

The Art Guys marrying a tree: The duality of belief.

James Surls

I grew up thinking I could be the monkey or the snake, or the walrus or the egg man. How does this thinking translate in my adult world? What had you rather be, Cindy Crawford or an African dung beetle? What had you rather be doing, figuring out how to “win”, again, or breathing deep the apple orchard, with its trees, grass, apples, broken sticks, dirt and all? Sometimes I inhale the horizon in its entirety, and blow it out with such force that I am left in a state of total implosion. Let’s reduce some vowels to silence, then pause until darkness comes to rest the living once more.

I never believed that pedestal art was dead; I never believed it took its own life in 1968. I did not give my tools to the Salvation Army, but I did roll my eyes and slowly back into the first ring, it was “think time”. I would become a believer believing in the sum total of “I am”, and all that is given in “that” as a reality. So then, I am the egg man placing tufts of grass around the edges, while watching the heat rise. The time is now; I adjust the baffle to personal and see if the manifold stops its flutter. Don’t let one side of paradox dictate the other, keep it balanced and steady, there is white water in the valley, and change is close at hand.

There was a wedding down in Houston, Texas. The Art Guys are at it again. And soon enough there will be those who grumble that the marrying of a tree by the Art Guys was a waste of time, a spoof on the stretching of a definition, and a commentary on the emergence of a group among us who want to be front and center, and counted as “whole.” I am not sure whose time the “Grumblers” would be referring to as being wasted, but certainly for any one who subscribes to “concepts made real”, as being a waste of time, then I guess for them it is. Although, I would like to submit a different point of view on this as a subject, and project this not as a “spoof”, but as a philosophically deep statement “in our time, about our time”.

We do know that the art community as a whole has made big shifts in its thinking as it relates to “conceptual art”. Personally I think all art should have a “concept” and then that concept should be brought into real, wither it be manifested in “sticks and stones” or through an “act” taken, either way its value is in the message represented. It is the age old question, “what does it represent”? In the case of the Art Guys marrying a tree, it means a lot, and carries a significant meaning for the world.

I looked up “marriage” in The Random House College Dictionary, and found several long and varied definition of marriage being a religious ceremony between a man and a woman. All the ramblings led to “religion” and “Man” and “Woman”. Certainly I can go with that because that is the model that fits “me”. I fall into the category that would accept that definition. But remember, I have a long and personal history of stepping into the concentric growth of nature, so when I read down toward the bottom of the Random House Dictionary explanations, and saw a short statement that says “the marriage of form and content”, I felt I did not have to make a new definition, but rather was shown this one as one way of expanding the meaning of marriage.

If the word “religion” was replaced with the word “reverence”, then marriage takes on a more universal context, now it is the melding of ones “Being” into the existence of something else. I hold in reverence the integrity of me as an individual as being equal too that which I am marrying and visa versa. Now “marriage” is a metaphoric concept for the union of that which you hold in reverence. And in the ceremony lies the commitment of forever. By the very act of the formal union, you are saying with a stated degree of reverence that “you do” when you say “I do”

I would submit to you that certainly there are those in our midst who would scoff at such a commitment to a tree, particularly the “dominion over the earth types”, who operate under the primes that the earth is “bounty”, and we are to take it. But I some how doughty that Wordsworth, Coleridge or Blake would have been “who they were” if that was their prevailing thoughts. In the poem “Nutting”, Wordsworth wrote of the destruction of a bower of young trees as a “rape”. Literary history is filed with examples of the marriage of mankind and trees. Thoreau went “wooding”, and spoke in terms of melding with, and having reverence for the sublime of existence. At its core this is the life blood of our beginnings. I believe on the deepest of levels the “romantics” not only would have embraced the concept marring a tree, I believe they did embrace it, in mind and spirit. I believe they and many of their piers would have been willing to go with the metaphor, of tree/nature being the bride of man/man kind.

Art is a paradox in all its manifestations, not real, but a symbol of and a metaphor for “a reality” that affects us. Why was the Mariner called “ancient”, if it was because he represented our historic nature, “us” as burdened, and then his blessing of the water snakes giving rise to the dropping of the albatross from around his neck, was a means of becoming “unburdened”, a metaphoric act for us all to think about. The Art Guys marrying a tree should give hope to a new generation that we as a people of this planet are ready for the embrace. This should be but one of many historic unions of man and the “holding of reverence” for that, that is also us. We are in the deepest of ways a part “of nature”. Jackson Pollock said “he was nature”, which leads me to think that in his soul, he had married the tree in all of it metaphoric context. Surly this as a personal reality allowed Pollock to be a free soul when involved in the creative act of making his art. I believe the Art Guys have made a statement that is applicable to us as a people. This “Marrying a Tree” by the Art Guys marks publicly a beginning for a new romantic era. There are those of us who have been knocking on this door for a while. For one, I am thankful to know the barrier has been broken. Now we can all be “Nature”, and the children of “Nature”. Thank you “Guys”, you have freed us all.

James Surls
June 17th, 2009