Many PNWS members know me as a sculptor involved exclusively with narrative bronzes. But there is another side bubbling up that wants to be more aggressive about other creative forms.

Before I went full tilt into using the figure to tell stories and convey emotions I was producing abstract work in all sorts of mediums and various commercial displays that required innovation and involvement in a wide variety of materials and methods. Here are a few that were both challenging and fun.

I once built a pinball machine that taught science museum visitors how our digestive system works to breakdown food into usable nutrients. A ball (bolus) rolled or bounced through various options to get masticated and swallowed, hopefully without gagging or choking. As the bolus traveled it turned on information about enzymes being released, nutrients being absorbed and chemical processes taking place along with all the bells and sound effects of a traditional pinball. The bolus would churn in the stomach while hopefully avoiding being thrown up – GAME OVER! A convoluted intestinal track would end up in the rectum, waiting for the perfect moment to release. The winner was rewarded by the sound of a flushing toilet!

Another unusual creative experience was in creating a display that demonstrated how a laser beam could be used to measure movement. Laser light was sent through a fiber, then split in half and sent in opposite directions around a coil of fiber optic cable and then recombined. If the coil was rotated, the two light inputs would get out of phase with each other because the light traveling in the direction of the rotation would have to go a greater distance in the amount of time that it took for the light to go through the coil. Amazingly, this phase shifting can be detected with a light meter and measured to calculate for visitors how far the device was rotated. We built one of these to demonstrate the principle. Three of these devices set up at right angles from each other make up a modern laser gyro. Similar devices are used to orient spacecraft. Our demo model was 3 feet across while the ones in spacecraft can fit into your closed fist.

When I first moved to Oregon I was hired to build a 5 foot tall face that could blink it’s eyes among other sculptural things for the Oregon State Pavillion to be placed in the Worlds Fair in Vancouver BC that year. I had the pleasure of working with Michael Curry who was on the same sculpting team with me and who recently hosted a tour of his amazing facility for the ISC conference.

The last few years have provided me with the opportunity to work with architects and various builders to design an interesting building titled The Geode. It included a 35’ tall spiral staircase, the iconic digital Light Blades on the outside of the Geode and custom furniture. All of these projects were done with teams of creative people including several from the ranks of PNWS like Matt Scheick and Dave Gonzo who drew up the engineering drawings for the spiral stair from my concept sketches. It was laser cut and welded together in my shop while it was raining indoors (an amazing cont. pg 3
Chas, Jesse and I met at the Giant brewpub in SE Portland to discuss the website and the future of PNWS in general. It was very informal relaxed affair and the sort environment where brainstorming naturally occurs. Watch for announcements of such meetings. They will likely be midweek and timed to avoid crowded and noisy conditions.

I would like to begin doing artist profiles for the newsletter. Such an article would feature techniques, inspirations, processes and materials as well as where the artist is coming from. It was suggested at the last board meeting that such an article could be followed by a meeting that artist’s studio. We’ll see if we can make that work.

Thanks to Carole Murphy for hosting the November meeting. I had to miss it but I heard very good things from those who went.

Thanks to All,
George

Notes from Chas:

New Show Committee
Before planning our next shows, it’s time to put a plan in place and a group to help execute. Ideas are welcome. Participation in organizing is even better! The goal is to create, partner, or otherwise be involved in high visibility events. These will hopefully be self-funding or, even better, profitable. We’ve had a couple of successful events in the past year if measured by visibility and educational goals. But, we need more options and more return on investment. If interested, contact Chas Martin.

Editor Needed
The monthly Calls for Artist list is a valuable asset based on feedback from the last edition. About half of our members acknowledged that they read it every month. At present, we have 3 contributors who glean assigned sources and select opportunities appropriate for our members. All of those are then formatted into the list you receive each month. The time commitment for gleaners is about 1-2 hours per month. The editor should plan on about 2-3 hours per month. As I transition into the role of president in the next few months, the Calls for Artists is one responsibility I need to pass on to someone else.
I don’t know where this journey leads but we’re looking for collaborators, ideas and skills to join us. Combining skills can greatly expand our options for making amazing things. We invite you to continue the conversation.

Contact me at: martin@eichinger-sculpture.com.

Board Meeting
Friday Jan. 24th 10:00am
4326 SE Ogden.
Portland, OR  97206
To attend by Skype email George gheath6006@msn.com

Next Member Meeting
There will be no December meeting due to the holidays. We’ll send notice when the location time and date are scheduled. Meeting dates and times are also posted on the calendar page of www.pnws-sculptors.org.

IS Day 2020
We have had 4 very successful IS Day events in a row. I have no doubt those brought us a closer association with the Intenational Sculpture Center and had some part in that organization looking favorably on Portland for the recent conference. It is time to begin planning our participation for 2020. IS Day is April 25th. If you would like be part of this fun and exciting event please contact any board member.

Newsletter Submissions
Submissions to the newsletter are most welcome. Profiles, techniques, motivations and images are highly desired. Help us make the newsletter interesting and useful. Contact George at: gheath6006@msn.com
Alissa Looney Open Studio

Note the Mandrakes on the table to the left and the Nimbus 2000 flying broom. Those are Jerry’s pieces. The theme for the entire Christmas event is books, this being the Harry Potter room.

Member Events

Alissa Looney Open Studio

The following article was reprinted from Art and Museum magazine spring 2019 issue. Art and Museum Magazine is a publication of Domos Fine Art Advisors of the UK.

In a remarkable way Ben Sams had something to do with our recent exhibition at the ArtReach gallery. On of his pieces, “Texas Ranger” stood in a side room at the Making Space exhibition. Bob Dale in seeking attention for the work of Ben Sams happened upon the ArtReach gallery. One thing led to another resulting in our group show with the NW Stone Sculptors Assn.

Ben Sams

A Nearly Forgotten Genius in Modern Ceramic Sculpture
by Zig Lambo

The art world presents a complicated and sometimes confusing environment where significant recognition and fame can be as random and elusive as winning a lottery. While there are thousands of recognised painters and sculptors, internationally, one medium where the number of true geniuses is minimal is that of ceramic sculpture. That may be a result of ceramics perhaps being considered more as a craft than a true art medium. The word ‘ceramics’ almost immediately brings up mental images of pots and tiles rather than credible works of art. However, the medium of clay provides the true creative artist with an almost unlimited opportunity to express ideas and images in colours and textures that can’t be produced in two dimensions or metal, wood or some other media.

One of the most creative, yet unfortunately nearly forgotten, pioneers in this field was Ben Sams. He came upon the scene in the 1960s and almost immediately created a name for himself as an innovative genius. The ‘60s and ‘70s were a period of political turmoil and questioning of values among the younger generation. Sams could pull together diverse thoughts and ideas into often whimsical sculptures that could make people laugh and also think about some of the statements he was making on the social issues of the day.

Quoting his own description of his work, Sams wrote: “The early sculptural images I made did not reveal if I was pushing reality towards abstraction or abstraction towards reality, and the resolution of my problems always remained visually exciting.”

Sams’ heritage had a significant influence on his approach to art. He was born in Texas in 1945, where his father, a Native American from the Walla Walla Tribe, was stationed during WW II. The family then moved to Montana, closer to the roots of his paternal ancestors. Sams began his studies in art at the University of Montana in 1965 under two well-known ceramists, Rudy Autio and Peter Voulkos. There he learned various techniques and processes which he adapted to his work in...
One such process used in printmaking is called collagraphy, which employs pieces and textures from various sources built up onto plates that can then be used to print. While typically used to produce prints on paper or canvas, Sams decided to use the technique to create textures and images in clay. These could then be incorporated into larger pieces to provide backgrounds or segments of the larger story being told in a particular work.

1967 was the year Sams married his first wife, Dana Boussard. That year his innovative work began to gain national recognition with numerous exhibitions, including one at the Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco which was sold out. These resulted in commissions from collectors who began to recognise and appreciate his unique talents and styles. Sams continued to create and display exciting works from 1967 until 1972 when his life changed somewhat dramatically with a divorce and a move from Montana to the Seattle area. There he tried to balance his creative work and exhibitions with teaching at Highline Community College and later Evergreen State College in Olympia. He married Cynthia Tasso in 1975 and moved his studio into a large barn on her property northeast of Seattle. There he began to experiment with the chemistry and physics of glazes he could produce to enhance and dramatise elements of his works. In his own words: “Glazes and glass represent a very separate discipline that must be united to the finalised clay form by means of extreme heat. The development of a glaze or glaze colours involves continuous experimentation into applied chemistry.”

Sams continued to produce unique and notable works for the next three years until shortly after a well-received exhibit in Bellevue Washington in 1978. He then decided that he needed to take a break from juggling the creation of art and the commercial activities associated with promoting it. By doing so, he left many unfinished works in his studio and moved on to dealing with real estate and studying common law.

Sams returned to his art in 2001 with a new passion. Unfortunately, the following year he died unexpectedly while on a beach walk with his wife and dog on the Washington coast. While Sams’ long hiatus resulted in his name losing the momentum, reputation and recognition as a significant pioneer in the world of ceramic arts, his legacy still lives on in his many surviving works valued by collectors, internationally.

Images courtesy of Robert Dale at: bensamsartist.com