

Lars Byrresen Petersen, "Allan McCollum's Perfect Couples," *Visionaire*, September 23, 2014.

VISIONAIRE

ALLAN MCCOLLUM'S PERFECT COUPLES

By Lars Byrresen Petersen



The Shapes Project: Collection of Ninety-Six Perfect Couples

He's made over 10,000 copies of a fulgurite, he's made over 30,000 different shapes from objects found on the street or in drug stores, he's made over 100 sculpture casts of the dog from Pompei, he's framed the 1200 most popular names—600 female, 600 male and he's made 750 casts of dinosaur bones, not one from the same bone with the same color. The American artist Allan McCollum is all about quantity and his work is nothing if not impressive.

"One of the ways I try to help myself feel that I make things in the best possible democratic way is that I'll make large collections, like this Collection of One Hundred and Eight Perfect Couples here. I forget what the price is—it's high—but if you divide it by 108 and look at the value of each one then it's not that expensive," McCollum laughs, sitting at Petzel gallery, which hosts the conceptual artist's new exhibition The Shapes Project: Perfect Couples.

Petzel

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The Shapes Project: Eighty-Four Perfect Couples

Although it's not the cause of his obsession with quantity, price is an important factor to McCollum. "My analysis of way the art world is structured is that certain objects are meant for the extremely wealthy and powerful people and certain objects are made for people that hardly have any money at all and they buy a postcard of an artwork," he says, explaining how difficult it has been for him to accept that to make a living from being an artist, your work has to come with a price tag not everybody is "comfortable" with.

Coincidentally, while walking around the gallery, a buyer shakes McCollum's hand and tells him he's just donated a McCollum piece to the Whitney and now he's bought one of the new works. McCollum laughs, asks which one and then hurries away waving at me to follow. "If you grew up in a working class like I did, you don't generally want to feel that you're spending your life making rich people feel happy. But you know, what are your choices," he smiles.

His work hasn't always been sold in complete installations; when he started making his famous Surrogate Painting and Plaster Surrogate series, pieces could be bought one at a time off the wall. There were 20 different sizes ranging from \$100 to \$500. "Many of my friends bought one but what the dealers hated is that even the wealthy collectors would come in and buy one. They convinced me to make solidified groups that would cost more because it took them too much time to write receipts for every single piece," he laughs.

Petzel

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The Shapes Project: Collection of Twenty-Four Perfect Couples

The contrast between mass production and handmade is often what inspires McCollum. All of the shapes in the new pieces have been scrollsawed by hand in New England Maple by a pastor in Maine. "Many craftworkers in Maine often have financial difficulties. China, for instance, has taken over much of the craft industry in the country; in fact, a majority of the forests in Maine are now actually owned by China and the demand for granite from the quarries of Maine has dwindled, since the use of concrete ballooned. So one of

they ways they traditionally make money is working from home, creating small family businesses. That's one of the reasons I chose Maine because they need customers, due to the fact that so much handicraft can now be imported from China for much lower prices," he says, as he shows the horizontal brush strokes that can be seen on the shapes.

A tabletop at Petzel Gallery has been dedicated to binders showing the various combinations of the shapes and the different color blends. "I chose 12 25 basic colors and had my assistant mix about 600 variations of the colors by adding beige, white, grays, and black. So she come up with over 600 variations and then we narrowed it down to 288 so that project could go on," he explains, flipping through a few of the many binders.

As he walks back into the exhibition room he says: "I was trying to humanize them by thinking of them as "perfect couples." It could be a mother and a daughter, or lovers, or a dominant and submissive partner etc. Sometimes I imagine that they a figures of people in bed together and we're looking at them from above," proving that there's more to it than just quantity.

Allan McCollum's *The Shapes Project: Perfect Couples* is on display at Petzel Gallery until October 4th.

<http://www.visionaireworld.com/blog/allan-mccollums-perfect-couples/>