# Interview 27-01: Pat Oleszko

**Tell us a little bit about yourself as an artist/designer. What is your practice like; how do you work?**

I am a mixed-up media and performance artist whose work rages from the street to the stage to the silver screen. Operating primarily through the wild range of humor, with a nod to exorcism and a bow to the fool, performances take place on the avenues, theaters, museums, fields, mountains, waters and on Spatial Occasions ever enhanced with an assordid mass of splendid ephemera. Literally a-dressing absurdity with elaborate costumes and props, the pursuit also include videos, inflatables, the cast-off thousands and whatever else comes to mind though always with much puntification. The truth squirts.

Inspiration comes from peculiarities, inequities and opportunity. I work from materials, words and circumstance that begin to shape a performance; it might be an object, a book, or situation psychological, political or environmental that demands my attention and starts the process. First there are drawings and collecting materials to make stuff into costumes, props or writings, which spawns more conversation with myself and others, until eventually the piece actually takes root. Once I get an idea and say it aloud, it must be done, no matter how challenging, so I am very careful before I announce the concept. My word is my commando.

**Please describe your work on *Odds at Sea Bahian Odyssey* from your point of view.**

This piece grew out of a residency at the Sacatar Foundation, located on an island off of Salvador, the capital of Bahia, Brazil. I arrived with nothing, determined to find some way to work with the indigenous materials and circumstances. The themed residency was comprised of performers of different stripe that created an amazing input and synergy. The Condomble religion of the area, a syncretic amalgam from African sources, voodoo and Catholicism was also compelling as was the decaying church at the top of the hill. Then came the discovery of the profusion of cheap, colorful plastics and paper materials used in Carnival. All that combined with the dazzling sun and water created a performance of fantastic proportions featuring a collection of mystic mountain myth-fits who lived in that ancient church and were spirited away by the curious clarion call of a boy, “To sea! To see!”

I created all the costumes and characters based on personalities and abilities of my fellows. The skeletal musician Bee, my muse, became the Beecock with the others as the Fool, Flower Girl, the Sorceress and myself as Eye-Aye. The Small Boy was a friend who was learning circus skills from the two women in our group. Having constructed the situation with costumes, place and scenario, rented the wooden canoe from the fishermen, I hired a local filmmaker (who spoke no English and I no Portuguese) and directed him as the event transpired, down the mountain through the town to the water, from dawn to dusk. The performance was exhilarating and exhausting, a daylong five-mile journey in character but the warm response of the people and the sea was ample reward.

**Have you had any memorable responses to this piece? And if yes, please describe.**

I received a much needed grant as a result of it, was invited to the Prague Quadrennial for Theater Design, was asked to mastermind and officiate at the wedding of the Beecock and the photographer Tamara, and Jorgo, the beautiful boy who lead the Mystics to the sea, cried at the end of the event and said it was the best day of his life.

**Please name three artists/designers you are influenced by and why.**

Oskar Schlemmer and the Bauhaus were an early influence, (I discovered him when I was 16.) His translation of the body into a breathing sculptural art forum established a world unto itself that was not only theater but also art in life. The Bauhaus parties famously were where a lot of their best ideas were born is something I thoroughly endorse.

Buster Keaton was not only a brilliant performer but also technical wizard that devised most of the apparatus and mechanics of his astonishing early films. The depth of his character and the seriousness with which he approached the absurdity of the story created as much humor as awe.

Fellini created visions, visually and emotionally from which I have never recovered. Both Keaton and Fellini worked in a kind of filmed performance using the world as they perceived it with audacity, humor, lyricism and great humanity something that I can always turn to for inspiration.

**What are you currently working on?**

I am bringing a lot of performance pieces that I had filmed recently into a finished video form, notably some works about the environment, *The Creeps and Charismatics of Charlatan, West Virginia*, a version of Beowulf called *Burning Mac*, and *See/Whorled* as well as others. There is a book and DVD upcoming of the collected works, a major installation/performance in Rosendale, New York at the Women’s Studio Workshop, an event in Moscow and an exhibition of the artifacts from my arty past.

**What is your dream project?**

Spinning straw into gold. It would be sew help-fool.

**What is one of your favorite 4D artworks, or pieces of design, and why?**

*The Carnivale* in Viareggio on the north west coast of Italy, noted for its staunch left-leaning politics, is a modern day miracle on wheels. The floats are four stories tall, entirely hand-made of papier mache, operated by ropes and levers and are brilliantly executed satires of local, national and international politics and celebrity. The conglomeration of wickedly pointed commentary is a political cartoon come to life, writhing and breathing smoke, making mamor racket with hordes of adolescents in fur costumes dancing underneath. I have seen Bill Clinton with Monica Lewinsky in a heart-shaped bed gyrating in every direction with smoke rising and the nine chief justices on pigs flying around them. I’ve witnessed a brilliant attack on the death penalty with an electric chair and a skeleton that gets zapped and literally blasted out of its seat. As these massive kinetic sculptures trundle down the palm laden avenue, everyone, yes everyone, throws fistfuls of quarter-sized confetti at one another so by end of the afternoon the pavement is knee deep in multicolored paper in what appears to be the largest walk thru pointillist painting in the world. Some sort of costume is mandatory for the audience so there are plenty of weird hats, silly string attacks and the mood is bizarre and thrilling. The beach is just on the other side of the old hotels lining the avenue and strolling along the water with a few bizarrely dressed characters wandering on the sand with the noise and visions of the moving floats peering over the tops of the buildings is the most Fellini-esque moment I have ever experienced. It may well have been the best art I saw in Italy.

# Interview 25-01: Stefan Prosky

**Tell us a little bit about yourself as an artist/designer. What is your practice like; how do you work?**

I like to make art that moves. My MFA is in Computer Art with a concentration on 3D animation and physical computing. I look for symbolic inanimate objects and think about an artful playful way to make them move and act. My portfolio has many pieces that are animated... baby bottles, furry spheres, simple solar powered drawing robots, and an animatronic pencil. Most of them use a micro-controller based robot mechanism of some kind. The programing of their movement in response to sensor input is the most important part of a piece in my 4D practice. What they look like and personify is the most important part of my design practice.

**Please describe your work on *Partisan* from your point of view.**

*Partisan* is a sumo-robot match between the US Capitol versus the Whitehouse with 3 rules.

1) Stay in the black political arena.

2) Look for the other wing of government, also known as a Democrabot.

3) If found, shove the other Democrabot out of the black political arena.

If a Democrabot is pushed out of the arena, it loses that match of power. To ensure a fair and balanced match, a live judicial attendant is included with *Partisan* to adjudicate all unclear outcomes of these contests of power.

Both the programs in each Democrabot are the same. They each use the same types of InfraRed sensors to sense the ring and each other.

The US Capitol and politics have always been a symbol in the background of my life as I grew up on Capitol Hill. I began with a simple robotic capitol that would just wander back and forth over a big black printed symbol and draw over it with white paint. The symbol would be a dollar sign or a mushroom cloud or handgun, a graphic with strong cultural meaning, something that would be even more powerful if whitewashed away. While I was working on this piece, an artist friend, Jim Magner, was working his own series of paintings of the US capitol. We both were upset with the invasion of Iraq and decided to collaborate on a robotic piece called *Future Capitol*. This work was a camouflaged US Capitol with cannons that would endlessly patrol a pentagon shaped table with concrete walls. The design choices for *Future Capitol* were a bit strong and took a definite side of the political argument. My whitewash piece was a bit too preachy for me as well, so I set it aside. I felt that I would like to try to make a political piece that spoke to the current gridlock in politics without taking a side. *Partisan* is the result.

**Have you had any memorable responses to this piece? And if yes, please describe.**

Well, an older woman took one look at *Future Capitol* and said "that's disgusting" and quickly left the gallery that it was patrolling. *Partisan*, because it does not take a political side usually gets a warmer response from viewers. *Partisan* allows viewers to make up their own mind and their own satirical comments about the current state of political affairs. Grade-school-age kids love the wrestling and game aspect of *Partisan*'s design. They have chanted "capitol! capitol! capitol!” to get the US Capitol to shove the Whitehouse out of the black political circle. Only a few folks older than eight root for Congress. Most people root for the Whitehouse to win *Partisan*'s shoving match.

**Please name three artists/designers you are influenced by and why.**

Norman McLaren for his amazing paintings of sounds in the soundtracks of his films, and of course, his animation.

Laurie Anderson for her remix of how to play a violin, her stories, and what she did with pillow speakers.

Yoko Ono for her book called *Grapefruit* which is filled with conceptual art events.

I feel that all of these artists have very personal ways of using / abusing the accepted methods of 4D art and design. They are playful with their medium and their message. I love that.

**What are you currently working on?**

Life is too short. (I'm a cancer survivor) I am working on a piece that will try to seduce the viewer into moving an piece of medical hardware (IV rack / holder ) across the room. A "cute and lovable" talking IV hanger that tries to get you to move it around as a favor... if you do, it will give you some kind of audio visual reward. Maybe it will be sick and gets better if you move it. That might be too much, we'll see... you have to build these things and play with them.

**What is your dream project?**

A real-time multimedia instrument that plays with music, images and our sense of smell. The sci-fi author Samuel Delany wrote about such an instrument in his novel *Nova*. He called it a sensory syrinx. I have wanted to build one for years.

**What is one of your favorite 4D artworks, or pieces of design, and why?**

*Cathartic User Interface* (1995) by Perry Hoberman <http://www.perryhoberman.com/page30/>

This piece consists of a large computer keyboard with a large projected computer screen. Soft balls are thrown at the keyboard. As different keys are hit multiple humorous o/s error messages appeal on the projected faux computer screen. I love this piece because it vents a frustration I face and feel everyday, in a satisfying physical way. It works on several levels, satirical commentary on general frustration with computing, a fun interactive installation for kids to throw things at, and catharsis for professionals who suffer at the hands of Microsoft or Apple everyday.

*Trichopterae* by Hubert Duprat. Pieces of stone fly jewelry made in collaboration with the artist. <http://www.leonardo.info/isast/articles/duprat/duprat.html>

I believe this is might be 4d artwork? You decide. I feel this is a sublime piece of biological collaborative art, I maybe too biased to judge as I was a research tech in biotechnology for 10 tens before becoming an artist.