

Gallery Going, by DAVID COHEN

A version of this article first
appeared in The New York Sun,
August 7, 2003

artcritical.com



in New York City,
unless otherwise
indicated

Eye Candy: Sculptures
by Peter Reginato at The
Hudson River Museum
until September 7 (511
Warburton Ave, Yonkers,
914 963-4550)

Aleš Veselý: Infinite
Point: Works on paper &
studies for sculpture at
Carosso Fine Art through
September 25 (42 E 76
New York, between Fifth
and Madison Avenues,
212-744-5400)

Wim Delvoye in Madison
Square Park at 23rd
Street and Fifth Avenue,
and at Doris C.
Freedman Plaza, Fifth
Avenue at Central Park
South (organized by
Public Art Fund, 212-
980-4575)



Peter Reginato **Area 51** 1999 stainless steel, mild steel plexiglass, and Insel-Tron light bulb. 123"x152"x133", with **Tristan** 1993 in background, installation shot courtesy the artist

Peter Reginato is that rare thing, an abstract maximalist. In 1970, at age twenty five, the Dallas-born welder was included in the Whitney annual. He betrays his vintage in terms of formalist sensibility and ambition, but he bucked a prevailing trend that led most of his contemporaries along an inevitable road to reduction. His avowed aim to make art that's "as full as possible," is amply borne out by his work, with its "everything but the kitchen sink" exuberance. A small show of recent pieces in a courtyard at the Hudson River Museum, Yonkers is definitely worth an excursion.

At first sight, a Reginato looks as if David Smith, the giant of post-war American sculpture, has come back to life and joined forces with a gang of Bronx graffiti writers. The eye swiftly adjusts, however, to Mr. Reginato's brashness of line, form and color: There's a classic sense of order amidst his goofy, cartoonish shapes and textures. Calder and Miró help inspire his nursery humor. A less obvious artist who Mr. Reginato brings to mind is painter Elizabeth Murray, although it is possible both artists simply looked to common sources in the common culture rather than at once another.

"Area 51" (1999), at over ten feet high and even wider, is the most

DAVID COHEN

last week: [Nature Photography at JG Contemporary; Contemporary Landscapes at Katharina Rich Perlow](#)

[archive of Sun articles](#)

[other articles for artcritical](#)

[résumé](#)

ambitious piece on show. It is at once daring and refined. Shadows are artfully orchestrated to form a fugal second subject while color is at once garish and effete. Like most of his works, it is essentially figural, though more in disposition than detail. It keeps company with several other distinct pieces of comparable scale. Unfortunately, a few fussy little pieces cluster an outdoor corridor, a distraction that mildly mars an otherwise handsome installation. The courtyard which plays host to these sculptural antics keeps pace with the cross-cultural identity of Mr. Reginato's aesthetics, as it is formed where a brutalist concrete museum extension meets a Victorian mansion. The sculptures' daring colors stand out nicely against the browns and ochres of concrete and pebble.

Minimalist or maximalist, Mr. Reginato shares with the leading lights of Sixties sculpture (Anthony Caro, for instance, and his acolytes) the conviction that the modernist Jones's to keep up with are painters. Rather than merely looking to great paintings for inspiration, or adopting color as a strategy to make sculpture cool and cerebral, however, Mr. Reginato goes full hog: he is a painter, using sculpture as his support.

This will sound paradoxical, for Mr. Reginato is very tactile, a worker in the round with a genuinely volumetric understanding of form. But the degree of painterly activity in his work transcends the mere adding of color to sculpture. Separate components are busy with painterly incident, with delicate, considered, autonomous color schemes, with evidence of pentimenti (creating a texture out of decision-making the way expressive painting does) and with a surface life of its own. Mr. Reginato's genius is to reconcile these highly involved surfaces with the sculptural whole. A true collagist, he speaks the language of modernism with a post-modern accent. This is what makes him such serious fun.

When it comes to Czech sculptor Aleš Veselý, "serious fun" takes on a whole different meaning. His is a lugubrious brutalism to offset Mr. Reginato's subtle whimsy, but underlying the drama and pathos of his hefty, tragic vision there is definitely wit, however Kafkaesque. Mr. Veselý has enjoyed international if underground recognition since the 1960s when his early forays into neo-dada were discovered by the French critic Pierre Restany. He has been head of the Studio of Monumental Art at Prague Academy of Fine Art since 1990, and has completed a number of prestigious public commissions in Europe, often at Holocaust sites. His penchant for rusty steel and ominous rocks held in suspended tension serves well to memorialize totalitarianism.

His current show at Carosso, extended through September, focuses on plans for monuments. Many are so ambitious as to be barely tenable. The pioneer modern sculptor Henri Gaudier Brzeska once exclaimed "I want to carve mountains"; Mr. Veselý has taken this somewhat literally to heart. In one scheme, for instance, he is to carve a perfect triangle out of the top of a mountain in Israel (where many of his schemes are projected) and fill it with a meteorite-like boulder. Another idea is his Kadesh Barnea Monument. Those who know their bible will recall this as the spot where the "wandering" Israelites settled for forty years. Mr. Veselý proposes a colossal Magen David, one triangle of which is defined by a twenty foot high steel canopy, the other a wedge of

concrete of similar proportions resting on top of it. The viewer (not for the feint hearted) standing beneath the slab can look up to the sky through a cone carved through the slab, and, similarly, down into the ground beneath through another cone.

A weird amalgam of fantasy and practicality animates these ludicrous schemes, lending them metaphysical humor. They are drawn in a hand that recalls the modern mannerist Paul Wunderlich. Inevitably such "off the wall" megalomania will bring to mind the American Claes Oldenburg, only without the pop connotations (or the likelihood of realization). His fascination with slabs impregnated with voids also bring to mind the Indian Anish Kapoor. But what is refreshing about Mr. Vesely's imagination is the heavy hint of earnestness that gives his sculptural fantasies truly ambiguous edge. He is a kind of Dada Michelangelo.

* * *



Wim Delvoye **Caterpillar 2** details to follow

Would that a pinch of ambiguity could be spared for the neo-conceptual ornaments that pass as sculpture in the hands of Belgian Wim Delvoye. His work is currently sited at Madison Square Park and Doris C. Freedman Plaza at Central Park, part of a series of exhibitions organized by the Public Art Fund (the plaza is named for the fund's founder, incidentally). This exhibition is essentially a one-line joke. He has objects like a caterpillar truck or such construction site bric-à-brac as traffic cones or a heap of sand fabricated for him in gothic filigree. There is such a patronizing obviousness to it all, as in "Do you get it? Modern technology, medieval craft"; the work invites a despondent "What do you expect from public art?" If the self-appointed arbiters of sculptural taste had a modicum of understanding about the medium they claim to represent they'd send these pseudo-intellectual tchochki packing and give our parks some real sculpture. Let Peter Reginato tease us with his 3-D graffiti, or have Mr. Vesely threaten us with his slabs and voids.

[Back to First Page](#)