

ALMANAC WEEKLY

A miscellany of Hudson Valley art, entertainment and adventure | CALENDAR & CLASSIFIEDS | ISSUE 1 | JAN. 2 - 9, 2014

Movie Thawing Miss Travers in *Saving Mr. Banks* **Night Sky** Meteor shower this weekend
Explore Road warriors: Resolve to join a running club this January **History** *Downton Abbey*-themed tours at Mills Mansion
Art "Write of passage" in Poughkeepsie brings luck for the New Year



DREAMS MADE CONCRETE

THE WORK OF ROBERT PETERSEN



ART

Dreams made concrete

IMOGEN HOLLOWAY
GALLERY IN SAUGERTIES
HOSTS ROBERT PETERSEN
SOLO SHOW

ROBERT PETERSEN HAS kept journals for many years, but they aren't confined between two covers. Instead, he takes a large sheet of paper, puts it up on the wall and for a month at a time makes dated notations about the weather, daily events and his observations, sometimes adding sketches for future artworks, affixing postcards, found objects and other ephemera or printing photo transfers of such objects.

Two examples, one made recently, the other dating back to 1985, are the centerpieces of the Tivoli-based artist's solo show at the Imogen Holloway Gallery, located in Saugerties, which is entitled "Blue Stone by Barn Door." The journal drawings are shown with what the artist refers to as "details": printed fragments of larger journal pieces hand-colored and produced in a limited edition. They incorporate bits and pieces of reproductions of Renaissance art, photos of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, prints of birds and other vintage images. Complemented by jotted notes in pencil and touches of dashed-off color, such imagery conjures ideals of beauty caught up in the minutiae and rush of daily life: dreaminess married to the mundane.

Also in the show are Petersen's sculptures, in which simple objects—a cannonball, bolt, fragment of a ceramic vase—are displayed on bases, themselves excavated from the environment, some embossed with photo transfer images. The artist's melancholy musings are projected literally into the environment: dream imagery made concrete.

One can't look at a photo transfer without being reminded of the work of Robert Rauschenberg. In this case the connection is not by accident: Petersen was one of the head printers who printed Rauschenberg's *Stone Moon* series at Gemini GEL, a print shop in Hollywood, in 1969. The two became close and Petersen, who was born in Iowa and grew up in California, subsequently moved in with Rauschenberg, shuttling between his New York City loft and Captiva, Florida beach house for the next ten years.

"Rauschenberg was so generous. He really made sure I had time to do my own work," Petersen recalled. "I started working at his studio in Florida, and my first drawing was very minimal: a blue shape on a white piece of paper, inspired by the



ROBERT PETERSEN

(Above): *For Cinda (Study #2)*, 2012, photo transfer, pencil on paper mounted to wood panel, 11.25 x 11.25 inches; (on cover): *Untitled (Aunt Sandy's Birthday)*, 2012, Acrylic, pencil, photo transfer, matte medium, powdered pigment and tape on paper, 14 x 10 inches

view of the Gulf of Mexico I saw every day. You'd see fins come up, and every day was different, with beautiful storms and sun on the water. From that I developed a body of drawings and paintings."

After visiting the beach-house studio, Ileana Sonnabend gave Petersen his first solo show in 1973, at the Galerie Sonnabend in Paris. He subsequently had numerous solo and group shows in Europe and the US. His work is represented at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Georges Pompidou Center and other major museums as well as in prestigious private collections, including James Rosenquist and the Cy Twombly and Rauschenberg Foundations.

In 1976, Petersen began making the 20-by-30-inch journal drawings, for which he became especially known. He recently returned to the genre, and one result is *In October & November 2013*, which is ordered around the triptych of leaf, vintage postcard of a nude and one botanical print of pears, setting up a synchrony of forms. The subdued color

scheme of russet reds, pale orange-yellows and neutral blues and pinks suggests a pleasing patina, offset by gestural touches, comprised of a black feather, a grass flower and a streak of bright red paint.

The subtle brushing of green pigment powder along the edges of the paper suggests the fading of old parchment, translated into the color of spring. The scrawled words, which read in part "feather near walkway on earth, Tivoli, NY" and include the day's date and time, crash over the paper like a gentle surf. The photo transfer images and objects are like memories embedded into the river of time. Their gestural quality recalls Abstract Expressionism, while the found objects attached to the surface are indebted to Dadaism and Pop. The images and words floating on the white paper rectangle also hint at the predominance of the computer screen as the all-encompassing personal portal to the world.

Petersen's work is characterized by a sparseness and classical sense of composition that markedly contrast with the prolific messiness of Rauschenberg's art. Instead of Rauschenberg's regurgitations of contemporary media, Petersen adheres to a more European, Surrealistic sensibility with his use of old photographs of ancient classical sculpture, prints of Renaissance art, bird and fruit prints and vintage photos of nudes and animals. The pieces have a quiet, self-effacing charm. Even the matter-of-fact red silhouette of a hammerhead, an image of a utilitarian object conjuring up Jasper Johns or Jim Dine, takes on a poetic resonance when one reads the scrawled inscrip-

tion, "shooting star to the north, Tivoli, NY 5:45 p.m.," under which NOV 4 2013 is stamped, as if Petersen is cataloguing a moment. Another piece, which consists of an actual hammerhead painted fluorescent red on the back side attached to a sheet of paper, gives off an eerie red glow, caused by the reflection of the color on the paper. It's a low-tech echo of Dan Flavin's neon installations.

Petersen also printed works for Cy Twombly, Brice Marden, Robert Whitman and Susan Weil. "It was just work," he said, although he acknowledged that living and working in the epicenter of the SoHo art world at its peak did have its perks. Leo Castelli "was like family." One night Petersen had dinner in the Village with Janis Joplin and her manager. He sometimes misses hanging out at Max's Kansas City, and noted that the scene was much more intimate and concentrated than today's. "The art world now consists of 1,000 galleries, while then it was six to eight. I miss the artists' bars."

The pencil scrawls in *July 1985*, the other journal drawing on display at Imogen Holloway, give a hint of this charmed life, with its references to art openings and lunches with art-world luminaries. The piece, which also contains a sketch for one of his Minimalist paintings, playfully incorporates the signature of a guest to one of his shows. "What I like is the collaboration of the viewer," Petersen said. "I do the work because I respect the world, nature and the beauty you see."

Petersen was always interested in art, but didn't get much encouragement from the educational system in which he

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Indian, 2013, photo transfer on paper, 7.5 x 6.5 inches

ROBERT PETERSEN

grew up, "Art was more like a craft in the schools," he recalled. He studied Architectural Drafting at Fullerton Junior College in California, and switched to Fine Art after he discovered a penchant for "putting the leaves in the tree in different colors and the curtains and cat on the window-sill" in his rendering of houses. He got a BFA in Printmaking at the University of California at Long Beach, and after some persistence landed the job at Gemini GEL. Rauschenberg was invited as a guest artist. "We had just developed hand-printing photo lithography, and Rauschenberg loved the stone" used in lithography, he said.

Like his mentor, Petersen was always interested in the possibilities of the surface, and his inventiveness with process subtly enriches the texture and finish of his drawings. He uses a joint compound on some of his paper surfaces, which gives them a heft and matte finish. In the mid-1970s, after discovering barrels of powdered pigments at an art-supply store, he began making drawings using the pigments. While visiting the Sonnabends in

Venice, where they kept an apartment, he noticed the inlaid wood of furniture displayed in the shops and got the idea to make inlays using paper. The technique, which results in subtle incised edges, is utilized in *In October & November 2013*.

Petersen moved out of Rauschenberg's digs in 1980 and purchased a horse ranch in Florida. He met his wife Cinda in 1981, and a couple of years later moved to SoHo. In the early 1990s the couple and their daughter Lena moved to New Canaan, Connecticut, where Petersen taught at the Silvermine School of Art, and in 1997 they moved to Tivoli, where they have lived ever since. In a touching tribute to her father, Lena Raye recently wrote a book, *Stories*

from *Solar Winds*, that's a retrospective of his distinguished career. The show in Saugerties follows on the heels of a recent survey of Petersen's work from 1970 to 1980 at the Williams Center Gallery at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania.

- Lynn Woods



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"Blue Stone by Barn Door," Robert Petersen, artist's talk, Friday, January 10, 7 p.m., through January 19, Imogene Holloway Gallery, 81 Partition Street, Saugerties; (845) 387-3212, www.ihgallery.com.

Ulster County Photography Club to meet in Port Ewen

OVERCOME THE JANUARY doldrums with the Ulster County Photography Club at its monthly meeting on Wednesday, January 8 at 6:30 p.m. The club provides competition and critique opportunities for its members and features regular guest speakers at meetings held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Esopus Library, located at 128 Canal Street in Port Ewen. For more information, call (845) 338-5580 or visit www.esopuslibrary.org.

Photo hike to Huguenot Street in New Paltz this Saturday

THE MID-HUDSON ADIRONDACK Mountain Club will host a photo hike on Saturday, January 4 to photograph historic Huguenot Street in New Paltz. The hike will be led by Brian Sullivan. Meet up at the Trailways bus station at the corner of Prospect and Main Streets in New Paltz at 10 a.m. Extreme cold or inclement weather cancels. Bring camera, water and food, and dress appropriately.

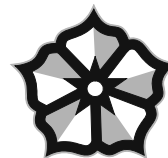
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