A conversation with Leon Golub and Nancy Spero

HELAINE POSNER AND KATY KLINE
Has it affected you, and your art, to be working outside of the mainstream for a good part of your careers?

LEON GOLUB I “earned” my oppositional position by the force and direction of my work, and perhaps by my irritability! Maybe I got what I asked for! But take a look at our game or market as it is constituted. What alternatives are there? Both Nancy and I have been down a lot—and up a lot! In the early years when Nancy got little public recognition, it bothered her ferociously. It depressed her. It made her literally ill, but it didn’t faze her.

NANCY SPERO I was frustrated in the 50s and 60s. There didn’t seem to be a space for my entry into the art world. My work was out of phase, underground. I worked harder than ever—proving to myself, if no one else—that I was an artist, not just the wife of an artist and the mother of two small sons. There was a lot I wanted to say in my art but I felt silenced and almost totally ignored. The exception to this “silencing” was in Paris from 1959 to 1964 where I received a measure of recognition.

LG In our own peculiar ways, which is crucial to how we have developed as artists, we have tried to plug our work into our frustrations and into our comprehension of events in the real world. We didn’t just sit in the studio and push paint and so on, there was directed intention, intentionality, in what we were about, and we knew what we were about. Nancy hooked into the issues that women face. Not just women artists, but women subjected to the pressures of subordination in the modern world. And I hooked into all phases of how men act out aggression and violence, power moves.

We have always tried to fight the good fight! To be relevant to ourselves and to the world!

NS In New York in the later 60s and early 70s it was pretty clear that many women artists were having similar problems getting their work out—no matter the content or process. We saw how women artists had been “left out” of the discourse. Our work was less valuable as it lacked the authority of the male persona as creator. Success has come to me recently, but Leon had early recognition and exposure in the 50s and 60s in Chicago as a powerful force, locally as well as artistically in the “Monster Roster”. His work was shown by James Johnson Sweeney in the important Younger American Artists exhibition in 1954, and at the Museum of Modern Art in the hugely controversial exhibition New Images of Man in 1959. His was the most attacked. In Paris his work gained recognition in the years 1959–1964 through Gallery Iris Clert, the American Cultural Center and various international exhibitions. Neither of us had cause for complaint in Paris.

But on returning to New York the aesthetic was dominated by Minimal and Pop Art. We both had struggles but took different routes. Leon was known but excluded from the “mainstream” and I was unknown, ignored and on occasion the War Series was ridiculed. I had shown in Paris, but it didn’t figure in New York.

LG New York, with its largely abstract view of art history, most recently Minimalism and Conceptualism and various updated versions, has never quite been able or willing to figure us in or contain us. We had a lot of success, perhaps hugely so, okay, so much so that what’s the bitch? Is the fact that our work is hardly represented in New York museums indicative? MoMA acquired a Codex: Artand in 1992 and in 1993 my former dealer Susan Caldwell donated a Riot to the Brooklyn Museum and the Whitney acquired a White Squad this year. Are these acquisitions historically retarded? Am I bitching?

Yes! Am I an outsider? Hardly! But maybe! Am I an insider? Should I shut up? I won’t! Nancy is a major insider in the feminist art world, okay, but that world still hasn’t been given that much credit in “Big Boy” strata.

You touched on a question that we were starting to ask, about the injustices you believe were done to you as artists. You are also constantly dealing with injustices in the world, and it seems to us that both your bodies of work occupy a truly moral position. However, the art world today is increasingly cynical, and we wonder how you come to terms with the moral stance of your work in the context of the art world of the 90s where such a stance is not cool?

LG It’s never been cool in the art world, because the art world is a protected enclave. The art world expresses the modern world in all kinds of ways. Contemporary art has shaped the way we visualize the modern world. In any case, the art world is a beautiful garden. Wonderful. Wonderful! It’s a treasured location, containing all sorts of cultivated and exotic objects. They’re often vigorous and cultivated lovingly. There is a high wall around this garden. And the garden grows beautifully.

But every now and then someone leaps up on the wall, and looks out and sees all kinds of strange growths that are not in the garden. There are other worlds out there which are only occasionally, inferentially, or sometimes reportorially contacted by the art. There are complex historical and socio-cultural reasons why the art world is such a protective enclave—obviously the art market demands it. People do not desire visualizations on their walls which have too great an urgency unless the impact is somehow diffused or ambiguously conveyed. A huge percent of collectors would rather have a Morris Louis on their wall than a White Squad or Nancy’s Torture of Women. And viewers indicate, well, we know about these problems, which
is true, they do know about them, but ask “why do I have to come home and look at this every night. I've had a hard day and I don't need to look at this painting.” Or, “I feel great, had a great day! Why do I want this to ruin my mood?”

**NS** The art world seems cool even in the face of real disasters, but the slightest tremors in the art market, art institutions, the art arena, can create a monumental crisis. There's a veneer of sophistication with certain privileged players who appear to be plugged into the latest trends. It seems transparent, if not naive to equate “quality” with high-priced sales, but that's the way the market operates. There is a huge contrast between the elitism of the art world and events in the real world, and a disconcerting abhorrence of dealing with tensions that are “on the edge” of psychic or social phenomena rather than the art world's preoccupation with “on the edge” formalisms. The more acceptable work remains within a discourse circumscribed by the idea of art itself. A conservative stance.

**LG** In large respects, our work is existential. We can identify with that era philosophically. I have never lost the feeling that that's where I am. We deal with ideas like pathos or fatality, stress or tension, ironies, derisions, in one way or another. We are not the only ones who do this, okay. But the point is, for the most part, the art world is more interested in conceptual arguments or morphological developments, you know transformative strategies, which are okay! This is a major aspect of what has occurred generically in the twentieth century, giving us a big picture, a sort of abstract notion of the twentieth century.

The difference is that the existentially minded artist is looking at the junctures where things don't match, don't quite fit. Not where colors or shapes jar against each other but in arenas where expectations and events as well as intentionality and political circumstances don't quite match or often match very badly, for example American “official” policy versus actual interventions. So the existentially minded or politically minded artist tries to function in those kinds of gaps.

*Are you concerned that your work might be considered propagandistic?*

**NS** In the early 80s I did three animal pieces. I wanted them to be propagandistic, unaesthetic, to broadcast facts of the cruelty and torture of animals. I used copies of photo documentation of animals suffering and I hand-printed excerpted information about their ordeals. These works were meant to inform, to let another audience in on it. I wanted to speak for those who couldn't speak for themselves. But, you know, these three pieces look like art to me.

This would be considered overt political art—but then all work is political and propagandistic. What about the Abstract Expressionists, mostly male, whose every gesture was a grand one, informing the audience of their grandiose sensibilities—that their feelings were of universal import. And what of the Minimalists, also male, who create an opaque wall, refusing a dialogue outside the art object itself. This is propaganda from whom to whom? Who dares to call what propagandistic?

**LG** Artists use the most effective means possible to make the “message” as clear-cut, as forceful, as possible. If we are not enthused about the “message,” if we think it doesn't work, we call it propaganda. Some art, some propaganda, is more meretricious, more corrupt, more naive, more pretentious. Figurative work is often put down because it's seen as a threat to the idealized positioning of art. I could characterize as propagandistic virtually any kind of figurative art. Take Assyrian hunting scenes where the King is shown in all his power. He's bigger than his retinue and the lion has certainly been killed by him, no one else—it's a drama of power and authority, and the hierarchy is upheld and glorified. We get the message! We have immediate access into some of the psychic forces that motivated that society and its explicit and implicit claims. It's clear-cut, as are Christian resurrections, crucifixions, etc., or John Singer Sargent or Manet.

**NS** Whatever the art, it is a pretty basic imperative that it should communicate, that there's some vehicle operating to carry the message—that's show business!

**LG** Abstract art points up the abstract mechanics of the society, an etherealization of the abstract forces that are so pervasive in the twentieth century. The abstract directional forces of, let's say, technology, finance, or pop culture cross borders in different transformative modes than modes of figuration. It is absurd to pretend that abstraction doesn't carry in its very modes of presentation propaganda for its ongoing claims of authenticity.

Modernism promotes the breakdown of the so-called master narratives, the basic narratives of religion, history, nationalism and so on. The narratives that confirm certain worldviews and class and gender orientations. The forms of modernism—Cubism and Futurism, Surrealism, Pop Art and everything else, are fractures which can serve to redefine and historicize what and who we are. To the extent that they telescope and slip through constraints, their fractures can be pleasurable.

The claims of modernist practice, which have truth, at least in their initiating aspects, come up against the hard facts that the world doesn't operate that way. Art becomes a commodity, and the logic of its freedom is highly
constrained, but not totally eradicated. But it’s pushed, it’s pushed very hard.

Occasionally you must find yourselves and the thrust of your work in opposition to each other’s ideas, and yet your values remain the same. We would like to know how you navigate through that. Nancy, your feminism must bounce off the fact that Leon is a very powerful...

NS Of course, of course. But what irritates me is that women artists are often expected to respond to the idea of the universal—the phallus, the symbol of power and authority. I would prefer to act without constant reference to it, unfettered from rather than in reaction to the male presence. Why should women artists be constrained to respond to male power and control? Let male artists respond to us! Which actually has occurred in various ways since the 70s.

In the Codex Artaud I use Antonin Artaud’s language to get my frustrations out into the world. The figures—hetero-homo-transsexual—were frequently tiny, my hands could cover them when the kids were going through the studio, but it wasn’t just the children. Perhaps I was mocking the giants that had been pouring forth in Leon’s Gigantomachies, and was reacting to the pompous world of postwar American painting, with its huge spaces and gesturings.

The largeness?

NS The large size of the canvases that male artists do in particular. Not that women haven’t done enormous works. I have done fragile linear works measuring 20 inches by 100 or 200 feet or more, but to me, in its characteristic manifestations, it is a male, and an American, phenomenon.

My figures were small, this was a ploy, just as working on paper was intentionally subversive, a personal rebellion, recognizing that I would no longer do “important” work, in terms of collectors’ preferences for canvases of the “proper” dimensions. Nobody was buying my work in any case. This was against the art world, the male establishment, and continues over time—male dominance, male wars, males as perpetrators. I reassessed my work when I began the War Series. Coming back from Paris to New York, I was fed up with oil painting night after night. I had to find my own way in the 60s....

You made a couple of decisions—to work on paper, to exclude men, to depict only women.

NS That decision to use only paper was made in ’66. Excluding men came about seven or eight years later. When you started the War Series.

NS Right. The War Series is about obscenities—sex and phallic extensions of power. Phallic eagles, devouring helicopters, the obscure language of the pilots, phallic Nazi crematoriums.

Leon, have you ever reacted to work of Nancy’s in the same way?

LG Nancy’s war paintings are a devastating critique of American policies in Vietnam and male self-visualization. But, then, men generally don’t have to be reactive to a situation which they dominate. The male attitude is to take for granted that men can do this, and men can do that. Men own the world, okay. Margaret Thatcher is called the “Iron Maiden” and given male attributes, and women in power like Hillary Clinton, who only has delegated power anyway, or Indira Gandhi are thought of as castrators. Men universally assume they are privileged to dominate.

I try to get at male aggression, at how men posture and so on. This is not a theater of the absurd, but the theater of reality, this is the way the world runs, the world as is. I don’t think I’m forcing the issue, nor over-dramatizing the evidence. If anything I can hardly portray it because of its ferocity. And if recently I try to probe various ironic and derivative terrains, irritable and itchy psychic locations, this is pretty mild stuff compared to the real thing.

Where does this place you in terms of Nancy’s work?

LG I don’t have all the answers to this. I recognize in Nancy’s work a subtle, complex and powerful subversion of much of what I’m about. She really can interrupt or counter these posturings. But even when she interrupts them, they are still there, because the world is still out there. Her work is extremely eloquent. What we have given each other, by mutual agreement and subtle consideration, is space to do our own work. And I’m not talking about physical space. If I make a criticism of her work and I do frequently, she knows there’s no ill will. I may misinterpret but it is not ill will, and I know exactly the same about her.

Is this a common occurrence?

LG It happens all the time. We intervene constantly, continuously, immediately, in the other’s work. It’s a major part of the logic of how we operate. It’s been going on for over 40 years. And we have no hesitancy about being very frank, if not bluntly explicit.

NS We call each other on a lot of things. Our studio, which we’ve shared since 1977, is a loft divided by a partial wall that is open on each end, and we each occupy one side. Essentially though, when we’re showing work or spreading it around the floor and when I put pieces together, we infringe on the other’s territory. We often drag the other over for an evaluation.
I trust Leon's opinion. It could be a minor problem that's cropped up—or a major issue. We give each other a lot of latitude and encourage one another to push harder, but we know we can't rely only on this two-way dialogue. And now we're profoundly associated, very much so with this exhibition in Paris, showing the relationship of our work over the years.

LG These are the paradoxes in who we are as artists and what we stand for. I am deeply implicated in Nancy's work, okay. And Nancy is deeply implicated in much of mine. We challenge the other's conceptualizations as well as critiquing process. What I'm saying is quixotic because anyone viewing her work would know I have nothing to do with it. Anyone looking at my paintings couldn't conceive that Nancy could have input.

Our work is highly differentiated, it represents different worldviews. Male personifications, seemingly exaggerated versions of the male (although I don't think it's exaggerated at all) and hers, perhaps extreme versions of the female persona. They both occur in this space, in their ideological, rhetorical manners.

Perhaps this is the first occasion where either of us has confessed that we are inside each other's work, inside each other's head, to this extent.

Would you talk about the crossovers and the similarities in your work, having focused on the differences?

NS There have been a lot of reciprocities. We follow our own trajectories but there are crossovers, junctures, sometimes discernible, sometimes less so. In our earliest days I know that Leon's work influenced mine a great deal even though there was a lot of give and take.

LG In our earliest years we both had an expressionist bias—I still do.

It emerged in the loose handling of paint, figural distortion, totemic elements and so on. There were others at the Art Institute that were working similarly, and we were under the influence of the Field Museum of Natural History. And in Italy in 1956, various versions of ancient art were highly influential.

NS The Etruscan in particular.

LG You are primarily Etruscan, I am Roman and Hittite!

And Hellenistic!

LG Etruscan art was crucial, of course, however, we selected different exemplars.

NS I was struck by the tomb figures of the Etruscans, the single figure or couples reclining on one elbow, staring at a cosmic future. The mature body, an aura of heavy sensuality. Also, I reacted to Tarot cards, in 1958–59, using divided space, the suggestion of double images, austere mothers and children, processional or ritualized images.

LG Nancy was interested in linear or lateralized figures, and I was interested in frontal figures, but nevertheless we both tend to push figures toward the front plane of the canvas.

In the late 50s, in Italy and afterwards, I got into the Philosophers, athletes and eroded male stances, reduced color, somber themes. Nancy used mostly black, occasionally gold which became like another black, tarnished, and I used primarily earth colors. In the early 60s, in Paris, she did the Black Paintings, lovers, couplings, and I was working somewhat more colorfully with lacquer paintings and big single figures.

NS And then I got into the War Series.

LG And the Gigantomachies. Nancy was ferociously specific about the Vietnam War, and here our work was very different—I had these huge guys clombering each other—enormous paintings—18 to 24 feet long. I was in this stage...

You were in your heroic phase.

LG Gigantesque phase. Going mad! A loft in New York, 10 feet by 24 feet—the first Gigantomachy. I was going nuts trying to do these kinds of things. Nancy got into the Vietnam issue in her work in 1966. I got into Vietnam as a subject matter in '69 in the Napalms although I had been active in the Artists and Writers Protest Against the War in Vietnam since 1964.

NS On returning to the United States in late 1964, I was horrified by our incursion into Vietnam. Now, no longer an expatriate in Paris, I felt a responsibility for the war—every American was implicated. This impelled me to rethink the direction my art would take. I was restless, unknown and wanted to make anti-war statements—manifestos against total destruction. I decided to work only on paper, to exorcise the war and deflate restrictive precepts in art practices. Nobody cared—nobody was looking.

What about the use of text?

NS I've used letters and texts intermittently since art school days. The combination of language and image seems to me to be a natural symbiosis, the one an extension of the other.

LG Nancy is all over the place. It is truly a global reach—aboriginal art, pop fashion, prehistoric earth goddesses, Josephine Baker, porn, etc., etc. Nancy used language very early. I am now using text, coming to it 40 years later, that's probably Nancy's belated influence! I pick up on graffiti,
what I call pseudo-metaphysics, garbled transmissions, etc. While she has influenced me in using language, I’ve influenced her in the use of biker photos!

NS That’s true. And porn!

We were interested when you said that both of you were drawn to late-phase cultural things—the Hellenistic, Etruscan—because we suddenly realize that ours may be a late-phase culture.

LG Late-phase culture is highly urbanized, devolving, frequently imploded. It’s sophisticated and knowing milieu, perhaps decadent, claiming very little innocence. Representative figures are equally media-wise within their culture just like we are in ours. Perhaps the closest psychological site to late twentieth century urban life is late Rome. I really go for late Roman art. The more degraded or rudimentary the image, the better.

There is a bronze statue in the Metropolitan Museum of the Roman Emperor Trebonianus Gallus, 3rd century A.D. The guy has a cone shaped head, piercing eyes, and his head is small in proportion to his bloated, powerful body with delicate hands. He is gross and brutal looking, a real head-basher. The kind of person who does the dirty work societies demand. They’re not intellectuals in universities, these guys.

NS Like King Kong. Leon did a huge sculpture while in art school call Jasper, a monster. This theme is pervasive in his art. The philosophers, they’re brutes also, stony patriarchs, dispensing the truth—a male privilege.

Intellectual brutes.

NS Intellectual brutes. Decreeing laws to the populace. Leon shows the power and brutality of all this and, I think, the vulnerability. There is a real continuum in Leon’s work from the 50s to today.

LG There’s a little range! The philosophers are scraped away, enduring and somehow rational. Man in possession of his faculties, contemplating fatality. That’s the way I think of it. Okay?

NS If you say so!

Do you see them as tragic figures?

LG Vulnerable. Enduring. Maybe tragic, sure. Fatality is always tragic. But it’s more than that—these things are beautiful to me, fatality and erosion, absolutely beautiful. That’s what I mean.

....

How long have the two of you been married?

LG We were married in ’51. It will be 43 years in December.

And you raised three sons together.

NS Very much so. And it affected me profoundly because what I remember after the birth of my first child, and then the second which was close, was a determination that I would prove to myself, perhaps to the world too, that I was an artist and not only a mother. I hadn’t really proven myself that much as an artist. I had shown in Chicago and had some minor recognition. Nevertheless, with kids coming along, I recognized the imperative shift of orientation and responsibility and was sensitive and maybe even paranoid about it. I think motherhood has been a stigma, whether overt or not, to women entering the professional world. I experienced a great deal of frustration early on.

LG This frustration was due partly to your isolation and perhaps your expectations. You were highly introverted in your practice and in your self-consciousness, more introverted than I was. I externalized my actions more, probably typical male practice. Nancy has really built up her public persona over the years.

You dramatized yourself in those early years, not publicly, but privately, as one who would not be recognized, who was destined to be a martyr. That she was one of those artists who society will never be able to come to grips with. With that kind of persona, you don’t go out into the world unless, in an unlikely circumstance, the world pushes in on you.

NS You want the world to come to you. I did have high expectations—I just thought that I’d make my art and then the “world” would recognize it. It was an unrealistic notion of how one gets work out. It’s not a fairy tale—where “virtue” is rewarded.

LG Like—it’s easy for a man to talk this way. You were justifying your isolation with these rather romantic notions of the artiste maudit. It was part of what was assumed by our generation, and it was certainly assumed by both of us, that success was not coming our way, that we were not going to make out. We took this for granted. For me though, while I was taking this for granted, I also had all these aggressive impulses. My work can have great insistence, and as my work became more differentiated or extreme I made it my business to be insistent on its behalf.

Earlier on you mention the confrontational or oppositional forces in your work. Do you want to talk a bit more about that?

LG My work is an “in your face, up yours” kind of art. And the guys I portray, one could say I was celebrating rather than exposing them. For example,
if the Pentagon had wanted, they could have displayed one of the huge Vietnam paintings, and claimed it as a victory painting. It shows our boys vertical and the gooks down. That's a victory painting. Just like the Romans and Greeks showed off their victories, the winners and the losers. So why is this an anti-war painting?

Well, nobody would ever mistake Nancy's anti-war paintings for victory paintings. My work exposes vulgar, gross actions. On another level, they can be considered celebratory of these kinds of macho strutting attitudes. Two police agents with a gun on the ground, a gun to his head. I try to expose both victimizer and victim, the psychic circumstances, their looks, and so on. Is this an American strut? A universal strut? I say yes.

Then within fifteen feet, there are these delicate, ephemeral, often gaily colored images of Nancy's. Figures float against each other. Goddesses appear. 

NS I have monsters too.

LG Yes! Your work is both horrific and celebratory. And characteristically delicate even when horrific. I grant you a greater range of human possibilities— even if men are absent! Nancy has the capacity to understand these guys and what they're up to and what I'm trying to do with them.

NS Tolerate.

LG Maybe. Maybe there's more at stake. I have found her a number of images, the more extreme images. She doesn't check out the bookstores, etc. where I search. Porn, sexual comic books for adults, for example, that drawing of the woman who is stretched out in bondage, explicit and exploitative.

NS Viciously exploitative and fake allure, like showgirls participating in the torture. Leon found a photo image that I've used a great deal, a Gestapo victim, nude, her body bound, a noose around her neck and she's gagged, about to be hanged. It looks like a porn photo—it is porn and it is actual. I developed a plate of it, but for a long time I never used it. I didn't have the context for it until I read Brecht's The Ballad of Marie Sanders, The Jew's Whore, and I put the two together. Leon finds a lot of images. He's my principal agent to search out images!

Have either of you ever had a period of crisis in your thinking about your own art?

NS Oh, yeah, a lot. I discussed earlier the crucial and abrupt shift in subject and process after Paris. The War Series. Antonin Artaud. The great shift into totally feminist themes and concerns. Each of these was a major self-confrontation as well as a change of external direction.

LG I have been in crisis frequently over direction, content and resolution. Where am I going? What am I up to? But this has always been resolved and I can be quite elated in the resolution process. The kind of crisis that is not resolvable by one's own effort is, of course, how one makes out in the art world game! But such a discussion would lead us too far astray.

But you two have weathered it all.
We bear younger artists talking and the competition between the male and female member can sometimes be enough to destroy a relationship.

LG It hasn't happened yet! There's always tomorrow! It can be a bitter situation, when one is getting quite a lot of attention, and the other is getting...

NS Very little.

LG We are fairly immune by now to the put-downs involved.

....

Have we asked overtly enough whether you believe that art has the power to change or improve human behavior? It's a tough question, but we were wondering if you would just give it a stab.

NS I used to feel that artists have insight, but are powerless as real world actors. And I think that came from very painful, personal experience in that I was unable to get the art work out. If you don't get your voice heard, it is rendered sterile. Now I'm more optimistic in that I have a dialogue within the art world, and sometimes beyond. And this is utopian, too, the hope that the work might generate a discussion of sorts. I hope that I am not just preaching to the converted, but that I might also reach those that would take exception. But it's hard to know. Art isn't going to change the world so much as the visual appearance of it, the way we look at it.

LG Many people fear what will happen if traditions break down. Contemporary art is associated with the new. The artist hopes to change the look of things. The changes are picked up by various groups and rejected by others, and the tensions over cognitive strife can easily become a vicious struggle. The arts change the interplay of ideas at any given time. And people who are suspicious of artists have cause to be suspicious, to suspect that some of their values are being challenged.

And to what extent have you internalized the values of that society, even as self-identified radical artists? You're challenging, perhaps affronting society. You're pushing your argument in the face of society and you proclaim, “we'll see if you can handle this”. So you're selling the product. You're selling the product as an affront but an affront that the art world can learn to appreciate.
Do either of you think about how you expect your work to be read, understood and responded to in a hundred years?

LG One can expect to be wrong! But here goes! Nancy's work performatively summarizes many of the kinds of existential conflicts a woman artist undergoes in the latter part of the twentieth century. I can't believe that Torture of Women won't be an extraordinary document of great visual and conceptual resonance in the future. Nancy's dancing figures, which are more utopian, may still be recognized as utopian a hundred years from now. It is doubtful that women will have broken their bonds. So the utopian aspects of Nancy's work will still be utopian.

I have asserted a kind of history painting in much of my work. I think it has an American look and the figures cross the canvas in typical American stance. Not specific battles, you know. How violence is prevalent, not just in the United States but almost universally, in militaristic and para-military terms. And that's not going to change either. Perhaps my work will be more easily acceptable because it will be possible to say "that's how it was in the twentieth century," even while ignoring artists in the twenty-first century who may be imaging equivalent subjects because it is too close at hand. It will be possible to coat the immediacy of my paintings with an historicism which will ease the impact. But the work is so upfront that it can only be partially co-opted. Dare I infer that we will be more crucial in the future in the recognition of what has occurred in our time? Dangerous futurology!

NS I can't envision how we will be remembered as time strips away much of the tension and resistance as it appears in our own time. We both claim to be artists dealing with contemporary issues, imaging figures, participating in the drama of the late twentieth century. Each in our own way records and visually heightens our milieu—taking the extraordinary kinds of information we are privy to—the overload of this era, to use this and turn it into something that will, I hope, resonate now and in the future.

An acceptable affront. When you said you put your art up in the face of society and say "can you handle this," and then society does, what does that indicate to you?

NS The artist becomes a valuable item—his or her body, or body of work, is bought. That artist has become a beneficiary of and is dependent on patronage, on the market. The art world is always looking for excitement, for something new to embrace—to flirt with danger, to taunt bourgeois society—while guaranteeing future respectability. The art world is essentially conservative, lots of small whirlpools of anticipated “excitement” but ingratiating to power and money.