidence. If there are colours to such things as birth, decay, cancer, hope, anger and sex, the question is moot, because by the time Redinger meets his subjects they have been reduced to their quintessence. Redinger has discovered that these accounts can be embedded in the bones.

Connected to *Apparition* but as if part of the same story told in a different voice, there are the cellular cum neo psychedelic prints that have under gone as much process as qualifies to be classified evolutionary. In them are the gasses, fluids, nutrients, hiding places, hunting sites and breeding grounds to be the territory of the *Formes*, the *God Seekers*, and maybe even the *Ghost Ship*.

Redinger's work appears technically impossible to achieve, and yet he doesn't insinuate any sense of his conquest. It is as if, as many artists claim, he has liberated his forms – merely taking away that which obscures the sculpture within. But Redinger's forms are constructions and there is nothing to remove except space itself. All these mythic beasts exist in this apparent contradiction, the most tantalizing of places to be, in suspension between the definitive solidity of the earth and the limitlessness of space, equally ephemeral, equally eternal.

Redinger's process here is as organic as his early sculptural forms were. Not only has he probably never wasted an idea in his whole life, but he keeps re-pollinating them. That explains why Redinger is exhausting and exhilarating company and is in every sense of the word the last man standing. And why we're still blown away.

By Sylvia Curtis-Norcross

1. Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation* Vol 1 appendix
2. Enright, Robert. *The Humanizer: an interview with Susan Rothenberg*, Border Crossings issue no. 95, p27.