

## Artist Approach to Public Art

I make collaborative and interactive public art pieces that invite viewers to reconsider their relationships with people, places or situations. When approaching any site-specific piece, I spend time at the site or with the drawings. I interview people in the community in an effort to better understand what may work for that environment. As described below, I design both temporary and permanent pieces that communicate on an aesthetic and conceptual level.

The pieces I created for the U.S. Embassy in Abuja, Nigeria were made in response to the curator's request for art that challenges people's expectations while offering a peaceful, serene-like quality where viewers may transcend their environment. I chose porcupine quills as my materials because they have long been a favorite ornament and good-luck charm in Africa. In *Dance and Drum*, thousands of quills pierce two 6' x 3' x 3" canvases. The quills outline the figures of three women dancing on one canvas and a man playing the drums on another. The hundreds of African porcupine quills strung onto necklace wire show how *Charm* may work as an amulet.

A shimmering wall reminiscent of memorials, prayer and peace walls around the world, *Vessels* draws upon many methods of religious and cultural expression. The hundreds of colorful, hand-made paper scrolls inside the baskets contain peoples written thoughts, hope and prayers. Two hundred volunteers helped make the work by hand-stitching wire-mesh strips into hundreds of brass boxes and baskets. Seven hundred people completed the original exhibit, which was shown at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, TN, by adding paper scrolls to the wall.

*Shelter*, originally created for an exhibit at the Art Museum of the University of Memphis, addresses humanity's need to seek physical and psychological shelter in a modern world. Simultaneously suggesting a rib cage and a gothic church, *Shelter* consists of human-scale, twin steel cages facing each other: one bare and empty, the other covered and pierced with 1.2 million steel nails. Mirrored floors reflect the ribs and spiky interior. Intended as a protective yet potentially dangerous space that visitors may enter, *Shelter* holds ideas of protection and entrapment in delicate balance. More than 300 people participated in making the work, coming together for one year to pierce the shelter while discussing ways to build healthy emotional and physical shelters.

I based *The Prince* mobile, installed in the children's area of the Nashville Public Library, on Antoine de Saint-Exupery's book, *The Little Prince*, where the fox said to the prince, "What is essential is invisible to the eye." I chose that book because it articulates themes I address visually and relates to the old and young alike. *The Prince* mobile hangs under a spiral-galaxy mural. On one end of the mobile colored glass stars freely twirl around a small, finely embroidered, white silk sculpture, which suggests a playful yet thoughtful boy dressed in Edwardian costume. A larger white men's suit sitting at a table hangs from the other end of the mobile. Colored glass stars float behind the suit. Unlike the boy, the man is blind to his own set of stars.

As I got ready to make the *Web of Life* mobile for the Edwin Warner Park Nature Center in Nashville, I began by examining spider web pictures taken by the park naturalists. In addition to extensive research, I looked at webs more closely in nature. I soon realized that there are 38,000 known spider species with many different uses for their various types of silk. After much study, I made a nine-foot tall funnel web, a 5 foot wide dew-laden orb web and a three foot diameter egg sac using silk, wire and glass. The mobile continued themes I had been working on for years - concerning the idea *trap* - while commenting on a specific aspect of nature.

In an investigation of nature and our connection to it, I also make outdoor works. Both *Six Miles* and *Extensions* encourage people to re-examine their relationship with the environment as they walk among trees joined by thin strands of monofilament. Because the monofilament is clear fluorescent blue, it looks like a laser beam when the sun hits it and a spider web when in the shadows.

A strong believer in the importance of collaborative and community-based art making, I regularly involve artists from various disciplines as well as scientists, engineers, students and volunteers in my work. Specific collaborative shows include *The Hunt* at the University of the South, *The Dance* at Tennessee State University, *Extensions* at Vanderbilt University, and *The Prince* at Nashville Public Library.

In addition to working full-time in the studio, I am active in the arts community, often serving as juror, lecturer or teacher and have a great understanding of where public art fits with the fabric of the community. I have served on boards of directors for six arts organizations and report extensively on the arts for newspapers, magazines and radio.