

About the Artist - Lyman Whitaker



Public Art

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ABOUT THE ARTIST: Lyman Whitaker

Lyman has been a practicing sculptor for over fifty years, with a unique knowledge of materials and their application. The past three decades have primarily been focused on creating Wind Sculptures. Because the Wind Sculptures are innovative and artistic and have a high degree of mechanical integrity, they are well respected for quality craftsmanship.

Lyman graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Sculpture from the University of Utah. There he studied under Avar Fairbanks and Angelo Carvaglia, learning classical sculpture techniques as well as contemporary design. Lyman resides with his wife Stacy and their youngest of two children in Southwest Utah. He loves the desert's solitude and the intensity of the climate.

The receptivity to his work has allowed Lyman to create a wonderful studio where he works with Stacy and his brother, John Whitaker. Together they have created a productive network. When Lyman is not working at his studio he enjoys the solitude of nature at his off-grid yurt in a remote desert area. He has a daily practice of yoga and meditation and enjoys spending time with his family, friends and dog “Roper”.

Lyman’s sculptures have an organic and mystical theme, as does his current philosophy. Concerned about the sustainability of our culture’s present systems, Lyman’s fondest dream is to have his artwork symbolize a move toward better solutions in our relationship with the environment.

“I care deeply about our ecosystem and the world’s societal impact on it. As an artist, I can express my concern for the survival of our planet through a creative medium. The Wind Sculptures, my current work, offer a comforting release from our fast-paced lives with their calm serenity and playfulness. By organically placing the sculptures in settings dependent on natural elements for movement, the sculptures rise out of the ground to symbolize creative energy, and the kinetic elements, new opportunities. I hope that my sculptures will generate a sense of interest and delight shared and enjoyed by a broad array of people.”

INTERVIEWS WITH LYMAN

Molecular Cell Essentials/Life Technologies Interview

2-14-2013

Art and science. What does that mean to you?

Art and science were once together, and I believe they long to be together again. Science grew out of art and they both come from the same part of the brain. That is the creative part, the part that looks ahead to the future to see if it can imagine what has not yet been thought of. They both seek reality in different realms and there is little need for conflict.

Science and art are they complementary or contradictory?

They are probably both. Which is a contradiction in itself but that seems to be the nature of truth.... it is often paradoxical. The idea of complementary opposites may help to explain the contradiction. Art and science are complementary where they're complementary and they are contradictory when they are contradictory.

Do you find that science narrows one focus and art opens one's imagination or vice versa or something totally different tell us why you feel that?

Both. Open imagination and narrow focus are both critical for art as well as science. An open imagination opens the way or the territory for things to happen and a narrow focus allows you to negotiate that territory. The territory of art is different from the territory of science but they both use the same process.

When working in both worlds do you feel that one discipline alters the perception or thinking off the other?

I think that imagination is more prevalent in art, and narrow focus is more dominant in science. I would imagine that a scientist working in art might stimulate his imagination, which would lead him/her to focus on new things in science. On the other hand an artist working in science would gain the focused discipline to carry out an artistic project.

Sculpture of the Rockies Interview 8-14-2009

ABOUT YOUR SCULPTURE

What inspired this sculpture? What is the personal story behind this piece?

The wind is mysterious, exciting and dangerous—and as a child I loved it!
As an artist the love for this mysterious force inspired me to translate the invisible moving air into visual abstract shapes. I feel I am in a partnership with the wind. It suggests which forms will work, and I do the work to translate the suggestions into a moving sculpture. It is my hope that the visual will reflect, on some level, the air as it relates to breath, wind and climate.

What prep work and techniques went into it? Why were these techniques chosen, and why were they crucial to the process of creating a successful finished piece?

For me a kinetic sculpture needs to be responsive to the most gentle breeze yet be able to withstand strong winds. Balance and bearings are the answer to the first need and the second need is answered in the way in which I fabricate the piece to give it strength. These elements are important so that the wind will propel my sculptures in a balanced fashion, which makes them responsive yet under control. The materials chosen are copper, for its malleability and color, and stainless steel for its strength. Both these materials do well outside in the elements.

What was your greatest challenge in creating this piece, and how did you overcome it?

In my first attempt to create a wind piece, I avoided symmetry because I thought it would be more interesting asymmetrical. It proved to be complicated and not that appealing. I simplified my idea and used a turning spindle with abstract shapes on it, which I hoped would form a dynamic changing composition. Once I began simplifying my idea the forms quickly arranged themselves into a simple elegant double helix strand. I picked the simplest approach and the result was a much more appealing and elegant effect.

What is your favorite part of this piece and why? Or what do you like most about it?

I like the way that my individual sculptures respond to the currents of the wind. When grouped, the pieces move in their own unique way, creating an interesting group dynamic. The wind is composed of small intricate currents. These currents act on the individual sculptures to give them a unique tempo and working together, they create visual music. These tempos are never repeated and the motion of the group is always new.

Why do you consider this one of your most significant works? How does it relate to, and differ from, all others you've done?

By the age of 50 I had been working with art for more than 30 odd years. I experimented with ideas, tools and materials. With persistence I experienced some success but not enough to support me. My wind sculptures allowed my mechanical and artistic interests to come together in a shared and balanced way answering a prayer I made many years ago that I might make something beautiful. Wind driven pieces allowed me to enter the universe of moving forms. While most of my earlier work hinted at motion, it has been a pleasure to get involved in tangible motion.

Did this sculpture turn out the way you had envisioned, or did it take some unpredicted yet pleasant turns? Did your vision change midway through the sculpting experience, or were you unexpectedly surprised with the end result?

The process of NOT envisioning where I am going with a sculpture as I am working allows me to proceed in a more natural way. By letting my tools, materials, and processes guide me, I can seize opportunities along the way, which allows the piece to establish its own direction. I look at building a sculpture as a collaboration of my tools, my materials, and myself.

What does this sculpture mean to you personally? Does it reflect or express something important in your life?

These sculptures are all about air. Air is the one thing we all share intimately. My pieces are largely designed by air, moved by air, and express the moods of the ever-changing winds. Air is the key component of climate. The pieces remind me that air is ever changing, as is climate.

What do you feel (or hope) it says to the viewer? Are there any particular emotions you wish the sculpture to convey?

My hope is that the rhythm of these evolving shapes will have a calming and mesmerizing effect on the viewer. I also hope that my art will act as a medium for the most primal of natural forces—the wind—and thereby create a harmony between the viewer and the natural world they are a part of. I realize that is asking a lot of a piece, and I hope that it works that way for some.

ABOUT YOURSELF

In what part of the Rocky Mountain region do you live, and how long have you been a resident there? If you relocated to the region, what, as an artist and a human being, drew you to it? If you've lived here all of your life, what do you most appreciate about your surroundings?

I live on the western edge of the Colorado Plateau. My home is in Springdale, located at the mouth of Zion National Park in Southwestern Utah. I moved from Salt Lake in the mid 1980's. As an artist I was drawn to the stark raw geological beauty of the desert of Southern Utah. My body was drawn to the warmer winters. I love my desert environment; it allows me the freedom to escape into solitude quickly and easily while rewarding me with sometimes subtle and often dramatic shapes and colors.

How long have you been sculpting and how did you get started?

I introduced myself to the world of sculpting at the age of 19. As a prank I carved a small bust in sandstone and buried it in a trench, which I was digging with a fellow worker. After lunch he dug it up and thought he had found an artifact. I so enjoyed the process of carving that I registered for a class in sculpture at the University of Utah in the fall as I entered my first year of college. I started out doing classical sculpture in clay, plaster, stone and bronze but gradually was drawn to abstract forms and then to my present kinetic work.

Did you try other mediums (such as painting or drawing) before concluding that you wanted to be a sculptor? If so, what made sculpting stand out from the other mediums in your experience?

I started out in sculpture and have never experienced painting and drawing except through entertaining my children with paintbrushes and pencils. Any painting and drawing I have done is in support of my sculpture.

How have you grown or progressed as an artist over the years? For example, has sculpting changed the way you view the world at large?

If one were to follow my art career it would be full of twists and turns and dead ends with little or no consistency except for the unavoidable mark of style. While my art has not been sequential it has constant force in my life. I feel I have developed and come together in a complete way. I am still faced with the challenge of expressing new ideas as I evolve. Sculpture affects the way I view the world, but more pronounced is the way the world affects the way I view sculpture.

With what materials do you typically work, and what drew you to them? Do you feel they help communicate your message?

Metal has been the material of choice for my current body of work. Copper is the dominant metal for me. Copper is a gummy metal and doesn't like to be machined but it responds nicely to forming by hand—hammering, rolling, etc. It is a noble metal but not too pretentious. It weathers well and takes on a range of natural colors. Stainless steel works well where strength is needed and offers bright contrast to the copper. The wind sculptures are composed of natural, mostly floral shapes. Copper's natural hues of browns and greens harmonize with the floral landscape.

What, in general, inspires you to create?

I don't work so much from inspiration as I do from a desire and interest to combine materials in a meaningful and interesting way. My source of shapes, forms and motion comes mostly from the natural world, but since I consider everything natural, man-made things may find their way into my work as well.