

Maxx Sizeler

During the 2018 Tricentennial year, curator Susan Tucker sat down with Maxx and other artists who participated in the Panel Discussion to ask some additional questions about their work. The following comments were made in response to Susan's question about how New Orleans had influenced their art.

*I did think, when we had the panel discussion, of the influences of the city on my work. Because the discussion was about being a Jewish artist, in my mind at first, I joined the two. I finally decided that being Jewish and growing up in New Orleans, both, really did affect me in wanting to be an artist. They both encouraged creativity and made me think of the meaning of freedom. New Orleans is a very creative city with creative energy and freedom and the Reform Judaism that I experienced had a lot more flexibility than say my Catholic friends grew up with, as far as what was permissible.*

*The city itself is craft oriented in our houses, and with Newcomb, its tradition. My grandmother had a piece of Newcomb pottery so I knew about that, very young. Overall, there are here high-end skilled crafts and I see that that was pervasive and definitely influenced me. People always note about my work.*

*Those were the immediate connections to the city. There were other aspects: I remember first all the art lessons. My parents sent me to art lessons really young so that contributed a lot. My mom*

*sent me to ceramics classes when I was very young at Alternatives, which was on Dublin Street. It was an artist-run co-op, Jo Ann Greenberg and some of her friends ran it. My dad took classes at Newcomb and he—when I was little, he took me with him. They let him come and finish the ceramics that he had made, probably a few years prior and so I remember going with him.*

*And my father, being an architect, I was really interested in what he did. We had many art books around the house and my dad actually made some art before I was born so there [were] his paintings and his ceramics around the house my whole childhood. And my dad's college books, which I would pick through and read, mostly architecture books but there were art books too.*

*I was an observer. But I started making things and I realized I really liked doing it and also, people told me I was good at it which is pretty much the only thing that I remember as a child being told I was good at.*

*I think if we had lived in a different part of the country, I wouldn't have been exposed to artists at a young age. My father told me about architects, famous architects, which I never met but I knew about them and artists, and photographers. Mike Smith—he took my baby pictures.*

*I went to Newman for part of elementary school and I can remember their primitive, art classes. They really didn't have an art department. Even at that point, I was beyond what they were teaching us at Newman (laughter).*

*So, then they sent me to Country Day, which had a really highly developed art department. I didn't*

*get to go to NOCCA. I wish I could have but at least I did have some good stuff at Country Day as far as art went. Lori Lockwood taught me and Jan Gilbert was there, and Vitrice McMurry. In the elementary school, there was Evelyn Menge.*

*Most kids were so not interested in art and I was one of the few kids who were and the teachers really paid attention to me because I was interested and had the patience for it. I just would sit there and just go at it.*

*Then I took these drawing classes my senior year of high school at the New Orleans Academy and through that, I met some artists and people who were involved with the arts who were ten years older than me. And I started hanging out with them and they started taking me to the Contemporary Arts Center and I started meeting them there and that's when it was a co-op basically. I was like a kid in a candy shop just absorbing all of this stuff.*

*After a circuitous route through a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, Newcomb and Tulane, and then Parsons in Paris, and Parsons in New York, I came back. I started exploring New Orleans and, really started getting to know New Orleans and things I had never knew existed as a child especially because in the 80s, since New Orleans was still really segregated in most ways. I hadn't been exposed to the traditions of the African-American community: I really didn't know that much about jazz. I certainly didn't know about Mardi Gras Indians or had never even been downtown really. I mean, I'd been to the French Quarter but I'd never been to Bywater or the Ninth Ward.*

*I had this friend and we just started exploring and so I started learning.*

*New Orleans was so different than it is now, post-Katrina. There was space to live here and be an artist. It was cheap. You could live an artist life really easily even though there was always the drawback that there weren't the buyers here.*

*I began to see too again all the crafts that went into making art wider, broader, here. Growing up here with Mardi Gras floats and costumes, you're exposed to that like all the time. And I would see these floats and all the painting on the float and I was like, who paints those things? Who makes those sculptures? I wondered that as a child and got to know more about that world as an adult.*

*The first job I had when I was sixteen was working for my mom's cousin who was a contractor so I was painting houses and doing sheetrock. And another of my first jobs was for the 84 World's Fair, when I was at Newcomb Art. I worked for Lois Simbach for a little while in her loft down on North Peter's Street and she made these Voo Doo dolls for the World's Fair and so I was hand-sewing objects onto the Voo Doo dolls. I thought it was coolest thing ever.*

*Lois didn't have any money. She lived in this open loft and it didn't have any walls and it was very un-renovated. It was like it had been for two hundred years in the French Quarter and the building had other artists, every floor was a different artist. I think it was four floors – I'm not sure. And I just remember Alan Gerson lived on one of the floors. And it had a primitive freight elevator, very primitive kitchen and bathroom and then the rest was just open space.*

*And I remember Lois did a lot of fabric work and when it was really cold, one winter, she basically slept under one of her sculptures (Laughter) to keep warm. It was like camping.*

*As a young artist, I thought she was really cool and I think she was one of the people that started Crew of Clones at the CAC. She was one of the early CAC artists.*

*Then, after I got out of college, I worked for Kathleen Lowe. She was painting murals basically to make a living and so she was doing faux murals, Italianesque scenes and faux marble and stuff like that. Oh, and I also worked for Luis Colmenares. He's a metal artist; he made metal furniture. So I worked for him for a while. I learned a little welding and painted on some furniture*

*And then, and I worked for Adrian Deckbar. I didn't actually do artwork for Adrian Deckbar 'cause her artwork—no one else could do it but her. But I ran the business part of her studio, kept her files and photographed her art work and so I learned the business end of stuff when I worked for her.*

*After 1988, everything was so cheap. We were in the middle of the oil crisis, and real estate was so cheap. So, I had a number of very large studios. In fact, one in my father's office, the first one, unfortunately for the people that owned the building, they couldn't rent the empty spaces because the economy was so bad. And so, I know I squatted in some 2200 for two years! And my dad was very kind. He never forced me to move out though of course I did move out when they rented it to someone.*

*Then, I had a number of studio spaces I rented after that that were all different. I ended up in one for eleven years that was quite large. It was fifty-cents a square foot. Then, after Katrina, everything changed as far as real estate prices.*

*More artists came after Katrina, younger artists because of Dan Cameron and Prospect. There are these co-ops now that started because of Prospect, on St. Claude, the whole St. Claude scene. And there's more small theatre. There are more buyers, for sure. And there are more tourists.*

*In the big scope of things, there are not as many high-end buyers and collectors here as there are in bigger cities.*

*Still, after Katrina, I did the Collection Project, which was a project directly about New Orleans and New Orleans architecture and the destruction from the hurricane and the loss of architecture and the changing landscape and changing city. In some ways the city became even more important to my work.*