

IDOL THREAT

Greg Lundgren interviews Dylan Neuwirth about his current exhibition at Walden Three.

GL: Do you think that selling digital blue prints is the future of sculpture?

DN: I don't think it's the future of anything. The image is the object. And the object is an idea. Realizing an idea is only one step in having that idea interfere with the real. The intersection of this confluence can create the hyperreal situation. Especially if the intention of the idea is an idea of an object.

It has to exist in some form to even discuss it. There has to be a medium for it to be rendered into. Having the work, the objects, exist as pure data is a medium. There is no difference between the objects being data or being what we want to cling to as real.

In the end, their shared characteristic is entropy. The degradation of the data or chemical half-life of its supports is no different than the corrosion, rot or failure of the materials that compose their physical counterparts.

Digital blueprints are just another medium to express the speculative nature of form itself, supported by the backbone of the idea of that form. No different than the assembled object, painting, drawing, text or whatever is used to communicate an idea physically or as somehow more authentic.

It's more like an open sourced approach to the work. The blueprint, the conceptual DNA, is a mainframe that expresses the idea of the maker and the finished form is open ended enough to be rendered with infinite variations.

GL: Does the contemporary artist need to learn a craft, or can they just render their ideas in computer programs?

DN: How did David Bowie create something like 'Low' in 1977? He learned, worked with and forgot the forms of past and present music so well that he worked himself to a place where there was no way out but out.

GL: When you sell the DNA to a sculpture do you worry that it will be built by someone using inferior skills, or to a color you don't like, or a material or scale that doesn't work for you?

DN: I'm not concerned with this end aside from seeing the variations mutated from the source. The aesthetics are beside the point. These are conditional. They depend on where a person is, where they're coming from or going. This has happened, is

happening and will happen again and again and only have meaning in a limited timeframe to the people involved in the minutiae of realizing the physical expressions.

This spectacle and the mediums involved are insignificant. It's more about the questions being created by the transference of the ideas themselves. The experience.

GL: Is there anything that you make or have made that you would not sell the blueprints to? Is anything sacred?

DN: Forms grow tired. Ideas live forever. Isn't that love?

GL: If an art patron bought the highest resolution file of your work and made a million of them, sold a million of them, would you care? Is there any way to guard against piracy or mass production? Don't they lose value if they are replicated?

DN: What can not be copied is the source of any impactful idea. Everyone freaks over their ideas getting jacked but there is little focus on the epicenter of said ideas. The real problem is the self generated leaks of the content across social media. You always have to be one step ahead, always moving.

The objects are someone else's problem: the transit, maintenance and preservation. In an increasingly compacted planet it's reasonable to assume the growing rejection of physical work at all, save the very few and very real objects of desire one can invoke or possess.

You just can't consume, contain and collect all the things you might have an interest in. It's about consciousness: for yourself, for the planet, for the rest of humanity.

An object should only exist if the desire to experience it far outweighs its impact on time, space, resources, health and ecology. It has to make sense.

It's more about questioning the idea of value itself. Isn't the object the end? Isn't that the thing that has the least value? As soon as an object reaches the event horizon of completion it's only turning the corner to begin falling apart.

GL: Do you think that collectors or museums will have virtual work, in virtual galleries?

DN: It's reaching a critical mass now as bankrupt museums are crowd sourcing what items in the permanent collections to dump. How to preserve these objects and always move forward? Or the problems presented by the creation, preservation and storage of digital work.

Similarly, what does the future look like when international art fairs are really just like living aggregate sites of what contemporary art looks like now? Work shown, bought,

sold in a blur like flicking through a website. Many of the works rarely leave the crates. The images of the work are the work. A gallery of images existing on retina screen displays living on a device is the collection.

What's the relationship between sacred idols, cherished works being tossed, or flippant contemporary constructions built from trends and the images of them? What's the connective DNA? It's the idea.

GL: There is something about the realness of a painting, of a sculpture, that you just don't get on a computer screen. Isn't that what people come to galleries to see - the real thing?

DN: Nothing can replace this unique experience. The spirit lifted to an infinite height in The Rothko Chapel. But the problem is the dilution of the true desire to obtain it. How do you get people away from the screen and into the work? How do you create a real desire, something you will die for?

People only want something they can't have. You have to remove everything so that the desire to obtain what is given, even if it's next to nothing, becomes inflammatory. It's like the handcuffed magician going into a box only to escape from it.

GL: Do your sculptures need to be fabricated to be fully realized? I understand you are giving the consumer the final responsibility for executing your artworks, but are they complete if no one makes them, no one realizes them?

DN: No, that's not the point. It's about faith and leaping beyond it. I've made these things myself but that's a dead end eventually. I'm always looking beyond them. It's more the process. Not in making, like a process oriented approach, but a continuous series of expressions. So, I'm more interested in the possibilities of these objects.

I'm trying to present something with no end. Isn't your identity as fluid as the changing of the hours, the seasons and the weather? Shouldn't your forms be as fluid as you are?

GL: What role, if any, does the depletion of natural resources, of the carbon imprint of manufacturing have on this process? Are you an environmentalist?

DN: Here's the deal: there is so much shit on this planet and really how much art, more shit, can there be made? It's endless. All I'm trying to say is, how can desire be generated? How can this be made? I clearly see the ecological side effects and that rules, but it's also got plenty to do with being a perfectionist.

GL: Artists like Jeff Koons or Damien Hirst are often criticized for not making their own work. Do you feel like you are in that same camp, or do you feel like there is a difference in your process?

DN: This discussion is as tired as their work is. Somebody has to make something. Whether it's an army of one or a highly skilled team, it doesn't matter. Sole authorship has been obliterated by the articulation of the Internet. It just doesn't exist anymore.

GL: Technology changes so much. And in culture, historically, the things that we discover, the things that are preserved, are often very tangible things. Could your work, in a 2013 digital form, be obsolete or lost in future generations? Does it matter? Does the fabrication of the art help preserve it's legacy, your voice?

DN: In the end, after the apocalypse, the only remaining thing will be the ideas; strings of words that live like poetry. And since all ideas began as questions that have no answers, the form of the idea is the most infinite object there is.

As technology changes the ideas evolve with these changes. Instead of the forms becoming the content of their own undoing, they initiate new and more perfect declarations of the content. I have no control over this.

GL: Much like how digital cameras made everyone a photographer, or Youtube made millions of filmmakers, do you see digital files as art a way of opening up the playing field to a generation of young people that could not afford to make large sculptures? To work in bronze or glass or some expensive material? Do you see this work as the birth of a revolution, a renaissance?

DN: This way of thinking, this trajectory, refracts these trends in the most natural way they appear. Again it's about the source. Digital cameras allow everyone to take pictures but that does not a photographer make, or filmmaker or anything. The proliferation of these mediums are just that: mediums.

The question is what are we doing with them. What are we saying?

GL: Have you done this as street art? I could see this form really being exciting - placing large sculptures in front of buildings, in city centers, in high traffic areas that you would rarely get permission to show in. Is it important to keep it inside the gallery?

DN: Augmented reality has been around since the first presence of smartphones. But like any other medium, I'm saying again, what can we do with it?

GL: What about hackers? Digital graffiti artists? Is this form of art vulnerable to corrupting? Stealing? How do you claim it as your own?

DN: I don't know. I mean, this is the fulcrum: I don't know. They're my ideas but this whole pursuit questions authorship, form, meaning, value and possession. What is more

important, the copy or the original, if one more faithfully replicates the core idea? How can you monetize this if it refutes the very concept of monetization?

It's something about the value of the source of the idea itself I think. Anybody I tell this shit too is always asking this question or whatever. I feel like in the end, if anybody remembers me, it's because of the ideas I've left in my wake that somebody else turns into currency.

I have no idea.

GL: What does the resale market look like?

DN: There are barely any metrics to gauge the current one. It's like futures trading. Collectors are literally speculating on the value of an idea whose end forms are not yet existing and that's what is propelling this trajectory anyway.

It's like I had to invent an entire genre for myself to be able to do this work at all. The market is only doing what it does and will do.

GL: I heard that the New Museum recently purchased 3 of your works. Congratulations. They had to place velvet stations around your virtual sculptures so visitors weren't standing in them. Is there a problem, or an intent for people to mix themselves up with your sculptures. Do you think the stations are a good idea, or was the intent that people are walking through your sculptures?

DN: Thank you, I am both indebted to and surprised by their faith. I think it's important that the work causes confusion. It has too. How else will it even be considered anything but a parlor trick? It must collide with our version of reality in order to assume a place among the real or even further the hyperreal. Physical bodies must trespass the digital reservations of the idea in order to produce organisms of new meaning the work is yearning to express.

This being said it's important to note that they bought an early set of work. This was back when I was showing the physical work and it's digital counterpart next to it in the same space to make a pointed division or comparison to the copy and the original. Or asking what the difference is.

I think, with the addition of the velvet interference, it only heightens the volume of this conversation. And oddly, I had never thought of this. But again, there you go, someone else is interpreting the work and causing the forms to yield new meanings.

GL: What about poor people? People without smart phones and tablets. Are you excluding them? Is it a commentary on the existing exclusivity of art?

DN: It does get classist here and opens up the work for assault, but there is no going back either. You have to start somewhere. It's more about recognizing the brink that is coming. You'll either fully accept or reject your digital destiny. This will be the only future solid division at all among the human race; one that cuts across race, religion, creed or economic standing.

GL: How do you establish pricing for your work? I understand that you have different levels of editions based upon file size, but "EMPIRE" for instance, if you sold out the collection, would net \$750,000.00. For, truly, just a bunch of zeros and ones, and maybe the thumb drive you deliver it on. Do you think "EMPIRE" is worth that much money? Is it justified? Do you compare it to a song purchase on iTunes? Is it simply supply and demand?

DN: Value is about perception. And perception is dependent on trends. I have no control over this and can only say that justifications are a dead end for anyone.

GL: Is craft dead?

DN: True craft is knowing the exact method to execute an idea. It will never die. The only problem in this scenario is the limitation to accept the evolution of what this truly means.

GL: Have people sold the manufactured versions of your digital work? Do you get a cut of that? How much do they sell for? Do you feel like it is "your" work when someone else manufactures it? Where do you let go, and say you are done?

DN: I see wholesale versions and components of my work everyday. It's hard to say where it starts or ends though. I steal all the time and openly encourage it. What I would say is: steal it better.

GL: Tell us about the mass event you created in Golden Gate Park. I would suspect this allows you to put your sculptures anywhere you want...

DN: I wanted to create something that was a way to unite people across the physical and digital experience. Something that was monumental in its ability to bring people together but that was so chimerical it almost doesn't exist. The project grew out of something else.

I was asking people to email, text or message me their locations around the globe. I would then geo-locate their coordinates and place a digital model of a mylar balloon there for them to find using the augmented reality app we designed. It was like a sea of disconnected symbols of affection slowly cresting the shores of isolation.

Then people were asking for custom ones and I even saw that they were cracking the code to make them look however they wanted, even re-gifting them. The permutations were insane and beyond anything I intended. So right there, the questions of everything we've talked about exploded, never to land.

The work "FOREVER" was essentially about taking as many of these stock and custom digital balloons as possible and releasing them into the air all at once. I think we had close to 10,000 people there pointing their devices to the sky in the first post human shared social experience.