



Spind

a magazine
for the other space
Issue 1

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Peter Shire

A conversation with Mara Mckevitt and the artist
at his Echo Park studio.

Photography: Ian Markell

PETER SHIRE: When I was born, we
weren't in Echo Park we were
ON it. That was a long time ago.



MARA MCKEVITT: Your father built the house you grew up in?

PS: Yes, he was a carpenter. The house was just down the street from here. Echo Park was very different back then. I rented my first studio for \$100 a month,. When I was growing up, my parents were very left-wing. They considered themselves Communists which they explicitly told me not to say in the fifties. They were also Marxists.

MM: In looking at some of your work, there's this structure and scale that we associate with the domestic landscape and there's this sort of irreverence in the objecthood of some of your sculptures. There's personality inherent in the architecture — like the teapots — I find them at once charming and inviting and incredibly intimidating. I want to laugh but I don't want them to hear me.

PS: One day a friend of mine said, "You know you can make a teapot that pours out of the bottom." It was over at that point. There's an irony to having a life that has depth and meaning within that middle class structure as opposed to an elitist, glamorous life. So the teapot format is an image that becomes very friendly to "regular" people.

MM: Right. The teapot has — for the most part — been a universally adored household staple. Can you talk a little bit about what was happening around you, in the world, when you began exploring your



Left page:
Ephemera from Shire's Studio

This page top & bottom:
Mayan Tableau courtesy of the artist, Ephemera from Shire's Studio



Right page:
Notes from Shire's sketchbook
Clockwise from top left:
Shire's knife collection, Views inside Shire's Echo Park studio/home

That's really what art is. It's visual communication instead of verbal.

PS: The thing about being a child of the fifties is that we were probably the first generation where the primary concern was if we were happy. There was a guy named Dr. Spock who wrote books about raising children and their main concern was our happiness. When we got out of college what was of interest to us? What were our imperatives? It wasn't getting out and earning a living per se. Not having certain kinds of financial pressures allowed us to be interested in things like art. In the sixties, we expected to be listened to. We expected fair play. That's what all the protests and resistances of the war were about. Then those National Guard guys shot four students in Ohio. Because of the banality of that, we became really intrigued with the absurd, which was probably an offshoot of Dada and Surrealism. That's what thrilled us and that's how we talked to each other.

MM: So the foundation was really communication?

PS: Yeah, that's really what art is. It's visual communication instead of verbal. That's one of the reasons why talking about it is always funny. A while back, I did a public sculpture out in Burbank which was very appealing to me for because it was directed towards communicating with the public, the man on the street, whoever that is. This particular sculpture was on the old Lockheed site and I made one of the pieces to resemble a distorted control tower. Just as we were finishing up, a guy walking through said, "Are you the artist?" I said, "Yeah." And he goes, "I don't know anything about art but it looks like a control tower." [laughs] People are pushed away from art by thinking that if they And there are ongoing languages of art history that become self-referential and exclusive and it's about being exclusive for people who spend a lot of money.

MM: I saw a photo of *City on the Hill* after it had been vandalized. After it was graffitied, do you feel like the piece was interrupted or do you feel like it became more a part of LA?



PS: You know, I'm not a fan so-called graffiti art. There are aspects of it that I think are really constructive, but I'm a constructor and graffiti is defacing by in large. It's actually very sad for me because on one hand I get to piss on my tree – I've made a great mark in these works and these poor kids are just trying to make their mark. I would like to get a grant and get a graffiti team to cover every inch [of *City on the Hill*] and let it go from there. I'll never have to paint it again! It's such a weird instinct, to want to make something by covering up someone else's work.

MM: There's something very primitive about it. It seems to come from a natural place.

PS: There's a kind of a romance to graffiti. I don't even begin to understand but I'm listening. I would love to understand it because it's clearly very powerful. My dad once explained it to me as the power that outsiders have. The commercial establishment, be it the soap company or the cereal company or the car company, want to co-opt that power because they don't have that kind of primitive power that I believe you're talking about. For example, beatniks and hippies were basically middle class kids who were total slackers. I remember there was a big article in LIFE

magazine about San Francisco and they had a picture of these kids who had taken their lawn chairs out to a parking space and they had put money in the meter to sun themselves. In other words, it had a little bit of jazz to it.

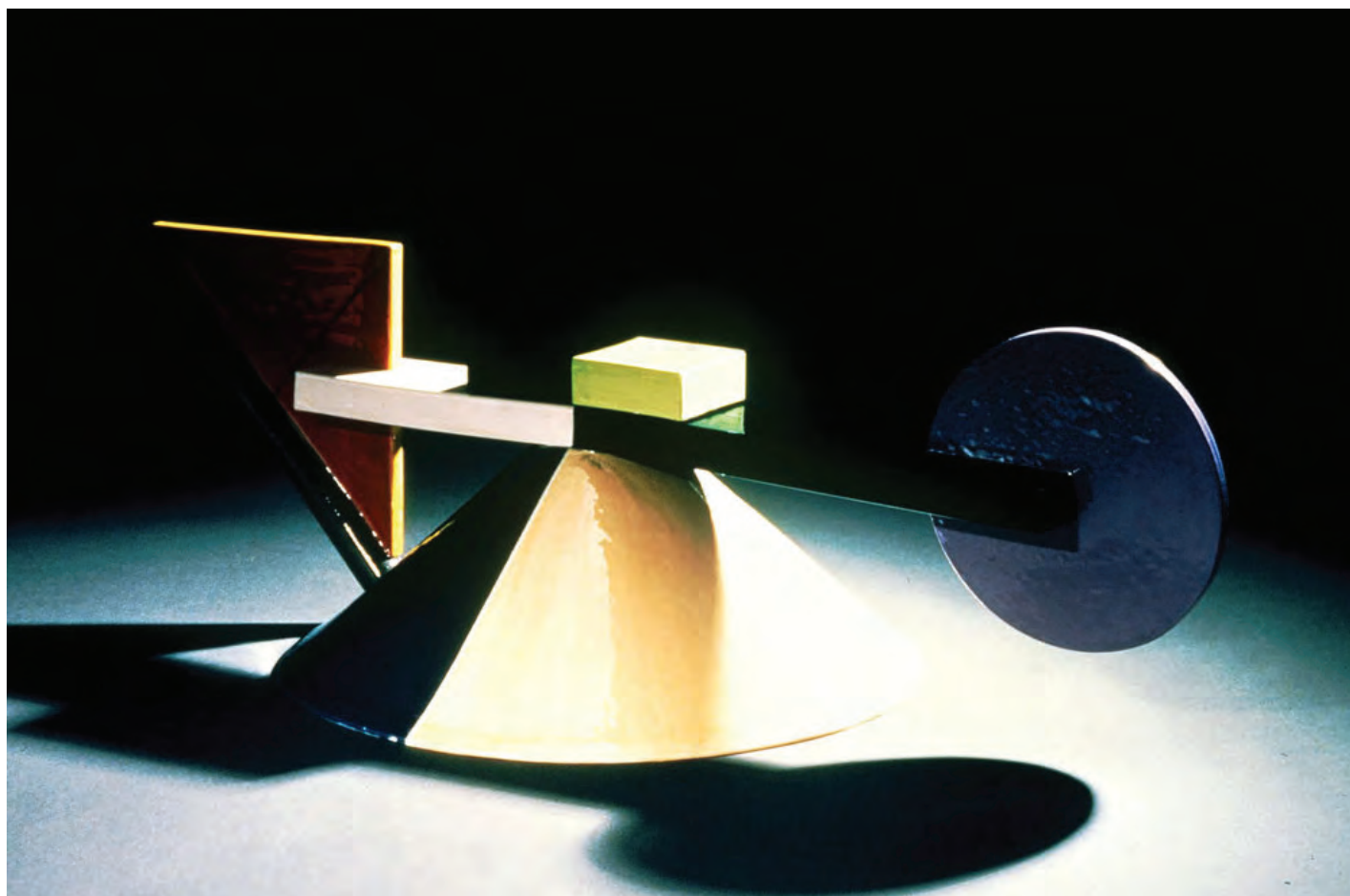
MM: It's such a radical idea to live and breathe and operate with your art all around you. You're really living in it here, you've constructed your own domestic landscape.

PS: What we say is that the rest of the world is compromised. Plato had his idols: the idols of the cave, the idols of the tribe, the idols of the Marketplace. Outside is the

crossroads where ethics really don't exist, and in here is the cave and tribe comes in. It stops at the door. It's about is having

a world that's my microcosm as much as possible. If transference between the interior and exterior didn't exist, then there would be no way to see it. If people see in here, then it may change the world out there a little bit. Things interlock. I'm trying to explain the fucking thing myself, constantly. Infusing the work with power and soul is half the goal. Now it's very interesting because this an ongoing history of what I do and so sometimes I think, "What am I doing?" But quite frankly working makes me happy so I keep doing it.

Infusing the work with power and soul is half the goal.



This page:
Two Tone Cone
Right page top & bottom:
Ephemera from Shire's studio, Towering Teatypes courtesy of the artist

