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D.K. Richardson, Jessica Pisano, Andrew Argent, Julyan Davis,  
Kelly Houghton, Mark Fehlman, and Mark Yale Harris

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# Aa

ARTISTS ON ART



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MARK YALE HARRIS

# CONSTRUCTING A SCULPTOR



*Success as an artist involves a bit of luck, yet I have found that proper groundwork can factor in. As I transitioned from businessman to career artist, I paid close attention to the construction of my new life as a sculptor.*

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How does a businessperson construct a new identity, a new way of working, a new way of thinking as he transitions to a life devoted to making fine art? A sculptor would use his hands, vision and heart to form new solid objects, in three dimensions.

At 63 years of age, I traded the security of an extremely successful business career for the risky life of an artist. But though I took a chance, I managed the radical shift effectively by leading with my heart, while being thoughtful and deliberate, getting trained, and working tenaciously. Just as my company had detailed advanced planning on many projects, I conscientiously assembled the necessary elements that would assist me in becoming a skillful sculptor.

The timing was right: In 1972, as a young man, I co-founded the Red Roof Inns, a successful hotel chain, which spanned across the United States. In 1984, I founded the Amerisuites Hotels, innovating a new concept of suite accommodations. I was enjoying the pursuit of excellence in my livelihood and my career was flourishing. Within the scope of my field, I did get to exercise a degree of creativity.



*As One*, 2008, Carrara Marble, 46 x 19 x 22 inches

My natural curiosity helped me seek the untried, exploring new ways of approaching and thinking about hospitality and urban development. Some of my greatest commercial achievements stemmed from ingenuity and imagination. It was gratifying. During this time, I had a beautiful family, raising my children and providing a comfortable life in which they could thrive.

However, I began to feel the need for something more. Then my first love, having never been out of view, came back beckoning.



Harris stands with *Awakening III*, 2014, Bronze, edition #8, 48 x 39 x 21 inches

When I was young, I showed a definite aptitude for making art. I loved creating, and I envisioned being an artist as an adult. Awards and scholarships validated my early talents. Yet I ended up following the advice and guidance of my parents, who, having lived through the Great Depression, advocated a less risky, conventional career. I supported myself through Ohio State University, earning a business degree, and then began 30-plus years in the realm of hospitality/urban development.

During these years, I maintained an abiding interest in art. To nourish this immutable pull, I became a collector and I continued to create in the quiet spaces. I became a street-student of art, reading and viewing everything I could. I found myself particularly drawn to certain sculptors, and to the medium itself.



*Barbie-Q*, 2006, Onyx with bronze horns, 12 x 27 x 15 inches

Henry Moore's gracefully minimal and stylized figures, Constantin Brâncuși's bare and expressive lines—this type of expression spoke to me. Brâncuși's quote speaks this beautifully: "When you see a fish you don't think of its scales, do you? You think of its speed, its floating, flashing body seen through the water. If I made fins and eyes and scales, I would arrest its movement; give a pattern or shape of reality. I want just the flash of its spirit."

I grappled with continuing my career path or upending my life to go after what I always knew was my true destiny. There was an enormous personal risk. I was weighing the options in my hands: continue my career path/follow my passion/continue my career path/follow my passion?

I had spent a lifetime yearning to get back to what made me joyful and expressive when I was younger. My artistic side was itching for release from the shadows. I was finally ready in the early '90s. I wanted to shift from the concrete measurable business world to the hazy and uncertain world of art making.

I sold my business interests. I chose Art.



*Crush*, 2009, Glass 11 x 14-1/2 x 3-1/2 inches







*Chaos*, 2010, Alabaster, 22 x 22 x 10 inches

Since sculptural form always resonated with me, I knew I wanted to be a sculptor. It was a big adjustment, becoming a “nobody” in the art world. I was humbled. However, as a self-made man who began with nothing, I understood that this professional change required starting all over, learning my craft, and earning my respect as an artist. I knew that skill was key and a mentor needed to be the fulcrum at the heart of this pivot.

In 1999, I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico and turned to a Native American artist whose work I had collected and admired for years, Bill Prokopiou (Aleut). In the spirit of the nation’s most recognized Native American artist, sculptor Allan Houser (Chiricahua Apache), and as former protégés of Houser, Bill Prokopiou and Doug Hyde (Nez Perce) took me under their wings. Inspired by the geographical region and grounded in the wisdom, talent and skill of my teachers, I was committed to learning how to sculpt. Over the years, I honed my technical skills as well as my artistic vision.



*Crush*, 2007, Bronze, edition #8, 61 x 80 x 20-1/2 inches

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My motivation became clear: to try and interpret and convey an emotion, be it human or animal, within my media. In my case, attempting to blend form, figure, emotion and gesture often results in a figurative abstraction. Some of my pieces speak best on an intimate scale, while others require a monumental voice.



*Recoil*, 2003, Bronze, edition #8, 46 x 33 x 42 inches

Working the intrinsic qualities of the stone, I seek simple, strong, expressive design. Try and fail, continue working through a concept until it feels complete—this is what I learned and kept in mind, as I grew more self-assured in my work. Since there is little margin for error in the reductive art of stone carving, you work slowly, sure-handedly. Eventually something emerges—that pure essence of the subject, the soul of the matter, abstracted. Those simple lines, gestures, and the physical manifestation of emotions are beautiful.

My art conveys my nonverbal view of life—an ongoing portrayal of myself—my behavior, adventure, exploration, risk-taking, and my non-acceptance of convention and the status quo. I am continually in search of the new, the different, and I am fascinated with the unconventional. Life has a hard, aggressive side, as does much of my work, represented by rigid, angular lines. However, the soft side is also apparent, visible as curves and soft forms. My evolving body of work evokes this duality. I hope to provoke a perceptual, internal, and intellectual response from the viewer.

From the outset, I chose stone as my medium—mainly marble, onyx, limestone and alabaster. I select stones that will be best able convey the form within them. Longevity and outdoor permanence also factor in. At times I have chosen bronze for its capacity to expand the surface possibilities and number of sculptures I am able to create; bronze editions are taken from a piece that is originally carved in stone and then cast using the lost wax process.

I use a combination of primitive and industrial tools. The pneumatic chisel is my favorite tool. With it I feel like I am drawing on the stone. I develop a rhythm when working with it that puts me in a dreamlike mental state. I work on three to four pieces at a time, creating twelve to fifteen new original works a year. Depending on the scale and complexity, a piece takes approximately eighty to three hundred hours to complete.

Much of my work created from the “Direct Carving Method”—I carve directly on the material in front of me with limited use of a maquette or plaster model. My Native American mentors believed that you quietly observe the shape of the rock, see the image within and it will come forth. It is the process of emergence and releasing the figure from the stone. In doing so, I allow the material to guide me.



*Recoil*, 2003, Bronze, 46 x 33 x 42 inches

Though I gave up on my music lessons when I was nine so I could play sports, I do believe that that early music education embedded in me my appreciation for the rhythm of line that manifests itself in my work. Additionally, not only did I absorb what my mentors taught me, but non-Western carvings from Africa, Oceania and India also influence me. Additional Western influences include Jacob Epstein, Pablo Picasso and Alexander Archipenko. Although an astute student of past styles, my art does not derive from them; it is my individual interpretation based on fundamental sculptural principles. Traditional, old-world sources of inspiration form a unique contrast to the often smooth and lustrous look of my works, resulting in a blend of contemporaneousness and agelessness.

I continue my artistic training through intensive workshops. I like to expand my repertoire of media and techniques. Broadening my range of proficiency in various media opens up possibilities for future work. Drawing and sketching are creative outlets. At one workshop, I experimented with printmaking. Of late, I have incorporated different media, such as steel, grog clay and broken glass, in some of my pieces.

I have a thriving studio practice in the Roaring Fork Valley of Colorado. It is a bucolic and geographically impressive area. I repeatedly find myself drawn to the mountains of the Southwest and the vast clear skies. It is peaceful and inspirational. I continue to nod in appreciation to the part of me that succumbed to the enticement of art. This has been a great gift to myself. I find satisfaction in the mysteriousness of the process, the tactile involvement. There is a thrill in creating. I even revel in the frustration of each new challenge in the execution of my work. It keeps me motivated and energized.

Having returned full circle to a childhood passion, I am finding it as richly rewarding as my first career. I took a risk. I now understand that when you are an artist, art IS your business. Not only did I have to produce work, I had to see to the pragmatic aspect of marketing my work. My business background put me in good stead.

While success in the art world always involves a bit of luck, I at least made sure I entered the arena as prepared as I could be. I paid attention to the construction of my life as a sculptor. This made the transition, the evolution of how I defined myself, that much less formidable, as I strove and continue to strive in my work for Brâncuși's illusive "flash of the spirit."





Website: <http://www.markyaleharris.com>

## ABOUT MARK YALE HARRIS

Mark Yale Harris was born in Buffalo, New York and spent hours as a child in his own artistic world. He was honored with awards and scholarships for his art, but was encouraged to pursue a more conventional career. As such, he embarked upon a successful career in real estate and hotel development. Never abandoning his first love, he sold his company in 1996 to fulfill his dream of creating art full-time. Although he had over a half-century of life experience, Harris was a novice at his craft. The artist chose a mentor whom he had long admired to assist with honing his burgeoning artistic skills, sculptor Bill Prokopiou (Aleut, 1944-1999). Prokopiou and sculptor Doug Hyde (Nez Perce) took Harris under their wings and generously shared their immense knowledge, talent, and vision.

Today, Harris's sculpture has been included in 80+ solo, museum and international exhibitions. 100+ publications have featured his sculpture in the past 10 years. Three books have been published dedicated entirely to the important works created thus far in Harris's career. Permanent public collections, include: Hilton Hotels; Herman Memorial Hospital - Houston, TX; State of New Mexico; Four Seasons Hotel - Chicago, IL; and City of Roanoke, Virginia. Exhibitions include: Royal Academy of Art – London, UK; Marin MOCA, Marin, CA; Open Air Museum - Ube, Japan; and the Frederick Remington Museum – Ogdensburg, NY.

# Thank You for Reading!

Next issue coming in May 2017

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