Public Art in a Changing World

By Devin Laurence Field

In the not so distant past, large scale sculptures in the public domain were typically realized through a kind of “good old boy” network: Mature artists were awarded commissions based upon their relationships and reputation, by knowing museum directors, politicians, heads of institutions, or company executives. There were seldom calls for artists and even when there were, they often had preselected favorites already destined to win. This is still the case in much of Europe and many other countries, but the way public art is carried out locally and abroad is evolving, and surely for the better.

The “good old boy” scenarios are common but no longer the norm in the United States at least, where public art has grown up and become not only very competitive but also highly scrutinized. We are blessed to have “percent for art” ordinances in much of the country that generate huge numbers of equal opportunity commissions for artists. Having said that, it is important to recognize how difficult it can be to successfully win one of them.

Many calls receive 300 or more applications (I have seen as many as 700), and since the most famous names in sculpture apply for even local opportunities if the budgets are substantial, successful artists must be extremely professional and compelling in their proposals. Big resumes are hard to beat; when our competition has half of the major museums in the United States under their collections’ list, one has to make up for it by having a stronger design idea.

Selection committees are not always made up of people who are experienced in looking at, evaluating, and making decisions about art. In fact, committees usually include one or two artists, curators, art historians or critics, and the rest are institutional representatives, architects, community members, stakeholders, public works staff, and so on. Art is subjective by nature, consensus is difficult to achieve, and when there is long and contentious debate, committees sometimes fall back on resume and reputation. Personalities and politics still play a part whenever there is conflict of interest and issues. For example, perceived potential controversy can readily sway votes. To be sure, the job of the selection committee is not easy and can be very frustrating as anyone who has been on one well knows, so we as artists need to make our proposals as strong and clearly presented as possible.

The process of competing for public art is not for everyone. It takes many talents, not the least of which is the artist’s ability to speak and write in a clear and articulate manner. It helps to be thick-skinned and persistent. I once knew an artist who became a finalist on the first public art project she ever applied for, and when she didn’t win, she was so disappointed she said she never wanted to try again!

Obviously the process was not for her, although in my opinion any artist should be thrilled to become a finalist their first time out. I certainly was not a finalist my first time out.

All that aside, I believe that America is by far the best place to be for sculptors doing public art. The great advantage that aspiring public artists have here is that anyone can win commissions if you have the wherewithal to go after them. Most public art commissions are driven by public fund expenditures and therefore managed with a relatively transparent process. Few artists know, for example, that all meetings conducted by state and most other public entities making decisions about public funds are open to the public by law–even the final selection

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President’s Message
By Carole Murphy

Hello everyone and hello Spring!!!
The last Circle Meeting is approaching! For those who haven’t heard yet, these meetings are to rethink, regroup, revitalize, refurbish, reinvigorate and reinvent PNWS. By the time this newsletter comes out, the fourth one will already have taken place and the fifth, which is the last and the most important, is still to come. We are asking that you come and be an essential part of it! At these meetings, we are deciding what are the most important aspects of PNWS to develop, where we are going, how we are going to get there. If you would like to see PNWS participate in more shows or perhaps have our own, become a stronger presence in the NW, expand the board, receive grants, offer more workshops and educational opportunities, perhaps even create a yearbook of members, you need to be at the next meeting.

Together we are defining the future of PNWS and shaping the methods of gathering energies and finances to create what we collectively envision. Your role will be to come and add your valued opinions and thoughts, and together we can bring PNWS into the future we create.

See you at the meetings! Your prez, Carole

Formatting Images (Part 1)
By George Heath

Pixels and screens, Dots and printers, Cameras and pixels again

Ten years ago, if you were submitting images to an art show or gallery you would be sending slides. It didn’t matter whether the image was for publicity or for jurying. There was only one format: a slide. Today, format matters. Images for the web, for jurying, and for print all require different formats in terms of resolution, size and sometimes even file types. There are basically three variables: pixels, dots, and inches. How these relate seems to have generated a lot of confusion not just among artists but also among those who ask for jury images.

It’s best to begin with the root of the problem: the pixel. A pixel is “the smallest addressable picture element on a screen device,” according to Wikipedia. If you take a magnifying lens to your computer screen, you will see either little dots or little vertical lines. There will be three: one red, one green, and one blue arranged either in a triangle of dots or a square of vertical lines. These are sub-pixels. Each set of three is one pixel. If your computer is true color (most are these days), the brightness of the individual sub-pixels can be varied such that each pixel can display one of 16.8 million colors. If all three sub-pixels are “on,” you see white. If the blue sub-pixel is off and the red and green are on equally, you’ll see yellow. (These are transmissive colors, and they don’t mix the way paint does.) To avoid excessive brain wear, let’s think in terms of the square pixels.

Your computer screen may be any size between 14” (time for a new one) and 24” (I want yours) measured diagonally. The resolution of your screen is determined by how many pixels it displays across and down. This is adjustable under “display settings”. My monitor is about 23” diagonally and just over 20.5 inches across. The resolution is adjustable between 1920 px by 1080px and 800px by 600px. I have it set at the max: 1920 x 1080.

Here’s the math part. Since my screen is 20.5 inches across and there are 1920 pixels in that distance, the resolution of my screen is: 1920 px divided by 20.5 inches or 94 ppi (pixels per inch). If I had it at the low setting of 800 across by 600 down, then my screen resolution would be 800 divided by 20.5 inches or 30 ppi. The higher the resolution, the smaller the square or pixel will be. Visualize these little squares across your screen; be one with them.

Just for fun, the new Apple IPod and iPhone both have a remarkable screen resolution of 960 by 640. At 3 inches across, that works out to 320 ppi. Wow.

Your printer also has resolution settings. These are in terms of dots per inch, or dpi, as your printer squirts dots not pixels. Still, when it comes to size, dots and pixels are equivalent. Your settings when you print probably just say “Draft, Normal, continued on page 6
Studio Tools
By McAllister Merchant

When we first moved into the house, I had a room we turned into a studio. It’s the size of a bedroom, and it served me well while I used it only after work. This was the time before I decided to try some of those classes I’d missed in college, the ones not directly in my Industrial Design curriculum. It was before I was home all day to make messes.

We eventually built a studio for me about three times that size, with lots of light and lots of windows. It seemed pretty big with only me and the contractors in it. It even seemed big when I put the drill press and the bandsaw and the sander-grinder and the tool bench in. It was...good-sized when I added two and then four sets of flat files. After all, I could move the (two) wheeled worktables wherever I really needed them.

The kiln changed things.

Sculpture is an open pursuit, like any other adventure. It has many of the aspects with which frontiersmen had to contend in the early American West, or in the Renaissance, or in the Pleistocene. Nature and/or industry provide you with basic or magnificent tools, but when the adventure begins, when you strike out on that unmarked trail, all bets are off, and you’d better be prepared to improvise or tuck tail and return.

I’ve blundered with hand and other tools all my life it seems. My dad was a master carpenter, a mechanic, and a hard taskmaster. You had to not only do it well, but you also had to do it right! Hold the tool in your hand correctly, swing it or twist it or pound it with just the correct vector and force. I’m NOT my dad.

What I think I learned after some things I built “worked” for me just fine, thank you, is that “working” is what counts. I also learned that making the tools work while you’re making the THING can be just as satisfying as making the thing was supposed to be. Sometimes you even learn more from the tool.

I’ve been in The Studio now for almost a decade. I sometimes wish it were bigger. Then I clean it, and it’s just right (or too big). Because of the kiln, I have buckets. Because of the kiln, I have bins and boxes. Because of the kiln, I have more shelves than the architect could ever have imagined. Because of the kiln, I have added lights and posts and boards and firebrick and kiln posts of many sizes and flowerpots and clays and waxes and so very much more. (As I wrote this it occurred to me that if, as I posed earlier, I am on an adventure, I might care to diminish to some degree the “baggage” in my studio. Hmmm....) And because I am still deeply involved in this adventure, I find

that I spend a good deal of time using nature and industry as a start in creating my own tools, tools for my adventure.

I create sculptures in kiln-cast glass. Any of you who are likewise so engaged know that we rarely sculpt in glass; we use clay, wax, paper, wood, and many other materials first, and if we sculpt in glass at all, lastly glass. I keep my wax in a crockpot or two. I make molds for sheets of wax, tubes of wax, parts and pieces of specific sculptures, and vents and sprues. I’ve made a small warming oven for my modeler’s clay; inexpensive, highly adjustable, modeling stands; two sizes of mold boxes; a water mill box. I use a wallpaper steamer to melt out wax from molds.

Because I also use the studio to record processes and results, I have tucked retractable light standards and screens into the corners and eaves of the studio as well as an easel and tray for my pastel painting during annealing. I also keep plumbing pipes, flanges and fittings, moderate sizes of lumber and aluminum channel and angle stock, and Styrofoam in many shapes and sizes to make... things.

I made the latest addition because I finally realized it had worked so well on one side of the studio that I should use it somewhere else, too. Some time ago I attached an inexpensive window shade to the edge of my wax worktable. (The table has a “T” extension from its edge because I found that I work over my lap better than I do over my knees—and there’s “stuff” under the table. The problem that creates is “lost wax” all over the floor). The window shade passes under the table end of the extension, and extends to its anchor at the near edge over my lap and generously, automatically, captures all that falls; easier to clean (or ignore) than the floor. I’ve used it for years now (and sometimes it looks it).

A few weeks ago, as I was once again cleaning the cabinet doors of plaster from the latest investment “dance,” it occurred to me that window shade-vertical might be just as helpful as window shade-horizontal, and I mounted two rollers to the edge of the counter at my “plaster station.”

Now, when I throw plaster, I pull the shades. After I’m finished, I roll them up, which breaks up and dumps the waste plaster into the trash.

More, later...
Member News

Stephan Seable Artist of the Month

Stephan Seable has been selected artist of the month for June and will show sculpture and paintings at the Bay City Arts Center near Garibaldi.

He is also nearly finished with a life-size companion piece to a bronze he did a few years ago for a gentleman from California. He will start the mold process shortly. This commission came about after Stephan painted a 40-foot acrylic mural on the client’s fence. The client was pleased with the work and asked to see some of Stephan’s sculpture. Stephan accepted a commission for a life-sized bronze of the client. The client was so delighted at the likeness, she asked Stephan to take a picture of her sitting beside the sculpture of her husband.

Not long after, the gentleman’s wife succumbed to a fast-growing cancer. Stephan was asked to add a sculpture of the client’s wife to the bench beside him. The process has been complicated because Stephan had to retrieve the 350-pound original bronze to build the clay model of the wife. He will take the finished bronze figure to the foundry so he can check the wax against it before casting and then make matching patinas.

Jan Shield Retires From Pacific University

PNWS member and Pacific University professor of art Jan Shield will retire this year. Jan has taught art at the university for over 40 years and is the most tenured member of the Art Department. Professor Shield’s many contributions to the vitality of the university art program are too numerous to list but include: his decades-long stewardship of the college’s extensive endowed art collection, director/curator of the campus’s excellent Kathrin Cawein Art Gallery, many years as Art Department Chairperson, and most importantly, the mentoring Jan provided to thousands of students during 40 years of teaching.

Jan has been painting and sculpting since his youth, surrounded by a family of artists. His works are included in corporate, public, and private collections across the United States from Hawaii to New York. Jan frequently attends monthly PNWS meetings, so the next time you see him there, don’t forget to congratulate him and perhaps ask him what his current art endeavor is. Last year, it was monumental environmental works; the year before, transformational entrances and spaces from Oregon to Egypt. And before that, it was trees and NESTS. He can be quiet and sometimes hard to draw out, but I’ve found that a glass of wine usually helps!

Isabelle Johnston-Haist in First Annual Astoria Open Studio Tour

PNWS member Isabelle Johnston-Haist is one of 25 participating artists in the first annual Astoria Open Studio Tour, sponsored by Astoria Visual Arts, July 30–31. Hours are from 10 am to 4 pm both days.

“Astoria Visual Arts has been actively promoting the arts in Astoria for over 20 years,” said AVA Chair Drew Herzig. “As part of the year-long celebration of Astoria’s history and culture, local artists invite you into their creative space,” he said. “We felt that a studio tour was the best way to display the amazing richness of the arts community of Astoria.”

Tour guides will be available at the Astoria and Warrenton Chamber of Commerce, 111 West Marine Drive in Astoria. The phone number is 503-325-6311.

Mermaid, painted plaster, 37” x 7” x 19”

Lance Carleton Sculptures Stretch from South Dakota to Portland

The month of May finds me on my way to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where I will be delivering two of my sculptures, “Expotentiality” and “Pushing through the Latitudes,” and Alisa Looney’s “Choosing from Within” for the Sculpture Exhibition. For more info, go to www.sculpturewalksiouxfalls.com/.

In Sioux Falls, I will be picking up my sculpture “Flora Grande” and moving it on to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, for installation. I will also be traveling to Kansas City to do a show there.

In June, I will be involved in the ANLD Garden Tour in Portland and will be exhibiting at the Twombly home on NE Thompson St. For more information go to http://www.anld.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=55&Itemid=228.
Ben Dye and Mike Suri Selected as PNAP Artists
The Pacific Northwest Art Program (PNAP), which is a collaborative project developed by Recology, Cracked Pots, Inc., and Metro, the regional government for the Portland metropolitan area, was recently launched to educate and inspire the Portland public about recycling, reuse and resource conservation through the arts. A jury of PNAP members selected PNWS members Ben Dye and Mike Suri as two of the five artists who will work through September 2011, creating art pieces from the material disposed of at the Metro Central Transfer Station.

Recology Group General Manager, Dave Dutra said, “[We] are proud to introduce this program to Portland as it showcases how discarded material can be transformed into unique pieces of art and creatively diverted from the landfill… With the support of Cracked Pots and Metro, we are able to help the public to see waste differently so that we stop wasting what we have and start making the most of what we use.”

Recology, Cracked Pots and Metro will host a public exhibition and reception featuring the work made by the participating artists on September 15, 2011, at the Metro Regional Center, 600 NE Grand Ave. in Portland.
Public Art, from page 1

meeting. You can learn a lot just by going along and attending such meetings and witnessing the process for yourself, especially if you are one of the artists in the running! Just bear in mind the potential to make it uncomfortable for the committee members, since they may not feel free to speak their minds in your presence if you are one of the finalists. More and more, young and emerging artists are winning public commissions all the time.

Public art is evolving rapidly in the rest of the world as other countries seek to increase the quality of urban life and internationalism in their own cities. The word is out that sculpture parks and public art in general are good economic catalysts. Public art also creates initial connections between different cultures, skirting political differences in favor of increased collaboration. For several years, China’s Ministry of Culture has been exploring the idea of having a Percent for Art program similar to those in the United States, and in 2007, while I was working on a sculpture for the Beijing Olympics, I was asked to give a lecture on the U.S. Percent for Art programs at a conference in Beijing. Since then, China has begun developing its own version, and last November I was invited to build a sculpture in Taizhou, China, as part of the first ever Percent for Art project in China’s history.

China is structuring their program differently from ours, bringing a group of artists together and building the sculptures for several sites all at once. Then, urban planners choose the exact sites for the works within the new development areas of the city.

One of the key differences in the way their program is structured is that the artist does not manage the entire budget. Managing the entire budget empowers the artist to maximize control and profit, but it also opens up the city to the increased chance of non-performance on the part of the artist, something they are not yet willing to risk at this early stage. The program is an experiment, and it is hoped that it will be replicated in other cities.

Sculpture Parks, built all at once by commissioning 20 to 30 artists from around the world to come, build and install works at the same time in the same place, is another increasingly widespread phenomenon being used to renew and invigorate urban settings. This is similar to a symposium setting except on a larger scale, and the artists are actually paid instead of just reimbursed with a small honorarium. I was fortunate enough to be a part of several such projects in Mexico, where a consortium of interests, including the National Association of Museums, the state government, and business interests, collaborated to fund and manage the process.

A similar sculpture park is underway in Swe-
Offered by PNWS Members

Maria Simon Studio

Workshops

Surface Techniques with Terra Sigillata
This is not as esoteric as it sounds...it is the fired material I use on my work that is quite different from glazing. It yields a soft, sensual gleam but is not glassy. Pre-requisite: previous ceramics experience or past/current enrollment in Bas-Relief class.
Friday, June 24 – Sunday, June 26, 2011
$250 + $30 for materials and firing
To register, please send a $100 deposit to the address below.

Carving Bas-relief Sculpture
This is a carving workshop, open to students at all levels of experience. This is the technique I use in my current work. It is fun, compelling, and meditative. Plan on leaving your judgment at the door and entering with a willingness to experiment!
Friday, June 3 – Sunday, June 5, 2011
9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
$250 + $40 for materials, tools, and firings
To register, please send a $100 deposit to the address below.
Maria Simon
www.mariasimonstudio.com
2216 SE 50th Ave., Portland, OR 97215 (5 blocks S. of SE Hawthorne)
503-235-9403

Sculpting Classes with Carole Murphy
Sculpt in Pozzolanic stone, a form of aerated cement that begs to be sculpted. Create in a material that is considered “green” by the construction industry and is new to the United States, although it has been around Europe for a century.
Follow your own vision or have that vision awakened in you. The class is kept small enough to make it viable for each student to follow their own personal direction.
To see a video of Carole Murphy’s classes and for more info on classes and student works, go to www.carolemurphy.com/workshop.htm
Three classes will be running at her studio at 1405 SE Stark. Contact Carole at (503) 235-7233 or Sculptor@CaroleMurphy.com.

Summer Workshops in (Czech) Bohemia with Olinka Broadfoot
This is an invitation to join me for a sculpture workshop in Prague, Czech Republic this fall. You can meet and work with other sculptors from various backgrounds, with an opportunity to trade ideas and develop or enhance your techniques. Some of your work can be displayed at a gallery connected to the Jan Deyl Music Conservatory for Blind Children in Mala Strana, Prague with the intent to auction this work off for the benefit of the school.
The program will be offered from September 1 to October 31, 2011. The tuition is $950 per week, which includes materials, firing, and transportation to and from Prague Airport. Accommodations, though not provided, can be reserved for a nearby bed and breakfast or hotel (a list of suggestions will be provided). Traditional lunches will be included each day of the actual workshop, with an exact itinerary to be determined.
I will take participants on excursions to historical places outside of Prague (e.g., chateaus, castles, or other medieval sites), which we can discuss/decide together at that time.
Payment is due in full by August 1, 2011. Cancellations are accepted until August 15, 2011, with tuition refunded minus a $100 handling fee.
Join me this autumn for a unique experience in old Bohemia, email me at obroadfoot@gmail.com with any questions you may have and to receive your application.
Olinka Broadfoot, Sculptor
Tel: 513-307-0325
Prague: +420-774-817-740
www.olinkabroadfootgallery.com
www.granzstudios.com

Sculpture Studio Space Available
Wanted: A male metal sculptor to balance the chemistry in a large metal working studio space. We, two gals and one guy, are in the process of setting up this beautiful 1440 sq. ft. studio in the Cedar Mill area. The studio space is designed to have individual and shared spaces. We each have our own welders and other stuff. We will share a plasma cutter, torches, a metal cutting band saw, and a few other things. A shared woodworking area is planned as well. The studio will have a gas furnace and a wood stove.
The monthly co-op rate is $250 plus shared electricity and gas heat costs.
If you are interested, please call Ralph Gilliam at 503-453-6412.

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Sculpture or School Yard Mural? Yes!  
This mural (detail) was made in 2009 by Portland artist Lynn Takata and several preschool-through-5th grade students. Together they created the design and ceramic pieces for the four-panel, mosaic-and-clay mural that graces the exterior walls of the Richmond Japanese Immersion School at SE Sherman and SE 41st Ave. Each panel is 14 feet high and 4 feet wide.

—Jim Ayala

PNWS Sculptor Spotlight

Eric Boyer

Growing up in New York State with an art teacher for a Dad gave me almost unlimited access to art materials, ideas, and encouragement. Even in my youth, I would be thinking of that snow shovel or lawn mower as an art instrument. Not surprisingly then, when my 1980s-era employment at a blacksmith shop in Vermont introduced me to metals of all types, I became particularly enchanted with the steel wire mesh we used for fireplace screens. After a few playful experiments, it became clear this was a worthy path. I began to actually take my art seriously, and, after a couple of years, gallery showings in New England expanded into national exposure.

I feel grateful that my hands’ “discovery” of the mesh pre-dated my brain’s recognition of it. So I never thought of it as an art medium; I just started doing it. Beyond the novelty of the material lies an endless pursuit of the “strength of the material,” a quest that has me perpetually thinking that my next piece will be better than the last, structurally, anatomically, optically. While many would switch media for a new expression, I find myself tapping the same medium for multiple effects. I try to think outside the box, all the while paying humble homage to masters such as Rodin and Michelangelo. Each piece is created by hand, directly, without the use of molds, models or casts. I have done extensive life drawing, but I use the experience very indirectly, always working from my imagination.

View Eric’s work at www.boyermesh.com

PNWS Sculptors

4110 SE Hawthorne Blvd #302
Portland, OR  97214