

Chutzpah Galleries

Presents

For Sale

Pfui, Ancient Egyptian God of Derision

Medium: Acrylic Painting on Masonite with Birch Frame

Artist: Welles B Goodrich

Date: Circa 1982

Dimensions: 40" W x 52" H

Price: \$75,000

Pfui Backstory

Pfui is silly. I like silly.

Back in 1969 I had an inspiration I described in an essay called Environmental Psychotherapy. The idea was to consciously choose qualities I found attractive and apply them to my creative work. I chose beauty, truth and humor as those qualities I most wished to embody. The final bit of that illumination is that I by consciously creating with those spiritual qualities I would reflect them as a person. Fifty years later I can attest that strategy worked. It was a process that will never end.

Pfui is my broadest foray into humor. If there would be such a thing as slapstick fine art it would fall into that genre. Parts of it are downright stupid. I like stupid, sophisticated stupid. It took me nearly a year to make it. Much of that time was spent in the preliminary studies of ancient Egyptian culture, including hieroglyphics. I thought up up stupid jokes in hieroglyphics, secretly hiding Rolling Stone's Lips on a fish for example. They were so obscure I expected no one would ever notice and that was really funny.

Designing the painting, the actual work of painting itself and woodwork needed to create the frame took about four months. I used Liquitex acrylic paints on a prepared masonite 'canvas'. It was coated with white shellac to avoid bleed-through of the tannin in the masonite. The frame was made of birch boards with osage orange wood used for the pyramids.

One of the more obvious aspects of Pfui is the headgear. It is actually a fair representation of the crown/headdress the pharaohs wore as they rode their chariots to war. It looked like a bowling pin to my uncultured eye so of course I had to have a dung beetle, um a Scarab, rolling a bowling ball toward it from between its back legs, rather than a ball of dung. Then there is the sistrum in shades of green which was a musical instrument used mostly in divine worship but also as a warning when a VIP was coming through town. I love the silly pomposity of self-important people who sent a slave ahead of them with a clacker to warn the hoi-polloi of their imminence.

It also seemed obvious to me that a Pfui (being a God of Derision) should also be the God of Gambling. So I added two sets of dice to the picture. One is 'in the air' and one is 'on the ground'. Look carefully and you'll find that all the matched sides of the air borne set add up to seven or eleven. When they come to rest they are snake eyes. Way to go Pfui. Never give a sucker an even break.

The entire process of creating Pfui was a joyful undertaking with lots of scarcely repressed hilarity as I imagined all the jokes no one would ever appreciate. I think the lesson of the piece is that you must laugh at your own jokes. You may be the only appreciative audience!

