

My Mardi Gras Life:

Intercorporeal Metamorphosis and Carnavalesque



A Mixed Media Tableau. Acrylic on plywood with body cast, personal photographs from 1953-2012, and memorabilia from the artist.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) writes: “The grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis of death and birth, growth and becoming” (p. 24). Like Bakhtin, I believe that by ignoring the material body and its degenerative and regenerative functions we are prevented from understanding our connection with the cosmos, our regeneration through reincarnations, and our mystical metamorphosis in daily living. Consistent with Michel Foucault’s (1978) historical account of the codification and repression of desire in the seventeenth century, Bakhtin refers to that point in history when bodies became private and individual, where “the link with essential aspects of being with the one organic system of popular festive images has been broken.” Anything associated with the lower bodily stratum is seen as “narrowly sexual, isolated, individual and has no place in the new official system of philosophy and imagery” (1984, p. 109; Krasny, 2003). In this mixed media tableau I seek to evoke a rediscovery of the universal through ambiguous juxtapositions, grotesque imagery, and a return to the intercorporeal world of carnivalesque. I intuitively understand the nature of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque having grown up in New Orleans on the Mardi Gras parade routes of St. Charles Avenue. In this tableau I present multiple images of myself in complex and disjointed forms, but all within the context of the flow of regenerative life forces. Fifty years of personal photos in the center of the tableau under the watchful gaze of my teenage photograph behind a Mardi Gras mask tell my life story from 1953-2012. However, the Mardi Gras mask reminds the viewer that the intercorporeal self- portrait must be deconstructed because conscious and unconscious omissions – as well as ambiguous juxtapositions – confound the logic of an integrated and imperial self. What is true is false, what is revealed is distorted, what is expected is subverted, what is concealed is revealed, and what is subverted is exposed. Metamorphosis and Carnavalesque reign!