



Portrait of K. Tokerud and Jane Millett, Oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 1981

## Hammers and Saws by Tim Slowinski

In the late '70s, my paintings took a turn inspired by photorealism, a popular style back in those days. Early in the '70s, during high school, I would go into the city (NYC) and be amazed by the flawless technique of the photorealists on display at OK Harris, Meisel and other Galleries. I wouldn't paint straight up photorealism, my mind wasn't straight enough for that, I warped everything. I broke the images into geometric patterns and used distorted colors to create shocking effects. I think that was the idea of these pieces, to shock for it's own sake, there was no commentary beyond that.

I started this process in a garage behind my parent's house. In high school, when I decided to become a painter, I rehabilitated the garage into a studio. In retrospect, I now see this was a training ground for my future life. In that garage I had my first experience (among other things) with electrical wiring, insulating, sheetrock and framing. It was my own little construction school. It's amazing now when I think of it, how much of my life has been spent with crowbars, hammers, saws and the tools of the construction trade. Many artists had help in their careers from parents, or from grant money provided by the government or corporations. My parents had thirteen kids and I didn't care to apply for grants, so the only way for me to get a leg up, to acquire studio and later gallery space, was build it myself. A burned out cafe, a decayed house, an abandoned decrepit storefront, all these became vehicles for the acquisition of space. Decay to me had a glow of freedom and represented opportunity.

Along the way I lived in some crazy situations. In 1980 I partially restored a burned out cafe in Woodstock, NY. The building was owned by a nutty and lovable old farmer from Wisconsin named Martin Steffanson. He was known for his long, ranting, political letters to the local

paper. He took off to Florida for the winter and I moved into the space. There was no plumbing and the small gas heater was too small to heat the large, undivided space. I constructed a tent of paintings around the heater and painted and slept inside it. The gas heater was a bit old and I didn't trust it, so at night I would open the windows and crawl into a goose down sleeping bag.

While living in the room, I befriended a local musician and artist, Berrien Fregos. He was living inside his 1968 Volkswagon station wagon and the winter was making that difficult. I let him into my tent and shared the studio with him for the winter. For him it was luxury to have a spot in the corner for his bedroll and books, and use of my primitive kitchen. We spent the winter cooking meals with a hotplate and toaster oven. Bathroom arrangements were difficult, involving a number of techniques and locations throughout the town. The Grand Union supermarket was a half block away, they had good bathrooms. That winter I also met the artist Jane Millett, now an established Manhattan artist and interior designer. She became my girlfriend and also moved into the tent room. She had purple hair at the time and used to get a kick out of going into the supermarket bathroom with a towel, washing her hair in the sink and walking out through the produce section with the towel wrapped around her head like a turban.

During the next seven years I continued to employ the same technique, acquiring an abandoned or semi-abandoned structure and applying my construction skills to restore it to health in exchange for free or low rent. The low cost of living gave me the time I needed to develop my art and build up a body of work. Early in my career, what I needed more than anything else was time and space, both expensive commodities. I purchased them with hammers and saws. During this time I explored several styles and series of works, eventually leading to the methods I now employ. Later on, when I moved into Manhattan, my construction skills allowed me to acquire retail space adjacent to other galleries in locations that otherwise would have been off limits.



Self Portrait with Berrien Fregos, Oil on canvas, 36" x 36"  
Painted in the studio tent on Sled Hill Road, Woodstock, NY,  
winter of 1980 - 81