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Celebrating 175: Jeff Donaldson, Biographical Summaries and Resumes, 1990s-circa 2001

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[[3 columns]] [[column 1]]
P-Form, a Randolph Street Gallery publication, and Herotica 4, a Bay Area compilation of erotic writing by women.

In 1994, after initially being selected by the Photography Peer Review Panel for an NEA Fellowship, DeGenevieve's application, along with those of Andres Serrano and Merry Alpern, was rejected by the National Council on the Arts, an incident that attracted wide, national attention. DeGenevieve's work can be found in the Seattle Art Museum, the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, and other significant collections. She participated in the 1990 "Photography: Inventions and Innovations" at AIC, and continues to show locally and nationally in a variety of solo and group exhibitions. LH

Dominick Di Meo
(Born 1927) Dominick Di Meo was born in 1927 in Niagara Falls, New York. He came to Chicago at SAIC, receiving a BFA in 1952. While a student there, Di Meo helped found Momentum, the first of many artist groups in which he would be involved. He subsequently cofounded a cooperative gallery and art center, Gallery 5, in Iowa City, while a graduate student at the University of Iowa, where he obtained an MFA in 1953. Following a one-year postgraduate fellowship from the University of Iowa, Di Meo was given his first one-person show, at Lake Forest College, Illinois (1955), and was included in two consecutive "New Talent Show" exhibitions sponsored by Allan Frumkin, B.C. Holland, and Superior Street galleries in Chicago (1958 and 1959). Sensing his potential, a group of Chicago collectors sponsored Di Meo on a trip to Florence to further develop his art; he lived and worked in Italy from 1961 to 1963.

Di Meo early on established an iconography that consists of skulls, bones, appendages, and occasionally common place objects such as spoons and forks, which he impressed into his surfaces. His early small-scale relief paintings and sculptures were modeled out of taxidermist papier-mâché and plastic. The combination of symbolic imagery with very thick, textured materials, recalling the gritty, earthy works of Jean Dubuffet, resulted in small but substantial reliefs that resemble funerary slabs or fossilized pieces of earth or clay that have been uncovered through excavation.

The profusion of strange and mythical creatures and the exploration of Existentialist themes associate Di Meo's reliefs with the "Monster Roster" school. Figurative elements are often mingled with representations of the land to portray the cyclical nature of life, another

[[column 2]] favorite subject of these artists, particularly Leon Golub and Cosmo Campoli. Also heavily influenced by Surrealism, particularly Joan Miró, Di Meo became interested in lyrical, yet sometimes melancholy, dreamlike landscape compositions filled with disembodied shapes hovering above and below the horizon line. In addition to acrylic transfers, he used objects such as dolls, egg cartons, and rope to texturize the surface of his assemblages of the mid-1960s.

After cofounding the organization PAC (Participating Artists of Chicago) in 1967 as well as participating in artist-initiated antiwar activities surrounding the 1968 Democratic Convention, Di Meo moved in 1969 to New York, where he resides today. His signature skulls, pared down to an elemental circle with three small holes for the eyes and mouth,



remain an integral part of all his work to date. He repeats them in rows and clusters to design studies for monuments, both sculptural and on paper.

Di Meo has had one-person exhibitions at Kendall College, Evanston, Illinois (1967) and P.S.1, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc., Long Island City, New York (1982). He was associated with Fairweather-Hardin Gallery in Chicago from 1959 to 1973 and Westbroadway Gallery in New York from 1972 to 1977, where he had several solo shows. His work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including "Biennial of Prints, Drawings and Watercolors," AIC (1961-62, 1964, and 1966); "Chicago School 1955-1960," HPAC (1964); "Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1967); "Violence in Recent American Art," MCA (1968); "The Koffler Foundation Collection," National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (1979); and "American Drawings Since World War II," AIC (1990).
SB

Jeff Donaldson

(Born 1937) A leader in the Trans-African art movement (a term synonymous with Pan-Africanism that the artist uses to describe an international aesthetic with its roots in the African experience), Jeff Donaldson has taken on the multiple roles of artist, educator, curator, activist, and writer. Born and raised in Arkansas, he graduated in 1954 from the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff, with a BA in studio art. After serving in the Army, Donaldson moved to Chicago where he received an MS in art education and administration from ID in 1963. While serving as an assistant professor at Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Donaldson founded the Visual Arts Workshop of OBAC (Organization of Black American Culture) and partici-

[[column 3]]

pated in their Wall of Respect mural in Hyde Park (1967). In 1968, in the midst of political and social unrest and the Black Power movement, Donaldson and other activist artists, notably Wadsworth Jarrell, formed AfriCobra (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) to further the philosophy of a formally and thematically Afrocentric art. Donaldson's 1970 AfriCobra "manifesto" stressed the social responsibility of the artist while it defined the intrinsic qualities of the black aesthetic. In 1970, while pursuing a PhD in African and African-American art history at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois (received in 1974), Donaldson organized the seminal Conference on the Functional Aspects of Black Art (CONFABA). Later that year he moved to Washington, DC, to become the Art Department chairman as well as Art Gallery director at Howard University, where he is currently dean of the College of Fine Arts. Donaldson has also served as a director of the World Black and African Festival of Art and Culture, Lagos, Nigeria (1975-80); and as art director of the Jazz America Marketing Corporation, Washington, DC (1978-82).

Donaldson's early paintings are earth-toned, collagelike depictions of the African-American experience that are intended to motivate and uplift. They combine representations of the violence of the civil rights movement with strong graphic lettering from the urban landscape/battlefield and traditional symbols of the collective African heritage. The individuals Donaldson portrays, many of them symbolic of African gods and goddesses, are usually armed and ready for combat. The titles of his paintings refer to current events as well as mythologies

from the past. Over the years Donaldson has turned to more vibrant, jazzy, abstract visualizations of African-American rhythms and music, many dedicated to important African-American cultural leaders.

Donaldson has been exhibiting with the AfriCobra artists since 1969, the year of their first shows at WJ Studio, Chicago; University of Notre Dame, Indiana; and AFAM Gallery, Chicago. The following year he participated in AfriCobra exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; National Center for Afro-American Artists, Boston; South Side Community Art Center, Chicago and at Black Expo-International Amphitheater, Chicago. Since 1970 Donaldson has exhibited with the AfriCobra group in over fifty-five different cities internationally, including the major "AfriCobra: The First Twenty Years" at the Nexus Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta (1990). As an independent artist, Donaldson has been given numerous solo exhibitions, and his paintings have been included in group exhibitions at Museo Civico D'Arte Contemporanea, Palermo,

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