

Assembly of Artists

'Sculpture Sonoma 2005' the first of several planned efforts to organize local artist groups

By DAN TAYLOR
Photos by MARK ARONOFF
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Sculpture Sonoma 2005, "an ambitious series of events and exhibits under way countywide, began last year with one man's thought.

It was an intriguing notion from an influential man.

"I thought it would be a good idea to find out who Sonoma County sculptors consider the most accomplished among their peers," said Jalter Byck of Paradise Ridge Winery in Santa Rosa.

Byck and his wife, Marijke Byck-Hoensears, initially wanted only to mark this summer's 10th anniversary of the outdoor sculpture show at their Fountaingrove winery with something a little different.

The idea just got bigger and bigger.

Now, 100 sculptures by local artists are on display at a dozen county venues through the end of the year. A carefully crafted, full-color, 14-page booklet documents the entire undertaking.

On Aug. 20, at least two dozen sculptors will add some of their works on trucks for "a sculpture tailgate parade," suggested by Timber Cove sculptor Bruce Johnson. The sculptors will convene at Santa Rosa Junior College and parade through downtown Santa Rosa during sculpture in the City, "a daylong salute to local artists.

"To me, this is artists supporting community," said Vicki Kumpfer, organizer of the downtown event and art coordinator for the Santa Rosa Parks and Recreation Department. "We often hear that the community should support artists. This gives artists a chance to contribute. Artists are great community builders, because their way of thinking is so creative."

Because the sculptors showcased were chosen by their peers, "Sculpture Sonoma 2005" allows the county's artists to present their best to the community at large.

Questionnaires sent to 110 sculptors yielded a list of 28 artists considered the top talents. The list included Johnson and two other local art-

ists already known nationwide: Mark di Suvero, who lives in New York City now but keeps a studio in Petaluma; and Ned Kahn of Graton, who won a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant."

The balloting also identified some highly regarded but less famous sculptors, including John Watrous of Graton and Michael Cooper of Sebastopol, both longtime teachers and artist mentors. Cooper actually is better known to museums than to his peers, Byck said.

Whimsical assemblage artist Monty Monty of Santa Rosa, a favorite among other artists, also made the cut. "He's very popular among his peers," Byck said.

List in hand, Byck began to meet with local museum directors and curators and the Arts Council of Sonoma County to plan a series of shows presenting work by the leading sculptors. Hours and hours of discussion followed, producing an electronic storm of e-mailed notes and minutes from meetings.

Meanwhile, Community Foundation Sonoma County was seeking a grant designed to foster collaboration among local arts groups and needed a specific kickoff project for 2005. The "sculpture project," as participants called it then, was already in the planning stages and seemed ideal.

Last December, San Francisco's James Irvine Foundation awarded a \$400,000, three-year grant to Sonoma County, to be administered by the foundation.

"It'll have lasting impact," Kumpfer said. "Our art community hasn't coalesced. Now we'll work together more, rather than on parallel paths."

"Sculpture Sonoma 2005," as it was finally named, became the first stage of a long-term plan to raise the profile of the region's arts. A task force was formed and an administrator hired to oversee the process.

"This has been the single most significant countywide visual arts event we've ever had," said arts council president Michael Friedenberg, "and it came from the collaboration between arts organizations."

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COVER STORY



Monty Monty of Santa Rosa put Chinese symbols on three revolving doors, from left, signifying "yesterday," "today" and "the future." A slight breeze sets them twirling outside the Museum of Contemporary Art at the Burbank Center for the Arts north of Santa Rosa.

MONTY MONTY

Age: 46

Home: Santa Rosa

Background: He started his art education with a correspondence course at age 14, and completed a two-year Sonoma County program in graphic arts technology by 16. In 1979, he became a professional graphic artist, continuing off and on until the '90s, when he began creating what he calls "vintage collectible sculpture and assemblage." He makes his artworks out of cast-offs and curios that include stopped clocks, old-fashioned kitchen tools and dented coffee cans. He even plays music on a bass violin he made out of a bowling ball.

Quote: "I'm constantly telling myself stories as I put these things together — 'Where did this come from? Where has this been?' I'm trying make people aware of familiar objects outside their regular context. You can get people to alter their preconceptions about how things should be used."

Where to see his work: Showing work at Arts Council of Sonoma County, Burbank Center for the Arts, Finley Community Center and Paradise Ridge Winery, all Santa Rosa.

MICHAEL COOPER

Age: 61

Home: Sebastopol

Background: Master's degree in sculpture from San Jose State, master's of fine arts from UC Berkeley. He taught art for 34 years at two community colleges: Foothill in Los Altos Hills and De Anza in Cupertino. Cooper combines wood and metal in intricate sculptures that are often mobile, sometimes motorized.

Quote: "I like combining materials. It creates checks and balances. You want to figure it out. You can't help yourself. I've always liked art that gets right in your face. I'm trying to get people to look in a different way. The truth is, the reason why I make things is that is the best way to explain what I want to say."

Where to see his work: Showing work at Paradise Ridge Winery and Sonoma County Museum now, Santa Rosa Junior College in November.



Michael Cooper of Sebastopol is a full-time sculptor with his home and studio off Green Valley Road.

JOHN WATROUS

Age: 62

Home: Graton

Background: Master's in sculpture from New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, N.M. He teaches computer art and three-dimensional design at Santa Rosa Junior College. During 31 years there, he also has served as gallery director and art department chairman. He collaborates with Peter Middleton to create circuit boards that control lighting installations that shift colors and designs. Each piece is crafted for a specific location.

Quote: "My work is about changing patterns, and getting people to slow down and notice them. During my 15 years as curator at the college gallery, my job was controlling placement and lighting. If you can control your own lighting, you can create your own environment. My technical side was always



John Watrous creates sound and light sculptures in his Graton home/lab studio.

separate from my artistic side. I never integrated them until 10 years ago. I want to control as many aspects of a three-dimensional work as possible."

Where to see his work: Showing work at Paradise Ridge Winery and Santa Rosa Junior College Art Gallery.