The Portland Art Museum has had two car shows that I’ve attended. Both emphasized design as well as engineering and in the case of the latter how engineering and design can go hand in hand.

The earlier exhibit was called, “The Allure of the Automobile”. Some of those designs were startling. All of them were gorgeous. For example the 1938 Hispano-Suiza Dubonnet Xenia. It was built in France under contract to the Spanish Hispano-Suiza company. There is only one. This is the first car to have a curved windshield. It is a marvel to behold.

Also in that earlier car exhibit was a Bugatti Type 57 Atalante Coupe. It looks like a hornet. A well dressed hornet on it’s way to somewhere classy. Perhaps to go see F. Scott and Zelda. That’s a 1933 Pierce Arrow there in the background. There are 3 left of that model. You can still buy a Pierce Arrow. They come with ladders and fire hoses these days.

The current exhibit is “The Shape of Speed”. It will be up until Sept. 16th. Having seen the previous car display I was anxious to go as I had since become something of a fan of 1930s cars. My favorite of all time was the 1937 Talbot-Lago 150c SS. To my mind the most beautiful car ever made and one the beautiful things ever made period. There are 9, all different colors. The maroon one was my favorite. There it was, right there. I could have gotten in before they had a chance to stop me. Other wonders competed for attention. You’ll see a bluish silvery thing behind the Talbot. That’s another Bugatti. An Aerolithe. There was only one, a prototype that has been lost though there were pictures. An early chassis was found that had a proper serial number. There was an engine in an unopened box. All they needed was to reconstruct the body using only the pictures for reference. The body on the original was a magnesium alloy called elektron. Welding magnesium wasn’t possible then, barely possible now so it’s riveted together. Isn’t that a great name though? Elektron. Buck Roger’s helmet was made of elektron.
Thanks to Chayo Wilson for hosting the last meeting. It was outside and the weather very nice. Then it rained like mad. It gave everyone something to do and was actually kinda fun. Chayo made a pleasant space for us in her backyard and it set an easy mood.

I highly recommend the current show at the Portland Art Museum. There are some remarkable machines there. The focus is the advent of streamlining in car design. A time of experimentation. Current cars may do better in a wind tunnel but they aren’t any prettier and certainly not as interesting.

I encourage members and even non-members to contribute to this newsletter. By sharing and receiving information we can improve our work and by crossreferencing with the techniques used with other media come up with things entirely new.

Please see the Upcoming Meetings box in this issue and I hope to see you on the 25th at Olinka’s.
Sadly the designers neglected to incorporate windows that could open so it was impossibly stuffy and hot in there. You see the insanely wealthy suffer too.

This is the thirties. The depression was raging. There was civil war in Spain, Germany is getting scary. Guernica. A great war is coming yet designers are sculpting cars that look amazing 80 years later. These are revolutionary times for car design. Speaking of Germany Mercedes is also experimenting with streamlining at the time though in a more intimidating manner. Cars as sculpture send a message as does any sculpture. The Mercedes looks to be about dominance. Maybe I am reading too much into it but it looks like it’s angry and in pain. Like a bully.

I will not close with that but a lovely little thing designed to look like a plane but looks more like a carp with a hernia. I’m being unfair. It looks like a dugong. It was meant to be a car for the masses and in a promotional drive around the country it did very well. Having only three wheels it was far easier and cheaper to make rigid structure. It got 43 mpg and was to sell for $300 new. It was just too weird to catch on.

In any case I highly recommend a visit to see how good it can be when designers get things right.
Truths Behind the Precipice of Wildly Successful: Sculptor Chas Martin

- Shauna Lee Lange

Over the course of several hours of telephone conversation, I recommend Guillermo Del Toro’s Cabinet of Curiosities to Chas Martin. He in turn suggests, The Garden of Evening Mists and The Gift of Rain both by Tan Twan Eng. I order them from the local library and can’t seem to begin to absorb the beautifully-rich esoteric material.

Honestly, I don’t know how Martin has had the time to read lately, never mind the time to integrate the material into his artful sculptures, as the enormity of his current life is comprised of work and yet more work. When we speak in March of 2018, he is finishing the touches on the last of nine sculptured characters he has created and yet he jokes as he quotes Chuck Close. Something along the lines of not getting there too soon, not arriving before one’s time.

Three months later, I find myself studying Martin’s show schedule to figure out when I might be able to reach him. Exclusivity drives value, and Martin is rapidly becoming necessarily selective. Life has been a series of surprising turn of events for this Catholic-raised artist who never before considered sculptural art or spiritual art as much more than small wall hangings in a parish church. As he metaphysically moved into more creative and intellectual practices, he began to follow and find value in Native American spirituality. Martin’s travels through Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado pointed out distinctive work in the field and he returned home with a list of things to try and apply to his own sculpting practice, most notably he jokes, marketing.

Martin’s present dilemma surrounds the periphery of art making at a time when the work, the shows, and the process are all beautifully colliding. The work itself has a distinctive, strong-voiced, even-tempered, clear-headed approach and realization. Rather, the emerging problems are embedded in which competitions to enter, what works to focus on first, scheduling challenges, or dangerous ruminations about the material choices he’s made. “I worry that it’s glorified paper mâché, particularly when it’s adjacent to bronze work,” he shares. So much thought and expression has gone into the pieces, Martin cannot see that his fears about an “amateurish medium” are exactly what make the ideas come to life.

It’s not surprising, really. Creatives often play in the intersections between physics, metaphysics, spirituality, and pure imagination, but Martin lives there. Over the past six months especially, his career has continued to catapult in the Portland, Oregon region and he recognizes a degree of what some might term fame, recognition, and appreciation. Frankly, it feels like he’s about to burst wide open in the best sense of the term. Yet he looks around and asks, “Who else is here in this intersection, who else is working within the conceptual construct?”

We talk of Burning Man, and Omega Institute, and Area 51. He mentions the medical realm and a growing fascination with blindness and ophthalmology as he increasingly recognizes that all levels of seeing are channels. He’s thinking about niche marketing, and community, and commonality of experience all at the same time. This, amidst the background of an abstract three-dimensional gesture of a being whose wings are hands. It’s an entity he’s constructed that is not Tim Burton, and not scary,
Martin knows of space and its light and shadows as he also paints with watercolor. Here, he exemplifies another common trait of exceptionally gifted artists who temporarily cross-over to different media as processing vehicles. His palette finds its way into landscape scenes on a mostly horizontal plane where there is explosion of color and controlled approach. “Landsapes have to be responsive as there is a shorter time in two-dimensional space.”

Martin recalls Singer Sargent’s work as being a source of inspiration for his landscape works. He also credits a cultivated discipline he has found to be very centering. “Before the start of every studio session, I execute what I call the ‘Four-Stroke Man’ which is an abstract character in a letter form of four simple strokes, in the same order, every single day. It is my method of channeling and clearing.”

When he comes home from his regular day job, it’s a return to Martin’s own private studio for another three to four hours of work. That day job is a physically-demanding and mentally-challenging position within the Portland, Oregon based Martin Eichinger Sculpture Studio with its inspirational levels and demands for excellence, particularly within science exhibits and instructional or institutional works.

Martin describes Eichinger’s work as spectacular, intellectual, and full of heart, yet not translatable to Martin’s own stylistic approach. “I have to face the fact that I have short, contiguous slots of time and within that is a balance of thinking versus doing. At the same time, I want more pieces in process and not to have to feel in such a hurry to finish any one.”

Portland has been good for Martin, especially in his involvement with the Pacific Northwest Sculptors organization. With the Sculptors group, there is a collegial exchange of friendship and information. It was at a meeting when he first met Eichinger and where a natural symbiosis followed. Martin illustrates the after-hours Portland sculpture crowd as being impacted by technology within traditional sculptural techniques. “Everything is more accelerated now which enables artists to work on more manageable and challenging scales – scales where printers are bigger than cars.”

Martin originally comes from an art background. Following a Pratt Institute education, he turned to art directing and advertising. After a sizable career, he suddenly felt nothing interesting was going in, and nothing interesting was coming out. “I was constantly questioning everything.” The corporate art directing and creative direction meant guiding other people through perceived problems and alternative solutions, something Martin still does through his accelerated, advanced workshop teachings. He’s interested in how a person thinks, which he often finds simultaneously refreshing and frustrating. “You have to be able to solve problems. ‘What if?’ should be your favorite question.”

That practice of exploring hasn’t ended at all, with current inspirations centering around the dream space, the waking world, the cyclical natural world, art books and museums. His thoughts on gravity, which are more than stylistic influences, presently have everything to do with tethering. There is a new concentration on the freedom of flight of thought, flight of style, and alternate consciousness extensions, more meaningful with ideas about the body in physical form being a hollow sort of ghostness.

I ask Martin what would be next if he had a magic wand? He points to William Park, a billboard painter hugely successful as a fine artist. “I think if I take anything from Park’s work, it’s not to direct my own path, but to explore multiple themes. To break away from a fixed position and to follow a conduit of energy is its own reward.” This is something Martin explores in a habitual sketching and journaling practice (often in the mornings or concurrently while reading) where he allows himself to wonder what’s going to happen today. So much of life can’t be known without bringing to it a mutability.

As artists begin to reach the tipping point of their own rise through a rapidly amorphous art world, I always ask them to share five things that could revolutionize life as they know it today. Followed by a pause, Martin answers: 1) I wish I had more time; that I were 30 years younger; 2) I wish the audience for my work was more identified; 3) A patron benefactor with fluid finances would be great; 4) I’d like to read faster so I could learn and
sketch more; and 5) That I could be exposed to more eclectic things that would trigger left and right brain ideas.

All of this sounds as if Martin would like to be left on his own. He disagrees saying that the discipline of the work helps him to visualize to a higher degree. Although he is an independent person, he finds stimulation through collaboration and now understands that in fact, he doesn’t like to be alone, which he finds isolative. When he is with others, he is marveling at expressions in hands and feet in realistic and romanticized figures. When we’re “with” him, watching him navigate the precipice of success, it is very much the same.

Shauna Lee Lange is an art advisor who writes exclusively about sacred art, sacred spaces, sacred places, and creative placemaking as she pursues the meaning of ‘sacred’ in contemporary culture. Twitter @shaunaleelange.

Upcoming Meetings
Board Meeting
Tuesday July 31st 10:00am
Skype or in person at: 4326 SE Ogden.
Portland, OR 97206

Member Meeting
Wed. July 25th 7:00pm
Olinka Broadfoot residence, studio 3291 SE 178th Ave, Portland, Or

A couple months ago I described some of my clay sculpting tools, a fork, a baseball bat, a stone with a sharp edge. Tools can also be a word or an idea, or a whole system of ideas, anything that can be used to affect change. The tools of this essay are vague abstractions grounded by physical elements of process. And presently Featuring an orange plastic bowl, about 17” diameter and one inch thick all around (see image).

It’s very rounded because this bowl was part of a sphere that was once a float for a fisherman’s net. I found this orange plastic bowl buried in sand on the beach of Ft. Stevens park by Astoria and hauled it home. It’s surprisingly heavy at over ten pounds. I’m going to pause, because there was a time when I did not know what this thing really could do. That was a time of unknowing, but keen recognition that this orange bowl seemed to have Potential written all over it. Like being handing a big puzzle piece that is connected to a huge new view of the world. Finding this orange hunk of plastic was like a wardrobe that leads to Narnia or hearing at a planning meeting for International Sculpture day that an empty storefront adjacent to the CAVE might be available for art installation.

There were a few moments in the middle of International Sculpture day within the bustle of other artists setting up demonstrations and Vancouver residents walking into the PNWS event. I was there, in the middle of an installation that I co-created with Amber Metz (AKA Aim Axon) called Meditation and Manipulation playing with one of the 200+ bamboo sticks that I brought into the CAVE Adjacent space over the month leading up to the event. I stood there observing yet another wondrous property of an orange plastic bowl, a piece of found object art that I now call the haFast: For a moment I am spinning this bowl, using a bamboo stick like a prod so that the stick, rotating along with the haFast...
forms a cone with my hand at the apex and I’m in that state of discovery and surrender to wonder spontaneously conjured, hyper-present, ready and willing, at the axis of crafting reality and it occurs to me, “The quality of this moment, is the thing I want to share”.

Dave Gonzo is riding the orange plastic bowl like a sled head on into bamboo structures, propelled by Alissa Looney and Matt Weiers.

Later used by Andy as a support jig for holding ceramics heads upside down.

Alissa tests it’s properties as an acoustic reflector.