

Welcome to Arc Studios News! This newsletter features events and activities of artists, nonprofit professionals and micro business owners that are part of the creative community at Arc Studios & Gallery 1246 Folsom Street San Francisco.



Arc Studios News June 2020

A Conversation with Stephen C. Wagner

Arc Studio #102
By Sherri Cornett



Lamentation of the Guardians #8

When Stephen tells me that he believes art provides an inexhaustible resource for exploration, reflection, and understanding, I focus on "inexhaustible" . . . for that is how I would describe his multi-faceted commitment to the world of art. He creates art. He has exhibited and sold works in galleries and art centers from London to Chicago to California. He lectures on professional development for artists. He has taught youth art classes. He has sat on advisory boards. He donated a private collection to the Smithsonian . . . And, he is a managing partner at Arc Gallery and Studios.

Sherri: I am wondering what part of your life has NOT been tied to the art world in some way.

Stephen: Through my 40's, I was involved in politics and progressive liberal issues, working on political campaigns, volunteering for local political organizations, organizing the Chicago contingency for the March on Washington for Gay & Lesbian Rights in 1987 & 1993, producing & directing political cable TV programs, and being a member of Zero Population Growth.

SC: I cannot help but think this also influenced your art. It is evident that you care deeply for and are curious about the world.

SW: From growing up in Texas, I learned that a large population can be easily brainwashed, and that there had to be more to the world than what was presented.

SC: You have also said that "we may now hold that nothing matters, but it also deeply matters that nothing matters". There are other provocative statements on your website, in your collages and the titles of your series . . . Your California Liberation Front series references the withholding of federal funding for fighting wildfires . . . Synesthesia is about us pretending that all is well in order to survive with some semblance of normalcy . . . and your Target series focuses on humans as the victims of forces beyond their control, yet often of their own making. This makes me wonder about nihilistic underpinnings in your works.

SW: I have studied quantum physics and earth sciences on my own to learn about the nature of the universe, the planet and ourselves, which brought me to the conclusion that we are destroying our own environment. In my artist talks I start out by stating, "I do not believe that the human species deserves to survive." I say this to grab people's attention and make them think about the state of the world that we inhabit.

SC: I would imagine it does! Your art is also arresting. I can see the connection to propaganda posters, to social and political commentaries . . . stark contrasts, faces showing strong emotions, textures and unique collage elements. The hunt for materials must be a significant part of your creative process.

SW: The papers used in these pieces consist of a variety of utilitarian and found papers, including maps, blueprints, book pages, foreign newspapers, and discarded fliers and signs. I often print original and appropriated photographs and words onto the found papers to interject subject matter. I find collage materials everywhere, including art supply stores, antique stores, thrift

shops, flea markets, yard sales, and often discarded on the ground. Art made of repurposed items gives the uneventful, the commonplace, and the ordinary a magic of their own.

SC: What is your newest series?

SW: The "Lamentations of the Guardians" began with the Corona virus outbreak. In these pieces, the guardians of humankind have given up on us as we have gone past the brink in damaging our environment and have turned our backs on our fellow man. They lament our actions. The Earth, shown in its twilight hours, reflects the decline of man's reign over the planet. Circle motifs symbolize the circle of life. I use practice shooting targets to reference us, the victims of the dysfunctional world that we, ourselves, have created.

SC: Underlying and connected to your concern and desire for people to see the darkness in the world and learn and take actions for its betterment is a balancing belief that the creative process contributes to a healthy quality of life.

SW: Yes. Making art gives me an outlet for expression of my thoughts & ideas and allows them to manifest in a physical form that can impactfully communicate to others.

Links:

<http://www.stephencwagner.com>

Sherri Cornett is an artist curator and writer living in Billings, MT

www.sherricornett.com