

Conflict and Complexity

Ethos and pathos, comedy and tragedy, war and peace are opposing forces that have forged inspired art for ages. They create emotional friction that energizes an artist's work and propels it to a greater level of interest and intensity.

Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of eviscerated bodies, and Pablo Picasso's terrifying *Guernica* are fascinating examples of art that I prefer to call "beautifully grotesque." These are images that simultaneously repel and attract us like a strong magnetic field. Thematically, it is a trope that is inexhaustible and continues to invite broad interpretation in contemporary art.

In my view, Richard Saul Wurman's work embraces this same creative conflict. By his own admission, he is in a renewed phase of art-making after a career as a celebrated entrepreneur in the "understanding" business. This new work reflects a path of earnest discovery and is curiously ambitious. In both painting and sculpture, he is trekking into an artistic realm where beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I enjoy this approach because it demands real effort on the part of the viewer. It is not easy work, and it encourages many questions.

It may not be Wurman's intention to create a narrative body of work, but because it is figurative, a story is implied. Comprised of elements such as consumer waste, industrial material, menacing serpents, skittish birds, crustacean-like modules, and angst-ridden faces, I can't help but wonder what this all means. Is the imagery apocalyptic? Are his "landscapes," far from bucolic, depicting an ominous future? Is the work an urgent political statement about the crisis between natural and artificial environments? After all, won't the plastic water bottles he immortalizes in his sculptures outlast the bronze in which they are cast?

Questions aside, I choose to see Richard's work as an invitation to wander into his artistic workshop. Here you can observe him freely juggling an unlikely mix of organic and fabricated forms into playful juxtaposition. Seen on a wholly abstract level, you can just enjoy the articulated surfaces, colliding volumes, and formal complexity. Finally, the courage to produce this exploratory work in bronze seems to state defiantly that he is in serious pursuit to make a strong artistic statement.

Are these sculptures beautiful? Are they grotesque? Fortunately, they are both, and there in lies immediate power.

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