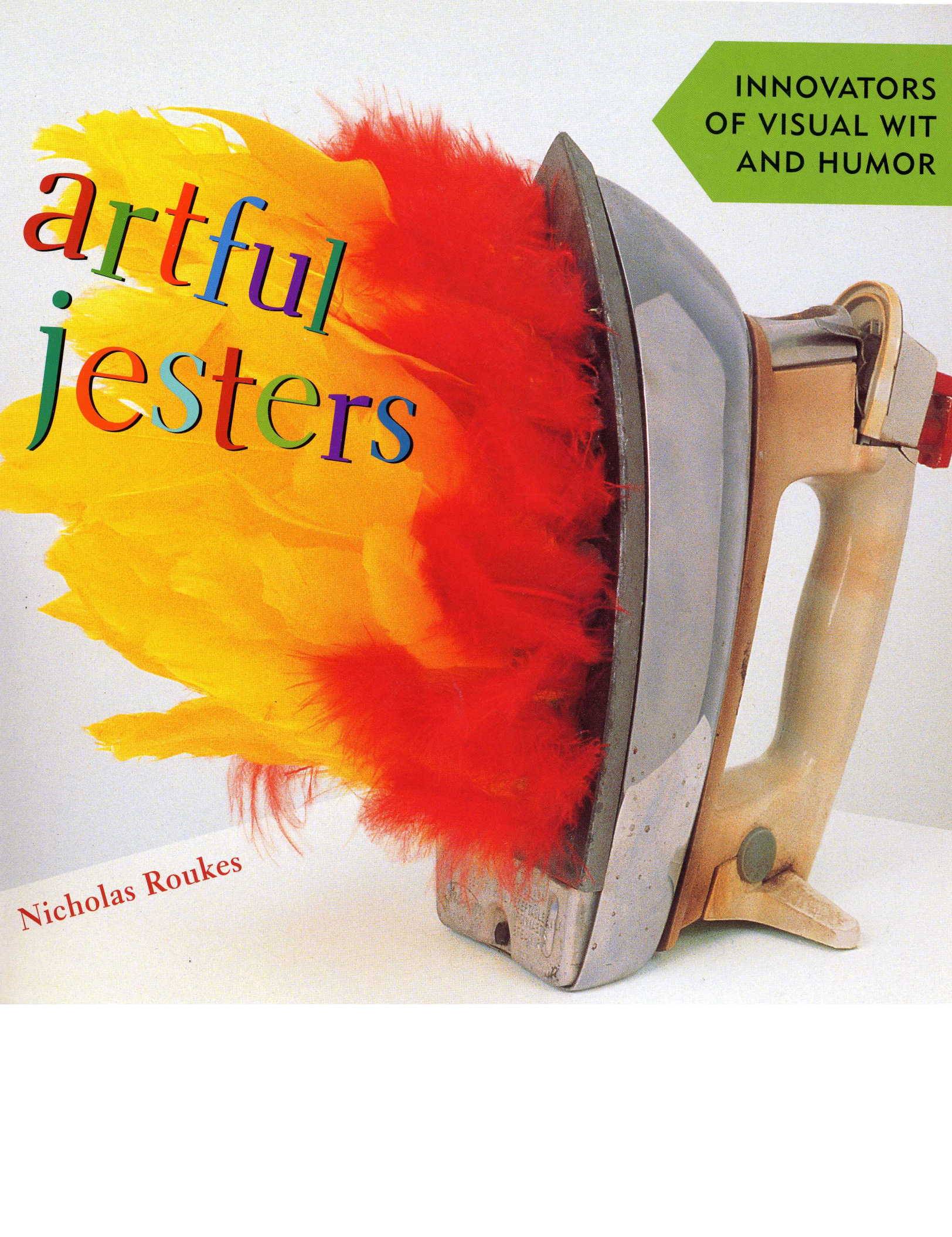


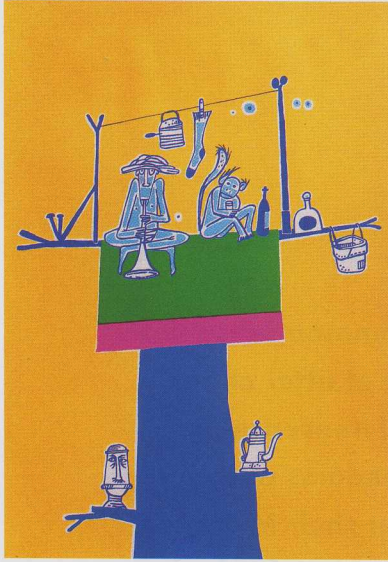
INNOVATORS  
OF VISUAL WIT  
AND HUMOR

*artful  
jesters*

*Nicholas Roukes*

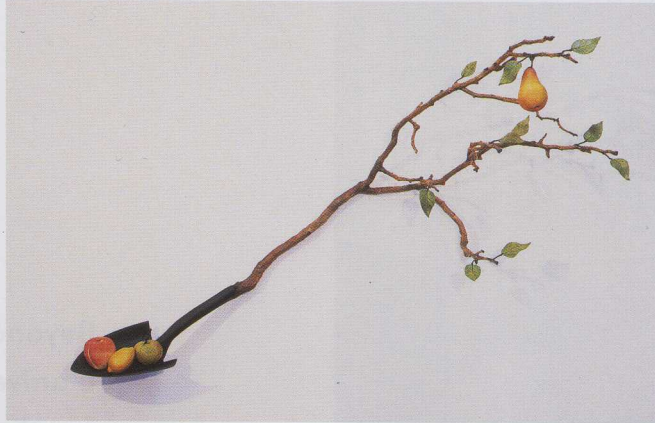


A



**A** Walter Askin. *Sampath*, 2001, lithograph, 16 x 22", courtesy of the artist.

B



**B** Victor Cicansky. *Garden Spade*, 1997, wood, acrylic, and paint, 99 x 63 x 24", courtesy of the artist.

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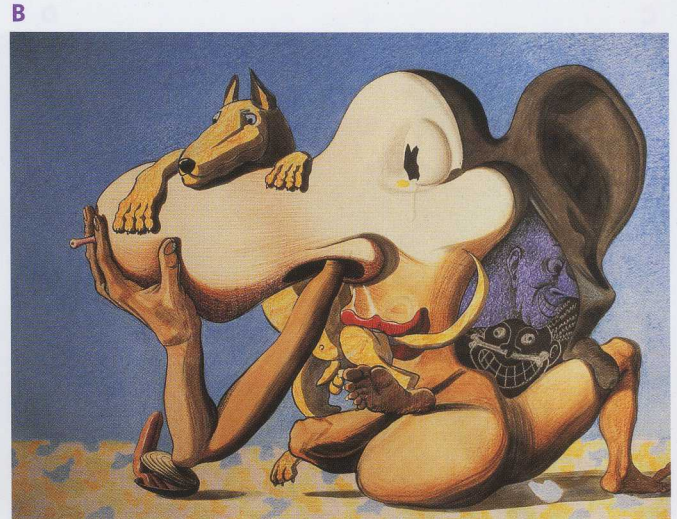
**C** Roy De Forest. *Return to St. Helena*, 1997, acrylic and mixed media on masonite, 45 x 50 x 9", George Adams Gallery, New York.

**D** Guy Johnson. *Self-Portrait*, 1983, oil on paper on aluminum, 20 x 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>", Louis Meisel Gallery, New York.

**A** Craig Nutt. *Tactical Tuber*, 1989, oil on carved wood, 22 x 15 x 21", courtesy of the artist.



**B** Jim Picco. *Knock-Kneed Chauffeur*, 1997, crayon on paper, 38 x 50", courtesy of the artist.



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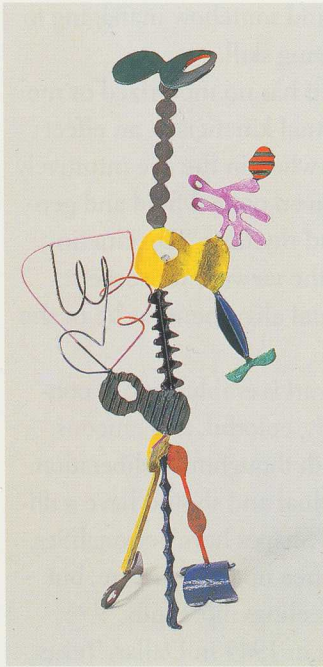


C John Wilde. *View Near Stebbinsville Road with a Giant Kohlrabi*, 1983, oil on panel, 10 x 12", Schmidt-Bingham Gallery, New York.

D Karl Wirsum. *Mr. Answer Pants*, 1991, acrylic on wood, 49 1/2 x 36 x 9", Jean Albano Gallery, Chicago.

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# Music for the Eyes



*The closest analogy  
for Reginato's sculpture  
is jazz.*

—PETER CLOTHIER,  
ART CRITIC

**PETER  
REGINATO**

PROFILE 33

There's nothing subtle about Peter Reginato's playful, hyperenergetic sculptures. Critics appropriately liken this New York City artist's art to jazz. "The shapes in his compositions don't just stand there frozen in space; they dance for us!" exclaims gallery director Warren Adelson.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Reginato's playful choreography of line, shape, color, and form swings like syncopated musical riffs, and his work brings to mind Duke Ellington's exhortation to his band—"Gentlemen, make your phrases dance!"

Like jazz, Reginato's visual harmonies are forged by deliberate and improvisational phrasing and are guided by both intellect and emotion. Although his art is classified as sculpture, it appears more like a hybrid of painting and sculpture, or like painting that has morphed into sculpture.

His unique way of balancing visual elements in space reinstates Piet Mondrian's hypothesis that forms, forces, and counterforces in visual compositions must be controlled to attain a "felt balance," a state of dynamic equilibrium.<sup>89</sup> Reginato's eccentrically balanced constructions nod to both Mondrian's concept of dynamic balance and to Alexander Calder's spirit of playful creativity. And, from the emotional and spiritual perspective, Reginato's art is close to the philosophy of Wassily Kandinsky, the Russian painter and teacher, who equated visual composition to music. "The artist who is unsatisfied in mere surface representation naturally seeks the methods of music to express his soul," wrote Kandinsky.<sup>90</sup>

Reginato says humor is not something he intentionally seeks, but something he discovers while his work is in progress or after it is completed. "In the construction of *Your Mama* [2000–01], I thought the idea of putting a small sculpture inside the larger one was pretty funny, and at the same time it reminded me of Matisse's early painting *The Joy of Life*, a composition of many unrelated elements that are brought together as a whole, but at the same time question that wholeness."<sup>91</sup>

The casual observer might conclude that Reginato's constructions are tenuously balanced, but they are in fact well engineered with a stable center of gravity. The parts are solidly welded together. Interestingly, Reginato does not make preliminary sketches to pre-visualize his sculpture, preferring instead to improvise and work directly, adding the various constituent parts piece by piece, while balancing the sculpture "from the ground up, until I reach the top."<sup>92</sup> The procedure is not unlike the performance of a carnival juggler who twirls and balances plates and

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Another Weak Moment*, 2001, steel painted with Insl-Tron, 40 x 18 x 10", collection of Jan and Warren Adelson.



*Bottom of the Half*, 1993, steel painted with Insl-Tron, 73 x 49 x 38", collection of Mike and Tania Sunberg.

saucers on the ends of sticks, adding plates as he goes, and somehow managing to keep everything spinning and airborne with gravity-defying skill.

Reginato's sculpture is abuzz with movement, yet it has no motorized or moving parts. Although static, his sculpture oscillates by virtual kineticism, an effect created by the peculiarity of human optical perception wherein the eye intuitively jumps throughout the myriad of focal points within a given optical field and generates perceptual linkages and rhythms. The kinetic effect is further activated by the viewer's movement, which produces different visual alignments as he or she moves around the work.

Symbolically, Reginato's art is emblematic of contemporary urban life; it is lively, colorful, and raucous. Color is assigned to shapes with thoughtful deliberation. "To me, each shape is individual and should have a different color," says Reginato. "Shapes have personalities, painting them not only helps free up the structure, but also allows me to express my feelings more fully."<sup>93</sup>

Peter Reginato was born in 1945 in Dallas, Texas. He lives in New York City.



*Your Mama*, 2000–01, steel painted with Insl-Tron, 73 x 69 x 40", collection of the artist.