

## INTERVIEW WITH SANDY SKOGLUND by Luca Panaro.

August 2, 2008

This interview took place in connection with an exhibition at the Betta Frigieri Arte Contemporanea, Modena, Italy. Sept. 19, 2008- Nov. 1, 2008

**Question from Luca Panaro:** In your works you have always demonstrated a great ability to oppose reality to fiction, a distinctive feature valued as premonitory of the present world, especially among the artists of your generation. How originated the idea of mixing natural and artificial?

**Sandy Skoglund:** The origins of my interest in mixing natural and artificial arise from my being a spectator of myself as I behave in the world. I see myself naturally attracted to some very artificial things, almost as if my life depended on it. If I try to talk myself out of being attracted to these things, but then I am lying to myself and full of miserable conflict. By these things, I mean delicious cookies to eat, fragrant creams to put on my skin, or exciting fabrics and colors to wear. To me, a world without artificial enhancement is unimaginable, and harshly limited to raw nature by itself without human intervention. So, to answer your question, the mixing of the natural and the artificial is what I do everyday of my life, and I hope that I am not alone in this process.

**Question from Luca Panaro:** From the end of the Seventies you have always used colour photography realizing images that continue to be effective and topical. Corns, oranges, carrots cut into cubes and other natural products are presented in strange ways, placed against colourful backcloths which deceive the common perception. What did you intend to communicate through this series of photographic works?

**Sandy Skoglund:** From the end of the seventies I used the subject of food as a means to create a common language. After all, everyone eats. So, my purpose in working with the subject of food was initially to create a bond with the spectator of my work. As I gazed around at the world of food I realized that human intervention with the appearance of food is a broad cultural phenomenon. The manipulation of food in terms of shape, color, taste, and so on, has achieved highly unnatural results. In the developed Western cultures, the shipping of food over long distances has given rise to artificial colors to simulate a freshly picked fruit or vegetable, for example. In the medium of commercial photography, the truth of the food is sacrificed for the appearance to the camera, resulting in shiny oily coatings to make something look juicy, and drops of dimethicone to imitate the sweat on a cold glass of freshly poured beer. The quality of freshness becomes something to be re-created in our contemporary world of plethora of options and possibilities.

**Question from Luca Panaro:** Since the eighties your best-known works have consisted of perfect rooms crowded with real people and monochrome sculptures reproduced in series. Once again the camera can document these fantastic sets before their inescapable disappearance. Are they children's dreams or today's nightmares?

**Sandy Skoglund:** Since the eighties, I have been fascinated with interiors and invading these interiors with problems and interruptions usually by animals. The animal presence to me is the link between ourselves and the natural world. We look at a dog and the dog looks back at us. During that moment we know that we are not the only consciousness at work in the universe. The world of earth is an inhabited place, full of many living entities that do not and cannot see reality in the same way that we do. This form of multi-consciousness has always been disturbing to me, as it introduces a world of chaos that we actually cannot see ourselves. Reality itself, then, is chaos that has been made presentable by the limitations of human perception. So, in my work, I am trying to show reality as it actually is, as a rupture through the fabric of our human consciousness.

**Question from Luca Panaro:** Who were the most influential authors in the development of your artistic research?

**Sandy Skoglund:** Right now, my favorite author is the Swedish mystery writer Henning Mankell. His work helps me to understand how much in common Americans and Europeans have, which is comforting. As a teenager I loved very long books, like Tolstoy, and very romantic brooding books like the Bronte sisters. In art history my favorites were the Italian Mannerists like Bronzino and Pontormo.

**Question from Luca Panaro:** In the series True Fiction, a preview for Italy, you seem to move from your traditional iconography. However the ambiguity, typical of your previous works, stays the same. Could you tell us about these images and about the necessity to interrupt the construction of sculptural environments in order to realize a sheer photographic work?

**Sandy Skoglund:** True Fiction initially came about in 1985-86. I wanted to make images that depicted contemporary interiors and exteriors of typical urban and suburban American places. Living in New York, I was struck by the close proximity of the violent imagery of crushed and abandoned cars and buildings that formed the backdrop for fashion forward narratives of urban renewal. I felt at the time that photography more than sculpture could help me to preserve the strangeness of that moment in American culture.

**Question from Luca Panaro:** Speaking from a technical point of view, how did you make these works?

**Sandy Skoglund:** I began the project in 1985 by photographing people, places, and things, all independently of one another, and in black and white. I wanted to erase the color from the subject matter so that I could go back in and rework the color. I was thinking about repainting the world to see, for example, how a bee sees or how a frog sees. I spent two years on the gathering of the images: from friends, family, and their homes, as well as around New York and Brooklyn. Once the images were gathered, I started to combine them using drawings to make narratives. Then, in 1986 I made color photographs from the black and white negatives by making the prints myself and dialing in colors. These color photographs were each monochrome, made of only one color, since they had been made from black and white negatives. To make the final narrative pictures, I cut out different people and pasted them into backgrounds using collage methods of scissors and glue. This resulted in a final collage for each of the twenty images in True Fiction. Then, I re-photographed the collage using my 8 x 10 camera. This resulted in an 8x10 full color negative. In 1986 I produced a portfolio called True Fiction, which was printed in the dye transfer color printing process. I never finished printing the full edition of 25 for this portfolio. Then, in 2004 I decided to take the original full color 8 x 10 negatives from the first edition of True Fiction and scan the negatives into the computer. From these scans I was able to work on the edges of the subject matter and to blend the cut elements to merge more naturally with the rest of the picture. This second edition is called True Fiction Two, which is printed in pigmented inkjet with an edition of ten. It is the second edition, True Fiction Two, which you have on view in your exhibition.

**Question from Luca Panaro:** Do you think that creating new images in a world like ours, now turned into a massive database, is still significant? Don't you think it would be easier to use existing visual material and work on it by changing its meaning?

**Sandy Skoglund:** I really don't think that our world has been reduced to a massive database. The massive database is just one more form of technology. If someone chooses to immerse themselves in the reality of digital existence, then that person might believe that reality is dominated by electronic media. However, in my opinion, it is the exchange and communication that is facilitated by the digital media that makes it so relevant to humans at this time in history. We, as humans, crave a social interaction. In prisons, solitary confinement is considered very harsh punishment. So, to me, the digital media are the means and not the end. The end is still the same: to make each other feel more comfortable in a world that does not make much sense. And we make each other feel more comfortable by sharing our discomfort.