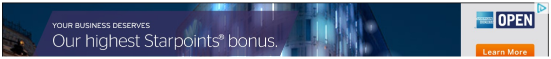
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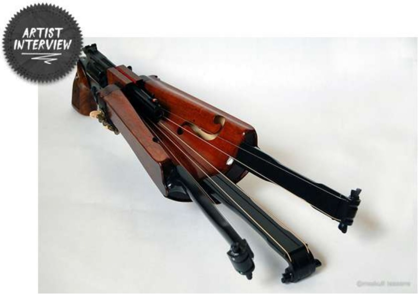
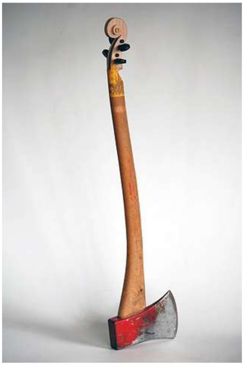
Artist Interview: Maskull Lasserre

by **Evan La Ruffa**



Maskull Lasserre's creations are tributes to the process of creative inquiry, while also existing so confidently within the world of the craftsman. His conceptual propositions are incredible inverted thoughts that require a certain inquisitive disposition from its onlookers. Within the work exists the same double-take of mind required by the French surrealists, while also asking questions of skill equally as challenging. Within each incisive action of sculpting exists a test of otherwise practical objects and casts them in perfectly intentional new contexts.

The point is that there should be no limitations to the questions one can and should ask, if only because the point of art itself is to serve as creative cognitive dissonance. The inquiries within are about emblazoning images on the mind while inviting logic to skip a beat, thus opening up a brand new set of possibilities. Seemingly unhindered by any technical obstacle, Lasserre's art is a bold testament to creative evolution, pushing the philosophical envelope while clearly exceptional insofar as vision and craftsmanship. It's always been about the ideas, but the impeccable execution within makes one question whether or not this artist is confined at all; After having asked the following questions, ir's clear he isn't in the least.



Lets get right to it! The second we saw your piece entitled, 'Second Thought," we

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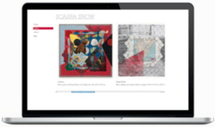

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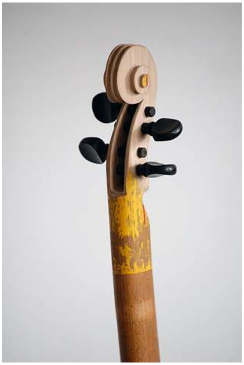
were hooked. The title is as appropriate as possible. How do you most often come to these inverted thoughts, in this case, where an axe becomes a piece of art?

I really like your term "inverted thought". In many ways that is exactly what these pieces are – cerebral musings that only converge, or distill into unity, in the material realm. In many ways, I work not from idea to object, but from object to idea. For this piece to work, the potential volume of a violin scroll had to exist within the wood of an axe handle. Where some people reason out their pieces, I think I am susceptible to the whims of inspiration. My work is to cultivate maximum receptivity to the potential of what is already present around me.



You seem to have identified a philosophy of seeing new objects come into being via the adaptation of another, often times, when the parts are divergent in tone. This causes a cognitive reaction of incongruency and wonder, as long as the viewer is able to get past the sometimes oppositional subject matter. Is it your goal to help them over that hurdle?

In a word, yes. I have to win the trust of the viewer so that they are willing follow me through the work. There needs to be an element of visceral, technical, or aesthetic seduction that makes the (often) bumpy cognitive journey worthwhile. This is where the sticky matter of "craft" or technical accomplishment is worth mentioning. People trust something that looks authentic, or – if not seamless – somehow "believable". I have to fight the impulse to get indigent when people ask me "where did you find that?". It's actually the response that all the work is somehow designed to elicit (when it is most successful).

Sometimes it's clear that the reaction, as in, provoking a certain response, is the goal of some creatives, while others are more focused on the transformative and vocational power of creating things. Which one are you?

I would imagine that I am the latter. I am consummately selfish in the creation of my work. I make the things that I do not understand in order to help me do so. My work is a material sketch or model through which I come to account for, or at least demonstrate, some otherwise disembodied mystery. It is my very good fortune, and great pleasure, that other people happen to enjoy with my indulgence.

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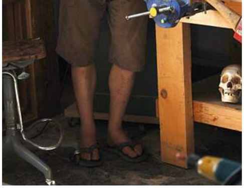
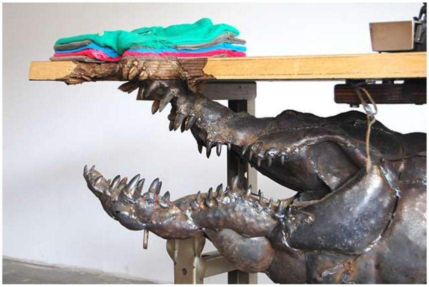


How do commissioned pieces tend to work for you? I assume the process would be different than the way a company or collector might interact with an illustrator or graphic designer.

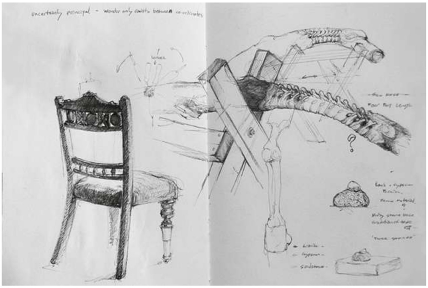
On one hand, I like to think that I am selective in the commissions that I accept – that I hold out for the ones that sync nicely with my sensibilities, or present specific opportunities to expand on current personal research. On the other, I really enjoy challenging my own dogma; expanding the conceptual and technical territory of my private practice through accepting projects with parameters very different from those I naturally follow.



Tell us about the piece entitled, "Allegory." How'd it come to be?

Allegory grew out of exactly one of these challenges. I was commissioned by Lacoste to create a work that included some of their polos. There was something analogous about how textiles are stitched together from a pattern, and how the crocodile head was welded out of small pieces of formed sheet steel. It was also an exploration of how the different vocabularies of additive and subtractive techniques (the crocodiles teeth and nose are carved out of the sewing table and pile of polos) could participate in the same piece.

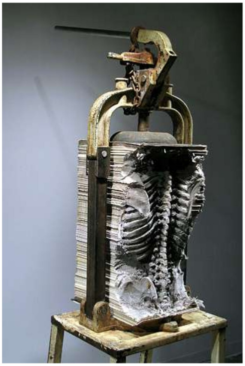
You also draw… I assume that was your entry into art… How did that inform your later work as a sculptor?

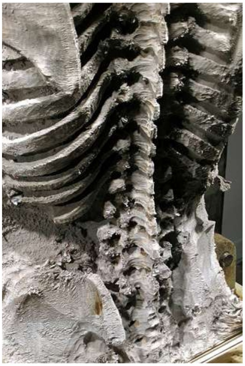

uncertainty principal - wonder only exists between co-ordinates
four foot length

Yes, and true. I understand drawing as a way of seeing – I think that the material trace on paper is a marginal byproduct of what is most valuable about the undertaking. Drawing is somehow uncompromising, and offers nowhere to hide -there is nothing like it for calibrating the eye, mind and hand. There is also something infinite about the drawn line; It holds the potential to describe a universe of texture, form, and motion. It's something that I should should do more consistently.

When did you find that you loved to make things with your hands?

It's something I have always done, it was characteristic of the environment into which I was born. My mother is an artist, and my father was a research scientist – both creative, hands-on people. I was never short of old mechanisms and instruments to take apart and investigate, and had all the clay and paint I could possibly handle.



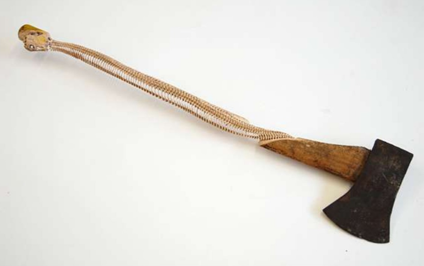


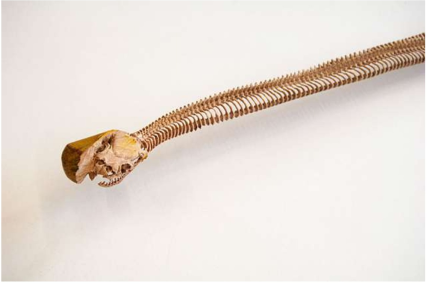
Sounds like a great environment to grow up in… "Lexicon" is another piece that blows us away. It incorporates carved newspapers and a mechanical press, which has been carved into the shape of a skeletal rendering of a human torso. Seeing human shape in machines is an aesthetic juxtaposition that feels much different than if you had carved the idea into a different material. How does the actual material you carve affect the technical process?

I share the authorship of each work with the material that constitutes it. The creative act has a trajectory in which the material is engaged, subdued, controlled, but then ultimately re-asserts itself as a dominant factor in the work. Often this dialogue between matter and technique is the truest subject of the work – the sculpture's representational quotient or motif serves only really as an architecture for this interaction to inhabit.

Similarly, it feels like the material being sculpted is a huge part of the commentary of the piece. How have other art forms influenced the way you create, or how have they influenced the environment in which you create?

At this point I can identify three types of experience that influence me most profoundly. First, I played the violin for 14 years. This instilled a certain kind of sensibility through which I both perceive and interact with the world around me. Second, my bachelor degree included a minor in philosophy. My cognitive approach to the creative process definitely derives from this training. Third, I boxed for many years. There is a surprising kind of grace and intimacy to this activity that reminded me of playing an instrument. Boxing also set a scale to measure physicality, something that is implicit in the way I address my work.





I can definitely trace identifying myself as a writer with learning about writers of the past, and it clicking in my mind that this was what made me feel good, and what I should work on in life. I feel like most creatives relate to a certain spark which inspires them be creative themselves, howbout yourself?

I think it was Rudyard Kipling who said that he wrote because no one was writing the stories that he wanted to read. In relation to my own field, I think this holds true. I guess I make the work that I want to think about and that I can't find anywhere else. Music, though, is something that I could identify as a direct inspiration. I think that if I could make sculpture like Tom Waits makes music, I'd be pretty happy.

THANKS MASKULL!!!!

My pleasure, most interesting questions that I really enjoyed pondering. Please keep in touch.

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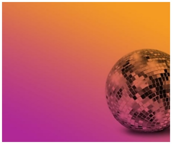

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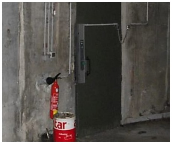

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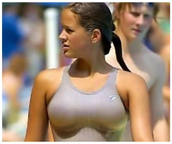

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