

25¢

**THE
SOHO
WEEKLY**

NEWS

Vol. II, #29

THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER FOR NEW YORK

Thursday, April 24, 1975

**PETER REGINATO:
SCULPTOR
ON THE
MOVE**

**MOIRA
HODGSON
P. 13**



Sculptor Peter Reginato

After The Monument

MOIRA HODGSON

When Peter Reginato, a twenty-nine year old New York sculptor, won the Allen Center National Sculpture Competition last year, he completed a thirty-foot steel structure for the center in Houston, Texas. It was this piece that caused his work to change drastically.

His current show at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery is a radical departure from the rusted, circular works of the past. The new pieces are made out of steel, but they are painted. They are lighter, suspended, bridge-like and airy, hovering over, rather than delving into the ground. I asked Reginato what made his work take such a swift and dramatic turn.

Reginato: "I'd made my monument. It was the high point of the rusted iron pieces I'd been making. I was stuck. I felt that the some ways I might have been faking it—it looked better than it really was. I had dragged my ass on that piece and I had to work faster. I had consciously planned it—it was simply one of my small pieces made big. A big version of an old idea. It fooled you because you thought that it was the direction in which I was headed. It was stupid of me to do it. It would have been much more honest to go ahead and make whatever I was going to make. All that planning is not good."

Hodgson: "How did your new works come about?"

Reginato: "I made two big pieces from maquettes. But I realised that they were more forced than the smaller works. I said, OK, I've got to take a chance. I've got to get in there and make it with a large piece. The results were much better. But it was good that I made the first two from maquettes because I started seeing something structurally. I became aware of some of the problems that were going to turn up and I knew how to handle them."

Hodgson: "When you took this turn, were you very unsure?"

Reginato: "I was hesitant. I've made pieces the same size as the

make the pieces, that's when I have a good time. Before that, the only fun I got was if someone said they liked the piece, and I said, thank you."

Hodgson: "When you start a piece, do you sketch it out first, or do you begin straight away with the materials?"

Reginato: "I don't sketch out very much. I make up shapes with no real idea of how I'm going to use them. Certain shapes I've already used, they are familiar; others I make up in different proportions and sizes. I try to develop a very large vocabulary of shapes. Sometimes I sketch silhouettes on a piece of paper. I fabricate as many shapes as I have the energy to make, then I lay them all out on the floor. In some ways I think that's where my work is different from other people's—more of a feeling of a shop versus a studio. I'm making these things just as objects with no real sculptural relationship yet."

"After I've laid them all out I start putting them together as

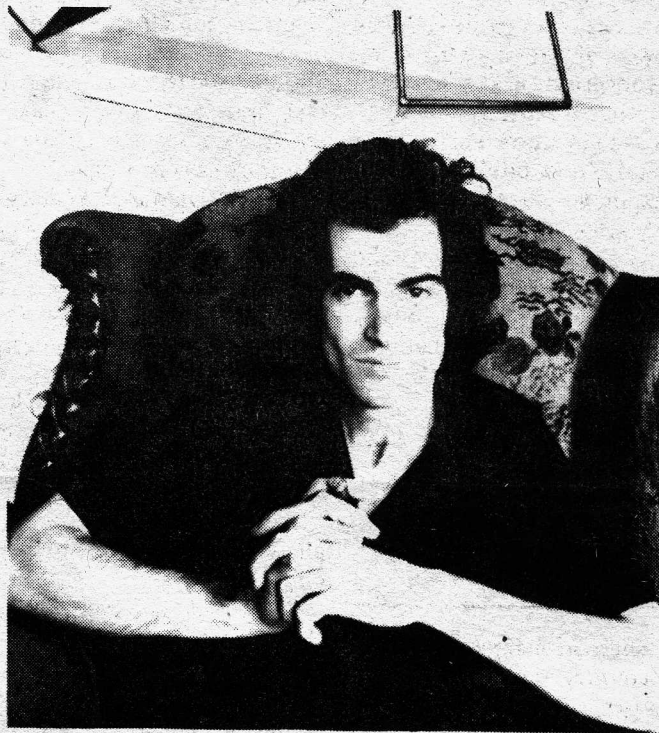
quickly as I can, depending on the size of the pieces. Even the big ones can be done quite quickly."

"The difference in the way I'm working now is that I've never been quite this subconscious in my approach. I'm trying to achieve this directness."

Hodgson: "When you're welding, do you destroy a lot and start again? If you don't like the shape in one spot, do you move it to another?"

Reginato: "Yes, but I don't really weld it, I tack it. It's a very slight weld, so that you can't even pick it up. If I think it should be changed, I break it with my hands, move it, and weld it again. Sometimes I might add something or cut something off. Or cut a hole in it, or go back with the torch and change the shapes. I keep looking at it to see what it needs or doesn't need. I leave it tacked for a couple of days and if I don't like it I kick it in and start all over again with the same parts, making another

Con't. on page 37



Thomas Victor

Reginato: "I made two big pieces from maquettes. But I realised that they were more forced than the smaller works. I said, OK, I've got to take a chance. I've got to get in there and make it with a large piece. The results were much better. But it was good that I made the first two from maquettes because I started seeing something structurally. I became aware of some of the problems that were going to turn up and I knew how to handle them."

Hodgson: "When you took this turn, were you very unsure?"

Reginato: "I was hesitant. I've made pieces the same size as the ones in my show before (about five feet tall), but no one liked them. But something kept me going. During the summer I finished off my monolithic monumental style. I broke the structure out of the circle. After I did that, I felt I could do anything. And most important, I stopped fabricating the volumes. I decided I was no longer going to get all bothered welding up some two-inch shape.

"You see, that big piece really got in my way. The only thing that seemed to count was that I was up to thirty feet. I had to pull back. Now, if anyone thinks my new works are masterpieces and would like to make them that big, fine, I want some money for it, but they can do what they want."

Hodgson: "So you don't intend to work that big any more?"

Reginato: "Big pieces slow me down too much. I want to work faster, more directly. I keep asking myself, how can I be more direct, more honest? How can I respond to my work more quickly? How can I make intuitive decisions? And above all, how can I have more *fun*? I wasn't having any fun making those earlier pieces. It was pure work. Making the shape is OK, but when I collect them all up and

and sizes. I try to develop a very large vocabulary of shapes. Sometimes I sketch silhouettes on a piece of paper. I fabricate as many shapes as I have the energy to make, then I lay them all out on the floor. In some ways I think that's where my work is different from other people's—more of a feeling of a shop versus a studio. I'm making these things just as objects with no real sculptural relationship yet.

"After I've laid them all out I start putting them together as

slight weld, so that you can't even pick it up. If I think it should be changed, I break it with my hands, move it, and weld it again. Sometimes I might add something or cut something off. Or cut a hole in it, or go back with the torch and change the shapes. I keep looking at it to see what it needs or doesn't need. I leave it tacked for a couple of days and if I don't like it I kick it in and start all over again with the same parts, making another

Con't. on page 37

Reginato

Con't. from page 13

culpture."

"By that point I have a fair idea of what the shapes can do structurally. Structure is very important. That's one aspect of my work that I'm always looking at, not only how the image works, but how the *pure structure* works."

Hodgson: "Why did you decide to paint your new pieces instead of allowing them to rust as before? What role does color play in their structure?"

Reginato: "I use color to emphasize the drawing. I want the drawing to be seen. Anthony Caro uses color to add to the quality of the piece. If it is light and airy, he might paint it a very light color. I think color re-emphasises what the work is about.

"I felt that color was such a decision, so much a question of good or bad immediately, that I avoided it for a while. My early pieces were incredibly complex—about forty colors on one piece of sculpture. But then I felt I could ruin a piece with the wrong color, and that at best the right color would simply match up."

Hodgson: "When you put the color on the new works, didn't it throw them into another perspective?"

Reginato: "Yes, but I kept the color down. Only one piece has a spectrum color and the rest are more earth colors."

Hodgson: "What is the point of the color then?"

Reginato: "I thought it would be the safest thing to paint them. I thought about keeping them the original silver, but I realized that it wouldn't last outside. I had to examine the question of looking at a work that would change. I wanted to make a statement that would be constant.

"To start off, I painted them quite bright. They were almost metallic. But it didn't seem right. I thought bright colors would be different at a time when most people are working in a more subdued range.

"Color is not as important an issue as I used to think. But you cannot avoid it, and you have to make it work. I wanted to go a step further with it and see what happens. Right now, I think there's one piece that needs to be re-painted and that's the one with the brightest color on it."

void, almost. The more I did that, the more I began to realise that I wanted to make a piece of sculpture. I was getting so close to it in technique—I was making paintings that were basically constructionist in idea, like Hinman's—I was building my canvasses and then painting on them. I see the same idea in Al Held too, very Cubist. They are right on the verge. So you want to put a three-dimensional object in that space.

"The closer I got to that, the more illusionist they got. If you had taken a photograph you couldn't tell how they were resting on the wall. So I started putting them on the floor. My first pieces were very minimal. But my head wasn't minimal. It was not a Dadaist trip at all. My minimal art was more purist. I was trying to shake all this symbolism and surrealism that was hanging on from when I was a figurative painter. I wanted to get rid of the figure and the landscape, to go abstract. As much as I thought I'd removed it, I was still merely illustrating in the third dimension. I didn't want to illustrate any more. I wanted it to be real."

Hodgson: "Do you think your work has turned back towards surrealism at all?"

Reginato: "Some of it has, and that's fine. I don't care so much about that anymore. There are certain bimorphic qualities in the shapes that get close to that. In

Con't. on page 38

Hodgson: "Why do you work in steel?"

Reginato: "I simply find it technically the most advantageous in terms of what is possible for my ideas. Steel is the most versatile material. If my sculptures could be made out of marble, I'd do it. But they can't. Some of the rods have to hold too much weight and they would snap. I'm really looking for a neutral organic surface. It's always tough and there's no way to answer that."

Hodgson: "You began as a painter in California and you were working with shaped canvasses. How did you get from the wall to the floor?"

Reginato: "Reading your piece on Charles Hinman [*Soho News*, March 13] I understood where his head was at in terms of the kind of space he was after, a sculptural space which was always implied in his work. I remember asking myself the same question. I started looking at the paintings I was making out of plywood and fibreglass, painted with a spraygun, taped, working with illusions—I saw that they were like boxes in space.

"As a painter I was always very concerned with trying to create space. When I turned from a figurative to an abstract painter, I was trying to create space like a

Reginato

Con't. from page 37

terms of structure too they can get pretty surreal—this shape holding that shape which is holding this shape, and so on. A lot of times I play against what should actually support another shape.

“There’s a feeling of randomness in some of the work. Randomness is a misleading word, though, it implies other things. It’s more like looking for the unknown. At the time you don’t know what to think of the work, later you understand whether it’s any good or not.”

Hodgson: “You say structure is the most important element in your work today, can you talk more about that?”

Reginato: “It’s what I’m most concerned with now. Lately I’ve been going after vertical structure which is the hardest to pull off. It is so difficult to make a vertical that doesn’t look either like a David Smith, or look figurative, or plain terrible. I look at a piece and I say, it looks like a man. How do you do it? You put all these strange shapes together, and what do you come out with? A man! I don’t want that.

“A lot of my work is gesture. I like motion, some of the pieces get very dreamy. Sometimes I think they are sinking into the ground, sometimes they seem to be popping out. On some level I feel that I have created this ‘thing’ and that some day it is going to come alive. They are like babies, you know.”

Hodgson: “Doesn’t that make it rather hard to part with them?”

Reginato: “Yes. It is hard to sell them for that reason. I forget how attached I become to them. I’ve subconsciously ruined a sale sometimes. When collectors would come over, I’d put the best pieces away. I don’t do that anymore.”

Hodgson: "Doesn't that make it rather hard to part with them?"

Reginato: "Yes. It is hard to sell them for that reason. I forget how attached I become to them. I've subconsciously ruined a sale sometimes. When collectors would come over, I'd put the best pieces away. I don't do that anymore."

Hodgson: "Do buyers often pick out the same piece?"

Reginato: "Oh, yes. Once I tried to make a duplicate. When I started I said, well, just to make it interesting for myself I'll make it from memory. I made about a third of it and took a look at the original. I said, oh, my god, it's completely different already. No one will be fooled. It's already three times as big!

"I changed it so much that by the end only the structure related to the original idea. I suddenly realised that I could make about thirty pieces from it, all of the same structure. It was a beautiful little scale—and I could go on getting a little bigger, a little smaller."

Hodgson: "Where will you go from here?"

Reginato: "The key to the new works is the rods, but they will change. I'm thinking now of pieces in which there'll be everything. I was crawling before. I'm still walking now. I'm going to be running pretty soon.

"I have been reacting against everything in a way. I had to do everything that the minimalists wouldn't do, which ultimately fouled me up because my work got so complex. As free as we think we are, we're always getting into some kind of program. I'm always trying to break out of that program." ●