

Mad scientist

Steve Storz and his oddities from space and time



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Steve Storz said he was a good little boy whose bedroom was immaculate, well decorated by his mother, and all of his toys were neatly placed in his toy box. He lived in a middle class neighborhood in Texas City, Texas, an industrial town with six major companies including Union Carbide and Monsanto (this was where, in 1947, a gigantic series of ammonium nitrate fertilizer explosions killed more than 600 people).

Now, Storz spends much of his time in his "weird little chair" playing the role of the "mad scientist" or as he prefers to be called, the "gizmologist," a name coined by Lee Bentley of Acorn Graphics. His chair has within it the power system for working on his electronics. It's a control stick from an F-16 fighter plane which he uses to raise and lower his chair and to control the lighting of his work space.

His transformation occurred one day when young Storz found a rusted spring from an automobile. He said he was intrigued by the shapes and the stuff sticking off of it. He thought it a magical object and saved it in a box in his dresser drawer. The junk box soon became a junk drawer and soon his entire bedroom became a found-object art studio.

"In high school, the art teacher, Skip Inman, and the drama director, Ron Wright, gave me license to do what I wanted to do," Storz said. "I did some acting and directing and lots of sound and lighting. I began to do some free-form composing in my studio, using my own voice and certain musical instruments to give accent. I compose, but I don't use notes."

In 1996, Storz came to Taos after visiting here numerous times from San Jose, Calif., where he had a studio in an old cannery. A friend in California owned a lot near here, and Storz bought it, sight unseen. He soon discovered that next to his property lived a squatter named Doc who had moved a bus onto the land and lived there for many years.

The bus, which was gradually



An example of Storz's found-object art influenced by technology and biological functions. Rick Romancio

becoming one with the earth, according to Storz, had a ham radio, solar panels and a hi-fi; and Doc tended to scare people off with his gruff voice and demeanor. Storz' real estate agent said, "No way can you use that lot," but Storz said he felt a kinship to Doc. Later, Doc was found frozen to the floor of his bus after suffering an apparent heart attack.

Storz still owns some land where he intends to build a site-specific sculpture of steel reinforced concrete shapes. He said it will be a life-sized castle and could be used as a place for artists to come and work. Storz realizes it is a big dream, but he wants it

to be completely self-sufficient.

While sitting in Storz' studio, I became fascinated by his twitching and grinding Grunge Machines. Storz explained that they are made from cast-off technology: Old computer parts, answering machines, VCRs, etc. He doesn't work with television sets or computer monitors, but only with things that have motors. And, he has sold more than 300 Grunge Machines as well as his steel electronic sculptures. Storz said he paints, does pastels, and, of course, lots of pen and ink drawings. All of the two-dimensional

work is part of the process for his sculpture.

"I have to build some circuitry to turn them on and off, make them move and jerk, so I go to surplus electronic outlets. Ed Grothus in Los Alamos has such a place called 'The Black Hole' where he sells the surplus that came out of the labs," Storz said. "He has an entire parking lot filled with old laser equipment, control panels, etc. Now a peace activist, he left the labs because he didn't want to create weaponry."

On arriving in Taos, an artist told him that the place he should see was called the Art Lab in Arroyo Seco. The next morning he arrived there just as the proprietor, Te Zins, pulled up. Immediately they struck up a friendship, and Zins said he wanted Storz' work. But Storz only stayed a few weeks because he was on his way to New York to deliver his girlfriend who was going to attend college there that fall. Storz set up a studio for three months in White Plains, N.Y., in the basement of an old machine shop. Even though he was making money there was never enough money to survive.

He decided to go back to Taos, although he knew Taos might not be his market. He realized that he had great friends and that the Art Lab might provide a real home for his work. "My first big launching point was at the Stables Art Gallery show curated by David Witt, 'Taos, The Next Generation' in March 1998. Being part of this show made me feel that Taos might be my home.

"I need the integrity of being the kind of artist I am," he said

"My mind simply takes off, extrapolating on everything around us and combining shapes, colors and movement. It wrenches the flossy, tangled sinew of chaos from the underside of my efforts to be sane and displays them."

Storz' work can be seen at the Bareiss Gallery, in the Harwood Museum Gift Shop and at his Web site, www.storzart.com.