

When public art doesn't please everyone

Sculptor, gallery owner put art on the street while also selling it

BY DAVID VARNAU

I am not alone in the belief that not only do the arts enhance our environment and enrich our lives, but also that our shared enjoyment strengthens our community and creates a source of connection. I have always believed that to be true. However, I recently have had cause to wonder if, at times, public art can serve to divide a community.

Public sculpture adds visual interest to our environment and allows pedestrians, in particular, to develop a relationship with it. Throughout the world, outdoor sculpture often is the centerpiece of public squares and piazzas. It gives the space personality and creates a sense of place. How often have you traveled someplace where you stum-



LARRY VOGEL PHOTOS

DAVID VARNAU speaks at the unveiling of two of his sculptures in Edmonds, Wash.

ble upon a sculpture that gives you a sense of thrill and discovery? How many times have you returned to that same place just to re-experience that wonder?

I have a vision to jump start a kind of renaissance in my hometown of Edmonds,

[See VARNAU, page 4](#)



TRANSFIXED—This bronze figure by Edmonds, Wash., sculptor David Varnau was recently installed on the streets of Edmonds with another Varnau nude or semi-nude. The two pieces sparked a spirited discussion of public art in the small city.

PNWS closes doors on downtown Sculptors Gallery

In the end, it was a bigger job than we anticipated

BY PAUL HAIST

When Pacific Northwest Sculptors celebrated the grand opening of its first-ever brick-and-mortar gallery last May 16,

most everybody was filled with hope and were optimistic that this was the beginning of something big.

About 200 people came through the gallery that night, and they were buying sculpture. There seemed every reason to be optimistic.

PNWS President George Heath shared everyone's enthusiasm at the outset.

"It was worth doing and it seemed

such a no-brainer at first: \$500 for 3,000 square feet of downtown retail. I would have grabbed it had it been offered to me personally," he wrote to the membership near the end of the experiment.

While artwork did sell in the gallery, it did not sell in sufficient volume to support the gallery, the expenses for which significantly exceeded the basic

[See GALLERY, page 3](#)

Pacific Northwest SCULPTORS

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www.pnwsculptors.org

The Pacific Northwest Sculptors Newsletter is published bimonthly on each even-numbered month by the Pacific Northwest Sculptors, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the public through educational programs and sculpture exhibitions. We are a dynamic, inclusive community of artists who inspire and support each other's growth with ideas, skills and knowledge.

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by Pacific Northwest Sculptors



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Au revoir, Sculptors Gallery; thanks to everyone who helped

I've had stores and that was, in the beginning, a matter of a cigar box for the cash and a note pad for recording sales.

The Sculptors Gallery that PNWS just closed in downtown Portland wasn't anything like that. It was way more complicated, as everyone involved can attest. There was constant effort to streamline operations, which was helpful, but new issues or old issues that became suddenly important kept the workload high. In the end, the workload was too high. We all got a very good look at what it takes to run a gallery. Not a bad thing to know.

We are, as of this writing, looking for storage space for the pedestals and other display items we use occasionally. We would need occasional access for set up and tear down of displays. If you have an unused building, please let us know. We need about 100 square feet. We have budgeted \$75 per month. It would help a

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



GEORGE HEATH

lot if we would avoid commercial storage rates.

With the gallery no more, we face the question of what to do next. I invite all of you to attend a board meeting to address that question. What would be useful to us? Profitable? Educational? What would help us take the next step in our work? This is the fun stuff to consider. The more the better. The December board meeting is at Julian's on Dec. 11 at 10 a.m. (see Upcoming Meetings on page 7).

Carole Murphy has mentioned names of those instrumental in making the gallery function. I won't repeat that. I would leave out too many, but I do know that Carole carried a tremendous load the entire time. I consider that rather heroic.

I am sad to report the passing of Sal Guardino. He's been a fixture in my life for some 40 years. Same poker game for 40 years. Veteran crab man at Guardino's on Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco (his dad and uncle were the owners, grandfather the founder), veteran printmaker, veteran of Sonoma in the 70s, the Renaissance Faire of the Bay Area, designer of the label for New Albion beer, (the nation's first microbrew), proud Sicilian, and one sweetheart of a man. Never gone.

Best to all and Merry Christmas!
George

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SHELLY DURICA-LAICHE

KEY PLAYERS there for the Sculptor Gallery's last day included, standing from left, Jim Johnson, Joe Pogan, Mo (Maureena) Ross, Carole Murphy, Jan Leader and Denise Sirchie. In the front row from left are Shelly Durica-Laiche, Laurie Vail, Dave Gonzalez and Alisa Looney.

GALLERY: We had a place of our own, for awhile

Continued from page 1

rent of \$500 a month. In the end, the gallery operation had to borrow from the PNWS general account to sustain operations.

Moreover, it was difficult to recruit ample volunteers to staff the space during regular business hours.

Another problem was location. The big space at Pioneer Place Mall downtown is an elegant retail location. It turned out, however, not to be ideal for an art gallery.

Heath summed it up in a message to the membership in which he mentioned the gallery location three stories above street level.

"A gallery needs walk-by traffic and there was none to speak of," he wrote.

Indeed, there was a lot more to the dream than just filling the big room with sculptures and enlisting PNWS volunteer artists to staff the place, although that too was a challenge. The mood was a little different when the gallery marked its closure on Oct. 20.

Former PNWS President Carole Murphy took on the task of directing the gallery. Following its closure she said, "It's amazing when you find out how much you didn't know about something. That's what happened to me when I took on opening and direct-

ing the Sculptors Gallery."

Her job was instantly full-time and a lot more and it never lightened up.

"I was daily surprised with what more had to be done: new systems, new follow-up, more PR, finding volunteers. I learned so much that I didn't even know I needed to know," said Murphy.

The decision to close the gallery was taken by the PNWS board on Oct. 16 after a disappointing financial report on the gallery from PNWS Treasurer Sam Hingston. The vote to close the gallery was unanimous among those present, which included Heath, Hingston, David Gonzalez, Rick Gregg and Paul Haist.

In the aftermath, Murphy looked at the big picture.

"After our six months, it became obvious that collectively we had no idea how much was involved and that the available volunteer support just didn't cover the gallery needs," she said. "What an education! What a challenge! We have all learned so much that we can take forward into our next marketing adventures."

Murphy was grateful for all the help she received along the way.

She offered special thanks to "Laurie Vail, Denise Sirchie, Sam Hingston, J. Mitch, Larry Treuber, Isabelle Johnston-Haist, Paul Haist, Alisa Looney and Jill Perry-Townsend.

"And thank you to the volunteers

who worked in the gallery and kept it open and running," said Murphy. "If I am forgetting anyone, please forgive and know that we do appreciate it."

PNWS Board Member Gonzalez summed up the experience about as succinctly as anybody. "Now I know why galleries charge 50 percent," he said.

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VARNAU: 'Fire storm' of controversy erupted

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Wash., where this community, which prides itself on its support of the arts, already has many sculpture installations in the downtown core. It's a place where residents and visitors feel the thrill of casting their gaze on sculpture that each time is an enriching and visceral experience.

After the completion a couple of years ago of a new bank building at the corner of Third Avenue and Main Street, my wife and I were walking by and noticed the nice open corner that was created there with a park bench. I said to her, "What a great spot this would be for a sculpture!"

I already had a sculpture displayed on the sidewalk in front of Cole Gallery which represents my art (see article in [December/January 2014/2015 PNWS Newsletter](#)). Not only was that sculpture well received, it was purchased by someone who noticed it while walking by the gallery. Given the enthusiastic reception that greeted that sculpture and the fact that it sold, Denise Cole, owner of Cole Gallery, was very supportive of my proposal to create an art loan program.

That notion included identifying locations in Edmonds where outdoor sculpture could be placed on loan. The model is a win-win-win-win. For the gallery, it is a win not only because the sculpture would be on consignment with gallery, which would receive the commission if the sculpture was purchased, but also because displaying the sculpture in the community provides greater visibility. The gallery gets exposure and doesn't have to pay rent on floor space to display the sculpture. The business where the loaned sculpture is sited outdoors—the bank for example—enjoys the benefit of having a work of fine art on its premises at no cost. For me, it is a great opportunity to gain greater exposure for my art. Of course, the community benefits because city funds are not used to purchase the sculpture even though it is enjoyed by people passing by on a daily basis.

The serendipity of targeting Washington Federal Bank in Edmonds was that Denise Cole banks there and already had a business relationship with



LARRY VOGEL PHOTO

APRÈS LE BAIN—One of two bronze figures by Edmonds, Wash., sculptor David Varnau installed recently on the streets of Edmonds, Wash.

the branch manager. Denise and I met with him and pitched our proposal to install "Ananda" on loan. The banker expressed interest.

He needed to put the question to bank headquarters. In the end, the proposal was reviewed by Washington Federal's CEO and approval was given.

The Saturday morning on which I installed the sculpture, I first anchored just the pedestal to the sidewalk and then removed the sculpture from my vehicle with a bag over it. I placed the sculpture on the pedestal, looked around to see if anyone was watching. Only an old man was walking by as I removed the bag. He glanced my way and, without any change in expression, continued walking. Although I was thrilled to finally have "Ananda" installed after many months of planning, it did feel anticlimactic. However, the sculpture has been well received. It has been fun to sit on the nearby park bench and observe

passersby as they interact with it. I find it interesting how often adults, apparently lost in thought, walk right by without even noticing it, but their kids almost invariably see it and tug at their parents to stop and look at it.

With the success of that installation, I was enthusiastic about looking for additional sites where I could install other sculptures in my home town. The genesis of the idea to install two sculptures in front of Café Louvre occurred while Cole and I were meeting with Frances White Chapin who is the cultural services manager for the City of Edmonds. We were sitting at a table on the café's patio having coffee and discussing possible locations for outdoor sculptures.

Denise glanced at the concrete planter boxes there and said, "That would be a great place for two sculptures." Frances replied, "I was thinking the same thing."

The wheels began turning immediately in my artist/engineer's mind. Denise—again, with her many contacts in Edmonds—mentioned that she knows the owner of the building there. We drafted a letter to the owner, who was receptive to a meeting to discuss the notion of partnering for a sculpture loan.

When I met with him, he was more than enthusiastic. I suggested that he speak with his tenants to ensure that they had no objections to the proposal and provided him with photographs of the two sculptures that we were proposing to install in front of his Windemere Real Estate Building, as well as a Photoshopped mock-up of how the site would appear with the sculptures in place. In the end, he reported that no objections had been voiced and the project was a go.

Together with Cole Gallery, we selected the two sculptures to be installed for the unveiling event.

One is entitled, "Transfixed," which has been on display in Cole Gallery for some nine months. It is a life-sized bronze that depicts a seated nude female whose arms and legs are crossed (hence, *transfixed*), as if she is protecting herself, or perhaps she is in fact self-possessed and at peace or even in a trance. It's a moody piece and the viewer may imagine any one of many differ-

ent messages in the piece.

The second sculpture was new and had never been displayed. “Après Le Bain” is a life-sized torso of a female holding a drapery over her front while she emerges from her bath. I was interested in rendering a piece that would simply celebrate sensuous feminine beauty in such a way that the pose in every detail lends itself to that sense.

Once the sculptures were prepped for the outdoor elements, the pedestals fabricated and powder coated, it was time to plan the installation. Because the installation of “Ananda” previously had been so anticlimactic, I decided to create a public unveiling event.

I hired a marketing person to send out a press release to the newspapers, hired an accordionist for background music, a local drummer to do the drum roll, and a couple of girls to hand out fliers at the farmers market that morning.

The gallery and I invited all the collectors on our mailing lists. The mayor and the city manager of cultural services were invited as well. About 60 people, including reporters, Mayor Dave Earling and Frances (Chapin—the city cultural services manager) showed up on a sunny morning in September. With the call for “Drum Roll Please,” each sculpture was unveiled. Applause!

I spoke to the crowd about the sculptures, commenting about the obvious synchronicity of them being in front of “The Louvre.” The gallery owner expressed her delight over being involved in the art loan and, finally, the mayor added his comments about the importance of art in our community.

The event was covered in the [online edition](#) of our local paper, with the opportunity for its readers to comment.

Well, a fire storm ensued with an online debate about the merits of the sculptures and, for some, how the sculptures were inappropriate, even offensive, in a public venue. What many failed to realize is that the sculptures are sited on private property. But, since the sculptures are visible to the public from the sidewalk, those objecting to them take issue with the fact that they are in the public view and that they wouldn't want their children to cast their gaze on the nude sculptures. Several [letters to the editor](#), both for and against, have

been printed in the local paper as well.

I continue to wonder if the brouhaha will ever die down, or if I will be asked by the building owner to remove those two sculptures. He has been supportive thus far in spite of the controversy and the pressure that has been brought to bear on him in the form of letters from “a concerned group of citizens.”

Also, there have also been attempts by some to strong-arm the gallery owner to withdraw her participation in the loan of the two sculptures. I have discovered that it is one thing to have a sculpture on display in a gallery where people who don't resonate with it simply walk on. But, when the same sculpture is in a public venue, it seems to give people permission to criticize it in public.

Further, in the case of semi-nude art where some find it offensive, their comments may elicit self-doubt and even shame in those who initially praised the art and found it in good taste. Some of the claims made, admittedly by only a few people in the online comments, forced me to do some soul searching about why I enjoy sculpting nudes. However, based on this experience, I suspect that artists always are subject to criticism of their art, whatever the subject or style, especially when it is in public.

Be that as it may, I encourage other sculptors to consider seeking opportunities for displaying their art in a loan program. It is particularly satisfying to have opportunities to see your art in your own community and have frequent opportunities to observe people interacting with it.

When attempting to have outdoor sculpture installed in public, you must consider whether you want it on public or private property. There are far more hoops to jump through to have sculpture sited on public property than on private property. Frances actually encouraged me to consider approaching businesses and inquire if they were interested in partnering in an art loan arrangement. She points out that there is only occasionally a request for proposal (RFP) sent out by the city to purchase art for a specific site. That is a very lengthy process that requires a committee review of proposals. The loan or gift of a sculpture to the city would, again, require committee review and the city

would have final approval of whether, how and where the sculpture is installed. When arranging for the loan of a sculpture on private property, there are fewer pieces to the puzzle. The artist must, for the most part, work only directly with the business on whose property the sculpture is to be located. There are additional considerations, however, that—in Edmonds and probably elsewhere as well—involve input from the city's Public Works Department to ensure, for example, that the proposed location of the sculpture, isn't going to interfere with passing motorists' view of cross traffic or of traffic signs or that the sculpture isn't going to be located directly over underground utilities.

The Public Works Department strongly encouraged involvement of the city cultural services manager. Indeed, her input proved valuable for selecting the exact location of “Ananda” on the corner of Third Avenue and Main Street, so that it could be enjoyed by viewers sitting on the nearby bench and passersby alike and, at the same time, not have the sculpture interfere with the flow of foot traffic on the sidewalk.

With that in mind, the first challenge in being able to install a sculpture outdoors within public view but on private property involves identifying a suitable site. Yet, that is only the beginning. The sculpture and its subject must be compatible with the site. Furthermore, to install an outdoor sculpture differs according to venue. Sites are never the same; the hoops to jump through are usually different than the last time.

For example, the slope of the site, what is in the background, how the sculpture will appear from different perspectives all should influence the exact siting of the sculpture. Consideration must be given also to security and to the deterrence of vandalism or theft.

Finally, a plan for maintaining the sculpture is needed. In the case of municipally-owned art, the municipality is responsible for the maintenance. When a sculpture is sited on private property, however, other arrangements must be made. Usually the artist must maintain the artwork.

David Varnau is a sculptor in Edmond's, Wash. Learn more about him online at <http://www.davidvarna.com>.

Pamela Mummy sculpts big chess sets



Photos courtesy of the artist



SCULPTOR PAMELA MUMMY, above, with the larger of two ceramic chess sets she has in galleries now for the holiday season. At left is a slightly smaller set with an “Above the Sea/Below the Sea” theme featuring pirates, mermaids and more.

Pamela Mummy has two of her ceramic chess sets in two galleries for the holiday season.

Her 52 inch x 52 inch chess set is at RiverSea Gallery in Astoria, Ore. Each piece, including the pawns, is unique. She created this set in a traditional king and queen style. The main pieces average 10 inches in height.

Her other chess set is 32 inches x 32 inches and has a

theme of “Above and Below the Sea.” This set is at Schack Art Center in Everett, Wash. The black pieces are “Above the Sea” with a Pirate, Wench, Bishops, Mates and Crow’s Nest Castles. “Below the Sea” includes Skeletal Pirate, Mermaid, Sea Serpents, Mermen and Crow’s Nest Castles. The pawns are all crew members.

Learn more about Pamela Mummy online at <http://pmummy.com>.

Corio, Frei install public art in Vancouver

Dave Frei and Jennifer Corio recently installed their newest sculpture “Heart and Stone” in Vancouver, Wash. The piece honors the founding mothers of Vancouver, women who have played a significant role in shaping the city’s history.

At 12 feet high, this colossal heart embodies the heart-centered traits at the heart of their work—compassion, caring, sense of community and connection, etc.

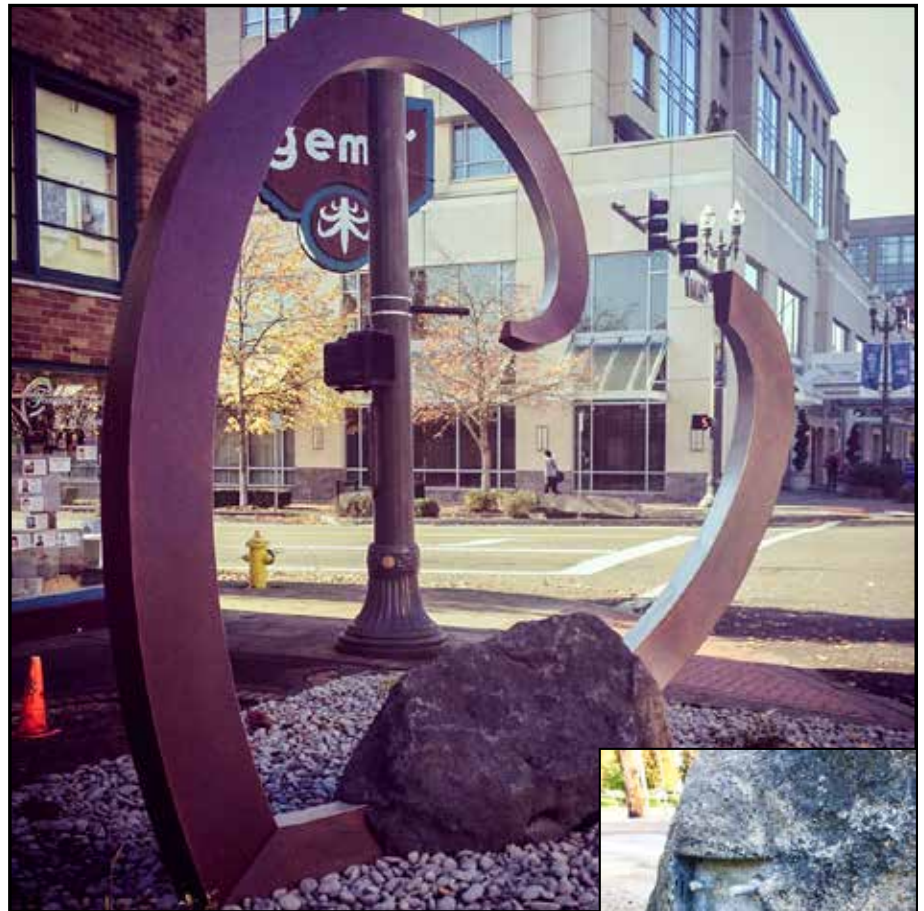
The heart is anchored by a two-ton boulder, symbolic of the solid foundation laid by these women. Perhaps more importantly it represents the grounding and balance it takes to realize our heart’s dreams—after all, desire alone cannot influence change. We must marry that passion with the nitty gritty of commitment, hustle, hard work, perseverance, influence, money and more—all the tools that enable one to make a concerted effort to promote real and lasting change.

Corio designed the sculpture and Frei engineered and fabricated the work using steel and stainless steel. The steel is finished with a ferric nitrate solution to give it a rich rusted look, while the center of the heart shines in brushed stainless. By far the biggest challenge of the project was working with stone for the first time, especially one so large. From choosing the perfect size and shape, moving it around, and carving it to fit the two sides of the heart well enough to lend the illusion that it burrows completely through the rock.

The couple was awarded the commission by Vancouver’s Downtown Association whose vision for this project was funded partly by the City of Vancouver and partly by private donations. You can see the sculpture in person at the corner of Columbia Street and West Sixth Street in downtown Vancouver.

Corio and Frei operate Cobalt Designworks in Vancouver.

Learn more about the work of Corio and Frei online at www.CorioFrei.com



Above: “Heart and Stone,” in situ in downtown Vancouver, Wash. Right: the boulder that Frei had to shape to fit the sculpture.

MARCUS GRIFFITH PHOTOS

Upcoming Meetings

November/December Members Meeting

POTLUCK

Hosted by Carole Murphy
 Thursday, Dec. 3, 7 p.m.
 4495 SE Alder Crest Rd.
 Milwaukie, Ore. 97222
 503 235-7233
carolemurphy.com

All members are encouraged to attend board meetings. These are where things happen and where one will get the full benefits of membership. Work with other sculptors, make a show happen. Attend a board meeting.
 503 329-5203

January Members Meeting

POTLUCK

December Board Meeting

December 11, 10 a.m.
 Julian Voss-Andreae residence
 1517 SE Holly St.
 Portland, Ore. 97214

Hosted by Kim Lewis
 Thursday, Jan. 21, 7 p.m.
 17383 Holy Names Dr.
 Lake Oswego, OR 97034
 503 267-8703

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PNWS Spotlight

Robert Gigliotti broadens his horizons

Sculptor and PNWS member Robert E. Gigliotti has been casting bronze for 35 years. But recently, the Bow, Wash., resident began exploring the world of fabricated metal and stone carving.

"I just completed my first outdoor sculpture with an eye toward public art," he said. The piece, which he calls "Inspiration No. 1," is his first work in stainless steel.

"Owl" is a recently completed stone carving.

Steel and stone notwithstanding, Gigliotti isn't walking away from bronze. His recent "Jazzman" continues his figurative work in bronze in a style that is instantly recognizable.

Learn more about Gigliotti online at Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/>.



JAZZMAN, cast bronze.

INSPIRATION No. 1,
fabricated stainless steel



OWL, carved stone