

Imagination on Parade

Written by Michael LoGuidice
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Steve Maxon's bronze and aluminum sculptures have a hard edge – pun intended – with a huge dose of humor. The bronze cast and iron piece *Gone West*, for example, has the upper part of a skull wearing a World War I army helmet that a skeleton hand is tipping to the viewer. The teeth imbedded into the upper jawbone give the eerie grin common to skulls, and the helmet-tipping completes the image. In fact, the hand appears to have a pinkie-up attitude.

Maxon and Jacki Olson & Dick Oberg have works on display at the MidCoast Fine Arts Gallery at the LeClaire, Iowa, Welcome Center through July 31. This is the first time I've seen a show of Maxon's work even though he has been well-represented in many art fairs throughout the area. For Jacki Olson & Dick Oberg, this show occurs almost one year to the day from their exhibit with Colleen Curry at the Quad Cities Arts Center in Rock Island.

Another work by Maxon is called *Jack O'*. It has a cast jack-o'-lantern sporting a cast carrot nose mounted on two turkey or vulture legs – a scary but fantastical Halloween theme. All of these pieces are very well crafted; Maxon's casting technique, finish, and style are first-rate.

And his imagination is amazing, which you can tell simply from some of the titles of his pieces:
Chas Manson Saves the Rainforest

,
Carrot Dart Board

,
Mystical Chicken

, and

River Styks

, to name a few. I think his artist statement speaks for itself: "Ruins have always fascinated me with their mute narratives and revelations of structure moving from closed to open forms. Molding and casting allow for the creation of brand new ruins. ... Casting iron was the media, all others inferior, and by golly it's fun, controlling great roaring fires and making that horribly blinding hot liquid go and do what you want it to."

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I highly recommend checking out Maxon's works.

One year ago, I said this about the work of Jacki Olson & Dick Oberg: "Jacki Olson and Dick Oberg are an extraordinarily talented couple still enamored with their medium. As they grow with their art, it will be fun to see what they create when they assert their mastery over their medium. For now, the medium is taking center stage in their works, not the message that they want to express. Most of the compositions have far too many images within them for us to get a cohesive message."

One year later, one work – *Art on 2nd* – shows a noticeable shift in which the medium has taken second place to the composition. This is a photo printed on silk that combines a cityscape of the Quad Cities with a lily pond. The difference is that the elements stand out over the method, and the composition is a very striking example what can be done with computer graphics.

Many of the other photos are repeats from the show a year ago. The photos contain different elements, but the color range, contrast, and color density do not vary enough from element to element for the different elements to appear different. They all start to blend into a gray, much like paint that has been over-mixed with too many colors.

But there are noticeable exceptions. *Horse & Plow* has enough contrast to allow one element to stand out and make a statement. It will be interesting to see this artistic duo develops. We've already seen a few examples in this show of the fruits that growth might bear.