

THE *Elegant* ★ **TEXAN**



## Mark Yale Harris A Visionary's Way

by Jane Gibson

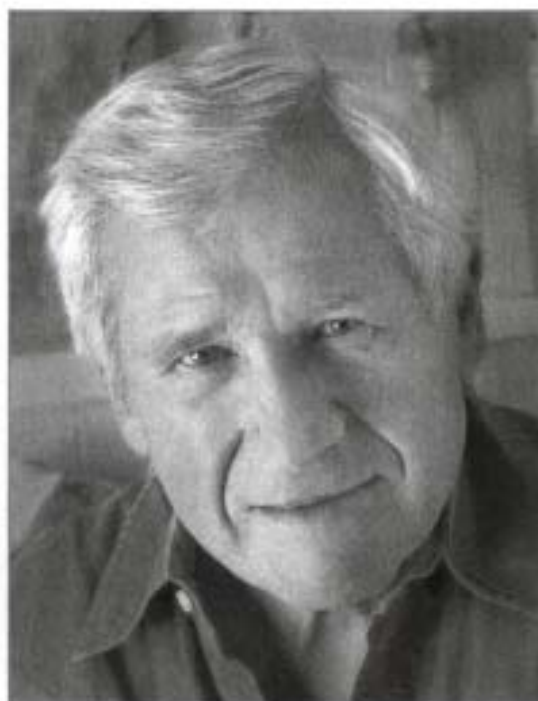
Mark Yale Harris is an artist-convinced-to-become-businessman-reborn-as-artist. He is that rare breed of visionary, born with a keen perception and passion for beauty and elegance. If psychologist James Hillman were to write a new version of his famous treatise on the inevitability of the soul's journey to fulfill his destiny, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, he would no doubt use the life of Mark Yale Harris as a prime example of someone living "the lot your soul chose before you ever took a breath." Harris was born to be an artist, an explorer and discoverer. Like great artists for centuries before him, he can see the beauty of "what can be" in places where others see only what is. Mark Yale Harris is a sculptor extraordinaire.

His official bio will tell you that he was persuaded from youthful artistic interests to turn his attention and talents toward the business world, where he co-founded first the hotel chain of Red Roof Inns, and then later, Americasites Hotels, the latter representing an innovation that "changed the face of the limited service hospitality industry." He had several successful careers in real estate and land development, serving in foundations dedicated to the intelligent use of land resources and urban growth. From the distant view of biography, the picture emerges of an artist dabbling in the business world, creating the new from existing forms, sculpting new ways from old. When he speaks of his philosophy of art, he describes his business life as well.

"It is my belief that as we go through life we can only create from that which we have, or are given... The ability to interpret and create beauty from that which we have is the challenge and the satisfaction I experience in creating my work."

Indeed, The challenge and satisfaction may be his; the pleasure is ours. An artistic community and general public who view his work and appreciate it on both intellectual and visceral levels.


Sculpture is that rare form of art that, with the artist's permission, can be touched, can be caressed and absorbed by the hand as well as the eye. Mark Yale Harris sculpts a finish that beckons human touch, one that bathes his forms in the brilliance of reflected light and almost breathes its spirit into the air around it. His work has provoked a wildly enthusiastic response among artists and patrons alike, exhibited in thirteen galleries across the U.S. and in both private and public collections in an ever-growing number. His



Mark Yale Harris

"Mark is one of my heroes. At an age when most people would never make a change, he went and pursued a dream. He jumped off of a cliff without a parachute, he landed on his feet with the wind at his back."

Craig Hester, CEO

 Hester Capital



Lunch



Unbearable

impressive long list of prestigious awards and feature articles all bespeak a fascination with this artist-come-finally; the long wait to realize his talents has been well worth the time.

Harris belongs to that school of artist that spans all disciplines; his counterparts in description and depictions of nature remind one of Annie Dillard's fierce but gentle prose, and e.e. cummings's sentimental but clear-eyed poetry. His figures do not move so much as pause, caught in mid-embrace or half-burrow, somewhere on a filmy divide between this world and another. His figures are voluptuous, but not self-consciously so. Harris is hard to categorize, and most likely would rather remain that way. One sees pre-Columbian lines here, oriental attitudes there, Mondrian strictures and geometric patterns. There are bulky Botero-like figures and Greco-Roman bulls; there is the innocent and the inscrutable, sometimes all in one piece.

Such talent is not born and brought to maturity on its own. Harris is an intelligent and thoughtful man with the humility to recognize and value the need for training, and so he began his career in art by seeking out the best of teachers. He had admired and collected the work of Bill Prokopiou (Aleut, 1944-1999) for many years before becoming his student in Santa Fe; Harris also enlisted the help of sculptor Doug Hyde (Nez Perce), both men noted protégés of "the nation's most recognized Native American artist, sculptor Allan Houser (Chiricahua Apache, 1915-1994). To this day, Harris considers Santa Fe and Austin his dual homes, having spent considerable time traveling to study with his mentors in honing his craft.

He works in alabaster, marble, limestone, and bronze, sometimes combining the different elements to "bring forth a duality" in his pieces. Duality is an important theme for an artist who both sees the natural world better than most of us see it, and sees beyond it better than most of us can bear to do. Harris seeks to express, in his own words:

"...gesture, form, energy, pleasure and pain. Alternating between gesture and

geometric form, depicting the contradiction we experience in nature, awakening the vision and appreciation of the duality in the world around us."

If there is a lesson to be drawn from Mark Yale Harris' art, it is that of the fascination to be found in looking, really looking at the world and its endless swirl of repetitive patterns that evolve somehow into pieces of original beauty. You think of the work long after it's been seen and experienced; you carry away some part of it that's yours now, whether the piece remains in a private collection or graces your own home. And every stone you pass, whether a boulder along the mountainside or a marble block in a building's foundation, makes you wonder: Is there a Mark Yale Harris hidden inside? What would Mark Yale Harris find in that one?

If there is a lesson to be drawn from Mark Yale Harris' life, it is that of the hope of following a passion, of fulfilling one's true calling, no matter how long and out-of-the-way the path of life seems to go. Success for Harris is counted in moments, in opportunities to create beauty out of the ordinary, to find the phenomenal in the normal, to breathe the miraculous into the mundane and call it our birthright of creating. It is certainly what Mark Yale Harris was born to do. And because he does it, the world of art will never be the same. ✪

