

TURNER CARROLL

Walter Robinson

COMMENTS

Walter Robinson can be regarded as an artist and cultural anthropologist. He uses familiar objects (or at least parts of them), often combined with some form of written language or consumer logo, to explore subconscious societal tendencies. Robinson's work first seduces the viewer with its zippy, optimistic color palette, glittery metal flake, and extraordinarily fine craftsmanship. But once the viewer is drawn into a work, dense messages of repeated historical themes take over, and the viewer is transported to a state that is both perplexing and highly redemptive in the journey.

Robinson states that his practice of combining extremes of positivity and catastrophe in his work is the way he makes sense of his world. Robinson grew up in California during the Cold War era in a multi-lingual household with a father who was a cryptographer. The 1950s were a time of happy consumerism, but the threat of disaster was always there. It was left to Robinson to reconcile external appearances with facts of reality.

Robinson's works portray a remarkably consistent and prescient world view. In this catalogue, you'll find works spanning three decades—from the early 1990s to 2018. One of his earliest works, *Immigrant*, illustrates the struggle of navigating a new country, while maintaining the culture of one's past, all the while attempting to balance and move forward on a flat-tired unicycle. It is striking that *Immigrant* bears as much relevance to life in 2018 as it did when Robinson created it in 1991. His *World History* (1993) addresses the global (with its multiracial appendages), endless repetition of human struggle—the wheel of dharma. *Tumbriel* (2018) takes meaning from the dung cart used to carry prisoners to the guillotine during the French Revolution. The corporate and consumer logo patches on the shopping cart/wagon's cover allude to our American religion of consumerism; illustrating our subconscious tendency to be manipulated by and literally buy into the promises of such products, whether we agree with the underlying values of the companies that create them, or not.

Walter Robinson's most overtly socio-political works are his *Labyrinth* works, one of which is curated in to the 2018 exhibition 21st Century Cyphers at 516Arts, Albuquerque's Contemporary Art Museum. The *Labyrinth* works combine the spiritual aspect of completing a labyrinth with text-based collocations—words that have distinctly unrelated meanings on their own, but which take on a new meaning when combined, due to contemporary societal context. Examples of evocative collocations found in Robinson's *Labyrinth* works are wage/slave, slave/auction, failed/state, state/bird, mother/ship, ship/wreck...

Robinson's works have been featured in exhibitions at the Palo Alto Art Center; the San Jose Museum of Art; New Mexico Museum of Art; 516 Arts, Albuquerque's Contemporary Art Museum; Villa Montalvo; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; Crocker Art Museum; Nevada Museum of Art; di Rosa Preserve; The Sheldon Museum of Art; and the Djerassi Foundation. Walter Robinson occupies a uniquely compelling place in contemporary art history, one that is sure to engage and endure for centuries to come.

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Santa Fe, New Mexico
2018

