



ARTS & LIFE

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Q&A | MARK YALE HARRIS

Once leader in business, he sees life in rocks

By **Kaizaad Kotwal**

FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Mark Yale Harris worked in the business world for 37 years before turning to his life's passion in 1999 — sculpture.

He co-founded the Red Roof Inn chain in Columbus in 1972 and went on to found AmeriSuites in the late 1970s.

Harris, born in Buffalo, N.Y., has had a peripatetic life.

His family moved to Chicago when he was 9, he spent his high-school years in Cleveland, and he received a degree in business in 1961 from Ohio State University.

About a year ago, he moved to Carbondale, Colo., after spending 25 years in Austin, Texas, and Santa Fe, N.M.



Mark Yale Harris

His work is represented in more than a dozen galleries nationwide.

In 1999, he studied with two established American Indian sculptors — Doug Hyde and Bill Prokopiou — and kicked off his late-life odyssey as a full-time artist.

Q: As you made the transition from business to art, what difficulties did you face?

A: Originally it was very difficult worrying about what people would say and think. I had friends who would say, "Harris, when are you going to get a real job?" Once I overcame that, I became very proud of my work.

Art has always been a great interest of mine.

Q: What drew you to sculpture over, say, painting or ceramics?

A: I enjoy it all and have dabbled in it all. I became fascinated with 3-D works, but before settling on sculpture I had taken courses in drawing, painting. I became entranced with stone carvings — the physicality, the mental challenge of how you get something out of a rock.

Q: To what subject are you most drawn?

A: I refer to my work as contemporary realism and as interpretive of animals and the human form. In animals I like to explore the humorous, while the figurative works are more serious explorations of anxiety, love, affection or whatever the mood may be.

Q: Not being a traditionally trained artist, what big challenges did you face?

A: I had a natural talent to draw things. But as I started to work in 3-D in clay, I realized I was not very competent. So I went back to the basics, took some drawing classes and began to learn how to look at things and create them.

Q: What have you learned about yourself that wasn't apparent to you in the business world?

A: I think, on reflection, I realized that I was always very creative in the business world. The disciplines I enjoyed the most in business were marketing and advertising. And when I started AmeriSuites, it was a completely new way of doing things in the industry that has become the norm today.

Q: What do you like most and least about your new vocation?

A: The best is the creative pleasure and satisfaction of evolving something out of a piece of stone. The least desirable is the business side because I'd rather be creating.

Q: Your business ventures must have made it easier to pursue art, without financial worries hanging over you.

A: Absolutely. It is very difficult to make a living at art, and I would not have done it had I not been able to afford to support myself from other sources.

► Works by Mark Yale Harris are on view through May 26 in A Muse Gallery, 996 W. 3rd Ave. Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursdays and by appointment Mondays and Saturdays. Call 614-299-5003 or visit www.amusegallery.com.