Randy Regier Visual Arts Fellow

Randy Regier was selected from among 134 applicants to be the 2009 Visual Arts Fellow.

He was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1964 and by the late '60s had moved to Barcelona, Spain, where his father studied at the university. Randy moved back to the United States in the early 1970s and lived in rural Oregon, where he largely spent his working hours as an automobile painter and raising a family.

While working as an automobile painter, toys were never far from Randy's mind, and long before he ever considered an art career, which he began as a 34-year-old freshman at Kansas State University in 1998, he was conscious of their bearing witness to history and childhood.

Randy explains,

"The power and the potential of toys are not reducible to the category of childhood memories, however. On one level the fabrication of toys allows me a continuation of play, from the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘play: To move or operate freely within a bounded space, as machine parts do.’ This defines my studio practice; a serious, investigative and sometimes exultant state of play. It is an incredibly rare thing, even a privilege in our contemporary adult society, and as such it is also incredibly fragile and difficult to sustain."

The real deal—an open letter

Living in Portland, and in Maine is a mixed blessing, at least from my point of view as a relative newcomer and an artist who desires to spend as much time as possible in the studio. Without a doubt the community affirms and celebrates the notion of an artist, and the worthiness of creative endeavors. The proximity to such a large art

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marketplace as New York City—without having to actually live there—is a very good thing. However, the other side of the coin is the side I am most familiar with from the last two years. It is very difficult to make a living here in Maine.

It is now late September, and my wife Vicki and I have just now caught up on our heating oil bill from last winter. Vicki works full time for a wonderful company, but amenities such as health insurance are not part of the package, and we have made the decision over the last year to rent studio space for my practice in lieu of health insurance for ourselves and our two children; the expense being roughly equal. I have taken on two part-time jobs in order to cover what Vicki’s job does not, and that leaves Saturday, Sunday and Monday to be in my studio, and work on art. I have not taken a weekend off in over eight months. In this amount of time, the work I have tried to make while in the studio in the odd or late hours is work that is always compromised by the very real, and very imminent financial concerns that are always just over my shoulder. As such, I have all but ceased to make the work that reflects my best intentions, desires and capacities as a maker and thinker, and have resorted to seeking out ‘sure things’—commissioned pieces and the odd hourly rate project.

What this fantastic grant means to my family is that we can pay off all of our debt, and enter into this winter with a clean slate, and the first unencumbered creative conscience that I will have had in two years.

I desperately need a few tools and materials that I have been lacking for quite some time, and without which my practice has foun-dered. It will be a huge spiritual and psychological boost to me to have these materials and tools without it taking from my family to acquire them. Vicki and I are weighing whether we might use some of the money to buy health insurance for a while, see how that feels. Joseph Campbell has written that ‘money is congealed energy,’ I can’t possibly think of a more elegant way to put it, this grant has given us energy to live, and me—personally—energy to create art. As an artist, there is nothing more I could ask for.

Thank you.
About the work

My current and ongoing work (in process since 2003) titled “NuPenny,” is without a doubt the single body of work that I most desire to complete. This will be an installation that has all the makings of a toy store, with an aesthetic that references the early- to mid-1960s, but every element will be rendered entirely in photographic grayscale. The physical location will be a vacant commercial storefront, something that can still be found in most towns and cities, and of an early-1960s aesthetic. I will render the interior in shades of gray and then install all my hand-built NuPenny toys, boxes and store ephemera, also fabricated or refinished in grayscale.

The toys will have a familiarity about them in the sense that familiar things in dreams do, that is to say they will seem familiar but escape our ‘actual,’ or waking experiences. I have built a few of the toys already (mostly from found, and thus inherently familiar, sources), the scooter (tape dispenser) with a sidecar plow blade, and the family in the station wagon (heater housing) with steamroller axles, bulldozer blade and windowless camping trailer (also heater housing), for example. There will also be robots, dollhouses, construction sets, etc. The boxes for each, also printed in grayscale, will feature what appears to be related imagery, but all language or textual components are rendered in 5-digit computer punchtape code. As in a dream state, this is recognizable as a familiar language, but is in-

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Randy Regier’s studio

decipherable, or maybe better said, encrypted by our subconscious filters. However, as this work is very much intended to be placed before an audience very much in an awakened state, it is important that the text on the boxes be decipherable, and punchtape code can actually be sight-read by those who desire to learn it. The text on my boxes is transliterated poems from various poets and novelists dealing with living in America in the twentieth century. For example, the text on the box with a woman on its cover references the wife and mother Cora Bittering, from Ray Bradbury’s short story, *Dark They Were and Golden Eyed.*

The store itself (installation) will not be open. The front doors will be locked, allowing viewers access only by peering through the glass. Like our dreams.

**Why they liked him**

Although the selection process might seem like a dull procedure, if you have applied for a grant or are thinking about it, it holds interest. For the fellowship grants in particular, we search for jurors who are highly respected in their field. This year, we were fortunate to have MacArthur Prize winner Anna Schultit and two resident faculty members from Skowhegan, Julianne Swartz and Francis Cape, serve on the panel. As the process gradually honed itself down from the 134 submissions, talk centered on Randy’s reach toward the future—how he embodies many aspects of a myriad of artistic genres, mediums and intellectual concerns and melds them into the *Museum of the American Imagination,* a place where fine craftsmanship and steely irony can come into play, filling our imaginations with false histories so likeable that we drift along with Randy’s imagination, happily. It was this broad-based gathering and delivering that brought Randy the honor of becoming the 2009 Maine Arts Commission Fellow in the Visual Arts. We like to think that Maine is a special place that fosters special artists. Randy now belongs to a long history of luminaries and will unfold himself brightly.
MISSION The Maine Arts Commission shall encourage and stimulate public interest and participation in the cultural heritage and cultural programs of our state; shall expand the state's cultural resources; and shall encourage and assist freedom of artistic expression for the well-being of the arts, to meet the needs and aspirations of persons in all parts of the state.