

LANDMARKS

THE PUBLIC ART PROGRAM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Peter Reginato

American, born 1945



Kingfish 1986

Painted steel
 113 × 121 × 62 inches
 Lent by The Metropolitan
 Museum of Art
 Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace
 Gift, 1987
 1987.226
 Photography not permitted
 Location: CMA Plaza

A native of Dallas, Peter Reginato grew up in Oakland, California, and studied painting at the San Francisco Art Institute. He moved to New York in the late 1960s, the era when sculpture was dominated by the modernist aesthetic of geometric

OPENS JANUARY 2009

abstraction. The minimalist artists were advocating strict adherence to the idea of “less is more,” a phrase coined earlier by the modernist architect Mies van der Rohe.

Reginato, however, found their impersonal geometries too bland and lacking in character (in the words of author Tom Wolfe, “less is a bore”). In the 1970s, he preferred to use angular geometric forms in a lighthearted way, harking back to the playful qualities of earlier constructions made by Alexander Calder, Julio Gonzalez, Pablo Picasso, and David Smith. Seeking greater visual energy and physical buoyancy in the early 1980s, Reginato adopted the biomorphic shapes devised by Jean Arp half a century earlier and developed by surrealist painter Joan Miró.

Reginato’s practice is to draw fluidly contoured shapes on sheet metal, which he then cuts out with a blowtorch. He joins them together at the edges with spot welds so that the forms appear to float in a delicate dance. He tries as much as possible to express the spontaneity of drawing in three dimensions. “I like to think that all my rippling, swelling forms could easily be flying wildly in space.” In the mid-1980s, he decided that adding bright colors would further animate the forms.

By finding his own path apart from the austerity of minimalism and equally distant from pop art, Reginato did not achieve critical acclaim, but his idiosyncratic works have a humor and vitality that is much appreciated wherever they are installed.

***Kingfish*, 1986**

The title gives an immediate clue to Reginato’s aesthetics: his sculpture is the antithesis of “serious” art. The forms are playful and brightly colored. The artist once noted that “essentially my work is joyous.”

The title alludes to a bird (kingfisher) that swoops and dives looking for fish in rivers and lakes. Art historians may recognize the use of an animal reference as an homage to the quixotic creatures sculpted by Alexander Calder in the 1940s. But no expertise is needed to appreciate the sculpture’s vitality. Reginato rarely intended a literal reading of his abstract compositions, but in *Kingfish* the uppermost six-pointed form suggests bird wings fluttering, and the energetic looping line of colorful steel evokes an avian trajectory.

Bibliographic Highlights

Carmean, E. A., Jr., “Peter Reginato.” *Arts Magazine* 52 (June 1978): 26.

Firestone, Evan R. “Three Musicians at the Harlequin’s Carnival: Peter Reginato’s New Sculpture.” *Arts Magazine* 59 (February 1985): 116–19.

Frackman, Noel. “Peter Reginato.” *Arts Magazine* 52 (January 1978): 5.

Ratcliff, Carter. “Reginato’s Improvisations.” *Art in America* 77 (December 1989): 146–51.

Sheffield, Margaret. "Peter Reginato: Struggling Between the Planes." *Sculpture* 21 (May 2002): 18–19.

[View Peter Reginato's website \(http://www.peterreginato.com/\)](http://www.peterreginato.com/)