

## Richard Prince / INTERVIEW & IMAGES

*Richard Prince is a prolific young sculptor whose works explore concepts related to local landscape, the action of the wind on land, literary and scientific ideas regarding nature. His pieces often include machines that can be activated by the spectator. The book illustrated here has the meticulous craftsmanship and economy of expression that distinguishes all his work.*

*RP* I studied Fine Arts (History) at UBC from 1967-1971, before there was a studio program. Though I did take some studio courses, they were so informal that they could hardly count. Anyway, I think artists should have a strong academic background. It is rather odd that most of my training as an artist was obtained at the Vancouver School of Art on a casual basis. When I wanted to know something, like how to make plaster casts, I would just go down there and watch someone do it. It is a lot easier way to learn technique than spending years doing someone's exercises in art classes. But I mustn't underplay the importance of that incredible class I was in at UBC, taught by Toni Onley — fantastic group of people. It was one of those occasions when no one was really depending on the teacher, yet it was a curious moment in time when things just happened to work. All of us were over that hippie stuff, and we also thought that any kind of self-motivated work was valid, so we did a lot of it.

My parents were into crafts and I was encouraged to diddle and play but at the same time it was understood that I should not be so irresponsible as to become an artist. And whatever I made had to be well-done and finished. And that was a good thing, I think, it gets you away from self-indulgent work. Some of the things I am doing now go back to the time when I was 13 years old, and that worries me sometimes.

Claes Oldenburg maintains that he learned his style when he was a little boy, so some others do. I know that the possibilities (without radical change in content) are still expanding for me in those areas where I began.

I am doing things now where the object itself isn't the pure conveyor of the notion. For example in the wind machines, the concept is very important, and the vehicle of the concept is really electronic gear. I have a piece that I am considering now that will consist of a wind pressure recorder placed outside on the roof of a house, which will be coupled to a wind duplicator

inside the house that will reproduce qualitatively the actions of the real wind outside. It will probably look like a console record player, maybe it should even have some teakwood around it. It will duplicate the wind outside on a small scale in terms of direction and amount.

I haven't decided whether it will be always on or whether it will have a proximity switch that will sense the heat of a person beside it, or will respond to being spoken to, like to "Hello, how's the wind today?" I also think I might add on a memory, although that is going to be difficult because the information will have to be digitized, so that you could choose to dial yesterday's wind and then today's.

*AR* Your first works had no active parts and were pure landscape sculpture but this piece concerns landscape but is a machine. What is the first piece you made that relates to the wind-concept machine you are considering now?

*RP* *East Wind, West Wind* was the first. Attached to the ends of a plexiglass box are two fans powered by a battery that is suspended under the box by exposed wires. You can turn on one fan for the east wind and one for the west. They can't go on simultaneously.

*SH* Your landscape is very idealized, and this seems to relate to its meticulousness and a desire to get everything perfect.

*RP* Well, I think that once I achieved the effect you described I tended to perpetuate it. The surfaces are not unemotional, but at the same time they are analytical. They have a cool appearance when they are finished, but the ideas behind them are really quite romantic. No aspect of the cruel weird scientist is explored, I am never intellectually concerned with the cruel. My pieces always are based in ideas from the landscape or upon human experience in the landscape, I am definitely not a pessimist.

In my experience, things always seem the way they are supposed to be. My experiences at Tastee Freeze seem to demonstrate that the product always lives up to its image, as advertised. I used to marvel at the way the ice cream was always served up with three bulges and that marvellous little curl on the end. And how many times have you seen an imperfect car? When they come out of the factory, they always look just right. Have you ever seen one with the bumper on upside down? And there's so many of them too!

*AR* What are you thinking of doing now?

*RP* I am thinking of doing more books, like the one you have photographed. There is an aspect of concrete poetry about that one, but I really thought of it in terms of words I liked. I knew when I started that it was going to be a book, but I hadn't worked out the technical problems. So the first image I made was *trees* and about a year later I thought *sails* would be nice. And maybe a year later I chose *Airstream*. Then it was a surprise that the words went together even better than the images did. They are all aerial, all environmental.

I want to make a scene out of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, a sculpture of his very three-dimensional, very detailed description of the place where Cora is buried. I want also to illustrate the *Lady of Shalott* and the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

I also want to do a piece with rotating compasses on landscape fragments that will state with a progressive difficulty in comprehension and a progressive sense of disorientation through the four phases, the idea of finding your direction in space. Where do you go? How do you get there? And where are you when you do get there?

And of course I am still into my wind things.

## EXHIBITIONS

*Directions* (with Dean Ellis). Vancouver Art Gallery, 1972.

*Pacific Vibrations*. Vancouver Art Gallery, 1973.

*Librations*. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1973.

*Sights & Sounds of the Canadian North & West*. Vancouver:  
Equinox Gallery, 1973.

*Process Editions*. Burnaby Art Gallery, 1973.

*Summer Show*. Vancouver: Equinox Gallery, 1974.

*Woodlore & Other Romances*. Nova Scotia College of Art & Design,  
1974.

*Landscape Abbreviations*. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1975.

*Nine out of Ten*. Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of  
Kitchener/Waterloo, 1975.

## IMAGES: THREE VIEWS OF

*Picture Book*, 1972, wood, 6" x 4½".

*Photography*: Mike Maxwell











