

EVOLUTION

AUGUSTE GARUFI'S RECREATIVE VISION

AND ENGAGEMENT

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Don't be fooled by the burnished series of cast hands laid out in Auguste Garufi's Brooklyn warehouse studio—they aren't finished and may not be for years. Walking through the artist's highly organized, airy space it would be easy to think of the works on display as final products ready for exhibition but in truth they are merely in the beginning of an extended process of creation that relies as much on deconstruction as invention to reveal the continually evolving essence of a piece.

As the artist describes it, his method of working is far from linear—it is more of a "cyclical process of doing and undoing." The installations filling the back of his studio space are moving out to New Orleans for an upcoming exhibition on view at Guthrie Contemporary during Prospect.1, but the hundreds of pieces stacked, crated, and stored in another annex still need to be "undone." They need to be taken apart and reformed, broken down into aesthetic components and reassembled into a cohesive whole. Works that he once thought ready now seem incomplete, like the building blocks of a greater piece yet to be accomplished.



He started work on one large canvas ten years ago, building the frame, stretching the fabric, and covering the surface with strips of Japanese paper. Once it was prepared, something didn't seem right. "I put it away and let it sit, until one day I took it out again and knew what to do." He silkscreened a number of abstracted hands over the paper, then almost completely rubbed them out. He obscured them with layers of paint and ink, reapplied them in a new pattern, gilded them, burnished them, and topped the mixture with new rice paper cutouts. Once again, it wasn't quite right. So the work sat in the studio until Garufi figured out how to achieve the sort of lilting visual balance characteristic of his work. The piece was only finished when he attached another, slightly narrower, solid-colored canvas to the left of the swirling hands. Balance achieved.

This piece, like all of the artist's works, took many years and many long pauses to reach its final state. "I think most artists let things leave their studio too soon," he says, "you have to live with them a long time, go away and leave them, and then see if they're really ready to engage with an audience and continue to evolve." And sometimes after all this a person can realize that the work he has created, though

beautiful in its own right, no longer fits with the current atmosphere. “I have many pieces that I made a long time ago that are complete by themselves (visually), but now I feel I need to work with pieces that can be combined to form something else.” These pieces often come together in installations, specifically configured and rethought for each exhibit or gallery space. For the essence and intent of a work to truly remain pure in different environments, its visual and contextual elements must continually adapt. Each space provides a new set of variables to incorporate and counter in order for the meaning of a work to be illuminated and understood.

In this sense, the fourth dimension is also woven into the creative process. Timing is key in the development and evolution of each work, as any segment—created 15 years ago or last week—can be appropriated to complete the artist’s expanding vision. He frequently delves into past work to provide fodder for a piece in progress, and will reconfigure installations of sculpture to create new aesthetic statements. Old ideas and images are consistently resurrected to serve as players in modern compositions. Working with images in the same way composers create music, he establishes exquisite themes and

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phrases that are arranged to form a harmonious and cohesive whole. It’s like he’s making his own puzzle pieces and seeing how many ways these disparate elements can come together.

And sometimes it takes quite a while. A native New Yorker who has been creating art for over 25 years, Garufi has an extremely developed and varied body of work that manages to unify his former studies of science with his unquenchable drive for artistry. After finishing his Master’s in physiology he began working as an artist’s assistant, learning and discovering the art working methods that formed the basis of his technical training. Through constant exploration and practice, he has built up a repertoire of techniques ranging from printmaking to painting to casting and drawing that he combines in ambitious multi-dimensional works.

Throughout all these different means of production, Garufi repeats motifs that further strengthen the link between his scientific studies of the body, nature and his aesthetic goals. Images of hands float in and out of his creations. Dissected, abstracted, cast in resin or silkscreened onto huge paper canvasses, they dominate his range of work. They “are a way of representing the whole body without someone knowing right away what they are.” In reference to a huge number of semi-transparent yellow resin hands lining the floor of his studio, he explains that this sort of abstraction renders the actual object eerie—we don’t know exactly what we’re looking at, but it leaves us ill at ease. He would like to play upon this ambiguous feeling of attraction and repulsion through an installation where viewers find their passage through a room blocked by a field of these *manus*—“hands” or “body of men” in Latin.

Again we find this delicate balance of opposing feelings and visual elements so central to the artist’s work. By constantly adding and subtracting from what he has already created, he is consistently re-evaluating work in production, making sure what leaves the studio is truly mature and singular. It is this sheer willpower and indelible drive that ensures that the balance by which a work is judged will always be perfectly attuned in the final product, like a scale held in stasis by an elaborate system of weights and measures. Garufi’s diligence and willingness to take apart and cantilever the visual scales of his own work provide a clear window into his unrestrained creative vision.