

World Sculpture News

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Richard Van Buren

GARY SNYDER GALLERY

Richard Van Buren began his career as a Minimalist back in the mid-1960s when this approach to art-making was becoming dominant in the lofts of SoHo and Tribeca, years before the galleries moved to West Chelsea. In the meantime, Van Buren left New York to live in Maine—the cold country—and in the process his manner of working radically shifted gears. Instead of continuing with a rigid geometric style of modular units on the floor, he began thinking more about crafting his forms in an organic way by giving more attention to the accidental maneuvers of the hand in the process of maneuvering his materials. I am thinking of a work mounted on the wall at the Gary Snyder Gallery in West Chelsea called *Botticelli's Revenge* (2011). While the title was enough to grab me by the heels, the work itself goes for the jugular. *Magnifico!* The lavender crescendo weave sits ganglia across the wall as if pulling two nerve-endings apart at either end. It gave me nothing less than a hallucinogenic riff. Like listening to Coltrane's *Ascension*, Botticelli does, in fact, take revenge. Neo-Rococo—I would say! This is the farthest cry from Minimalism one could possibly expect.

A daintier, yet more eloquent morsel, a manacle of humped tentacle can be cited in *Anabelle's Kiss* (2010). This is pure poetry spoken like Byron. This is also a wall piece. Like *Botticelli's Revenge*, Van Buren's materials are consistent—Thermoplastic, acrylic paint, and seashells. The combination suggests a cracking marinescape, a romantic stasis, a hiss of élan blowing through the ears, eyes, and nostrils. *Gum Sum* (2011) is a floor piece, a sticky one at that. The twisted turquoise appendages move in all directions, in and out. There is a fragrance in this piece—not a literal one, but a waft of something sweet, yet oddly vengeful at the same time, more secular than Botticelli, more urbane: the beauty of deceit, the denial of encroachment. But Van Buren has ultimately shown the ability of the true sculptor to bridge the gap, to discard the iron doors of minimal art and gradually move into the ecstatic light of pathos, joy, and the carnal consecration of maturity. This is not a feat that many artists in the era of digital commerce can perform. Van Buren's achievement is not unlike that of the painter Philip Guston. Something unexpected is ringing against temerity and in favor of truth.

—Robert C. Morgan



Richard Van Buren, *Botticelli's Revenge*, 2011, thermoplastic, acrylic paint, and shells, 72 x 168 x 60 inches. Signed and dated. Image: Courtesy of the Artist and Gary Snyder Gallery.