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TRENDER: RISD Sculptor Dean Snyder

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Who are the Rhode Islanders leading in arts, fashion, food, and style? They're Trenderers, and GoLocalProv offers a glimpse of the people you most want to know on the scene. Today's Trender is Dean Snyder, a famous sculptor and the department head of sculpture at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Over the course of his career, Dean Snyder has received artist's fellowships from The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, The Berkshire Taconic Arts Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts, The New England Foundation for the Arts, The Rhode Island State Council for the Arts, The Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, and most recently, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.



NeverMind 2013, candy and pearl auto enamel, carbon fiber, epoxy, 62 x 49 x 27.5 inches

Snyder's work has been displayed both nationally and internationally in a variety of group shows and solo exhibitions. In the United States, the sculptor's pieces have been presented at The American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York City, The deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park in Lincoln, Massachusetts, and The Tang Museum of Skidmore College, just to name a few. On the global level, Snyder's creations were put on display at The Beijing Olympic Park for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, where some of his artwork remains to this day.

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The RISD professor's sculptures have also been exhibited during Berlin Fashion Week, at the Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano of Lima, Peru, and through Sydney, Australia's: Sculpture by the Sea. Snyder's work has been collected privately and can also be found in the

public collections of The Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design, the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago, Fidelity Investments, Albany International Airport, and Mongolia's Freedom Park in Ordos City.

His sculptures will be available for viewing from April 26th until June 20th, 2014, through Cade Tompkins Projects in Providence. In this upcoming exhibit, some of his award-winning artistic masterpieces from the last three years will be open to the public by appointment, including: *Flavia* (2012), *NeverMind* (2013), and *MiddleWay* (2014). For those interested in finding out more about this world-renowned sculptor or viewing his archive, they should visit Dean Snyder's website or check out his exhibit through Cade Tompkins Projects in the coming months.

After viewing a great many of your sculptures which come in a variety of shapes and sizes, it appears as though you are fascinated by spider webs. *MiddleWay* is your most recent sculpture as it was earlier this year, and this web fashioned out of stainless steel takes up an entire doorway at your new exhibit. Where does your fascination with the entrapments of arachnids spawn from and what went on behind the scenes to shape this life-like snare?

Your handiwork that stuck me most of all, and which I have yet to mention, is called *Almost Blue*. It makes me feel as though I am looking at a snapshot of a rainstorm, as two puddles lay on the ground, and a few of the falling drops are creating splashes and ripples in the small pools. How in the world did you capture this natural occurrence so beautifully and how did you manage to freeze this delicate moment in time?



MiddleWay 2014, flo-jet cut steel, 59 x 93 inches

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***NeverMind* is a vibrant, coiled, and organic sculpture that is compressed near the ground and as it reaches towards the sky, it spreads out and the colors cool off. Where did your inspiration come from for this contemporary creation and what did you want this twisted, tangled figure to communicate to your viewers?**

I really try to surprise myself in the studio. Over the years I have worked in a wide spectrum of materials and processes, from traditional methods of casting and molding, aerospace composites, rawhide, plastics, and wood. I have to tame my outsized curiosity for processes by drawing. I find out things in the process of drawing that help me to gage the appropriate pathways into a given piece of sculpture. That said, I have always cooked from scratch. I make tools and invent processes to build my work. I am a huge believer in tool-making. It is not only intrinsically human; it is central to deep process for me. For example, right now I am in the beginning stages of building a CNC carving machine. This will allow me to work more directly from drawing into form.

All of the works in the upcoming exhibition are members of a body of work focused on seduction—entrapment. It occurs in nature in many forms and I find it fascinating. There is a new group of work in the studio rising up and coming from an entirely different frame of reference that I am very excited about. Exhibitions are complicated for me. They are the proofing of the work out in the world as well as the portal to the next question that will lead to new challenges in the studio.

A sculpture proposes a type of formation in my mind that could lead the viewer to several notions of its point of origin. *Almost Blue*—two puddles of liquid, frozen mid-formation. Its title refers to a specific state of becoming. A puddle is almost a pond. It is almost a river...it's almost a sea. These two puddles are also neither blue nor black. An emergent note of blue in formation, hesitating in the sum of all colors pooled.

The sculpture is, for me, a meditation on formation and the state of becoming something larger than what you see in the moment.

General Studio Statement...

For nearly a decade I produced works in sewn, inflated, and sometimes tattooed, rawhide. These sculptures announced their complex material properties through the illusive and alluring calling card of translucency. The sculptures appeared to be made of a plastic composite, yet upon closer viewing, the surface artifacts unfold a more visceral narrative. This once living material became an amber translucent second-skin overtaking the void of the object within. The lingering after effect of these sculptures often provoked a sensation of uncanny “graphical organicism.” In 2008, I began working in epoxy composites. The directive was the same, but the new process of form-making forced the imagery to another level of complexity. Resin is a mute material and unlike rawhide, it awaits its marching orders to become something else.

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The new work is a result of a highly considered approach to forming, molding, and assembly. The newer sculptures are more “engineered” in process and more graphically akin to the way I make drawings. I am now deeply engaged at the intersection of drawing and making objects. Drawing has been the graphic landscape where the sculptures emerged, but recently the gap between drawing and sculpture has narrowed for me. I can now imagine a bioconvergence of graphic images into objects and sculpture. Work-shopping within this area of discovery and exploration will clearly be the next decade or more in my studio.

How have your experiences in the state of Rhode Island and at the Rhode Island School of Design influenced your work?

I have had a long career in university level sculpture programs. RISD is the most recent post among others I have held at UC Berkeley, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Alfred University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and more. Teaching and running academic sculpture departments has been my day job since 1985. The work I do with students has been, and continues to be, embedded into the feedback loop of my life as an artist.

What inspired your love for art, and specifically sculpting? When did you decide that you wanted to make a career out of this profession?

I grew up on a farm in the heart of Amish/Mennonite country in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. My first encounter with visual art was through an album cover by Andy Warhol for The Velvet Underground. So it was Pop that captured my curiosity and took me away from the verdant pastures of my adolescence to a life in the arts. I was also lucky to come up in the golden era of American public education. I had really fantastic teachers all throughout my early years growing up in rural America. I still remember every one of them, but Rodney DeHaven and Maxwell Briggs were powerful early mentors that found me summer work in art museums and exposed me to advanced classes in local college summer art programs. I went to art school with the idea that I would become a photographer and a painter. That did not work out...so I tumbled into sculpture through photography. It seemed to me that photography and painting were too bogged down by their own histories and the rules of engagement had intolerable limits and governors. Sculpture departments seemed more...well, rock and roll, more punk...open, broad-shouldered and tolerant of disobedience. It was hard for me at first because I was pre-lingual, but once I developed some basic skills in the wheelhouse, my language got sea legs in short order.

What effect do you believe that sculpture can have on individuals and on society as a whole? How do you believe that your work as an artist contributes to the greater good of humanity?

Everyone should make art...I do it for too many reasons to list. Specifically, my passion for sculpture is hinged to how it performs in time and space. Sculptures are time-travelers. As a practice, Sculpture is and always has been a time and space discipline. The most interesting job of work a sculpture performs is long after the original audience and the author's time on earth. Because of its longstanding civic role, sculpture, more than any other human art production,

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endures with a unique voice. It speaks to human engineering, poetry, longing, remembering, and tool-making all in one object. Sculptures perform in time and space like time capsules of the entire scope of human enterprise from their native epoch. There is not one other thing that humans do that does this...NOTHING!

Your piece named *Flavia* (pictured) earned you a Guggenheim Fellowship for the Arts. It is an astounding work of art that appears to be a glass-blown formation resembling some kind of human organ. Can you describe the message that you hoped to convey through this work and what went into the creative process?



Flavia 2010, urethane auto enamel over epoxy composite, carbon fiber and cast optical resin, 18 x 18 x 37 inches

It is always very humbling to receive recognition from colleagues in the field. Receiving the Guggenheim, Tiffany, and being selected for the Olympics and The American Academy of Arts and Letters were great honors for me. Opportunities to advance the work came with each and every one of these open doors. I find it important to keep perspective on these moments however. They came through the conduit of the work itself. That is the conduit; the work, out in the world. I am simply the individual who happens to be the author/guardian.

What are you most looking forward to about your exhibit with Cade Tompkins Projects?

It is always satisfying to see an ensemble of recent work come together in one setting. Beyond that, I'm looking forward to the day after the opening...