

PETER STANICK

BY TOM BETTHAUSER



Peter Stanick is an artist living and working in Sarasota who began making art as a young man in Pennsylvania in the 1970's. Jumping from his hometown of Pittsburgh, then to Indiana for his education and early career, he would spend some 30 years of his life in the state while at the same time, not terribly far away in New York, another artist born and raised in Pittsburgh (Warhol) along with a growing number of other young artists from around the country were coalescing for the rise of what be remembered as the Pop Art movement. It hardly needs to be stated that Stanick's present work is inseparably linked to the ideas and questions key to this movement, but his work as it has evolved through the 1990's (when he relocated to Florida) and to the present day has continued to focus on similar subjects of popular culture, indirectly raising many of the same questions about American visual psychology and it's complex web of relationships to sex, photography, fantasy and consumerism.

Stanick belongs to a generation that witnessed the rise of the visual culture that we live in today. For a developing artist in their twenties or thirties, any art made by this generation, especially art that directly deals with some aspect of popular culture, holds buried within it a key for understanding the impenetrable juggernaut that visual culture presents itself as in contemporary society. When perusing Stanick's recent work, populated with images of pin-up female figures, archetypal Marlborough Men, convertibles and cameras and architecture that reference both contemporary culture and a nostalgic past, an artist born any time after the 1970's is left with a legitimately





(previous spread) **Inspiration**
ink on aluminum
40 x 60in.

(previous) **Flannel**
ink on aluminum
30 x 40in.

(top) **Shop**
ink on aluminum
40 x 60in.

(facing page) **Taxi**
mixed media on canvas
40 x 60in.

intriguing set of questions not only about the motivations that lay behind such work, but more importantly about the separation between any two artistic generations and perhaps even what it means to make a work of Pop Art in the 21st century.

The first specific question that one naturally must ask is whether or not such work falls under the umbrella of Pop Art, which of course raises the question of what Pop Art was and what it has become. In our dialogue, Stanick pointed out that Pop Artists traditionally made work that elevated the everyday disposable imagery that saturated their lives, and insofar as this plays a similarly important role in his own process, he recognized that his work might be considered Pop Art. Of course Stanick's work also shares a simultaneous intimacy and estrangement with commercial imagery and the unattainable fantasies

that such imagery propagates. His work also seems to share with traditional Pop Art the desire to occupy a space between the world of fine art and commercial art. In spite of these commonalities, Stanick is making this work now (rather than then), which presents a conundrum especially to an artist of a younger generation as the term Pop Art and these ideas associated with it have been canonized into an art historical movement, in turn leaving one wondering how the ideas of a supposedly past movement can still be unresolved and therefore valid territory for an artist to explore.

Although these questions that were raised originally by Pop Artists and their corresponding aesthetic seem to have by and large become inappropriate subjects of discussion for the casual gallery goer and the ambitious graduate student alike, they still seem (as stated before) critical insofar as they might help disambiguate the current state of affairs in the art world. This state of affairs might readily be construed as one where economics reigns as the defining factor behind all outward concerns, where some of the most respected and insightful art critics of our time have expressed foreboding concerns about the increasing power of the collector, the art fair, the curator, the blue-chip gallerist and conversely the diminishing importance of art criticism, academic dialogue, independent exhibition spaces, the increasing homogeneity of artworks from Chelsea to Culver City, and of course the tenuous role of the artist in all this. Such characterizations are dramatic to say the least, and hardly need further re-stating here, but dramatic and poignant as they are they seem to have little or no effect on the state of affairs they describe, which seems only to increase in its momentum towards as yet unimagined ends. If or when we choose to entertain such assessments, we are naturally left curious as to how this world came to be, the answer to which might very well lay in a renewed meditation on the changes that Stanick and his peers bore witness to.

For any such negativity however, there is contrasting positivity that might just as easily be attributed to the artists and art of the past five decades. Art has never been more popular, quantitatively if in no other respect. There are more artists making more art than in any past century, and this is undoubtedly due at least in part to the level playing field that the contemporary art world presents itself as. Discrimination based on traditional talent, learned taste, or requisite free time to invest in the production of art are no longer deal-breaking factors that hinder individuals from expressing themselves.

Of course there is no guarantee of success, and the task of trying to distinguish oneself amongst their peers is perhaps more daunting than ever, but one's ability to make art is if anything less contingent on critical and economic success. Art supplies are undeniably more accessible than ever before, and one can sustain a vibrant studio career with time squeezed between two or three unrelated jobs that pay for studio rent and materials.

One of historical Pop Art's greatest complex strengths is that it can (and did) make a viewer ask very serious questions without appearing on its surface to be overtly serious. My experience with Peter Stanick's work put me in much the same position, it may seem almost



inappropriate to prompt such weighty questions from work that does not directly illustrate such ideas, but all artwork, especially work that deals with popular culture, must certainly embody and reflect the social environment around it, and of course in this respect Stanick's work both speaks and asks volumes about our cultural past and present, questions that remain unanswered and worth asking.

<http://www.stanick.com>