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Brian Russell

American, b. 1961

Artist's Statement

Sculpture is a vital element in our visual environment. The creation of objects that exist in three dimensions whose purpose is to stimulate reflection, meditation, awe and amusement is as unique to humans as it is ancient. I create works that will live harmoniously in the world as independent functionaries of society. I draw inspiration from forms and rhythms in nature, ancient artifacts, mathematics and science, distilling these influences into abstract points of intersection. My aim on a public scale is to involve the viewer, to interject into the world points of beauty, interest and spontaneity. I want people to use my sculpture as an excuse to mentally shift to another level of consciousness, above the daily hubbub, even for a moment, and to reconnect with themselves via that primal, emotional, cortex-controlled spasm of an encounter with an unexpected oasis in a visual desert.

On a personal level creating sculpture is an endless connected series of experiments. Technical matters drive visual possibilities. Imaginings require research into materials and techniques. The act of physically manipulating substances informs the entire thought process. Knowledge of process induces parameters and frees the mind. The daily work ethic gives total responsibility over the outcome. The path is long and winding and where it leads I will follow....

Biography

Brian Russell's artistic endeavors began in the late seventies when he started exploring black and white photography. Concentrating on the human form Russell pursued photography as his primary expressive medium until his introduction to sculpture in 1981. Under Lawrence Anthony's instruction at Rhodes College, Russell began to be fascinated with what his hands could create. Beginning with wood and stone carving, he soon progressed to fabricating large freestanding sculptures from scrap steel and industrial debris.

Russell spent the year after graduating from Rhodes fashioning welded sculptures in his mother's backyard. At this time he began also to build furniture, both of wood and of steel. Furniture and functional items provided capital for the establishment of his first studio in midtown Memphis in August 1985. Shortly after starting this business, Russell became aware of the creative possibilities of working with hot forged metals. Using the tools and techniques of traditional blacksmiths allowed the shaping of metal into forms matching his creative vision. For the next nine years Russell worked in his studio on Broad Avenue, building everything from fire screens to monumental gates, from sculpture to lighting. Mastering new techniques and materials stimulated his creative vision, each new work allowing a synthesis of ideas. Driven to incorporate color into his work, Russell began experimenting with fused glass and pate-de-verre. Initially focused on glass vessels and fixtures, Russell laid the foundation for subsequent mixed media sculpture. His visual vocabulary was derived from his travels, nature and the human form.

In 1994 Russell moved his studio to 15 acres in the countryside northeast of Memphis. During the next six years, Russell produced an exceptional volume of work, including four commissions for monumental architectural sculptures. Satisfied with his mastery of forging technique, Russell began to leave the more linear forms driven by blacksmithing and to expand his vocabulary to include more color and volumetric shapes. In 1998 Russell decided to reintroduce glass into his work in a more sculptural way Using a scientific approach, and with much

experimentation and patience, Russell was now able to realize his vision of combining glass and metals to create new expressions in his work. Still, the techniques of fusing lacked the crisp sculptural qualities he desired.

On a visit to New Zealand in 1999 Russell was exposed to a lost wax glass casting technique that produced exciting results. Two more years of hard work and research resulted in the current state of Russell's art: a fusion of forged metals and cast glass unique to his sculpture. A confidence in technique and agility with materials now allows him to fully exploit his creative talents. The transparency and optical nature of the colored cast glass have an inherent emotional effect that enable the artist to speak quietly, yet powerfully about his ideas on the nature of reality and purity of form. The effect of the metal forgings, synergized with the images presented by the vivid glass castings give life to his sculptures.

Since 2004 Russell has been working once again with formed and fabricated sheet bronze forms, as well as forged aluminum. The bronze shapes flow smoothly into the glass castings, giving the effect of unity. The metal work gives scale and structure to the glass. 2006 dawned with new explorations into adhesively joining pieces of glass, thus further enlarging the repertoire.

Selected Exhibitions

- 2007- Finely Cast, solo exhibition, Baum Gallery of Fine Art, University of Central Arkansas
- 2006- Lines and Spheres, solo exhibition, David Lusk Gallery, Memphis
- 2005- New Sculpture, solo exhibition at Tobin Hewett Gallery, Louisville
 - SOFA Chicago, represented by Jerald Melberg Gallery
 - Earthspace 2005, outdoor sculpture, Arlington, TN
 - Hot Glass in the Blue Grass, Lexington Art League, merit award
 - Flowers and Vessels, Eleonore Austerer Gallery, Palm Desert, CA, with Roberto Azank
 - The Art of Contemporary Blacksmithing, Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft, Louisville
- 2004 - Hemispheres and Gestures, Jerald Melberg Gallery, Charlotte
 - A Glass Act, solo exhibition, Function Art Gallery, Chicago
- 2003 - Hemispheres, solo exhibition, David Lusk Gallery, Memphis
 - SOFA Chicago, represented by Jerald Melberg Gallery, Charlotte
 - Hemispheres, solo exhibition, Tobin-Hewett Gallery, Louisville
 - New Work, group exhibition, River Gallery, Chattanooga
 - Earth Space 1, solo outdoor exhibition, Arlington, TN
 - ArtForm, West Palm Beach, represented by Jerald Melberg Gallery
- 2002- Gallery Selections, group exhibition, David Lusk Gallery, Memphis
- 2001- New Sculpture, solo exhibition, David Lusk Gallery, Memphis
 - Best of Tennessee Art Competition, Tennessee State Museum, Nashville, purchase award
- 2000- New Works, group exhibition, David Lusk Gallery, Memphis
 - Made for Use, invitational, National Ornamental Metal Museum, Memphis

- 1994 - New Works, solo exhibition, Limn Gallery, San Francisco, CA
National Invitational, National Ornamental Metal Museum, Memphis
- 1993 - Chicago International New Art Forms Expo, Kurts Bingham Gallery
Introductions, solo exhibition, Kurts Bingham Gallery
- 1992 - Form, Fantasy, Function IV, Kurts Bingham Gallery
TACA 1992 Biennial, Nashville; Memphis Brooks Museum of Art; merit award.
- 1991 - Form, Fantasy, Function III, Kurts Bingham Gallery
- 1990 - Selections from the Metals Museum, Schering Plough Corporation, Memphis
Life Support, One Market Square, San Francisco
The Nouveau Tradition, National Ornamental Metal Museum, Memphis
Recent Works, solo exhibition, Clough Hanson Gallery, Rhodes College
American Craft Council 10th Annual Fundraiser, Christie's, New York
- 1988 - House Jewelry II, National Ornamental Metal Museum, Memphis
- 1984 - Flowers and Art, Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis

Selected Commissions / Collections

- 2006 - First Tennessee Bank, Memphis, outdoor sculpture
Lark Creek Steak, San Francisco, 30' long steel and glass sculpture
- 2005 - Piedmont Natural Gas, Charlotte, NC
Energy Capital Partners, New York, NY
Cafejian Museum, Minneapolis, MN; purchase of 2 works for the collection.
- 2004 - The Virtues, Church Health Center, Memphis, TN; 6 piece illuminated aluminum and glass sculptures.
- 2003 - QHemisphere 22 Sheaf, Tennessee State Museum purchase
- 2002 - Cerebral Map, sculpture, Rhodes College, Memphis
- 2001 - The Will to Live, sculpture, Tennessee State Museum, Bell South Collection
- 2000 - Ceremonial Mace for Rhodes College. Commissioned by the college to create a mace to be carried by the faculty marshall at commencement. 38" long consisting of forged bronze oak and laurel garland surrounding cast glass sphere featuring relief carving of symbols from the college seal. An engraved collar mounts on a turned walnut shaft, terminated with a bronze acorn.

1998 - Draig Mempho, outdoor sculpture. Commissioned by Loeb Properties, Memphis, to design and build a sculpture to complement the Celtic theme renovations of a retail shopping space. The result was a forged steel, bronze and copper "Celtic torch", 17 feet tall, 5 feet in diameter.

Dancers, outdoor sculptures. Ballet Memphis, with the Memphis Arts Council, held a competition to select an artist to design and build five sculptures to adorn the top of their new studio, designed by Williamson and Pounders, Memphis. My winning design captures the energy and grace of the dancers, originally sketched from life. The material is forged aluminum.

1996 - Blue Plate Special, indoor wall sculpture. Commissioned by Urban Retail Properties, Chicago, for The Wolfchase Galleria, Memphis, as part of a public arts program involving 5 other artists. 9 foot tall forks and spoons made of forged steel float above a tablecloth grid of copper and aluminum panels. The central plate is made of segments of forged aluminum.

Bibliography

2006 - Glass Art Society quarterly, featured artist profile

2005 - Forging Beauty, documentary on Southern Exposures, PBS station WKNO-TV

2004 - History of Tennessee Arts

Palm Springs Life

Exhibition catalog, Jerald Melberg Gallery

2003 - ArtForm exhibition guide, cover photo

2002 - Rhodes magazine, Summer 2002, p.7, photo and article

2001 - Anvil's Ring, Fall 2001, photo p. 44

Mid South Living, Nov/Dec 2001, article p. 22

l'Arca 147, Italian architecture journal, photos of Ballet Memphis sculpture

2000 - Direct Metal Sculpture, 2nd Edition, Dona Meilach, photo p.-C6, 212

The Contemporary Blacksmith, Dona Meilach , photos

Rhodes Magazine, Summer 2000, photo, back cover

Rhodes magazine, Fall 2000, p.10, Some Noted Memphis Alumni

Mid South Gardens, WREG-TV, video segment, aired June, 2000

1999 - Veranda magazine, July/Aug 1999, photos p. 99, 104

1998 - The Commercial Appeal, May 30, 1998, photo, front page

1997 - American Style magazine, Winter 1997, photo p.96

1996 - Home magazine, February 1996, photo, p. 24

1994 - Memphis Artists 1994 calendar, photo, April

Professional Experience / Education

- PRESENT- 1984 - Independent professional studio artist. Maintains studio and sculpture garden in Arlington, Tennessee. Exhibiting glass and metal sculpture widely in galleries, as well as pursuing public and private commissions.
- 2007- Visiting lecturer, University of Central Arkansas
- 2003 - Visiting Foreign Artist at Collaborations NZ, Whangarei, New Zealand
- 1986-02 - Independent Study: National Ornamental Metal Museum; James Horrobin, 1986; James Wallace, 1986-87; Phillip Baldwin, 1988; Richard Quinnell and Ron Eastman, 1989; Bill Fiorini, 1991; First International Festival of Iron, Cardiff, Wales, 1989; ABANA Biennial Conference, 1990-1998; Hot Glass Horizons, Portland, OR, 1998; Glass Art Society Conference, Tampa, FL, 1999; Glass Casting Workshop with Tessa Clegg, Wanganui Polytech, New Zealand, 2000; Sandcasting Workshop with
- Cathy Chase at Urban Glass, Brooklyn, 2000; G.A.S. Conference, Corning, NY 2001; G.A.S. Conference, Amsterdam, 2002
- 1984- College of the Redwoods, Mendocino, CA; non-degree studies
- 1983- Rhodes College, Memphis, B.A., studio art; cum laude
- 1979-1980 -Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH
- 1979 - Raleigh Egypt High School, Memphis; valedictorian
- 1961- Born in Memphis, Tennessee