

F in



"Mandinga De Capoeira"
22" height
Cast bronze, concrete

Bodies motion

by Bonnie Namkung

Even though his “perspectivist” sculptures are closer to two feet high, they play a trick on the eye, giving the illusion of enormity and demanding the observer’s involvement.

Todd Kurtzman’s celebration of body and motion begins by photographing dancers, sometimes directing their movements, sometimes giving them free expressive rein. “I harvest the dancer’s creativity, then edit the photos down to one that works for forced perspective in three dimensions,” he says. From that, he crafts a wire armature to capture the pose and fleshes it out with clay, calling in a live model to help him perfect the details. Two or three months of full-time work go into each piece.

Kurtzman designs on the fly, solving the puzzle of blending the fantastical and exaggerated with realistic anatomy. The finished clay figure is the basis for a mold the foundry uses to create the final bronze sculpture. He limits the castings of each piece to the number of his age when he created it.

He’s attracted to the permanence of bronze because he believes his creative chops will stand up over time, and it gives him a tangible comment on our culture’s disposable bent. Kurtzman intends to translate his sculptures to large-scale public works, so his smaller bronze pieces provide a viable preview. It also gives him the freedom to form



*“Monument in right feet major”
14” height, Clay*

delicate arms and legs, without worrying about material strength.

Art roots

Kurtzman grew up just north of San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge, and studied art at the University of California at Santa Barbara and at New York and San Francisco Academies of Art. His parents, an architect and an interior designer, have supported his artistic choices, just once posing the big question, “How is this going to be a living?” He claims he inherited his father’s technical skills and his mother’s aesthetic, and added some wackiness of his own. Kurtzman

“I harvest the dancer’s creativity, then edit the photos down to one that works for forced perspective in three dimensions.”

traces his art roots to age eight, sculpting clay characters and animating them using his father’s movie camera.

His animation career began in earnest when he interned on the feature film, *James and the Giant Peach*. He went on to animate or direct animation for a multitude of stop-motion television series and commercials, and created two animated short films he screened at international film festivals. “It’s about posing puppets—communicating with expressive gestures,” he says. “But animation is actually less about acting and more about choreography.”

While he worked in animation, Kurtzman exhibited and sold his sculpture and photography. He continues to make films and performance art,



"Bun Snax", 18" Height, Clay

but finds his dance-inspired sculpture becoming the better part of his livelihood. He works in his studio in his fixer-upper home in Portland, Ore., a space he's quickly outgrowing. Although the local market for art is not large, Kurtzman collaborates frequently with dancers and musicians and is happy to be in the thick of Portland's vibrant arts culture. "It's tied to the Burning Man movement and has connections to Los Angeles, the San Francisco area and Seattle," he says.

World rhythms

He's traveled extensively in Europe and Latin America, and is most influenced by Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Cuban culture and religion. The energetic music he listens to while he works is an offshoot of his 10-year immersion in capoeira, the Afro-Brazilian martial art he practices two or three times a week. Developed by African slaves in Brazil in the sixteenth century, it combines music, dance, cartwheels and kicks, strategy, spiritual elements and a sense of community. "Really, capoeira, animation, photography and sculpture are all related," he says. "The rhythm, timing and movement are all manifest in my work."

Kurtzman draws inspiration from the sculpture of Michelangelo and Rodin, the whimsical inventions of Calder, and the social consciousness of author Dr.

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Seuss, musician Joe Strummer and photographer Sebastian Salgado. He says, "I have highest respect for any art—sculpture, painting, music or poetry—that takes a stand for a paradigm the artist believes in. It requires substantive content that goes way beyond the decorative. My pieces have a decorative element, but I'm working to include more content, expression of what I think is important and isn't being said."

Among the undercurrents in Kurtzman's work are his explorations of human rights, the worship of nature and the sacred feminine, and individual rather than one-size-fits-all religious truth. He sees his position as an activist as much as an artist—to foster cultural, ideological,

philosophical and scientific discussion that brings about change.

Pure imagination

His work is available at selected galleries in the West—in Vail, Colorado, San Diego, California and Sun Valley, Idaho. This year he's doing his first round of art fairs, and is scheduled for about one a month for the next few months. "I'm out on a financial limb, producing enough inventory to do the shows," he says.

It would cost tens of thousands of dollars to produce and store an entire limited edition run at once, so he's casting them a few at a time. If the responses he got at the New Orleans Jazz Festival are



"Incantation"
18" x 21" x 7"
Cast bronze, concrete

"My pieces have a decorative element, but I'm working to include more content, expression of what I think is important and isn't being said."

"Wendy's Shoes"
11" height
Cast bronze, concrete

any indication, he may need to speed up the process. "People were amazed and intrigued," says Kurtzman.

Although he got a couple of "Dude, what were you on?" comments, Kurtzman doesn't take offense. Pure imagination sometimes throws people. "Overall, the experience was very gratifying," he says. "The feedback encourages me to keep at it, and have confidence that the boat will float. The glider will catch air. The parachute will open."

See more of his work at www.todd-kurtzman.com.