

the
ART WORLD



Scott Ashley
MAKES HIS
CONCEPTUALISM PERSONAL

By Donald Miller

SOME OF THE QUIXOTIC SPIRIT OF RENE MAGRITTE, THE LATE BELGIAN SURREALIST, MAY BE FOUND IN CONCEPTUAL ARTIST SCOTT ASHLEY, WHOSE WORK IS EXHIBITED AT THE ALDO CASTILLO GALLERY IN THE MIROMAR DESIGN CENTER, ESTERO.

The Apology, for instance, a print depicting an improbably hinged knife, not only reflects Magritte's distortion of reality but also his sense of humor. Similarly, Ashley's image, Aldo Castillo says, also humorously stands for the times when a person might like to kill someone but wisely holds back for a multitude of reasons.

The work is somewhat characteristic of the visual play Ashley, a tall, blond 40-year-old Chicagoan, likes to infuse into his art. "The knife is many things: a weapon, a domestic tool and can even be seen as a phallic symbol," he suggests. "I feel the knife is a visual representation of an aggressive act, sexual or otherwise. And that, after the incident, one would want to retract: an apology for transgressions on another person.

Opposite page: Scott Ashley, *The Apology*, 2002, *Knife and Hinge*, 11 x 4 x 1 In.





“The knife belonged to a longtime friend of mine,” Ashley continued. “I wanted to make it as a sculpture and asked him if I could use it. He said no but I used it anyway. It was perfect for the piece! He was a little upset at first but got over it after he saw the work in a museum exhibition. The Apology was also viewed online and inspired a Chicago theater to perform a play about it. To promote the play the knife was exhibited at Aldo’s gallery in Chicago which led to many other galleries showing it,” Ashley recalled on the phone.

“Since then, Aldo has promoted my art more than anyone. Aldo is amazing in that he loves art and artists but is very inclusive in his vision, something that is rare in the art world.” Ashley recalled his visit to Castillo’s gallery in the Design Center and lecturing there two years ago.



“Many people think because the work I make is often dark I am unhappy but that is not the case,” the artist said on the phone. “I am attracted to the absurdity of existence, the complexity of the human experience and I try to make work that points those things out. The re-

sults can be awkward and painful at times but that is what makes it wonderful.”

Consider for example, Ashley’s challenging prints Lust and Life. Somewhat like David Hockney, who made mirrors of Mylar because this reflective sheeting does not steam up

Top: Scott Ashley; Logic and Lust, 2015, Diptych, Mixed Media on Canvas, 72 x 72 In.

Bottom: Adaptation, 2009, Shovel, Neon and Mixed Media, 60 x 9 x 4 In.

Opposite: Scott Ashley; Psychological Self Portrait, 2014, Watercolor, 10 x 8 In.



Top: Scott Ashley, *Reflection I*, 2015, Acyclic on Canvas, 60 x 48 In.

Opposite: Scott Ashley, *Swimming Bodies*, 2015, Mixed Media on Canvas, 36 x 96 In.

during a shower, Ashley brought two large target images into his bathroom and discovered his reflection with them in a mirror. They are bold and unflinching depictions that can be interpreted variously, as both threatening or amusing. In any case, they are powerful and difficult to overlook or forget.

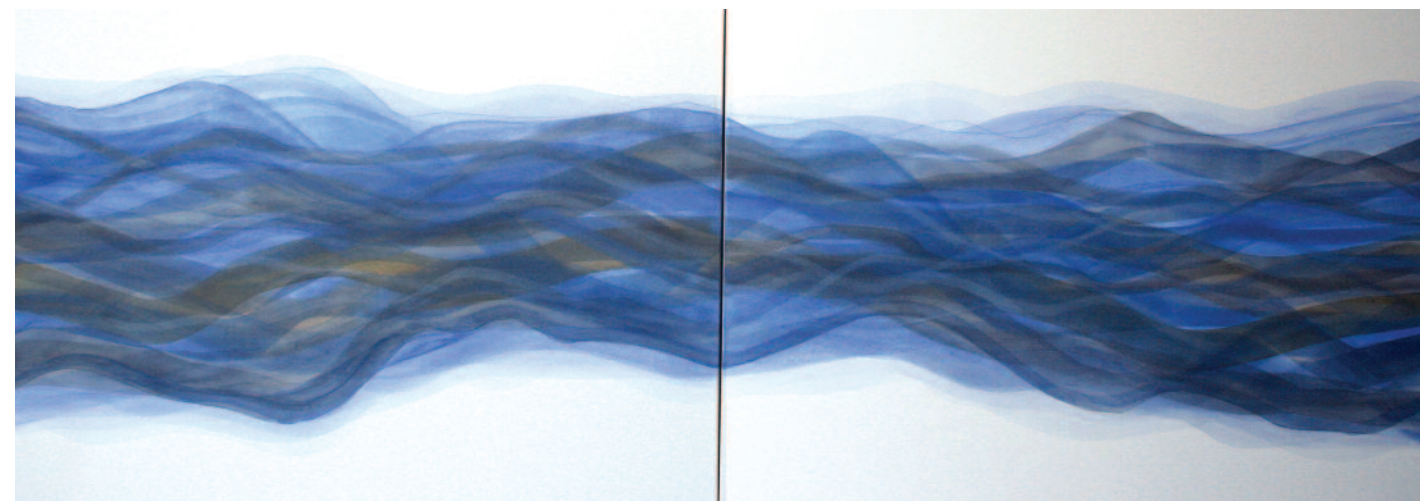
Ashley has been helped by his mentors during the years he has been associate director of Chicago's well-respected Perimeter Gallery, which for some thirty-five years has exhibited

Seeing the consistent display of different forms of art encouraged Ashley to incorporate everything he could get his hands on for his own art. He grew up in Washington State's wine country forty years ago. While studying at the University of Washington School of Art, Ashley not only became a fine printmaker but also began to incorporate his love of unusual art media into his work.

This continued with his master of fine arts studies at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, N.Y. Scott Ashley trans-

One of Ashley's finest pieces is a spinning disco ball pierced by arrows. It is called "Saint Sebastian," after the early martyred Christian youth. Today the saint has become a widely used metaphor of the gay community, of which the artist is an openly declared member.

Ashley recalled, "After my living in Queens and wanting to be in Manhattan and not being able to do it, I moved to Chicago, where I have been very happy." He lives in a large 20-foot-tall loft studio with his growing



paintings, sculpture, ceramics and weavings. "This has inspired me to see all of the arts together, not separately; that I continue to do," said the artist. Although he has been invited several times to exhibit his own work in the gallery where he is employed, Ashley has always resisted doing so as a matter of personal integrity and to avoid a conflict of interest. Yet he praises Perimeter's owners, including a Johnson Wax heiress, for their long dedication to him as well as their private purchase of his work.

forms our accepted understanding of objects into further extremes, Castillo notes.

"Ashley has hand-knitted garden hoses, added neon light to garden spades and has fumigated doll houses. At the Julie Keyes Gallery in New York, "he showed his more elaborate work, such as 'Talent Possessed,' an installation consisting of an electric guitar infused with verbal curses from a Haitian voodoo shaman. It was exhibited along with the guitar's case, an amplifier and letters in neon tubing."

collection of many kinds of art objects. It is located in Chicago's Lake View district, a half-mile from Lake Michigan. At the Aldo Castillo Gallery, Scott Ashley's work is continuously viewable.

The gallery is located at 10800 Corkscrew Road, Suite 195. Telephone: 312-375-8887.

Donald Miller has reviewed art in Naples for fifteen years, after thirty-three years as a critic at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.