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READY

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PETER LORIMER

PUBLIC ARTIST
ED MASSEY

MEDICINE MAN
SHAMAN JON

PORTA VIA'S
PETER GARLAND

KINDRED SPIRITS
KAREN SNOOK

GALLERY ARTIST
LAURIE RASKIN

Around Town: "LITTLE ETHIOPIA"

MASSEY



"THE PURE PHYSICALITY OF PUSHING PAINT ON CANVAS OR MIXING PLASTER AND TAKING A MALLET TO FORM SOMETHING HAD A VERY SPECIAL QUALITY TO IT. I HAD SUCH A THOROUGH ENJOYMENT OF THE PROCESS OF PUSHING PAINT, IT WAS VERY FREEING."



When did you first think about what you wanted to do as an adult? Were you encouraged or discouraged by family, friends, teachers, mentors?

I didn't know I was going to be an artist. In college I was designing clothes and was interested in fashion. After five years designing clothing I realized the limitations fashion had on me: commerce, functionality and wearability that were set within the industry for me as the functionality of clothing was rewarded with orders. I felt that I was limited because of the practical nature of fashion – it had to be worn to be sold and be profitable.





"I had a very active imagination and played many hours at a time setting up plastic toy soldier war scenarios"

(continued)

And it was at the same time that I was trying to work as a painter and sculptor. I thoroughly enjoyed the creative process. I could concoct and create and it didn't have to have any function to it nor did it have to have any particular audience as long as I felt satisfied doing the work, which I was. I loved the opportunity to let my imagination run free. The pure physicality of pushing paint on canvas or mixing plaster and taking a mallet to form something had a very special quality to it. I had such a thorough enjoyment of the process of pushing paint, it was very freeing. I began doing sculpture but never realized in my early 20s that I would actually continue on to this day. My family has always been extremely supportive of the work I do and that's typically a rarity for a young person choosing to be a fine artist. I think most people I know and most of my friends even going to art school were persuaded not to go into the field of Fine Art. I felt that when I chose to do my graduate studies my family was extremely supportive and

encouraged me to keep striving for whatever I dreamed of doing.

What kind of kid were you? Where did you grow up? What were your influences?

I grew up in Los Angeles. Both my parents came from outside of the US: My mother born and raised in a small town outside of Veracruz, Mexico; My father was born and raised outside of Paris, France. Being the youngest of three my family gave me quite a bit of latitude to do as I wished. I was a youngster when my parents divorced so my mother raised me. She served as a very strong role model for me and exposed me to many Latin American artists especially the Mexican muralist; Siqueiros, Orozco and Rivera. The colors of Mexico enchanted me; the dynamic warmth of the color palette that was chosen in the art, architecture, textile design, fashion, and Mexican culture itself.

Surprisingly, I was not exposed to a great number of art museums or galleries as a youngster but much more so to large public murals on Mexico City's buildings and university walls. As early as I can remember, I loved to create and draw with color markers. My greatest enjoyment other than playing sports, was seeing how toys were built - silkscreens, painted figurines, aesthetically pleasing vehicles and fully articulating action figures were on the top of my list. I had a very active imagination and played many hours at a time setting up plastic toy soldier war scenarios.

You were a top Volleyball player. Did you think about the Olympics or playing in pro leagues?

I grew up loving to play sports, in particular volleyball was my passion. I played as often as possible as a high school teenager and college athlete. I continued to play for a club team where I had the opportunity to play abroad. I was extremely focused on volleyball and then my interests began to change and focus more on fashion in the visual arts.

You did fashion design for Team USA. How did that happen? Were you always interested in fashion?

While in college I played volleyball and realized many of the athletic shorts that I would put on were too tight around my thighs and were just plain uncomfortable. So I set out to make my own shorts mostly beach style volleyball shorts. I started a small company with my sister, Lillian, and later my brother, Bernie joined us. I was designing men's and women's activewear and our Team USA line sold across the country and abroad from stores such as Neiman Marcus and Marshall Fields to boutique style stores such as Fred Segal and a host of many many others. I enjoyed fashion but realized that being successful in the industry meant that the clothing had to be functional, wearable and had to have certain qualities to be in the marketplace. I felt at a certain point that it was too restrictive for me. As my interest began to shift

into painting and sculpture. I only needed to please myself creatively and visually as I was not making it work for the market place. I was creating works that inspired me and that I felt an urge to make.

Why Sculpture? How did it lead to Columbia and your commission from the Principle Financial Group

As I departed Team USA sportswear and fashion and manufacturing of clothing I submersed myself in a studio for a year in a community studio space with approximately 20 painters and five sculptors. I thrived on making things in the round. I loved the physicality of mixing plaster, cutting wood, using tools and seeing the worksite to come to life. I especially gravitated towards figurative work and social criticism. It was an extension of my interest in the social sciences. I was still in my early 20's (a grad student at Columbia University) when I created a work dealing with the hierarchy of corporate America. It depicted intra-office competition, highlighting ethnic gender imbalance and wage discrepancies.

I did other important projects dealing with race relations and crime and punishment. The corporate ladder sculpture, however was my largest physical sculpture at that time - measuring 20 ft in height. Once it was completed it became an extremely controversial piece of public art in this country. It got major media coverage and ultimately had to be taken down.

From there your work seems to get more socially conscious, how did that happen and why?

From the onset the majority, if not all my work dealt with social issues - social criticism. I felt as a student in the field of sociology I could portray my messaging points much more forcefully through the visual arts then with a pen. The visual impact of my work on viewers was critically important. I knew that many people may flip the page of a newspaper or magazine or click the channel of a TV set if the subject matter was not of interest to them. But with a piece of art that was put up in front of a high-profile public setting, the viewer would have no choice but to see and study the work. My hope is that they will contemplate it and discuss the subject at hand. This observation could lead to profound and passionate commentary by the general public and by many who may not frequent a museum or gallery. One of the most important aspects and interesting parts of my work is that everyone; men, woman and children - have the experience of seeing important artwork that has a unique message.

The appeal to me is to make the art accessible to all - 24 hours a day and at no cost to anyone.

"I loved the physicality of mixing plaster, cutting wood, using tools and seeing the worksite to come to life."

Explain a little about the oil derrick art event at Beverly Hills High School?

In 1995 after completing the Mortality exhibition on rape and completing my first children's picture book, *Milton*, I was invited to read at bookstores, schools, and at pediatric care units. To make a long story short, I witnessed children in the pediatric care unit playrooms drawing and painting on paper, the same as any school kid in a regular classroom. Around the same time I had seen the oil tower situated near Beverly Hills High School begin to fall apart. Millions of cars passed the tower on Olympic Boulevard annually and it was badly in need of a facelift. I'd studied the tower and came to the realization that the 165 foot structure could not be scaffolded and repainted. I learned from the structural engineers that the original walls of the structure were painted directly on the ground and later elevated by crane. The old tower was the only building that I knew of in a metropolitan area anywhere in the world that could be removed piece by piece. There wasn't any concrete, wood, steel, or windows to deal with...the pliable, removable walls could be brought down to ground level. It dawned on me that the children at the pediatric care units could paint them and then later the parts could be brought up by to the structure's heights and installed panel by panel. That is how the concept came for "Portraits of Hope". The idea

was to include thousands of children throughout the state of California. The concentration was predominately in hospital settings where the kids could not get out and paint a mural on any structure outside of their hospital environment. After the political approvals that took several years, the project was ready to go. We witnessed tremendous effort by tens of thousands of children and adults as they completed what became the "Tower of Hope" in Beverly Hills, California. The hand-painted structure measured slightly taller than the Statue of Liberty!

What's does your daily process entail? Start to finish. Can you give us a short step-by-step?

I work with my brother Bernie on the "Portraits of Hope" projects. Most of these are large scale civic and public art projects - we wear many hats. It starts with the creative development of projects, then he and I work the political process, speaking with foundations, individuals and corporations that want to partner with us. We request political approvals from elected officials to permit the unimaginable. We do not accept government funds - we depend fully on private and corporate funding to support our large scale, civic and public art projects. We're now going on our 23rd year! I've learned a lot about different areas that are not in my field of expertise. From NASA to NASCAR and nearly everything in between. It's a privilege to work with groups that care.

What do or did you do to promote yourself and get more backing? What exciting projects are you working on now?

There are always exciting projects on the horizon I'm developing a few as we speak. Currently we were just given the political approvals to transform a large section of the Los Angeles convention center and a roof section measuring over 200,000 ft. I am also developing and working on a patent for a renewable energy - a public art project that I envision will look spectacular.

Lastly, I am developing an artwork for the Fairfax location of Samy's Camera. The art design will measure approximately 50ft in height and measure just over 100 feet in length and should make for an extremely vibrant addition to the Fairfax Corridor. I'm very excited to work on this project and I thoroughly enjoying working with Samy and all of the very knowledgeable folks at the store.

