

## **DON'T THINK: TOM, JOE AND RICK POTTS**

December 08, 2019 – February 16, 2020

*A college instructor once told me I was a bricoleur after I turned in a major paper critiquing a book of folklore theory which I wrote from the point of view of Huckleberry Finn and incorporating many Mark Twain quotes. He was right.*

*I grew up in the family plumbing supply store where we not only sold things but also tried to fix most any plumbing item a customer brought in. Many of these things were old or obscure and parts were unavailable. We had to think about what we had that we could modify and make work. We did the same making store displays, shelving and racks and such. We were always using what was at hand, usually in a way it was not intended to be used.*

*My college career was also somewhat of an assemblage. I got my general education classes out of the way early and while nominally an English major pretty much took whatever caught my fancy at the moment. It is tough to be an English major when you find literary criticism boring and pretentious. Writing and Linguistics were the part of the major that I enjoyed. Most of the classes I took had nothing to do with English. Eventually I discovered the Liberal Studies Department where I only needed a handful of classes to graduate, and they seemed interesting. After ten years of part time schooling and having acquired a hundred + more units than required I finally got my diploma. And never used it. I went to work at the family store. But I continued my education by reading widely - I have thousands of books and a hundred or so courses on CD and DVD from THE GREAT COURSES. It is sort of like the plumbing shop, if you have lots of pieces (bits of information, points of view) you can usually put them together to make that new idea you feel you need.*

*I am certainly no musician, but LE FORTE FOUR was a natural for me. We used all sorts of objects to make all sorts of sounds and in those instances where we attempted to approach something more normal Joe, Rick, Chip and Susan were musicians enough to cover my honks. I liked finding ways to make noise from stuff that was just around. I liked the performance/drama aspect which was generally ad-libbed around some rough concept. I was usually the word guy when we did word based pieces given that I was the English major, a lapsed one perhaps, but still an English major.*

*I am also not an artist, but my brothers, Joe and Rick, are, as in their own way, were my parents. My extended family through my brothers consists almost exclusively of artists and some bit has probably rubbed off on me. Most of what I make is utilitarian and as a bricoleur it is assembled from whatever is handy. The damper on the vent of my wood stove is tweaked in such a way that it always wants to twist to the same position. I made a device from plumbing parts, bead chain and a pulley that allows me to lock it in the adjustment of my choice. This is not mainstream Montana and I am forever being asked, "What the hell is that?". "Art", I tell them.*

*I do actually have one actual piece of art that I made. It is an assemblage built using a sea turtle shell (I ate part of the turtle and the shell may be illegal to own - endangered species), a burl (I packed it out of the mountains), a pigskin ball cap (given to me by my father and too nice to wear, he wore the matching one he got for himself) and parts from a cardboard Halloween skeleton.*

*For me it is all about acquiring assorted pieces and putting them together to make something new.*

-Tom Potts

POTTS is pleased to announce its final exhibition, *DON'T THINK: TOM, JOE AND RICK POTTS*. Comprised of historical works spanning a period of more than four decades, this presentation will bring the brothers' work together for the first time at the exact site of their creative origins – their family's former plumbing parts store in Alhambra, which namesake POTTS gallery now occupies.

In 1973 the Potts brothers co-founded the seminal experimental music collective, Los Angeles Free Music Society (LAFMS), staging their first performance under the moniker Le Forte Four. LAFMS, whose impromptu methodology of absurdly layering sounds from found objects, handmade and traditional instruments, and sampled material, would later grow in membership, achieving underground eminence and significantly influencing the history of avant-garde music. The Potts, continuing to operate at the core of the collective, quietly pursued individual projects.

From growing up in the plumbing parts store, their aesthetically disparate work came to be characterized by a resourceful, do-it-yourself ethos. This exhibition will consist of key works from their development as visual artists, along with a number of more recent projects and shop relics.

Eldest brother Tom's functional assemblages demonstrate an unconventional pragmatism. Originally sourced from discarded plumbing parts and now comprised of objects found near his rural Montana home, his works straddle the line between aesthetics and utility. One example is a sort of meta-sculpture: a sprawling pipe rack made from surplus pipes and fittings.

Joe's work will be drawn from the numerous series of graphic works he's made over the years, beginning with a selection of prints from the *Daily Planet* series from 1983, in which he developed a photo-mechanical transfer technique to enlarge and layer multiple exposure Xerox prints. Joe attended art school, where his convictions on the function of art began to take shape. For him, art exists in the response of a viewer to whatever stimuli they've been presented with. He describes both his sound and visual art as creating situations – opportunities to activate channels of communication between separate entities. In his visual work, as in his music, he often inserts subliminal messages and employs mind control techniques, in attempts to elicit a certain response. To this end, he has made numerous series of drawn, collaged, painted or photo-mechanically transferred graphic works using imagery culled from forensic pathology textbooks, porn, manga, tarot cards and thrift store paintings, often with "unspecified apocalyptic overtones".

Youngest brother Rick, interested in the darker aspects of the human psyche, mines the subconscious through his paintings, works on paper and small sculptures. Equally influenced by underground comics, Dr. Seuss, Surrealism, Mad magazine, Rube Goldberg and Hieronymus Bosch, he has employed absurdist humor and an iconoclastic impulse in the creation of strange mutations since the mid 1970s.

*Not long ago I remembered how the split-brain research of Roger Sperry led to a now debunked theory that the right hemisphere of the brain was creative and the left was logical. This entered popular culture when I was a 16-year-old. I decided that the left side was overpowering the right side. It was cancelling out interesting ideas before I was aware of what they were. The left side was an asshole. I decided to bypass the left side and experimented with several practices to achieve this.*

*One technique was spontaneity, acting quickly with as little thinking as possible. Creating before the left side got the chance to thwart it. I babbled or wrote down made-up words into absurd sentences and drew surreal cartoon creatures all day in high school. I read words backwards and practiced speaking in reverse.*

*My motto was "Don't Think" which I took from a friend who had obscured the word "Just" from between the other two and pinned it to his wall. At the time, I was beginning to play improvised Noise with Chip Chapman, Joe, Tom and other artists/friends in the days before the LAFMS gelled. This is the best training for cancelling out a critical, analytical mind. Spontaneous sound put me*

*into the moment and took me out of thinking. It put me into a non-verbal, pure feeling place that felt like my brain was unleashed and didn't need to think.*

*Many of the drawings I constantly made are from a barely filtered mind. Unplanned marks on paper led me to fill in shapes and forms that appeared before me as I went. As I drew it made me feel similar to how our noise jams made me feel. There's raw material there that was captured but drawing was also about experiencing that feeling.*

*I think I've made peace with the left side now that my developed right brain muscles can't be easily bullied. However, I realize now that I ruined my chances of being regular. Just maybe I broke myself for the better.*

-Rick Potts

