

Sculpture Northwest

NORTHWEST STONE SCULPTORS ASSOCIATION

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INSIDE

BREAK TIME –
by Rafael Sebba

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT –
Michael Binkley

BUILDING BRIDGES –
by Ellie Hochman

1 x 1 x 1 –
by Dave Haslett

MICHAEL BINKLEY:
'UKRAINIAN GIRL', 2020,
CARRARA MARBLE & GLASS

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In This Issue



Artist Spotlight: Michael Binkley... 4



Building Bridges ... 8



Breaktime ... 11



1 x 1 x 1 ... 12

DEAR READER

So... Here we are. It feels as though we've stepped through a portal into an alternate reality, or perhaps awoken washed up on the shores of Lilliput, completely surrounded by tiny creatures who may or may not do us harm.

By the time you read this, you may have heard the news that the coronavirus pandemic has forced the cancellation of most planned NWSSA events in 2020. This includes the Kubota Garden Youth Carving Workshop, the Women's Carving Workshop, the Volunteer Park pop-up exhibition, the Washington International Sculpture Symposium (at camp Pilgrim Firs), and the Oregon International Sculpture Symposium (at camp Suttle Lake). This brings new feelings of loss and sadness. It will be the first time in three decades that either of the symposiums have been cancelled. Through our events, we keep the stone sculpting art form alive and vibrant. Our members rely on these events to collaborate, and to inspire our studio practice through the rest of the year.

The question is, how do we choose to respond to this situation? Please, first and foremost, take care of your

health. That includes giving yourself carving time! Apply your creative problem solving skills; in many ways we are better equipped than most to deal with this situation. Stay in contact. Call friends and see what projects they are working on. It will lift you up! Even though NWSSA activity will be limited, we are still here, and we will get through this. We had a great exhibit at the Northwest Flower & Garden show in February, for which we are grateful to Ed Salerno for taking up the mantle from Nicky Oberholtzer. Our new pilot project, the rotating public art exhibit at Marymoor Park in Redmond, WA, is still active and soon will be seeing lots of summertime visitors. Finally, every two months this journal will keep bringing images, stories, and articles on the art of stone sculpture direct to your home.

To all the members of the tribe, be blessed with good health and good fortune and know that you are not alone. Better days will be here soon; let's get to work on creating them.

~ Ben, Maya, Kentaro, Ellie, Doug, Cyra, and Ken

Discussion Prompt: Censorship

Recent U.S. national news has amplified important questions of how, where, when, why, and who has freedom of speech. What do you think about censorship? Do you self-censor your own work? Why do we do this? There are many practical and valid reasons to edit and focus elements of an artwork: it often makes for clearer, better communication for the intended audience. Do you see a clear line of distinction between acceptable or unacceptable instances of censorship? You are invited to reflect on this prompt, and then discuss the matter with another artist.

Image credit: Leon White, 2014



ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: MICHAEL BINKLEY

After seven months of preparation and build-out, I am finally ready to open the doors of my new gallery and studio in Squamish, Canada—right in the middle of a pandemic. Although the timing is less than ideal, my dream of the past three years is finally coming to fruition.

In September, 2019 I was able to take occupancy of my industrial unit, which I bought in 2017. Huh? Well, through a series of events, (which is another story—search “Moodyville 2016” on YouTube), I had to vacate my previous studio and gallery of thirty-two years, and then my wife Michelle and I travelled for a year during 2018-2019.

After our home and studio/gallery/sculpture garden of thirty-two years sold, I could no longer afford new digs for my studio in the Metro Vancouver, Canada area. Looking farther afield, I settled on a new-build industrial unit in the town of Squamish, about a forty-five minute drive north of Vancouver where our house is. I was to take possession in the fall of 2017, but due to construction delays, I got the keys at the end of February 2018. As Michelle and I had planned the year abroad to travel and work in Europe beginning in June, I decided not to move my equipment into the brand new unit. Instead, we found a non-art-related tenant to rent the space from us in our absence.

Upon returning from travel, all went according to plan and our tenants ended their contract on August 31, 2019. I was presented with a huge, empty shell in which to start my new gallery and studio. I had stored my entire studio and raw materials at our North Vancouver home. The bulk of the



▲ ME IN THE EMPTY STUDIO, SEPTEMBER 1, 2019

heavy stone and equipment was transported on crane trucks over a two-day period, and the remainder I took in multiple loads in my truck. I thought, This set-up should take two months, tops. How hard could this be? It’s now been seven months and the tent is still going up.

The beauty of buying a new build was that I could customize the interior to fit my needs. Since I am a self-represented artist, I had a demising wall installed giving me one-third of the space for my exhibition gallery and two-thirds for my production studio. I installed my cable-track lighting system that I took from my old gallery, and it works well in the new space. I thought long and hard about how I would set up my studio workspace, but you know what they say about the best-laid plans. For three decades, I had worked in a garage studio at the back of our home. I worked in an outside space on large projects, relying on very accommodating neighbors and the fact that I could blow my dust and stone slurry into the small forest across the alley. I don’t have that luxury in this new environment of an industrial complex, as I know my new neighbors would not be as accommodating as my last location. Thankfully, working in some Italian studios taught me how to work differently in an interior environment. I bought a very effective



▲ SETTING UP THE GALLERY, NOVEMBER 2019



▲ MY DEvised MODULAR WALLS TO CREATE A FLEX DUST ROOM

dust extractor, devised moveable walls to create a flex-space dust room, and I had a drain floor and sump installed to collect the slurry from my wet work. These have combined to contain my carving mess so the rest of the studio is relatively dust-free. But there is still some tweaking I need to do to keep the gallery as dust-free as possible.

I am now at a point where I can open my door to the public. But as we are all experiencing, the middle of a pandemic just isn't the time to be trumpeting your presence. Michelle and I had planned a grand opening for late spring, however with the COVID-19 virus, the big shebang will have to wait until later in the year. In the meantime, I have devised a "soft open", and my door is open in case an interested customer comes a-calling.

This current virus situation is certainly frustrating. What compounds it for me is that after a soul-and-creativity-crushing period of change for Michelle and me from 2011 to 2016 that resulted in losing our former home and creative space, I incurred a frighteningly-deep creative block. A big part of our year abroad was to heal and hopefully get out of my funk. We nicknamed the venture "Back to Epiphany", as forty years ago, I had my epiphany to pursue a career as a sculptor in Florence, Italy. Thankfully, two months of carving in a Seravezza, Italy studio and a two-month residency in an Andalusia, Spain sculpture garden were the catalysts I needed—my Muse reawakened, and I found my juju again. I was so excited about presenting the new "me", but now I must wait even longer.

For the past three years, Michelle and I have been planning how to roll out our next chapter and best utilize the new studio and gallery space. What is exciting for us is the diversity of projects we can pursue. We want to create a sort of "art hub" and offer opportunities for other artists and art

patrons.

A large part of my former brand was offering my patrons the opportunity to "come to the artist's house," and we built a beautiful gallery space and sculpture garden onto the front of our home for that purpose. Patrons were able to visualize their potential art purchase in the environment of a home. However, in our new chapter, Michelle and I want to separate the business from home life completely. At our new location, we want to concentrate our patron's attention on the artist's own gallery and studio, and focus on the artwork itself.

Often, I get the request to see how and where



▲ FRONT WINDOW OF THE NEW GALLERY AND STUDIO!

I create my sculptures. To this end, I can now show visitors from the gallery through to the studio, something I could not do at my last location. Now, I can simply slide a beautiful, fir, barn door to the side, and in one easy step, go from gallery to production space!

Another benefit is I now have space to provide for workshops and mentoring. After forty years in the business, I would like to give back to my community. Just as I was given the opportunity to learn the business of stone sculpture from George Pratt, it's time for me to pass the baton. ►

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT *continued*

I'm developing some five-day workshops for all levels of experience in stone carving, a mentorship program, and rentable workspace for traveling sculptors. I've led several workshops of my own, at symposiums, and on cruise ships. These were all at other locations. Now that I have the space, I'd like to offer instruction at my own studio. For those sculptors that have experience but may want to bone up on their skills,



▲ GALLERY VIEW (A)

I'd like to offer mentoring sessions. And just as I like to combine travel to Italy with renting studio space to work, I am hoping there are sculptors from other parts of the world who might like to carve short-term while visiting Canada's west coast.

There are several other ideas we have in store for how we can utilize the new gallery and studio, and we'll roll those out in the future, once this virus situation is resolved. We have to save some surprises for you!



▲ 'AROUND AND THROUGH', 2020, CARRARA MARBLE
I started carving this in Sept 2018 in Seravezza, Italy.



▲ GALLERY VIEW (B)

For the moment, I'm using this time to my best advantage. I'm creating inventory (both 3D and 2D), building and launching a newly-designed website, and refining workshop syllabi. And after over three decades of producing only original art, I'm honing new skills in



▲ GALLERY VIEW (C)

the realm of 3D virtual sculpting for limited edition art and to lighten the rough-out stage of my sculptures.

After being without a work and exhibition space for two years and in honor of this new gallery and studio, I'd like to present an exhibition theme around metamorphosis and muse awakening. When appropriate, I'll announce my grand opening.



▲ 'MICHY' is a jewelry piece I sculpted in ZBrush as a gift for my wife, Michelle. It was cast in bronze with a gold-like finish. Virtual file left, finished piece right.



▲ 'BEHIND THE CURTAIN', CARRARA MARBLE
This is the piece I was working on at Suttle Lake in 2017



▶
'SEATED WOMAN',
2020, CARRARA
MARBLE & GRANITE
*I started carving this
in 2018 in Seravezza,
Italy. This shows the
ZBrush file (left)
I made, but after
I roughed out the
sculpture. I've done this
virtual sculpture for
possible reproduction
purposes for limited
editions.*



BUILDING BRIDGES

By Ellie Hochman

The Women's Hand Carving Event: A Bridge to the NWSSA Community



Trying to explain something you know deep in your soul—to put it into words—can be daunting. Articulating why the Women's Hand Carving Event now endures as a yearly event sparked my desire to write this article.

I began by talking with Arliss Newcomb, the founder of this event, and here's what she had to say:

"Three years ago I wanted a way to celebrate my 80th Birthday. For over a year, I had been showing and selling my work in the lobby of the Old Alcohol Plant Inn (OAP) in Port Hadlock where I lived at the time. I decided with the input from some longtime sculpture friends to make it an all-women's event. Now this was NOT meant in any way to separate the membership by gender, only to give the women a chance to support each other in a way that is hard to do in



a much larger group. Having a hand-tool-only event would allow women (safely) to talk while working."

Being outside at the Old Alcohol Plant is a great setting for both a birthday party and a carving event: it is local, it has beautiful gardens overlooking Townsend Bay, and it has a great indoor gallery space next to outdoor workspace for artists. The public is invited to watch and talk to the artists

who are working, and they could see completed works in the nearby gallery. The energy created by this event was infectious as female guests received encouragement from female artists to try their hands at a piece of stone. Guests to the gallery were so inspired that they wanted to know if there would be an event the following year that they could attend. Each year since has been better-attended than the last. It has invited women who are

BUILDING BRIDGES *continued*

new, newish, and seasoned into the magical world of women stone carving together. Arliss was right: for some women this acted as a life-changing bridge.

I am one of those women... Since my life has been devoted to working on women's issues—politically, socially, and in my career as a Women's Mental Health Specialist—it is apparent to me that Arliss' Women's Hand Carving event has provided an open forum for mentorship as well as an amazing opportunity to highlight the works of seasoned and talented female artists. It has opened new doors to the public for women who may have viewed stone carving as implausible.

This event came at a much-needed time in my life. I was in the midst of an emotional five-year marathon of assisting my ninety-four-year-old parents in navigating their end of life journey. Taking a carving class with Tamara B. at Pratt served to alleviate some of my caretaker stress. When my parents' journey ended, I felt the need to take the summer off from my counseling practice to provide myself the space to grieve. Tamara suggested I consider the Women's Hand Carving event. At first, EVERYTHING about a "carving event" felt foreign and new. I took comfort that it was an all-women's group. The event provided a 'relatively' quiet and very supportive and nurturing environment which fostered deepening connections between everyone. I learned, and I became more comfortable with both carving and the traditions and flow of an event like this. My deep sense of loss began to shift into a hopefulness that this could fill a hole in my heart—my father was a carver and I used his tools and even wore his jacket to the event—and by the end of those three days, the healing power was transformative. I had become a new member in this community of women.

When I learned that Arliss was preparing to leave the area, I volunteered to help out with the second event. With the marketing help of Renee and the long-distance check-ins and support from Arliss, I organized the gathering. Now, with NWSSA board support, the Women's Hand Carving Weekend has become an association-sanctioned annual event.

I am grateful that the women's event was a bridge to an organization that values gender equality. Joining a new group and trying on a new skill that is not traditionally seen as a women's arena was intimidating. For some, joining an event that is all-women makes it easier. Newbies can see themselves in the faces and experiences of other women who are established carvers and sculptors. Established carvers have the chance to communicate their experience of being female artists. Even coming from different backgrounds, there are subtleties of language, of intuition, and ways of connecting that are shared. Growing up female in a world where many



of us have struggled to hear our own voices and show our talents in mixed groups is often a fact of our lives. Many find it easier to express their thoughts in a community of women. Some can visualize more opportunities with direct woman-to-woman-encouragement.

Kim B. is a local Port Townsend resident—and now an active NWSSA member—who also benefited from this kind of encouragement. She and a friend had come to check out the gallery and see artists at work. This is what she had to say:

Female stone carvers showed me I really could carve stone. And could carve with others looking on, even commenting. I'm grateful for this gift. I'm ever so blessed by this community and how I've been accepted. There's a generosity of spirit here that transcends all else. Advice, encouragement, and love permeate the group.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. The Women's Hand Carving Weekend has been that first step for many over the past three years. It is but one piece of a larger mosaic that contributes to the continued diversity of our NWSSA Community. It has acted, as so many other NWSSA events do, as a bridge for new members to later come to the symposiums and become part of the larger NWSSA community and enjoy the generosity of spirit and encouragement that is found there. I feel blessed to have found my new and emerging voice as an artist and a carver with that first step.



BREAKTIME

by Rafael Sebba

It's early in the afternoon and I think I need to take a break. I stand up and walk away from my makeshift home office (just a small folding table, a laptop, and an old chair in the corner of the bedroom). I swing through the garage, grab a pair of gloves, safety glasses, a hammer and a point chisel, and make my way into the backyard. I sidle up to the piece of dark gray granite resting on my work table.

In that other reality that is gradually fading from memory, I did most of my filing, sanding, and hand finishing on my lunch breaks at work. I reserved grinding, chiseling, and other more intensive work for the weekends, in the backyard, limited to short bursts so as not to piss off my neighbors. But in this new reality, I have opportunities to piss them off every day.

I don't have some big idea. I am just following a curved line that I think I see. Shortly after I started chasing it, I noticed a complimentary line in a half-carved piece of tan limestone. Though the curves are similar, the two pieces of stone do not stand flush together and are distinctly separate. But they are leaning, leaning towards each other, leaning into the distance between them. Perhaps there is something more in this.

I've been wanting to hand carve harder stone for a while. Last year at Suttle Lake I finally picked up a few carbide chisels, a hammer, and a koyasuke from Kentaro Kojima. I'm exploring these tools as much as I'm exploring the granite. And if I'm being completely honest, this is the second piece of granite I've hammered on in the last three weeks. I reduced the first one to little more than $\frac{3}{4}$ minus gravel in the first five days. Might as well have been using a twelve pound sledgehammer. I am doing better with this one, though.

I stand over the stone, contemplating the one-inch point chisel and the one-

pound hammer I am holding. They are a long way from their birthplace in Japan. The hammer is light enough that I feel like I could swing it all day long. The handle is long enough to be able to really leverage gravity. It's octagonal face lacks the corners of my other square-faced hammers. Yeah, those squared corners that so eagerly seek out my thumb every time I miss a swing. This point chisel has a different geometry than the Italian points I have. Two of the tip's sides are more gradually beveled, giving it a diamond shape. This makes it more directional, kind of like a flat chisel. Only with a point. Hard to describe. But in any case, this shape definitely requires a more mindful grip and position on the stone.



And thus it begins.

As they ring out, I think about the extraordinary journey of this steel. From a craftsman's forge half way around the world into my hands, in Eugene, Oregon. This is no small feat; no online global two-day distribution network happening here. Only Kentaro's passion, persistence, and perseverance, for which I am now especially grateful.

As the point cracks through areas of more and less resistance, visions of

Sabah Al-Dhaher carving last year at Suttle Lake take over. I try to employ his technique of removing a given mass from different angles, repeatedly circling until it gives way. It is a non-linear, flowing, stream of consciousness dialogue that gravitates towards whatever ought to be addressed next. It is extremely efficient. The chisel agrees.

I raise the hammer. Relax into a loose grip. They ring out. Again. And again. I try to channel a bit of Joseph Kincannon's relentless, effortless rhythm. Until I saw him two years ago, I don't think I could have imagined anyone swinging a hammer with such a consistent, unstoppable, indestructible beat. Mesmerizing. Hypnotic. I raise the hammer again, higher this time. Trust it. It doesn't want to miss.

Memories of symposiums dart in and out, this way and that. The sounds and smells of the field, spontaneous connections, evening presentations, glasses and bottles raised, and early morning walks. This is a beautiful tribe. My heart sinks for those of us in hard hit areas, for those of us who are being hit hard, and for those who are suffering. I have to remind myself to breathe. Just breathe through all of this.

I am easing into it. Eventually, every swing seems to connect and the chisel is peeling through the stone with every blow. We are on fire and can do no wrong. The ring of the hammer against the point against the stone falls in time with the music. I am dancing. We are dancing. All of us. Together in this momentary state of grace...

The alarm chimes. Time's up. Break's over. It goes so fast. Maybe I can squeeze in another hour at the end of the day.

Today, tomorrow, this year, or next, I'm certain we'll be dancing together again.

Rafael Sebba — April 2020





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by Dave Haslett

'EQUATORIAL EQUINOX #8'

1: How did the idea come to you?

The circle "idea" is happening all around us. Rain drops hit on a pond, giant halos around the sun and the planets orbit in giant circles around our star.

2: Process: Maquette? Drawing? Direct Carve? Other?

Lots of drawings starting with a simple compass circle and then seeing how far I could alter the roundness. The circle is a shape that has no beginning or end and drawings are the easiest way to work out design issues.

3: Hardest part?

Sourcing the basalt and making sure the stone has no hairline cracks. Handling the large stones, staging the stone solid and safely under my core drill. The largest stones I have done so far are 30" and 36" diameter, I have two 48" dia stones on deck.

4: Easiest part?

Dreaming up the design.

5: What did you learn from the making of this piece?

Producing a sculpture during the pandemic put a focus and clarity on the importance of living fully and appreciating everything we have.

