

### The Pacific Rim Sculptors Group

Ever since Aristotle introduced his notion of the academy—a place for creative individuals to gather, drink, and talk—artists have met regularly to socialize and share ideas and resources. From Picasso and his group who met at the Lapin Agile in Paris to the Abstract Expressionists who shared convivialities at the Cedar Bar in New York, to members of the Royal Art Lodge, a Winnipeg-based artists group whose members gather to listen to Edith Piaf and collectively draw each week, the camaraderie of these groups has consistently influenced individual expression and enabled a collective voice and visibility.

The Pacific Rim Sculptors Group (PRSG) has a unique history in this artistic continuum. The group was founded in the San Francisco Bay Area during the late 1980s by six sculptors who wanted to create a forum to exchange ideas and exhibit their work. By 1990 they became a formalized entity and began to welcome other artists. During this early phase they established by-laws to ensure that they would remain “a democratic organization allowing for everyone to contribute ideas.” In 1990 PRSG also established its pivotal relationship with the Contract Design Center (now called 600 Townsend) in San Francisco, where the group holds indoor and outdoor sculpture exhibitions four times per year.

Membership in the Pacific Rim Sculptors Group offers sculptors working in all media various opportunities, including participation in regular juried exhibitions and a slide registry made available to curators, galleries, critics, and collectors; a newsletter that lists exhibition opportunities; a Web site; informal slide nights for members to view and discuss work; and the sharing of resources among the group’s members. The juried exhibitions have been especially meaningful; the group has invited such artists, curators, gallerists, and collectors as Manuel Neri, Karen Tsujimoto, Ruth Braunstein, Richard



Above and below: two views of “Off the Rim: Selections from the Pacific Rim Sculptors Group” at Grounds For Sculpture, 2004.

Berger, Jim Melchert, and Rene di Rosa to select themes and participants. Juried shows have created visibility, feedback, and encouragement for members, resulting in expanded exhibition and collection opportunities for some.

PRSG’s commitment to increasing public awareness of sculpture and providing greater visibility for its members has also led to off-site exhibitions in the Bay Area, at local art venues such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Rental Gallery, the South of Market Cultural Center (SOMAR) Gallery,

the Richmond Art Center, and the Oakland Museum. PRSG has also sponsored or co-sponsored exhibitions in various northern California locations, including an outdoor show in Mountain View, and a seven-site project, “Pacific Rim Sculptors Group Exhibits the Gold Country,” in Sonoma, Murphys, and Jamestown, California. Since 1996 PRSG has also hosted the Bay Area Student Sculpture Biennial, an exhibition of college student work at 600 Townsend, and sponsored an exhibition of work by the Polish sculptor Jędrzej Stepak.



As part of the quest for exhibition possibilities, Peter Hiers, co-chair of PRSG’s exhibition committee, approached Grounds For Sculpture (GFS), which sponsors annual exhibitions of work from sculptors groups across the country. GFS curator Brooke Barrie was enthusiastic, and “Off the Rim: Selections from the Pacific Rim Sculptors Group” was on view during summer 2004—the first exhibition of a West Coast sculptors group at GFS. The show included 33 PRSG sculptors, whose work was selected on the basis of merit rather than style, medium, or concept. Barrie says that the exhibition was meant as a survey of the best work—she had no preconceived ideas about what types of objects would be chosen. When asked what distinguishes PRSG work, Barrie explained that it “has a playfulness to it that is refreshing. We were impressed by the wide and varied use of materials... Compared to other regions, there seemed to be more ceramic sculptures, which can be attributed to the strong tradition of ceramics in the Bay Area.”

Over the past 15 years, PRSG has established itself as a visible and noteworthy organization. One of the group’s most important strengths lies in the recognition that it is a society of artists. PRSG retains a fluid leadership structure (the chair and committees rotate every six months) and employs an administrator to take care of organizational details. This enables PRSG to remain dynamic and prevents burn-out among members. Alternating leadership has also inspired a variety of programs, such as an evening at the Crucible (a Bay Area metal casting facility), a visit to the artist residency program at the Sanitary Landfill facility near San Francisco, and an afternoon of videos by and about sculptors. Of course, PRSG events are lively gatherings, fulfilling Aristotle’s belief in the necessity for a congenial forum where artists can drink and talk, share resources, and envision a shared and unbounded creative universe.

—Terri Cohn