

Portrait

Jim Dine's latest icon pops in from the past

Jim Dine emerged as one of the major pop artists in the early 1960s and has remained a significant figure in American art. His accomplishments are vast: He's a master draftsman, sculptor, printmaker and photographer whose works can probably be found in nearly every major museum collection. Dine is as voracious in his choice of mediums as he is focused on capturing particular objects. His portrayals of hearts, for instance, are massive 12-foot bronze sculptures and delicate small prints; his bathrobes are giant haunted paintings and smaller etchings.

Dine, along with his contemporaries, taught us to see the potential beauty in ordinary objects.

At the Richard Gray Gallery, there is an exhibition of sculptures the artist made of his obsession: Pinocchio. But the wooden puppet is not a new thing for Dine.

The beloved children's tale, written in 1881 by Italian journalist Carlo Collodi, always captivated him. "It is a gripping story. Particularly for a little boy," Dine says during a phone interview. Pinocchio, in short, plays pranks upon his maker—the kindly woodcarver Geppetto—and gets into a heap of trouble. We remember the part about his nose.

Dine found a doll in a junk store that was made at the time of the Disney movie in 1940. "It is hand-painted and has real clothes," he says. "I have been carrying the doll since 1964." He has found a few newer versions on eBay, but none as good as the original doll. He adds that he used the doll over the years as a model for photographs and drawings.

"It is completely screwed up now because I have taken it around with me," says Dine, a self-described gypsy. He was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1935 and has lived in New York,



London, Vermont, Munich, Los Angeles and Key West. He now lives part of the year in Walla Walla, Washington, and Paris. Pinocchio has seen the world.

But it wasn't until 1996 that Dine started to seriously work with the icon. He began to photograph his Pinocchio, later making paintings and drawings.

One of Dine's next projects will be to create illustrations for a new edition of Collodi's timeless story.

When Dine started making his Pinocchios, he used wood. That he should carve it first seemed appropriate. After all, he says, "...it is the mystery of this talking stick that Geppetto found and released. It is like a metaphor for creativity."

Dine has two big commissions on his plate—one in Oslo and another in a small town in Sweden. And the Block Museum will host a retrospective of his drawings next year.

What about his other projects?

"I am starting an idea for a very large Pinocchio," he says. It will be in bronze.—RL

"Jim Dine: Pinocchio as I Knew Him" is at the Richard Gray Gallery through May 20 (see Galleries, Michigan Ave).