

THE MILLION QUESTIONS

BY SAMANTHA PAIGE FURGASON

In conversation and text, the often-used terms, “art and architecture,” and “art and science” reference the bridging of the creative process across each of the respective fields. Hence, these allusions often include more than one individual, practice, or school. Upon meeting Glenn Comtois, the divisions between these disciplines liquefy. Comtois exists as an artist, architect, and scientist, all at once. His extensive academic record bears witness: Art and Design; Architecture and Art; Computers/Technology; and Architectural Design with a Bachelor’s Degree in Architecture. Comtois’s studies have taken him from Denton, Texas, to Florence, Italy, and back again.

Well over a decade ago, whilst immersed in a full time career with Arch2Graphics, his long-standing and successful Architectural design firm, Comtois committed to a secondary profession in the creation of personal visual art. For most, a career move of this nature would remain a dream at best. However, Comtois’ boldness and courage landed him solidly on his feet, and with the wind at his back. As a testament not only to his dedication but to his talent, his creations are currently featured in numerous galleries, museums, and contemporary collections, as well as the prestigious Neiman Marcus Company, in locations across the country.

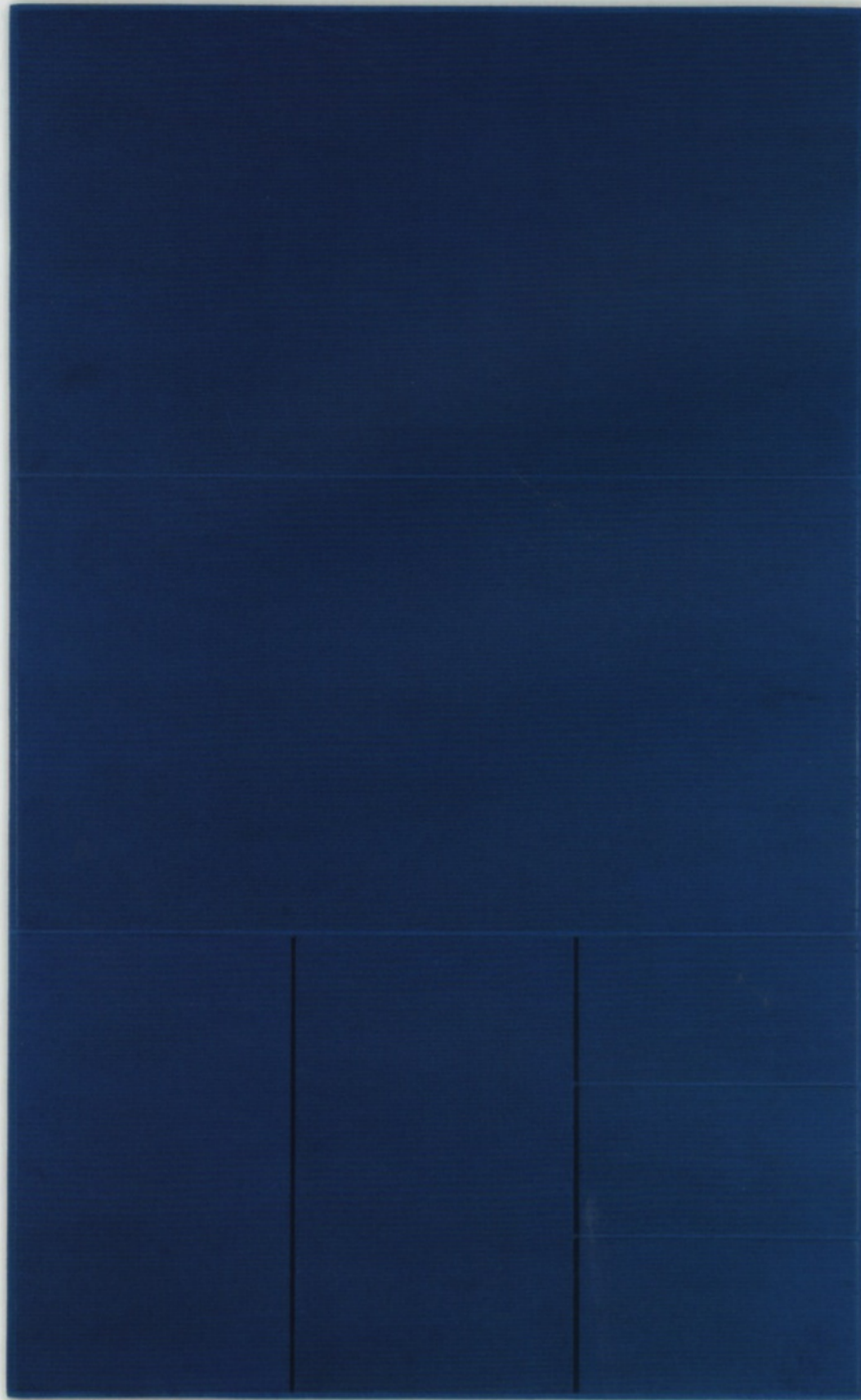
Although his career had always been on the creative side of architecture, he longed for the freedom that is inherent in being an artist. While he loved the rendering and drawing aspect of his field, he was wary of the business end, what Comtois defines as “the meet and greet part of architecture.” After all, the corporate culture and the structured business model were the primary reasons why he started his own company. His wife, Heather, offers a more intimate clarity in her view that, “Glenn does indeed like structure, as he is organized and methodical. However, he does not like structure imposed upon him”. Hence, Comtois’s creations, both from an artistic and architectural perspective, are immaculate from every angle. There is nothing in where the eye travels as it encounters his works to detract from the purity of a well-executed concept.

Many people say that at some point or stage we are offered a glimpse of what our passion in life will be. It is also said that it comes to us as children: parents and teachers alike seek to recognize this, and facilitate its growth. Comtois not only has been drawing since he was a child; he even has pictures of himself in diapers — with a pencil and paper in hand. The artist remarks, “How I didn’t lose an eye I will never know!” Upon reflection, he can see that his passion has always been art. It just took a few more years for him to know this to be absolute.

Comtois attributes this lifelong immersion in the arts to a broad list of influences, giving generous credit to artists and movements from across the spectrum of history. “I tend to gravitate towards artists that use geometry



OPPOSITE PAGE: *Untitled 1*, acrylic on wood, 17" × 74" × 4"; THIS PAGE: *Pixel*, acrylic on wood, 23" × 36" × 3"



to represent organic forms.” Specific artists include, Marcel Duchamp, the French /American artist most often associated with Dada and Surrealism; Georges Braque, the French Fauvist/Cubist Painter; and Pablo Picasso, the renowned Spanish Cubist Painter and Sculptor. Comtois clearly recalls being absolutely mesmerized upon his first exposure to works from Picasso’s early cubist period. “I was overcome with emotion... It was amazing to glimpse (Picasso’s) understanding and view of the world around him.”

After making his transition and finding the creative release that architecture wasn’t providing, Comtois remembers the exact moment when he understood the true meaning of Marcel Duchamp’s words: “No, the thing to do is try to make a painting that will be alive in your own lifetime...” Comtois recalls, “I was working on a painting, about half way through completing the piece, I sat back and started to become emotional. I was just overwhelmed by my feelings about being exactly where I wanted to be in my life and doing exactly what I wanted to be doing.”

Comtois’s vision manifests through an unrelenting need to interact with his physical environment on a tactile level; an unremitting desire to touch; to feel the weight, the texture, of an object, to not only view it but experience it from all sides. Inverting objects becomes therefore a necessary and regular practice, in order to fully examine and compare any hidden constructive elements or techniques. Perhaps this was the influence of his Great-Uncle, an aeronautical engineer and profound inspiration to Comtois. Certainly, there can be few things more exquisite, than a man made object which has been designed specifically for, and capable of, flight. There is an irrefutable and specific perfection in the shape of the

body, the slope of a wing, the location of every bolt, each single element flawless in its execution. It is this sensibility of completeness, of perfection on every level that permeates Comtois’ own philosophy and, ultimately, his work.

Comtois’s undeniable interest in both art and architecture derives from a deeply entrenched passion for mathematics and spatial relationships. The artist clarifies, “The combination of shapes and forms and their interaction and relationship to one another have always fascinated me. The connection between objects, how each sits upon another, and how light strikes one form and casts a shadow upon the next.” Pablo Picasso’s *The Shadow*, an oil and charcoal on canvas from 1953,

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serves as an excellent instance of this phenomenon, which has seduced artists since its inception. Ever-illusory shadows are also evident in works created over 16,000 years ago, as illustrated in Upper Paleolithic art. The complex caves of Lascaux in Southwestern France house perhaps the most famous examples.

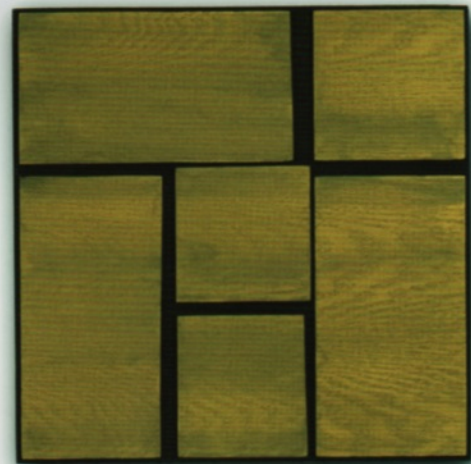
In contrast to Picasso's study in applied shadows and illusion of depth, Comtois chooses to create actual shadows in his three-dimensional pieces. Comtois's current body of work captures this interactive play; relationships in intricate and grouped forms; assembled wood objects that transcend space and transform the viewer. Pixel, as pictured, is an ideal instance of shadow as this artist's primary impetus. Here, strong use of color, silhouette, and luscious natural texture combine to create an almost optic effect, making this multidimensional piece appear kinetic. Comtois's work is never static. He admits spending hours gazing at buildings, trees, or any form that is capable of casting a shadow. The learned mathematician within Comtois labors to comprehend exactly how the light's rays are falling upon the object and the subsequent geometric shape of each shadow. Comtois elaborates, "I am thrilled when an interesting shadow is created within my artwork, it sometimes delights me more than the piece itself." Future shadows that will appear in the artwork are impossible to foresee, as the illumination differs from artist's studio, to the exhibition space, then once more when the artwork arrives in its new collection. When the piece is finally installed, shadows and shapes appear that Comtois never expected, the artist quotes Georges Braque, in a statement we would easily believe to be from himself: "Once an object has been incorporated in a picture it accepts a new destiny."

Many artists/scientists of all kinds describe their bodies of work as "attempts to solve a problem." Sometimes this problem can encompass one's life work. Comtois's life work thus far has been what he describes as a process of "deconstruction-construction"—the creation of order from chaos. Not necessarily trying to make each piece fit together with the next, but trying to make all of the parts transform into a whole.

A perfect and beautiful whole. ■

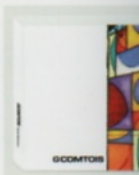
OPPOSITE PAGE: *Composition Three Square Root*, acrylic on wood, 21" × 34" × 2".

Glenn Comtois, Selected Abstractions, published by ARTWORKinternational, Inc., will be released to the public in June of 2008. To obtain a copy of this publication, or for additional information, please contact artwork@artworkinternational.com.



Color Form 4 acrylic on wood 18 by 18 inches each / four panels 20

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published by ARTWORKINTERNATIONAL, INC., will be released to the public in June of 2008
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