



Meso-American Remix

The use of Native and Latin American traditions

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This issue's art feature considers the work of two North American artists who independently mine Native and Latin American traditions in their work. Taking two very different tacks, Keister focuses on the corporeal; Adams on the spiritual.

Steve Keister (b. 1949, Lancaster, Pennsylvania) has consistently explored the body and physical form since arriving in New York. He first haunted SoHo's streets and the industrial surplus stores on Manhattan's Canal Street for inexpensive materials to fabricate his work, typical of the "No-Wave" art movement active in the 1970s. He first relied on Plexiglas shards and sidewalk discards to make futuristic, abstract sculptures and mobiles, before moving on to Spandex-covered sculptural suspensions, anticipating the work of Latin American constructivist and conceptualist artists, like Lygia Clark and Ernesto Neto.

During a serendipitous holiday in Isla Mujeres (Quintana Roo, Mexico) in 1989, Keister jettisoned his artistic assumptions about abstraction, recognizing that he was developing a lexicon of forms and shapes which were far more substantive. Like an urban archaeologist, Keister collected Styrofoam and molded-paper packaging materials discarded on New York's streets and sidewalks to create casts of those materials in terracotta and concrete. Unlike the acclaimed British artist Rachel Whiteread, who casts and interprets negative spaces, Keister recombines his ceramic and concrete casts to assemble original sculptures that bear resemblance, but do not copy, Olmec, Mayan, Aztec and other Meso-American artifacts.

Keister's focus on packaging materials also makes use of the Duchampian readymade prevalent in conceptual art. His dual references to Meso-American and contemporary North American cultures result in what he terms "interstitial archaeology," a unique place between classic Olmec (2000-1000 BC) and today's consumer cultures. His recent works are a commentary on both.

Keister is represented in more than 40 museum collections. In 2010, his work was featured at the University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Mesoamerican Galleries, where it was situated among existing artifacts, enabling museum-goers alternative ways to see, interpret or experience the museum's collections.



Mictlantecuhtli, 2006
Terracotta, earthenware, glaze, and
acrylic
9 x 12 x 4 inches



Chac Mool, 2006
Terracotta, cement, pigment, plaster,
wood, glaze, and acrylic
26 x 30 x 19 inches



Olmec Head, 2010
Glazed ceramic
9 x 7 x 4.5 inches