

MYSTIC MUSEUM OF ART

News & Views | Fall 2018

TONGUE IN CHEEK: THE ART OF BRYAN GORNEAU



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TONGUE IN CHEEK: THE ART OF BRYAN GORNEAU

BY AMELIA ONORATO

Museums are constantly caught in a balancing act, paying tribute to our traditional art heritage while always searching for newer, different ideas. Perfectly encapsulating that dichotomy is Bryan Gorneau, a sculptor and mixed media artist from the Connecticut shoreline, who has also worked as a second-shift welder and art fabricator for nearly thirteen years; an arrangement he enjoys because it leaves his days free to work on his own art. Gorneau attended the Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts, where he was required to redo his entire application portfolio—the initial one was all heavy metal drawings—before apprenticing with local sculptor Gilbert Boro and completing a welding program at Central Wyoming College.

Gorneau's works incorporate elements of our society's cultural identity, often co-opting historical images and headlines of Americana from periodicals, or even from the side of the road. In terms of influences and themes, he is drawn to the oldness of things that aren't inherently archival quality in and of themselves, but that through their subject matter are timeless aspects of pop culture. And that aspect can be for better or worse. Consider *Children at Play*, in which two boys in vintage clothing toting lunch baskets and firearms are superimposed on a street sign we all see every day.

His work used to be more political, Gorneau confides, but these days he prefers to avoid making overt statements in his art; choosing rather to present ideas in juxtaposition that everyone can interpret on their own terms, forming their own opinions.

Ironically, although Gorneau prefers sculpture work he actually went to school with a focus on painting. "Obviously I had seen sculptures before college, but I didn't really notice them," he laughs. He credits Daniel Edwards, a professor at the Lyme Academy, with getting him interested and motivated in the medium, almost through reverse psychology—"He played mind-games! He'd say 'I can tell you're here for painting, I'll give you a C,'" Gorneau jokes, before admitting that this only made him work harder.

Above, right: Bryan Gorneau
Children at Play, 2017
Mixed media, 24 x 18 in.



Similarly, Gorneau speaks highly of sculptor Gilbert Boro, with whom he's worked with closely for over a decade, and considers to be family. In Wyoming, Gorneau focused on figurative sculpture, and found himself struggling after graduation because of the limiting nature of figure work, but more importantly because it just felt like schoolwork. It was Gil, Gorneau says, who helped him feel confident as an artist.

Although Gorneau's playful aesthetic and subject matter transcends medium, the methods between mixed media and sculpture are naturally quite different. His process for the former involves stockpiling images that catch his eye, just waiting for him to find the perfect background, often a road sign or a piece of newsprint, that will pull it all together. Once the disparate elements present themselves, he begins the daunting and time-consuming job of combining them. His mixed media works always start with Gorneau knowing what the finished product should look like, whereas he finds the process of sculpture infinitely more freeing; it evolves naturally as he plays with and deconstructs his materials.

Regardless of his work's two- or three-dimensionality, Gorneau says he doesn't mind things being a little dirty. He proudly points out that the sculpture shows his tool marks; the paintings show his drawing marks. There's a life and an energy in imperfection.