



## Spumoni Village

CHARLES-GENE McDANIEL

Spumoni Village does not appear on any map, and probably never will. It existed only briefly as a tangible place—a place of joy and celebration. It doubtless continues its fantastical existence in the minds of the artists who created it, and in the memories of those who visited it and relive that happy time.

Cosmo Campoli, the noted Chicago sculptor, and eleven of his young artist friends created their Spumoni Village in honor of the long-forgotten inventor of the Italian ice cream confection. After all, "Alfredo Spumoni" has not had his due and he was "as great as Rembrandt." Campoli explained with tongue tucked inconspicuously in cheek. "He made more children happy than Rembrandt."

Spumoni is derived from the Italian *spumone*, meaning froth, and like the froth, its namesake village was short-lived, flourishing from early May through early August at Gallery 1134 in Chicago. The village was a collection of work with no unifying theme other than just sheer pleasure. The creator of spumoni—whoever he or she was—would have been proud: Not only were the pink and yellow and green of the layered ice cream to be seen, but dayglo orange and grape and assorted other joyous combinations, too.

The setting itself was incongruous: a building which once housed coffin showrooms, at 1134 West Washington Street, in a rundown area west of the Loop that accommodates many of the city's wholesale produce markets. It was appropriate, somehow, that an affirmation of life occurred in a place formerly devoted to the denial of death.

"We are trying to create humor," Campoli, the village mayor, told me. "There is not enough of it in this country."

Campoli is fifty-four, bespectacled, with an iron-gray beard and untamed hair flowing back from a high

hairline. He is chairman of the sculpture department at the Institute of Design of the Illinois Institute of Technology. He is irrepressible, somewhat madcap, uninhibited in his verbal and artistic expression, but he is also an artist to be taken seriously. His work has been shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, as well as in Moscow, Paris, Italy, and West Germany.

Campoli is not one to let a work of art speak for itself: He extemporizes and free-associates about his work. To talk with him is to tap a fountain of fantasy. The show, he said, was "all about probably the direction we should go in order to have joy in the world instead of pessimism and unhappiness."

It celebrated, he continued, "the love of color, the love of life, the love of food, the love of the sun, the love of clouds, the love of everything."

"We artists feel we're very important and can in the future, if society allows us, improve our society to a great amount," he went on. "Artists are held back, undernourished. It's time to improve cities and we know how, especially we artists of the 1950s who went through World War II. We want a world without war. We want armies to work together instead of fighting. We want to build happy situations for people to feel whole again. We feel we have the power to do this."

Among his many verbalized dreams is a plan to have children decorate empty old houses as happy places where old people can live. And he envisions "teapot club houses," shaped like teapots, where the "Children Help Children Crusade" could meet and discuss how to help other children—"The most talented people in the world are three to eight. They can redesign our cities."

For a start, Campoli would set them loose redesigning and repainting storefronts in the drab neighborhood of Gallery 1134, overshadowed by the stark, sterile

*Charles-Gene McDaniel is a Chicago writer.*

Sears Tower just to the east—"They can make this area into a jewel, as seen from the sky."

What Campoli described as "the most beautiful shoes you ever saw" were contributed by children to Spumoni Village. Children at Morgan Park Academy took all kinds of shoes and painted them in bright designs suitable for a child or a clown or a free spirit or a Spumoni Villager, which are all the same thing.

Campoli's own contributions to the village were childlike, whimsical, and birthday colored. One was a model for a circular playhouse, the wall in the form of seated lions and the doors shaped and colored like children of various races.

However, intentional or not, the focal piece of the village was a work by Sonja Weber Gilkey, a native of Holland, who crocheted two almost life-sized figures in psychedelic yarn and called them Mr. and Mrs. Spumoni. Mrs. stood while Mr. reclined in a chair, a big crocheted ice cream cone drooping from his hand. Surrounding the couple was a hanging wall of Gilkey's macrame work, easily accessible to anyone who wanted to visit them in their living room.

The most serious work in the traditional sense was that of Robert W. Hutchinson, who explores the effects of color on form. For example, a set of short, square poles leaning symmetrically against a wall was painted in gradations of rainbow colors, each blending into the next. The effect was clean and pure and beautiful. Even more interesting were Hutchinson's shaped canvases, painted in hard-edge fashion.

Arlene Becker used natural materials, such as walnut shells symmetrically arranged on a base of earth, and plastic-coated cicadas, in juxtaposition with clean-line fabricated materials, such as heavy wire milk-crates. The statement was not so much contrast as unity of form and material. As she said, "My sculpture speaks of landscape—not the objects of landscape, but I use our most solid materials to express the color, space and formless form of the air surrounding us."

But the works of Hutchinson and Becker were esthetic rest stops in a Disneyland of art.

Nancy Forest Brown created realizations of fantasy using Woolworth materials. She put together a child's ice box of delights, including some sharks eating small boxes of cereal, and harmonicas shaped like carrots. And she had a child's stove with flowers gushing from the oven, and "Santa Claus at Lake Tahoe"—St. Nick, dressed in green and orange, standing on a plot of desert with a cactus.

Thomas J. Cvetkovich stacked toy pianos and wired one of them to play continuously. And Sheri Lynn Smith, a professional cook as well as an artist, had green bagels with pastry flowers in her lazy susans of bought and created objects.

Like spumoni, Spumoni Village was joyous, frothy, and too brief. And like that anonymous Italian creator of the confection, Cosmo Campoli and his young artist friends made children and the child-like happy. It's likely that they will go on doing so, in one way or another. □

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## America's Business

Presidential utterances to the effect that we have nothing to fear but fear itself, or that we should ask not what our country can do for us, or that your President is not a crook, are all very well for the schoolbooks. But the first magistrate who laid down the single philosophy that guides all our governors, be they Republicans or be they Democrats, was President Calvin Coolidge, who summed up all their law and most of their prophecy when he declared that the business of America is business.

The Government of the United States bows to no master, except whatever corporation happens to knock upon its door with an appetite. Thanks to this universal reverence for Coolidge's Law, liberal officeholders have nothing in common with conservative ones so much as their shared servility to corporate greed.

Not long ago, for example, Governor Hugh Carey of New York, a Democrat of otherwise pietistic progressivism, felt compelled to fire Ogden Reid, his Environmental Commissioner, for having affronted the General Electric Company. Absent Governor Carey's training in Coolidge's Law, there might have been the impression that General Electric had itself offered no small affront to the people of New York by dumping poisons into the waters of the Hudson River.

After being caught by Commissioner Reid, General Electric handsomely offered to give the state \$2 million for research on water pollution. Commissioner Reid responded to this suggestion that he crown the polluter as the patron of learning by proclaiming that he would not sell out to General Electric. Given the national theology, it is surprising that the statute on high treason has neglected to cover public officials who announce that they refuse to sell out to a corporation; but, in the absence of such legislative wisdom, Governor Carey could only fire Commissioner Reid, which he promptly did.

We have licensed business to expect every sort of liberality from the liberals and not to worry about being required by the conservatives to conserve anything. But then Calvin Coolidge was and is our only true prophet; the business of America is business, and there is no heresy except in the absence of the commercial instinct.

MURRAY KEMPTON

(Murray Kempton is a regular commentator on the CBS Radio "Spectrum" series.)

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