



GOT TO BELIEVE IN SOMETHING (detail image) 2008 epoxy primer, automotive paint, acrylic & graphite on aluminum, 96"x60"

JOHN MILTON ENSOR PARKER, PAINTER

by Bob Kruse

*When first the flash of the new born sun
fell on the green and gold.*

*Our father, Adam, sat under the tree
and scratched with a stick in the mold,*

*The first rude sketch that the world
had seen was joy to his mighty heart,
Till the devil whispered behind the leaves,
“it’s pretty, but is it art?”*

- Rudyard Kipling

What is it about that question posed by Kipling’s devil that seems so elusive and dangerous? Is there any use in that question? Is the devil just juggling apples at our expense? What is it that happens when we refer to something as “art”? Is there something lost when you label something as art? How do we keep hold of that initial discovery without letting it be drowned out by those whispers?

A bottle of coke, for instance. I have found myself in conversation arguing over whether the coke bottle is a work of art. I know Vermeer was a Pepsi man, but if he painted a bottle of coke does it then become art, whereas before it was just a container? Should we dig up the guy who invented the coke bottle and study his brain? Or should we build a condo on his grave? Let’s dust off that coffin and crack it open.

Is art holding the mirror up to nature, or is it striving for something more than nature can offer us? The word’s meaning continually changes over time. All of the artists that have come before us chased after their own meaning of the word. They ran across the great plain of existence chasing after some little star that held the essence of their inspiration or their masterpiece. They spent their lives trying to catch it, trying to wrap their hands around it, leaving a wake of music, sketches, equations, scribbled words behind them. The chase carried them across the barren landscape. Some got tired and went off looking for something more concrete and tangible. Others just weren’t fast enough to keep up with it. For those that carried on, the little star took them out as far as it could until it finally came to rest upon the opposite side of a deep canyon that seemed to have no bottom. Some had gone far enough and just sat and gazed into the canyon. All the artists who dared gave themselves some room and ran as fast as they could and took a giant leap over

the canyon grasping out at the little star as they fell. For a moment they soared and a smile broke across their faces, for maybe they touched it and for a brief second felt that warm glow up close. Maybe that was enough.

Then they fell to the bottom, and the star continued to lure more and more. Over time, the canyon filled up with the bodies of these great searchers. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bodies piled up in the canyon, each one with a little smile on its face. They are all twisted up in Wilde’s great gutter holding their own part of the secret answer to Kipling’s devil’s question. Over yet more time, the canyon was all filled up. This happens every generation or so. It gets filled up until a bridge is formed out of their bodies. This makes the great chase an easy stroll across the canyon, changes the meaning even. Words or ideas get thinned out so that they don’t reach the same brightness they used to. At this point a different perspective is needed. Someone may look down instead of up. The careful eye can see, towards the bottom of the canyon, a puddle of blood - a trickle still from Mozart’s eye, a drop from Shakespeare’s finger, Dostoyevsky, Curie, Rembrandt, Newton, Armstrong, Aristotle. At the base of this puddle is a little flower that looks like a star, and the careful eye can see this. The careful eye is drawn to this and begins a downward climb, a climb through the corpses of the great chasers. Perhaps, digging through these bodies and concepts is a way of getting underneath the forms and conventions they have chased after, a deconstruction and a reconnection of what lies underneath these ideas. Then when the careful eye finds the flower, it destroys it. This devouring of the flower or turning over the soil is necessary and, I think, is one of the great contributions of abstract art.

*One of the most striking of abstract art’s appearances is
her nakedness, an art stripped bare - Motherwell*

I spent some time with gifted artist, John Milton Ensor Parker. I took a look at some of his wood and metal works, and it didn’t take me long to identify them as art. The first thing you notice about his work is the energy. There is a powerful convergence of science and art that comes to life. Science plays a major role in his work and process. It serves as fuel for his work. Where others may create forced contrivances in such a marriage, John finds harmony. There is always a sense of personal truth to his work.

John grew up in Florida and Sicily. He studied philosophy and science extensively and worked primarily as a mechanical engineer as well as an architect. He has designed environments for scientific researchers and also did a stint painting hotrods. He had his first solo show in NYC last year and has been intensively exploring his work in his Brooklyn studio. John’s background in the sciences plays a significant part in his process which results in an intriguing combination of science and art.

I asked John how his approach grew from his background. He replied, “Science and Philosophy are the study of ideas. I wanted to acquaint myself with them. Then I turned to the physical laws of the universe. After I found the methods that felt true to me, I began exploring them, those methods being strongly rooted in science.”

To those who don’t agree that there is such a strong connection between science and art, John’s response is simply, “Art is science. Although, our society has a strong tendency to separately categorize art and science, they are actually one and the same, governed by the same laws of our universe and (both) attempt to learn and understand.”

*No great discovery was ever made without a bold guess
- Newton*

John’s studio operates much like a laboratory. Cut yourself and put it under the microscope, a little autopsy. Sometimes of the very art he creates. Listening to anything from Bach to Megadeth, John Parker goes to town.

He works with wood substrate and wood joint compound, built up, layered in paint, rubbed off. Putting energy into the piece. Scratching equations into the surface of the wood. Rubbing them out. He builds up layers and weathers them down. So, if you stand back you cannot see that within the work are several equations from physics or mathematics. Up close it is revealed, the intricate under-workings that live inside and around this experience he is sharing.

He also works with Aluminum. Sanding sheets down, again a process of putting his energy into the piece, and he may pour automotive paint on them. This introduces an element of chaos to the work.



FREE-BODY DIAGRAM 2.05, 2008 enamel, acrylic & graphite on aluminum, 12”x12”

“There is no mathematical equation that can ever predict the exact result in this process. There is an aspect of no control. It becomes its own figure, its own entity.” This evokes a violent aspect of the work. When I visit his work I continue to find something to respond to. The work is alive with energy. Something pulls you into the work that can at times feel like jumping into a pool of lemon juice and razor blades, or at other times feel as gentle and serene as a young girl reaching her hand over the side of a boat and gliding her fingers across the surface of the water.

He uses what he knows to push his work into places that he does not know. There is bravery in this, an artist taking the charge into the dark. Intent is for others to have experience.

I asked John where he sees himself in relation to “art.”

“A lot of people follow the market. I don’t direct my focus accounting for the market. If it’s good, a

market will come. Sincerity and honesty are first in any art. That’s where it starts. Great artists are not necessarily the best. I’m certainly not criticizing any portion of the art world, but it has to be honest. The Law of Conservation of Energy, taught us energy can neither be created nor destroyed. It can change form. You put energy in; you get energy out. Art is a study of reality to me. It is a documentation of reality. And there’s a blue collar element to it that is often neglected. You gotta work. For me, art needs to be made in the studio. With hands. Then something magical can happen. With your mind as well as your soul. Inspire thought. Make a difference. Art is powerful.”

I asked him when he feels he is finished with a piece.

“Good question isn’t it? When I get there. But then there’s another destination when I’m there. Keeps on going doesn’t it?”

When Earth’s Last Picture is Painted

*And no one will work for fame
But each for the joy of working,
And each, in his separate star;
Will draw the thing as he sees it.
For the God of things as they are.
-Rudyard Kipling*

Bob Kruse is an American which means he believes in the American Dream. That pretty much means happiness is lounging atop a pyramid of money being propped up by a naked woman, while he smokes a cigar, drinks a coke, eats a cheeseburger, and tries to look serious while he reads the Bible. He also likes taking walks in the woods. He’ll settle for no commercials.