



0 | 1 | 2 | 3

Process Points

Evolution of a Sculptor

Jynja Calderon discovers the beauty of concrete

by Sue Martin

I don't recall who suggested I become Jynja Calderon's "friend" on Facebook, but, like other suggestions or requests for would-be friends, I checked her out by going to her profile page and learning a bit about her. And, yes, I accepted the friend invitation because I was fascinated by her concrete and mosaic art.

One FB message led to another and before long I had signed up for a concrete sculpting workshop with Jynja. I wanted to make a planter for my garden. In Jynja's home studio, high above the Capitol overlooking the Salt Lake Valley, I spent about seven exciting, and sometimes-challenging, hours learning how to mix, pour, and carve concrete. Jynja worked on her own sculpture as I worked on mine, occasionally looking over my shoulder, making suggestions, showing me how and when to use a different tool, and cheering me on.

Though we were often in our own zones and oblivious to each other or the summer storm flashing lightning outside, we also had time to get acquainted and I asked her about her evolution as a sculptor and her dreams for the future.

From Rock Collecting to Hair Styling

Jynja believes her love of rocks and other earthen materials derives from her childhood with a father who was a metallurgical engineer. Family vacations were often spent exploring old mining sites. Jynja began collecting rocks, responding not just to the color and beauty but the feel of them.

Always interested in art, Jynja's path into adulthood took her into hair styling. She worked in some of Salt Lake City's most elite salons and still retains some of her long-time customers who come to the salon on the lower level of her home. Perhaps it's her 30-year career working with the human head that inspires some of sculptures in the form of heads with nicely detailed hair.

A Serendipitous Relationship

Though Jynja had also done some painting in her exploration of artistic expression, it was her life partner, a tile contractor who opened the door to mosaic and concrete work. "I went to a tile convention with him," she explains, "and I was in awe of what I saw. I knew right then that somehow I wanted to learn that medium."

Shortly after that, her partner went to California for a job, and finding herself with some spare time, Jynja signed up

Exhibition Review: Ephraim Apprehending our Fate

Colin Tuis Nesbit at the CUAC

by Geoff Wichert

Driving south on I-15 the other day, I was mildly amused to see a billboard promising passers-by that a particular obstetric clinic provides "better birthdays." The advertiser's attempt at wit was really just the commonplace confusion of two terms, "birthday" and "birth day." We rarely use birth day, which refers to the day on which we were born, but commonly refer to the annual date on which we commemorate that event. On the other hand, unless we are Jewish, few of us light candles and sing songs to commemorate the anniversary of a dear ones death. This difference between the way we treat these two days, the bookends of our lives, propels *Regrets Only*, an installation continuing through September 8 at the [Central Utah Art Center](#).

The installation begins in the Center's front yard, where a freshly dug and re-sodded grave fills the small lawn. Standing before the white tombstone, several unsettling things gradually become apparent. First, the tombstone is also a cake, being made of white frosting decorated with extruded icing and topped with multicolored candles. As this sinks in, it becomes apparent that the grave itself the very earth is vibrating. Finally, beneath (literally beneath) the rumble of traffic from nearby Highway 89 one discerns the sound of music. Evidently there's a party going on down there.

If this sounds irreverent, even a touch blasphemous, that is certainly one of the dimensions being explored by Colin Tuis Nesbit, the artist who variously drew, sculpted, hung, scattered, and dug the assorted parts of *Regrets Only*. Inside the gallery, on the main floor, he created another cake that re-creates the space within a grave as a solid mass, a rectangle six feet deep, seven feet long, with straight sides and a mounded top. The luscious white impasto that covers it tempts one to touch it . . . at least until it becomes apparent that it is the source of the sickeningly sweet odor that fills the room. Only a hundred-odd pounds of Royal Frosting could look so good and smell so sweet. Flanking this most unlikely of shaped cakes are a couple of drawn and be-glittered tombstones, walls hung with bright decorations, and, scattered about the floor, glitter, confetti, and bits of ribbon: the detritus of some very lively party.

Upstairs, standing alone at the far end of the room, accompanied only by four grim, functional chairs, stands the ultimate celebratory centerpiece: a coffin resting on a trestle, with an arrangement of edible flowers on top. Despite its frosting and colorful accent, there is something anticlimactic and even grim about confronting this final confection. We can make fun of death all our lives if we want to, but it will be waiting there when we come to take our final bow, and it will get the last laugh.



0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4

In *Regrets Only*, Colin Nesbit displays a remarkable range of skills, though as befits our usual expectations for an up-to-date artist, he doesn't display an excess of facility for any of the crafts he invokes. His drawing is rough. Frosting is one thing that even the amateur chef takes

for a stone-carving workshop at Red Butte Garden. This both prepared her and whetted her appetite for further work in three dimensions.

Her partner returned from the California job with buckets of tile scraps that made Jynja's imagination race. "Please may I play with these?" she asked, and he agreed.

Learning from Internet and the Master

Meanwhile, Jynja was browsing the Internet for anything and everything she could find about sculpture and mosaic art. She discovered wetcanvas.com and a conversation thread on "cement as a sculpture medium." She became so excited by the information and experience shared on this site that she read the conversation all the way back to 2001. By the time she'd finished reading, she said, "I can do this!"

Through the Internet and books, Jynja also became acquainted with the work of concrete sculptor [Elder Jones](#), whose work appears in several of the leading books on concrete sculpture. The Tennessee-based artist came to Utah last summer and conducted a workshop using Jynja's studio. Working side-by-side with a master was inspiring and confidence-building.

From Pet Memorials to Dinosaurs

Jynja's garden is a sculpture gallery filled with colorful examples of her work. **[O]** Her early pieces were memorials to dear departed pets, like "Butch" the dog, who, thanks to hidden plumbing, raises his leg and pees on a fire hydrant. Friends and clients have commissioned Jynja to similarly memorialize their own pets.

Last year, a client who works at the Museum of Natural History invited Jynja to contribute a sculpture to an auction to raise money for a new museum building. The museum's theme was "DNA to Dinosaurs."

"I researched dinosaurs on the Internet," says Jynja, "and found the Dimetrodon, which predated dinosaurs by about 260 million years but has DNA closely related to that of humans." She recalled having played with toy models of the Dimetrodon when she was a child and could easily imagine a Dimetrodon-shaped couch made of concrete and mosaic tiles.

She contracted the welding of a frame, then spent about three months building the couch-creature. The finished piece was auctioned for \$6,500. In addition, Jynja created tall, spiral-shaped DNA strands of concrete and mosaic tile, one of which was purchased for \$1,000.

Prices for her sculptures and mosaic pieces range from \$200 to \$15,000. You can see examples of her work on her [web site](#).

Though Jynja loves the creatures she creates for her own and her clients' yards, she aspires to create something monumental (think "Utah Tree" in the West Desert). She would like to see Utah set aside some land in the salt flats for a monumental sized sculpture garden, similar to one in Texas and many other places around the world.

Want to Play in the Mud?

Thanks to Jynja's instruction and encouragement, I was quite pleased with my first attempt at concrete carving. "Poo Cat," a sculptural planter somewhat resembling a Mexican tribal artifact, graces my garden. Though scarred on his side where the sand and cement didn't quite mix, Jynja insists, "The beauty is in the flaw."

Jynja will conduct workshops on request. You can contact her through her web site (<http://www.jynja.com>) or call her at 801-243-2673.

on, so we don't expect much from it; still, a first-class pastry chef would probably sniff at these rough surfaces. The arrangement of individual works within the installation is odd, leaving large areas unaccounted for. Of course many viewers will find nothing here that says "art" to them anyway no sentimental images of meaningful cultural artifacts or familiar reassurances that all is really well and those that enjoy the provocation will not much care about absent finesse. Thinking about death is not a subtle exercise: it's a struggle to keep down the rising gorge of fear, to wrestle the terror of inevitability to a lifelong standoff. Groping along the line that separates what we celebrate from what we dread, Nesbit has created some visual metaphors that may not, but yet may, stimulate some new apprehension, in both senses of the word, of our universal fate.

Regrets Only, an exhibition by [Colin Tuis Nesbit](#), will be at the [Central Utah Art Center](#) through September 8.

Media Spotlight Awkward Guys & Gals Brian Staker's Awkward Hour

If you've enjoyed Brian Staker's fluid and insightful prose in the arts pages of the [City Weekly](#), you'll probably be surprised to learn that in person his conversation can be, well, awkward. Out in public Staker suffers from social phobia, but behind the veil of the written word he can be as suave and charming as any martini sipping super spy. So, the last thing you'd expect him to do is embrace the digital age and start his own online talk show, right? Wouldn't it be kind of, uhm, awkward?

Yes, but that's sort of the point. When Staker launched his podcast series in the Spring of 2008, he decided to embrace his own personal discomfort and called it "The Awkward Hour." Over the past sixteen months he has interviewed local and national artists, poets and musicians, figuring out the interview -- and frequently the technology -- as he goes. The [audio podcast](#) has turned into a streaming video format and last week Staker interviewed Circlegal, a university trained artist who has turned to making paintings of stick figures in unsettling circumstances, and positions, and leaving them around town. This week he'll be an 'embedded reporter' with [Iao Projects Gallery](#) as they go to San Diego for the [Beyond the Border Art Fair](#). You can [tune in live](#) Thursday at 7pm.

Awkward Hour interview with Circlegal, August 27, 2009