

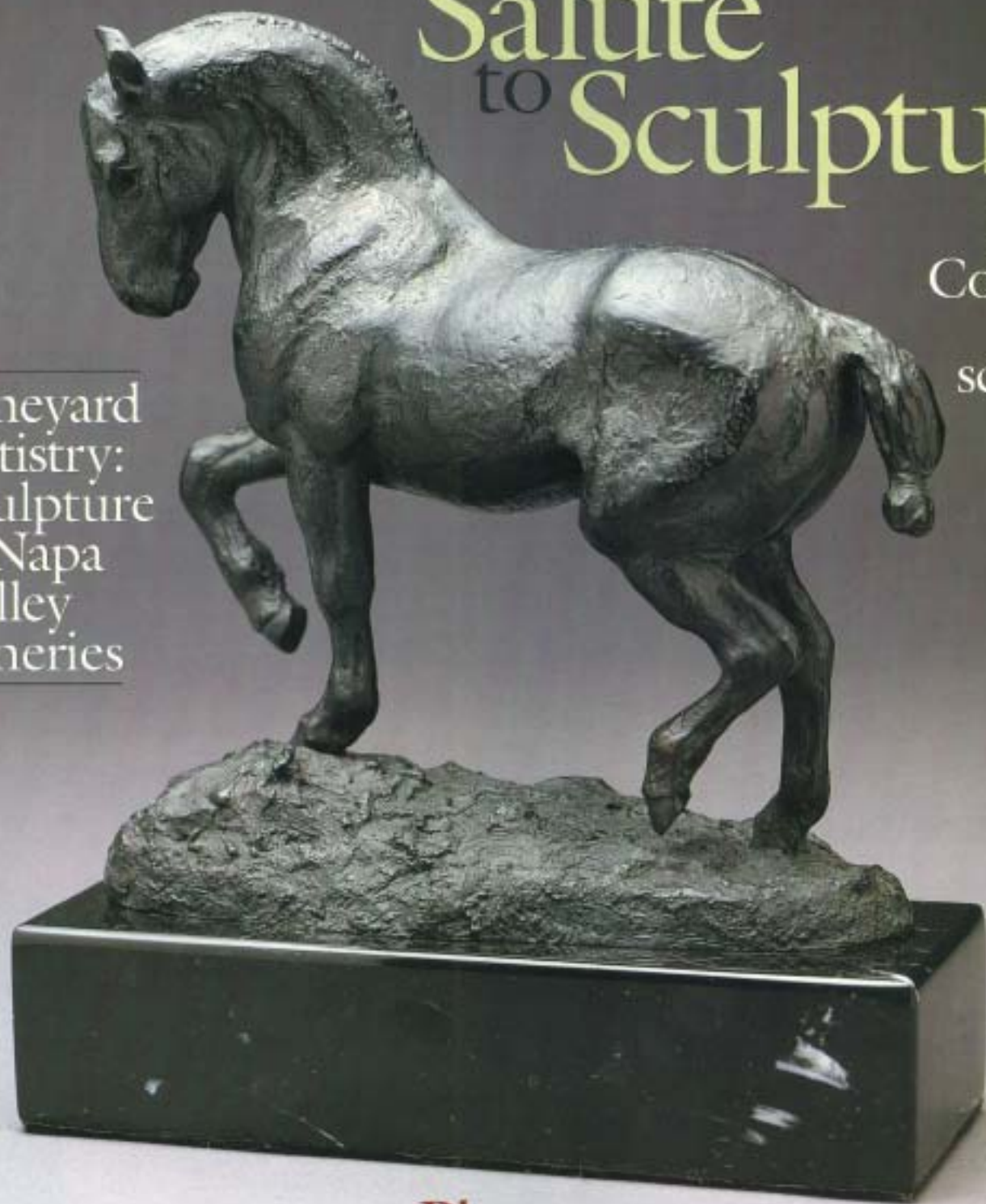
# Southwest Art

JULY 2005

## Salute to Sculpture

Preview  
Colorado's  
annual  
sculpture  
shows

Vineyard  
Artistry:  
Sculpture  
at Napa  
Valley  
wineries



**Plus**  
Gallery-hopping  
in Utah | The luminous western  
landscapes of Kathryn Stats



NOT KNOWING,  
COLORADO YULE  
MARBLE, 25 X 20 X 14.



GOT AWAY,  
ALABASTER,  
14 X 9 X 16.

BIG GULP,  
TRANSLUCENT/ORANGE  
ALABASTER, 9 X 13 X 20.



TANGO 63, PINK  
PORTUGESE MARBLE,  
22 X 9 X 9.



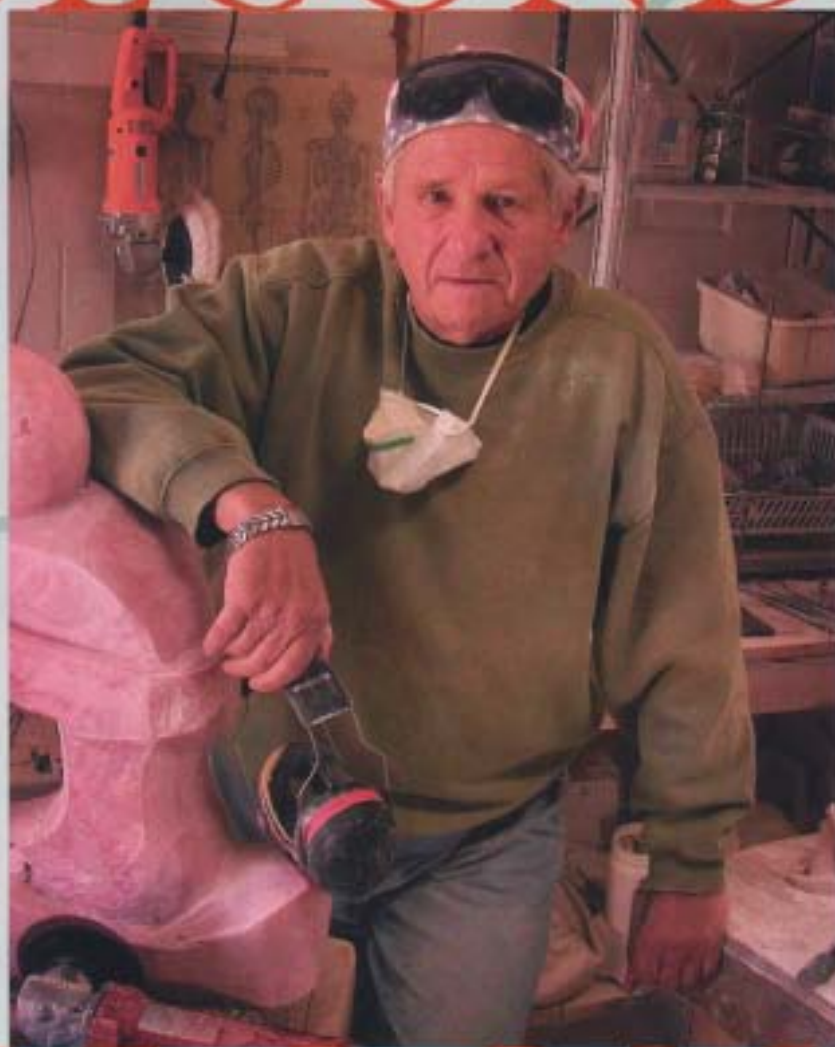
STORIES OF LATE BLOOMERS are inevitably heartening tales, possessing as they do the dramatic suspense of doubt, courage, setbacks, turnarounds, and patience, followed by the catharsis of emergence and success. The world of art is especially rich in these narratives; the vagaries of critical and popular taste alone would make it so, even if artists had what is commonly meant by "careers" in other human endeavors. In the Vincent Van Gogh-based Myth of the Suffering Artist, any blooming that's not posthumous can hardly be said to be late at all. And in our era of longer lives and expanded expectations, a sub-genre you could call "stories of second bloomers"—people who show accomplishment in fields altogether different from those in which they've already succeeded—is now

# SECOND SECOND

## HOW SCULPTOR MARK YALE HARRIS SUCCEEDED IN THE CAREER HE EMBARKED UPON AT MIDLIFE BY VIRGINIA CAMPBELL

burgeoning. In the art world, the second-bloom phenomenon is flourishing—not unpredictably, inasmuch as art is the part of life we are generally encouraged to put off until unforgiving needs are met by surer means.

Sculptor Mark Yale Harris provides an interesting example of late blooming. He's in his mid-60s and has in the last decade become a successful, self-sustaining artist. He makes an even better example of second blooming. His first career—hotel and real estate development—was so successful it could easily have led to early retirement, perhaps embellished by some form of generous "giving back," with an excursion into the arts for purposes of self-growth. Unattracted by that scenario, Harris resolved to throw himself into art full-force in his mid-50s and found the talent and commitment within him to create a genuine second



# BLOOM BLOOM



TEXAS TORO, UTAH  
ALABASTER, 14 X 28 X 16.

career. Late bloomer, yes. Second bloomer, yes. But Harris' resume is longer than that of many artists who've been at it for decades, and combined with the vigorous achievements of his first career, it offers the portrait of a man with intense energy, unusual confidence, creative vision, and productive discipline. Not many people with these gifts and qualities are able to succeed on a grand scale in a competitive business, and then muster the patience, humility, and finally—here's the rub—vulnerability that making art requires.

"I was always drawn to three-dimensional art," says Harris. "So that's what I collected over the years, until finally I had too much of it. Then," he laughs, "I began creating it myself."

**H**ARRIS WAS IN A POSITION TO COLLECT art because he was a co-founder of the budget motel chain called Red Roof Inns and went on to develop Amerisuites. He'd always spent time drawing and painting while

he was growing up in Shaker Heights, OH, but never pursued art as a student at Ohio State University and was able to satisfy his emotional involvement with it by looking at and buying it.

It wasn't until about 1994, when he'd been living in the artistically vibrant city of Austin, TX, for two decades, had raised a son and daughter and dissolved his marriage, that he started taking art classes. He studied drawing and painting with interest, but during a class he'd chosen almost randomly, the tenor of his experience shifted fatefully. "It had never occurred to me to carve stone, but I took a course in

carving alabaster. At one point, my teacher put a pneumatic chisel in my hand, and when I started using it, I couldn't let go," he recounts. Though Harris draws to this day and creates clay models as part of his creative process, stone carving was ever after his passion. "Part of the appeal is the physicality," he offers. "Part is the challenge. With

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stone, you can't turn back. If you cut it wrong, you can't undo it. It's a metaphor of life—you deal with what you have and work forward."

Harris sold his business in 1996 but continued with business projects while becoming more deeply involved with carving stone. "My original business had been very interesting—developing projects, creating a brand—but eventually I was just in the deal business, and though it was profitable, it wasn't satisfying," he explains. He didn't linger where his energies were waning. Instead, he called up Santa Fe sculptor Bill Prokopiou, whose work he'd bought. "I said to Bill, 'Would you consider giving me some lessons?' He said he would, so I asked him what I should pay him, and he said, 'How about a bottle of vodka and a steak dinner?'"

Therein followed a sprint up the learning curve, with help from Prokopiou and also from another Santa Fe sculptor, Doug Hyde. Both Prokopiou and Hyde are Native American, Prokopiou being an Aleut and Hyde a Nez Perce, and both were favored students of the legendary Allan Houser, who was educated at the Santa Fe Indian School in the 1930s, went on to the Institute of American Indian Arts, and became a transformative sculptor of monumental pieces. "Houser changed the whole direction of Native American art," says Harris. "He was assertive enough not just to imitate traditional forms, but to translate into his work the influence of great modernists like [Henry] Moore and [Alexander] Archipenko." Though Harris had turned to Prokopiou without knowing he was Native American, his choice made sense in view of his lifelong appreciation of things Native that began with camping and fishing in Canada as a boy. His own work showed that affinity from the beginning, and it has developed in a way that takes the human-animal bond as a given and, in the manner of both Native and modernist art, explores the expressive possibilities of both stone as a material and the abstract shapes to which stone lends itself.

Prokopiou guided Harris in discovering and confronting the aesthetic aspects of sculpture. Hyde schooled him in the use of tools. After a couple of years going back and forth between Austin and Santa Fe, and between business and art, Harris sat down with Hyde and said, "Shoot straight with me. Do I have what it takes to make a career as an artist?" Hyde gave him the thumbs-up. Harris had already sold pieces, and in short order he had a gallery representing him, the first of many.

It was never an option for Harris that he would study, take his art seriously, and yet rely on his existing wealth rather than strive to succeed commercially. "I need the ego gratification of people recognizing and purchasing my work," he says matter-of-factly.

Here his business background spelled out his agenda with a clarity and decisiveness that would probably mind-boggle the average talented artist setting out to make a career. Harris could afford to delegate the measures he knew should be taken, and he did so. "I have all I can do to be the creator," he says. He hired a studio assistant and also a firm to take care of the paperwork involved in approaching galleries, submitting work for juried selection, and keeping accounts. The depth of his eight-year resume is a testament to the effectiveness of this strategy, though beneath it all, of course, is the dedication, or as he puts it, "the willingness to go to work."

Harris moved to Santa Fe while keeping a residence in Austin, and he now spends every day working in his downtown studio. "It's in a warehouse district," he says. "It's a dirty and unattractive place where you can make lots of noise and use forklifts and power tools. And there's an outdoor area where I work as much as I can." He moves from one piece to another during any given day. "It helps me to have several pieces in progress," he explains. "Right now I'm working on three figurative pieces, one in carrera marble and two in alabaster, and two alabaster bears. The bear pieces are humorous and



LOOKING FOR  
SOMETHING  
NOT KNOWN.  
UTAH  
ALABASTER.  
33 X 12 1/2 X 5.



ON EDGE.  
ALABASTER, 8 X 8 X 14.

light, 'fun carves.' They sell well—I can't make them fast enough. The figurative pieces are much more challenging. I've made drawings and created models in plaster, and the process of carving is much more intense. You have to step back and study things and make decisions. So I tell myself, 'Let's lighten up here and work on a bear.'"

Besides the intensity of the work, there is the outright danger of working with heavy, diamond-tip cutting tools that move at 10,000 rpm. Moving from piece to piece to rest from the heaviest work is only part of his thought-out regimen. "I go to the gym five times a week to work out," says Harris. "For one thing I don't want to get old, and it's good for general health, but I also do it for my own safety. So far I've made only one trip to the emergency room."

Harris works in marble—some Italian, some from Colorado, and occasionally, a pink-hued variety from Portugal; in alabaster, the pale Italian stone and the warm, bright orange stone from Utah; and sometimes in onyx. Because marble arrives cut in cubes, his marble pieces tend to be the ones that proceed from existing ideas. It's alabaster, which comes in boulders, that inspires shapes on its own. "Often when you get a boulder and you just stare at it a while, you begin to see the shape in it. That's what Native American sculptors I know do. They'll look at a stone all day." Whichever way the inspiration moves, from material to concept or vice versa, says Harris, "I'm in constant pursuit of a better way to interpret my views of the human experience." Understanding that to be the general drive of all serious artists, Harris watches the contemporary art world with an element of dismay. His own personal icons, from Michelangelo through Rodin to Eric Gill, Jacob Epstein, Brancusi, Moore, Archipenko, and Giacometti, encompass modern and abstract art but stop short of the more provocative figures in the avant-garde today.

"I'm taken aback by the shock nature of contemporary art in general," he says. "I've studied with the acclaimed sculptor James Surls and I'm friendly with him, so I asked him to explain various artists to me. I can't get him to explain them or say anything against them. He just says, 'That's the joy of being an artist. You tell people whatever you want



AWAKENING III, UTAH  
ALABASTER, 16 X 13 X 7.

to tell them.' I'm frustrated by my lack of understanding, but I read and study and think, and then I drop back and tell myself, 'Just do what you feel is appropriate for you to do.'"

With the validation of collectors for his more sophisticated figurative pieces as well as for his popular bears, Harris appears to be enjoying an extraordinary experience of renewed life. "Every day I feel like a kid," he says. "I'm all consumed in the creative process." □

Virginia Campbell, the former editor in chief of *Movieline*, has also written for *Elle Décor*, *Departures*, and *Traditional Home*.

Harris is represented by A New Leaf Gallery, Berkeley, CA; Crossroads Contemporary, Santa Fe, NM; E.S. Lawrence Gallery, Aspen, CO; Exposures International Gallery, Sedona, AZ; Gallery Mack, Seattle, WA; La Posada de Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM; Lawrence Gallery, Portland, OR; Mountain Trails Gallery, Palm Desert, CA; Old Town Gallery, Park City, UT; Riverbend Fine Art, Marble Falls, TX; Thomas R. Riley Galleries, Cleveland and Columbus, OH; and Thornwood Gallery, Houston, TX.