

TONY FEHER
LECTURED
ON HIS WORK
AT SHATTUCK
ANNEX ON
MAY 14TH, 2014.

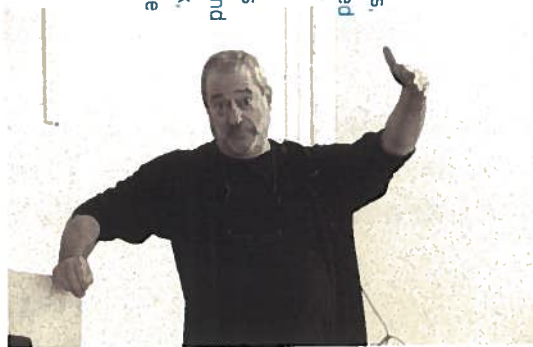


[STUDIO] IS THE
DOCUMENT OF
PORTLAND STATE
UNIVERSITY'S
MFA STUDIO
VISITING ARTIST
LECTURE SERIES.

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An in-depth retrospective organized by Claudia Schmuckli, Director and Chief Curator of the Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston, premiered at the Des Moines Art Center in 2012 and traveled to the Blaffer Art Museum and the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, MA. The exhibition was on view at the Bronx Museum of the Arts before traveling to the Akon Art Museum where it will run through August 2014. A fully illustrated monograph published by Gregory R. Miller & Co. was published to accompany the survey.

TONY FEHER'S PSU LECTURE IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE LUMBER ROOM.



TONY FEHER was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1956, and raised in Corpus Christi, Texas, with early stops in Florida and Virginia. He received a BA from The University of Texas, and currently resides in New York City. Feher's work can be found in important international public collections including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and The Art Institute of Chicago.

STUDIO

INTERVIEW WITH TONY FEHER



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The 2013-14 PSU MFA Studio Lecture Series concluded on May 14 with American sculptor Tony Feher. Feher was an artist-in-residence at the lumber room in Portland, Oregon, where his site-determined exhibition is on display from May 19 through June 29. After his lecture at Shattuck Annex and a conversation with students at the lumber room, he answered a few more questions via email.

[STUDIO]: How did you start out in the art world? Do you have any formal training as a sculptor or painter?

TONY FEHER: I started out in the art world as a fetus.

[S]: You are very open to letting the world come into your work, while at the same time you make very particular decisions after you have found something.

TF: The point of any of this is to make art.

You do whatever it takes to get to the other side.

Some paint, some draw, some form clay, some chisel stone, others carve wood. I pick up shit from where-the-fuck-ever and get one with it. That made sense to me.

[S]: Your work transforms what some might deem mundane or readily accessed materials into a transcendent experience of visual phenomena, a beauty that changes our notions of art. Could you discuss your process and inspirations for creating this transcendence?

TF: My curiosity about things and objects and anything everywhere and looking at things, really looking, has served as a starting point. Mixing things together in unusual ways.

In my youth I never made anything practical or useful or looking like anything else. Instead, I made completely unique and individual objects with no other explanation than art.

[S]: Thinking about the jars and how you said there was this moment where you placed red marbles in this jar and sealed it and somehow came to an agreement with yourself that you "understood" this to be sculpture, would you talk about how this suddenly made sense to you?

TF: The understanding I felt viewing the marbles in jars and water in bottles was to know I was making art. It was license to do whatever. I don't actually use "found objects." I use anything I trip over. I take advantage of everything around me. I'm not recycling, no DIY, not repurposing. Those are agendas of another sort. My agenda is to make art.

[S]: Do you catalogue the objects you collect? How long do you keep them?

TF: I don't catalogue. Don't count the number of marbles in this piece or that. I know where everything is—in a bag under the pile of stuff on the other side of those boxes.

[S]: Do you make your pieces beforehand in the studio or assemble them in the gallery?

TF: I make pieces in the studio like anyone else. Building a body of work. I have also shown up with some stuff in a sack and made a show in two weeks. It can be nerve-racking to say the least but stimulating. The lumber room represents a third aspect of my work with an architecturally-inspired site-determined all-inclusive installation. It's less about simply looking at an artwork than rather being within an artwork.

To experience it is to become a piece of it.



The new **PSU MFA Studio Lecture Series** brings together artists from a variety of disciplines to explore the subjects of their own work before a live audience. Lectures and related events are held throughout the year, most often at 1914 SW Park Avenue in Shattuck Annex on Wednesday nights at 7pm.

PSU's two-year, full-residency **MFA in Contemporary Art Practice/Studio** degree program is dedicated to interdisciplinary exploration through the experience of making. Students are supported in a range of production disciplines, from the traditional to the emerging, as they consider the multiple ways art can live in and beyond the studio.

WWW.PSUMFASTUDIO.ORG // WWW.PDX.EDU/ART/GRADUATE-STUDIES

[STUDIO]

RESPONDS TO TONY FEHER

01

No limits
No boundaries any longer
I guess I'm supposed to say
something here
I got tired of going to the art store
Thinking there was something
there
That was going to
Make me an artist
Ten different greens
Ewwwwww! It's too much, I can't
keep track
You don't put your Rembrandt in
the sun
Bless You!
The possibilities began to be
limitless
Thousands of square footage of
pure, unadulterated crap
Who cares—who's Archie Bunker,
ya know?
I just think they're lovely
I find them joyful
If I knew what I was doing I
wouldn't do it
Looks good to me
Nice people live there now—well,
that's dull
It's an iris and it's a pinwheel and
it's a ferris wheel and it's a butthole
It's celestial
I'm in the toilet—literally!
Superstar!
It's just all zzzzzzzzzzzzzzz
Eh, there's that thing and there's
this thing and WHAT'S THAT POLE?
What are you doing?
What is this?
Well it's my art. It's a sculpture.
Ooooooh, it's your art. I like it!
Drip Blip Blop
Oh Brad—I said I'd call you later
I don't know how to plant a tree
Dig a hole and stick it in
All that and a bag of cheese
As soon as you step outside, you
need other people
Love that guy
Are you kidding me? Look at that!
When you start with something
that's so wrong
If you try to make it right
That's like gilding a poo
So just let things be
What they are

02

WHEN I WAS 19 YEARS OLD I MOVED TO NYC AND FELL IN LOVE WITH A HUNG, BEAUTIFUL, HAIRY-CHESTED IRISH MAN NAMED MICHAEL.

He loved me too, and wanted to take my virginity. BUT he was also in love with the East Village spa that he frequented every weekend. Those nights I'd go to his tiny apartment on Avenue B anyway and drink wine with his sassy, wiser, older housemate, Stephen. Stephen taught me to love myself. He was the first and only person to touch my face and say, "Young Manny, you are gorgeous! Have you ever danced alone to ABBA? Or watched Derek Jarman's *Sebastiane*?" Looking back, part of me couldn't let go of Michael because it would also mean letting go of Stephen.

A year later I was working at Film Forum and had a Queer posse who all majored in art and film at Hunter College. And I started to become friends with more and more people similar to Stephen. All of them despised Michael, except for the one he tried to sleep with. One

day I asked Michael to meet me where we met, on the corner of Astor Place outside K-Mart. We shared a slice of pizza and I got real.

"I am so in love with you but I deserve more. Not just from a boyfriend, but from a friend. I've given you my heart and all I got in return was Stephen. Goodbye Michael, I will always love you."

As I walked away I heard Michael crying behind me for the first time. "Goodbye, Stephen," I cried, mouth full of delicious pizza.

Tony is free, inspirational, fabulous, confident, hopeful and loving. He openly discusses his own diagnosis with HIV at a time when many of his gay male contemporaries were passing away, while also reminding us that, "It's ok to love your own art!" He made me think of a dear artist friend named Stephen who had his own diagnoses and spoke fondly of his friends, life and art in 1970s and 80s NYC. He was quite confident and free and, like Tony, he KNEW he was fabulous. For my piece I wanted to write something Tony would describe as "lovely" and emotionally powerful like his art, while also introducing him to his secret brother Stephen.

03



04

Helping Tony find
the words; it's not *re-cy-cle*.
Culture Free Objects

Practice vs. Project
I hate the first and the last.
So Sha-ra-di-ant

Save like the dickens,
He mumbled to the chickens,
We're all gonna die

Thought I was nearer
To death than I could afford.
It's how I art now

Feel it with your heart
To have a beard, or to not
Leggo-the-ego

05

