



a transcendent artist

by ERICA MCFARLAND | photography by STEVE WILLIAMS

A Paisley boy from youth onwards, Doug Hays grew up swimming in the lakes and tromping through the woods, and that shows in his many nature-related works. At first, he turned to art as a hobby, learning how to work with steel because he enjoyed the challenge of bringing life to a normally unyielding, challenging material. Completely self-taught, Doug's determination to master his material and give voice to his creative vision led to a career that has spanned two decades. He started Doug Hays Art, a combined blacksmithing and sculpture venture, which now has studios in Paisley and Liberty, Tennessee.

Graduating from University of Central Florida in 1992, Doug spent his early years developing high-end furniture commissions and functioning sculptures. The majority of his work is in private collections spanning Orlando to Georgia, but in the last ten years he has centered on large-scale pieces for public areas. Still, his approach remains the same throughout each project. "My philosophy is that each artist approaches their medium with the idea of mastering the material," Doug

explains. "Whether it's glass or wood, the freedom to express one's self is dependent on the ability to control the medium." His adroitness with metal is the product of hours of reading instructional books and then experimenting with techniques.

Through his work, Doug hopes that he can reach out to other aspiring artists. "While I was a student at Umatilla High School, there were no other artists or works of art to guide me in Lake County," he recalls. Now, much of Doug's work is easily accessible, setting him up as future inspiration not only to artists like him, but to anyone who simply wants to escape from reality for a bit. He designed an abstract yellow bike rack for the Mount Dora Center for the Arts, as whimsical as it is functional. Visitors to

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South Lake Hospital in Clermont can also see his piece "Red Arc" in the lobby, which combines modern elements with Doug's characteristic smooth lines. In the future, Doug will have a piece in DeLand's 2011-2012 sculpture exhibit and another installation in Mount Dora in the fall.

In Eustis, Doug's fourteen-foot statue of a preening heron in Ferran Park has become a focal point as paramount as its downtown streets. Unlike his smaller works, the heron required intense planning and cooperation. "When I create works for public spaces, I work as a part of a team. Placing the heron sculpture required a collaboration of community, city of Eustis, PAM (Public Arts & Music) engineers and contractors," Doug says. He enjoys the teamwork because it offers him a chance to a work on projects larger than what he could normally manage, seeing his idea go from inception to ending as the product of many different minds.

With the heron watching over them, children play around the small enclosed pool while couples picnic. "I have always been inspired by the works of art that define the cultural identity of a community, like the metro in Paris or

the St. Louis Arch," Doug says. Although on a smaller scale, Doug's Eustis heron definitely contributes to the City's identity.

The motivations behind an artistic piece are as various as the artists themselves. Some produce art because they feel an intrinsic need to create, while others believe they have a unique take on life that must be shared. But only a few are truly motivated by the desire to beautify their community, giving back to those around them. Doug Hays is one of those few, striving to produce not only fine art but art that is impactful on his community.

When he tells me he hopes his work might "inspire young Floridians to see that there are opportunities to be a part of a cultural movement to create public sculpture here, where we grow up," I am struck again by the true reach of Doug Hays' work. He's a sculptor, but more importantly, he is a community figure who will make a difference in his world. ■

Doug's heron is on display at Ferran Park in Eustis. To see more of Doug's work, visit www.doughaysart.com

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