



Spotlight Artist: Bob Rizzo

The artists of Kobo Gallery have begun a "Visiting Artist Series" with plans for a guest artist that include six months of representation, an artist's reception, gallery talks, and a workshop. We are pleased to present to Savannah our first guest artist, Bob Rizzo.



Rizzo is a self-taught artist with a varied history that includes serving the public as an arts activist, a nine month stint as a visiting artist in Strasbourg, France and 'Artist in Residence' for the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts. His work can be found in numerous private and public collections that include: The Rhode Island School of Design Museum, The International Museum of Collage, Assemblage and Construction, and Brown University.

Rizzo's artist statement states that he "rarely starts the (working) process with a particular idea in mind. Making the work is like playing improvisational music." Indeed the process of working with improvisation opens the door to creativity and brings unlimited options into the field of play. His works are often humorous yet filled with a spiritual sense of genuine care for the work and its message. He is inspired by nature, religious shrines, music, and particularly artists from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His goal is to "create work that helps people smile, think, and sometimes question what they feel safe with."

Bob Rizzo will be in Savannah for a reception and gallery talk to be held Thursday, April 25th at Kobo Gallery from 5:00-8:00pm. The artist's talk will take place around 5:30pm. Bob's workshop will be held on Saturday, April 27th at Thinc Savannah. More detailed information for these two events is included below.



JCP: Bob, your career as an artist is so varied. You have truly been an arts advocate for most of your life. What opportunities did you create for other artists that you are particularly happy with or truly enjoyed working on?

BR: That's a very hard question to answer, because the opportunities were many and varied. Over the 20+- year period that worked I as an administrator I worked

with hundreds of artists of many different experience levels, from grad-students to seasoned professionals. In some cases I helped artists make work that was

outside their comfort zone, for example a poet who usually worked only on the printed page creating a building size animated poem projected on a 50' wall or poets that floated their works on the surface of a pond or river. There were many sculptors who I helped make their first large-scale work. I worked with musicians creating collaboration opportunities with other musicians they probably would not have shared the same stage with otherwise. Often my role

was to serve as a catalyst for artists to launch major projects. I also had the opportunity to work with actors, performance artists, and dancers. Being an artist myself with experience in site-specific work I was able to offer the expertise and feedback most arts administrators could not offer. Because of my city position and my non-profit I was able to offer seed money that often resulted in very successful large-scale projects. A few were career changing. So I'd say I enjoyed almost all the opportunities I had.



JCP: How did you find out about Kobo Gallery and our visiting artist series? Why did you want to participate?

BR: I literally walked into the gallery with my wife Karen because I saw a large piece by Betsy Cain in the window. We had been staying in a condo around the corner from the gallery that had lots of local artwork on the walls. One that I looked at every day was by Betsy, and I had just taken a photo of it that morning so I could remember it when I returned home. We asked the woman behind the counter who did the painting in the window and she replied "I did". We chatted for a while and as we were leaving I handed her my business card. Betsy noticed it had a 3-D image on it and mentioned that the gallery was interested in hosting the work of out-of-state sculptors; it sounded like a nice

opportunity. I didn't expect the email invite a few weeks later. It was a very pleasant surprise.

As for why participate? Why not? The idea of exhibiting in a new venue is always interesting to me. I'm looking for a diverse audience to share my work with. The quality of the work I saw at the gallery impressed me so I saw it as a great opportunity to exhibit my work along side other artists I respected.



JCP: I understand that the pieces at Kobo were created especially for the gallery and that some of the found objects in the works were discovered here in Savannah? Did these objects lead you to any unusual thought patterns as you were creating these sculptures? I guess my question relates to your thoughts in general while creating this body of work knowing that they were headed to Savannah.

BR: Of the six pieces, four have Savannah artifacts included. The two with ducks and the one tall one with the glass dome as well as the small house-shaped piece all have things I found on my walks around Savannah. A few were antique shop purchases. The purple antique bottles, ceramic caster wheels, mardi-gras beads, the magnolia pods and a few of the toys came from Savannah.



JCP: By special request from Dicky Stone, what can you tell us about humor and how it is seamlessly tied (almost literally) to the pieces?

BR: Another good question! I sometimes like to make pieces that just make people smile. The pull-toy pieces certainly fit that in that category. I love just putting odd things together, and seeing if the crazy juxtapositions are as funny to others as they are to me.

JCP: Artist Betsy Cain has a couple of questions for you also.

BC: Considering that Savannah is home to many students of the Arts, including a dedicated High School of the arts, what would you say to young, aspiring artists about finding their own "voice" in their work?

BR: Work, work, work, travel, travel, and travel. Take risks. Don't let what others think influence your work. Collaborate with others, it helps you stretch, helps with finding your own voice. Don't be afraid of mistakes, there are none. If it doesn't look right you are probably headed in the right direction.



BC: Your work references many cultural icons and mythologies, and scrambles them to your own vision in your assemblages. How do you see an artists' role in cross-cultural commentary?

BR: I think that most artists have been influenced by other cultures from the very beginning of time. We record what we see. Our ability to travel freely around the planet, to access images from everywhere via the web, I think it's important to be aware of our differences and celebrate them. We are all connected in one way or another. I'm always surprised when I get the opportunity to work with artists from other countries, other cultures just how much we have in common. The arts are the one thing we all seem to understand regardless of language. I had a wonderful opportunity to interact with a few found-object artists for Haiti a year or so ago and although we spoke different languages (my French isn't very good) we felt like we were brothers in art. The African artists I've been lucky enough to have exchanges with felt the same way.



JCP: We are so excited that you are able to offer a workshop to the public while you are here. What should the participants expect at the workshop? Are you a 'hands-on' instructor or do you teach more by demonstration?

BR: I'm hoping that each participant leaves with a nearly finished piece, a new understanding of just how Assemblage pieces can be created, and a sense of jumping into the unknown. I'm pretty hands-off --- I do plan on making a piece myself during the workshop. I plan on offering guidance where I think it might be needed. But each piece should come completely from the maker's hands.

JCP: What other things might you want to mention in this interview that I haven't asked you about? This question is very general....I'm just probing to see if you want to say anything else that you feel is important.

BR: Where do I find all the "stuff" is always a question I'm asked? It comes from everywhere. I'm a walker so I often find things on the street; I search junk shops, antique shops, flea markets, and the web. People give me gifts. Objects

they've collected and then decided they didn't need or that I needed more. It's amazing all the things people throw away. It's funny you really don't notice it until you start looking. I really enjoy it when I heard folks looking at my work and pointing out pieces saying, "I used to have one of those".

JCP: Bob, we are thrilled to be able to present your work to the Savannah community. Thank you for participating as our first visiting guest artist.

Opening Reception at Kobo Gallery: April 25th from 5:00-8:00pm with an artist's talk around 5:30pm.

Workshop is co-sponsored by ThincSavannah, 33 Barnard Street 2nd floor: April 27, from 10am - 4:00pm (w/hour break for lunch). Fee: \$200. - prior registration is required. For registration and more details call Kobo Gallery (912)201-0304 or Betsy Cain- (912)308-6321. Workshop information can also be viewed online at www.kobogallery.com

Click here for a link to Bob Rizzo's book on Blurb.

kobo gallery

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