

First you draw, then you sculpt



Artist Kevin Pettelle answers questions about his 7-foot-long bronze sculpture, "Ped" at Art on the Avenues' Sculpture Garden in Wenatchee's Riverfront Park.

By JEANETTE MARANTOS
Beauty of Bronze Coordinator

Kevin Pettelle was 6 when he taught himself to draw. He loved monsters, and he kept pestering his father, an artist, to draw monsters for him, but his dad said no.

"He said, 'I can teach you better with an eraser than a pencil, so draw them yourself,'" Kevin said.

So one day, while he was reading a nature book, he had an **epiphany** about drawing.

"The book had a picture of a squirrel, and I saw that the squirrel's eye is a circle and its nose is a triangle shape and I noticed they were certain distances apart from each other and there were shapes between the shapes, and I wondered, what would happen if I tried to draw those shapes?"

So Kevin pulled out his pencils and began drawing the shapes. "I remember working hard to make a circle and a triangle next to the circle and keeping the right shapes the right distances apart. I wasn't looking at the whole picture at all, just the shapes. When I put the last shape on, my drawing looked very similar to the picture I was trying to draw, and I thought, 'Oh! That's how it's done.'"

Kevin didn't grow up thinking he would be an artist, however. He was a shy child who was often alone. Drawing or making monsters out of clay was a way to entertain himself.

His career plans, however, were to go into medicine. He had a neighbor who was heart specialist and he spent many hours looking at medical books, thinking he would become a doctor too.

But school was hard for Kevin, "very hard," he said. "I had **dyslexia**, so when I was in elementary school I had to take special reading classes. I felt like I was stupid, but part of me knew I wasn't; I just had to figure out another way of learning. I know a lot of artists who have dyslexia; it's a condition that lends itself well to art because you become a better observer."

By the end of high school Kevin said he knew he couldn't handle the years of schooling required to become a doctor. "I just didn't have the patience for it."

Instead, at the age of 19, he moved to Bellingham and got a job as a scrimshaw artist, carving drawings into pieces of ivory from long-dead mammoths.

Five years later, he moved to Sultan, got interested in sculpture and has been a full-time sculptor for more than 30 years. He works in three dimensions, and doesn't really do any other kind of art, like painting. Nonetheless, he said, drawing was an excellent introduction to his career as a sculptor.

"Drawing is cheap, it's portable and it's something you can do anywhere," he said. "You're learning all the things you'd be learning as a sculptor—how to break down forms, negative space, positive space, how to use shadow and line. Sculpture is more difficult, but it's the same language as drawing. And if you're a shy person, like me, it's a great way to keep yourself entertained!"

She carved out an artist's life

BY JEANETTE MARANTOS
Beauty of Bronze Coordinator

Nicky Oberholtzer is a sculptor who listens to stones.

"Rocks talk to me," said the Seattle-based artist. "When I go to pick a rock for a sculpture, certain rocks say, 'I want to come home with you,' and others say nothing. It's like the spirit of the stone speaks to me."

Once she picks a rock, however, it can take awhile for Oberholtzer to "hear" what it's trying to say.

"Someone said to me once, 'That rock has been waiting for hundreds of thousands of years for you to carve it.' I had a hard time sculpting after that, because every time I put the chisel to the stone I thought, 'Wow, am I living up to that expectation? I feel such a responsibility to do what the rock tells me to do. What if I get the vision wrong?'"

Luckily, she got a clear message about her sculpture *Playful Octopus*. She wanted to create something that children could touch, and climb on safely, and she wanted it to represent something from nature.

That led her to the idea of making an octopus. She drew out the design, "and I kept thinking, 'I have to go look for a rock for this,' and then one day I was walking through the granite boulders in my driveway and it hit me--the rock I needed was right there. The stone fit my design exactly. The octopus had been waiting there all along. It was just waiting for me to get around to seeing it."

Oberholtzer was born in Seattle in 1952 and has lived there all her life. She remembers getting interested in art when she was 3. "I was drawing pictures and everybody was raving about them. My mom said, 'Why are you able to draw so good?'"

Doing art helped her through high school, when



"Playful Octopus," by Nicky Oberholtzer (at right) is on display at Art on the Avenues' Sculpture Garden in Wenatchee's Riverfront Park. The sculpture is for sale. It can be purchased for \$7,500.



Photo by Steve Oberholtzer

she was unhappy with everything else. She did all kinds of art, from stained glass work to weaving, but in college she discovered stone carving and knew she had found her favorite medium.

Nowadays, Oberholtzer says she's not very good at drawing—she prefers to work in three dimensions. But she still thinks drawing is important.

"It's the best way to see the world, because you can't draw something without really looking at it," she said. "So the next time you go on vacation, instead of taking photos, draw what you see!" she said.

"It doesn't matter if you can't draw in the beginning, because by the end of the trip, you will be able to. You will make memories too, much more than taking photos, because if you draw something, it becomes part of you."

He found the courage to do it all

By JEANETTE MARANTOS
Beauty of Bronze Coordinator

Leon White, is an artist and former actor who has lived in Seattle for 35 years, but he started out on a farm near Yakima, milking cows and gathering eggs.

Farming was a long tradition with the White family, but little Leon always felt different, partly because his goal from an early age was to be an artist.

“There was no way I was going to be a farmer,” he said. “I was always the black sheep in the family, and I knew farming was NOT my destiny.

“My family wasn’t very supportive of my goals,” he said. “They’d say, ‘You want to starve as an artist or actor?’ But my grandmother, Laura May White, knew I wouldn’t be staying in Yakima. She used to tell me, ‘Leon, don’t wait for your ship to come in. Take a rowboat out to meet it!’”

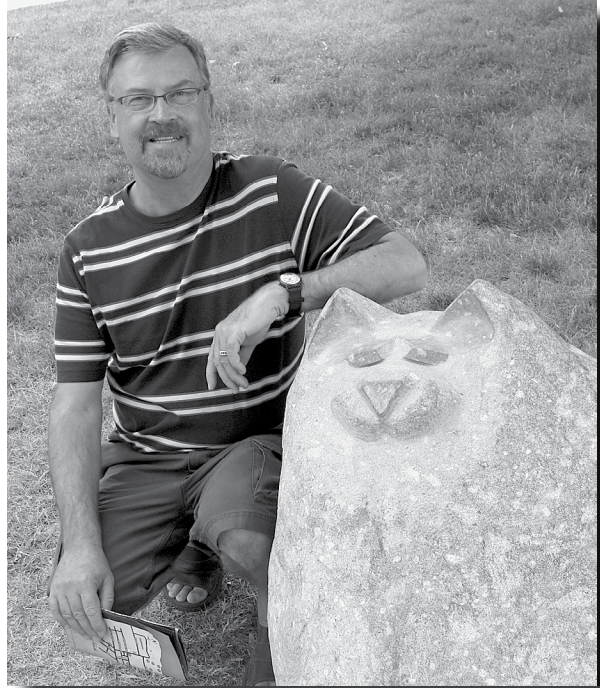
White lived on the farm with his grandparents, his single father and his older brother. No other children lived nearby, so the brothers learned how to entertain themselves by being creative.

“My father worked as a carpenter and brought home his wood scraps. My brother and I spent a lot of time building things from those wood pieces,” he said. “My dad would sand the ends of wood and we would build forts for our little soldiers. Instead of having Legos or Lincoln Logs, we had the real deal!”

White also taught himself to draw by copying pictures out of magazines, and soon, he said, drawing and painting became a regular part of his life.

But he had another passion as well—acting. By the time he was in college, he was earning money selling his paintings, but he also wanted to work as an actor. His professors and friends told him he couldn’t do both, but in 1978, as he was getting ready to finish college, he read an article about the famous actor Henry Fonda who loved to paint in his spare time.

“That was a kind of an awakening for me. I thought, ‘I’m OK after all to want to do all these things.’ I



Seattle artist Leon White with his stone sculpture “Hugs Welcomed,” which is now owned by Art on the Avenues. It’s one of 10 sculptures in AOTA’s Sculpture Garden in Riverfront Park.

wrote Mr. Fonda a letter, never expecting to hear anything back, but lo and behold, I got a letter from him, telling me how much he enjoyed my letter, and that it was OK for me to do whatever I wanted.”

The two men continued to write each other until Fonda died in 1982. They met a couple of times and even exchanged paintings. White gave Fonda a painting he had made of a barn in Ellensburg. Fonda gave White a water color of a potted geranium on an old wooden chair. He made the painting in his hotel room while he was performing in New York.

White went on to do modeling and acting on television, but he never stopped doing art. He had an exhibit of paintings in New York in 1982 and by the 1990s, painting and sculpting—especially stone carving—became his main job.

“I tell people, ‘I don’t take myself serious, but I take my art work serious.’” he said. “Art is my relaxation, a way to get back to my soul, because what I do really does come from my heart.”

His passion is art, warts and all

By JEANETTE MARANTOS
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Artist Leo Osborne is a big fan of warts, as long as they're growing on trees!

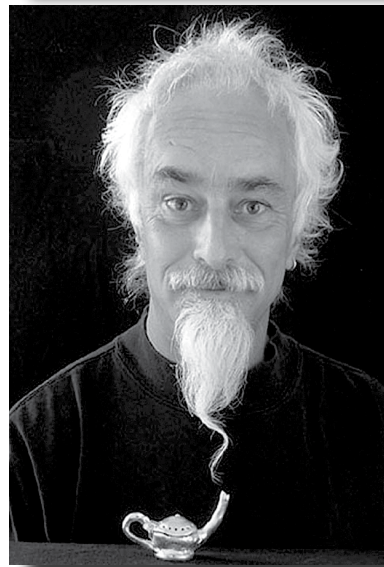
"They're called wood burls, and they're caused by a virus, much like a wart on a human," he said. "It's not a disease or rot. Warts are just a virus that changes the cellular structure of our flesh and it's the same with a tree. Wood burls grow on all kinds of trees, like fir, cedar and broadleaf maple. They look like gnarly old things, but they're all swirling texture. You have to find the essence within them, what wants to be released.

"I was just given a huge birch burl, which is very rare," he said. "It's three feet in diameter and has two knobs sticking out of it, so that helped me see what the final piece should be, two swans with their heads coming together. The composition is a dialogue between myself and the wood. I have to allow the wood to speak for itself."

Osborne was born in 1947 and grew up near Cape Cod in Massachusetts. He taught himself to draw when he was young, copying pictures out of magazines, and later taking correspondence classes, where artists could make comments and corrections on his work. before mailing it back. "It was very very helpful," he said. "I wasn't happy in school, so drawing was a wonderful outlet for me."

Osborne lives on Guemes Island now in the northwest corner of Washington. He's spent most of his career painting pictures and carving wood, but he still believes in the importance of learning how to draw. "It is the root to everything," he said. "A lot of art schools gave up teaching drawing in the 1970s and 1980s, but without the basic elements of drawing, most modern art is very weak."

Osborne graduated from a commercial art school, which taught him how to do graphic art for advertising and publications, but when he graduated, all he wanted to be was a painter. So he painted



Artist Leo Osborne, left, isn't really a genie, but he loves to make magic by carving wood burls. A detail of his popular bronze sculpture, "Ancient Traveler," is above. The sculpture is owned by Art on the Avenues and on display in the AOTA Sculpture Garden at Riverfront Park.

Photo by Jane Lane

pictures and worked a series a jobs, from cutting fish to hand-lettering signs to make enough money to survive.

He found a way to be a full-time artist when he discovered wood carving. He carved a few song birds out of bass wood—"a wonderful sculpting wood"—and they sold almost immediately. "I told my wife, "I think I need to do this full time" and that's what he did for the next 20 years, earning recognition and many awards for his work.

He moved to the Northwest around 1999, discovered burl wood and learned how to cast his carvings into bronze. He's also gone back to painting, using gold leaf. Both techniques have required a lot of new learning, but that's part of the fun, Osborne said. "If you're not evolving as an artist, then why do it?"