

Reginato's Improvisations

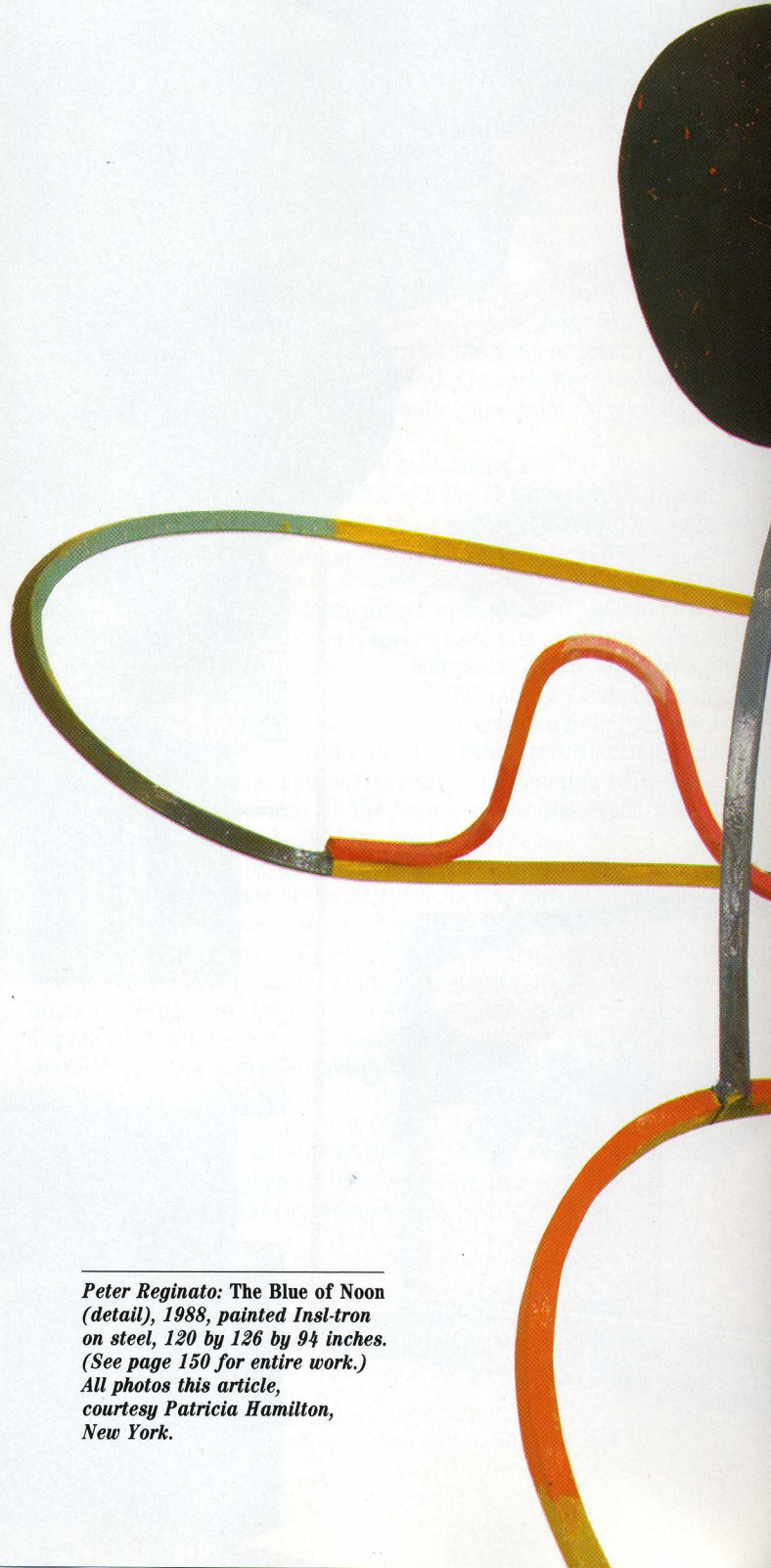
A late-'60s alumnus of the Park Place Gallery, Peter Reginato in recent years has produced a proliferating breed of biomorphic, painted steel sculptures. Below, some comments on the generative role of color in his work.

BY CARTER RATCLIFF

Many art-world eons have passed since Jean Arp and a few others persuaded an unrealistic yet undeniably organic kind of form to crawl onto the avant-garde beach. Biomorphism was born. Each variant of the style took its own direction, so great distances came to separate Arp's undulant marble statues from, say, Alberto Giacometti's early, entomological bronzes or Max Ernst's hybrids of bird and broad-leaved plant. Between the oeuvres of these artists the evolutionary niches are myriad, yet each seems to be filled. Perennially explosive, the population of biomorphs crossbreeds with abandon, obscuring early origins, generating the plenitude that Peter Reginato has harvested since 1985. His sculptures swarm into view, crowding the field of vision, threatening in a good-natured way to remain ungraspable. Resigning itself to the pleasures of an unguided stroll through a jungle of biomorphic options, the eye begins to notice signs of sculptural logic, though Reginato promulgates no all-encompassing system. He prefers local clarities—correspondences of form, echoes of color, sympathies of allusion.

With a cutting torch, he gives flat chunks of steel acutely angular outlines. Others he makes palmate and Matissean or voluptuously Arpish, with a resemblance, also, to the silhouette of Casper the Ghost. Still others are bounded by leisurely arcs and braced like the wing-parts of an aircraft. Crossing organic with industrial form, Reginato's art flourishes at the border where images of nature meet ordinary facts. Boiler tanks supply him with disks, large and sensuously concave. Internal recycling encourages each shape to assert its own point, then migrate to another work and assert a new one. Four-sided rods loop through the lower reaches of *Yo* like currents of an updraft. Sweeping the sculpture's crowd of gregarious, warm-hued shapes off the floor and into the air, this suggestion of weather provides a pedestal of sorts. In *Swing Big*, rods curve and careen in much the same way but to a different end. Making their moves near the ceiling, not the floor, they trace the path of a swirling gesture.

Reginato's repertory includes a form pierced by a triangular gap and sporting a zigzag edge. Though it usually plays the part of an unshod foot, it also appears as a super-watchful face in profile. Rounded and bluish-black, a biomorph in the middle regions of *Yo* suggests a lurking shadow. In *The Blue of Noon*, a similar shape painted yellow looks like a far-off source of light or maybe a sun-filled cloud. Shapes that read as body parts in dense, weblike works count as entire bodies in sculptures that sprawl, and they don't have to get any bigger to do it. The skittish vivacity of Reginato's allusions makes scale elastic. Ascending to monumental stature through the buzz of their meanings, his sculptures can suddenly look life-size and immediate. *Tarnished Angel's* title recommends that we read into this tall and alluringly gawky object an idea about the figure—Luciferian but still a rendition of the human



Peter Reginato: The Blue of Noon (detail), 1988, painted Insl-tron on steel, 120 by 126 by 94 inches. (See page 150 for entire work.) All photos this article, courtesy Patricia Hamilton, New York.

