

PERIPHERAL *ART*ERIES

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Geoffrey Stein: an interview

What in your opinion defines a work of art?

I don't know what "art" is or what will be called "art" in 50 years. In terms of the visual arts, for me a work of art involves the creation of a visual metaphor for an experience or idea.

You have formal training: you have studied in London and in USA: in your opinion, how much does formal training influence art?

I worry that formal art education is steering artists towards making work that is more theoretically than visually compelling; that drawing and seeing are being lost in the postmodern muddle.

How did your early work differ from what you're doing now?

My older work was more concerned with learning how to make marks and achieve a likeness. My recent work is more concerned with formal structure and the tension between the figure and ground of the canvas.

Have other artists influenced your work?

Yes. I have been influenced by numerous visual artists from Rembrandt to Milton Glaser. I remember being excited by the mark making of the Abstract Expressionists. Later I became fascinated by the mid-career figurative paintings and mixed media draw-



Guardian Self Portrait

ings of *Richard Diebenkorn*. I am drawn to the intensity of looking in *Lucian Freud's* portraits and the massive flesh in *Jenny Saville's* paintings.

What technical aspects do you mainly focus on in your work?

Lately I find myself focusing on the formal relationship of the image/figure to the edges of the canvas/ground. I'm interested in exploring how I can crop the image to focus attention on the subject of the painting.

Your portrait series "Irrational Exuberance" was inspired by the economic context of 2009. A recurrent characteristic of many of your artworks is experience as starting point of artistic production: in your opinion, is experience an absolutely necessary part of creative process?

Yes. Life experiences, the bumps and bruises of the work-a-day world, provide material that is essential for making art.

As you have written in your personal statement, "My paintings explore the tension between what needs to be shown and what does not, the seen and the unseen": do you think that art plays an important role in revealing hidden aspects of society? Could art change people's behavior?

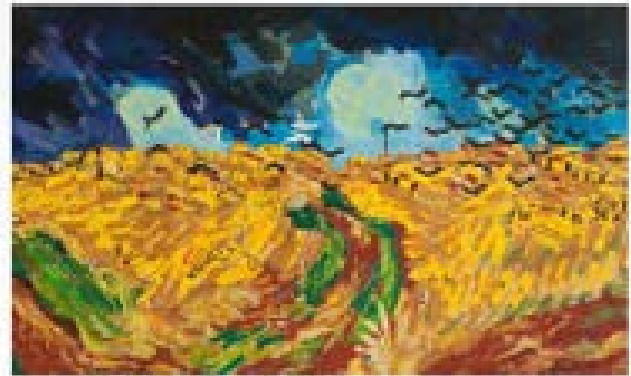
At it's best, art provides a glimpse into the artist's unconsciousness and thus, perhaps, the hidden issues that impact society. Art may eventually change the way we view the world, but I am less optimistic about art's ability to change behavior.

We have selected a recent artwork entitled "She". We have found it very interesting: it combines a beautiful mixture of abstract forms with realistic elements: what was the inspiration behind this painting?

"She" is one of a series of portraits of **Piper**, a talented photographer, who I met at art school. This painting explored the tension between the figure and the ground, the seen and the unseen, while trying to get a likeness.

Another interesting painting of yours is entitled "After Van Gogh", that you have realized in 2003. The ears of wheat are pictured as strips of a newspaper. This seems to become doubly metaphorical...

My collage, "After Van Gogh," is a transcription of Van Gogh's "Wheatfield with Crows." Using collage materials and acrylic paint, I investigated the structure and color in Van Gogh's painting. The wheat in my work is made from pieces of a Cheerio's box. While I was primarily concerned with the formal issue of color in the collage material, perhaps some viewers can see a metaphor in this. I love the potential for secondary meaning in



*After Van Gogh
Collage and acrylics on canvas (2003) - 24x48 inch*

What are your upcoming projects?

I am working on a series of large portraits of artist friends and a written history of life drawing at the **Slade School of Fine Art**, London. The history explores the school's Life Room, where students could draw from live models, and includes interviews I did with former **Slade** students and instructors.