

The World Discovers Santa Barbara Sculptor Larry R. Rankin

A Giant Talent Among Us

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By [Heather Jenö](#)

"Art was my savior," Larry Rankin says as we walk toward his Santa Barbara studio courtyard, where a giant mound is barely visible in the waning evening light. "After I came back from serving in Vietnam, art gave me the opportunity to express things." With a grand gesture, he pulls the plastic covering off a five-foot-tall bronze sculpture entitled "Sedona Sunset." The work hovers in front of me on three splayed "legs," an intimidating abstract mass of bronze polished to a perfect finish. When I ask if the work was commissioned, Rankin replies, "No — I just felt like I needed to make it."

It is exactly this indefatigable artistic impulse that defines Rankin's work. After locating a foundry in Bangkok, Thailand, that had the facility to cast such a large piece, Rankin traveled there three times over the course of one year to revise and refine the work. So great is the call to create that Rankin, without hesitation, funded the piece's creation, just so that an idea could be birthed.

Although Rankin has been a Santa Barbara resident since 1977 and has occupied his studio space in the heart of the Funk Zone for more than 25 years, he is, according to Corridan Gallery owner William Fedderson, "Santa Barbara's best-kept secret." Rankin's position as a solitary artist working in relative obscurity, however, is about to change. Recently, Rankin was awarded "Best in Show" in sculpting at the 2007 Art Expo in Las Vegas, one of the largest art shows on the West Coast. Chosen as he was from among 300 artists representing 16 countries, Rankin was unprepared but happily surprised to win the prestigious honor. "I just went there to show my art and be a part of it," he explained.

And the recognition won't stop there; Rankin's work will be featured in next month's issue of Art Business News, while Lake House Gallery, a new, high-end gallery located in the burgeoning North Hollywood arts district, recently contacted Rankin and asked if they could include his works in their opening show this December.

"Guess how long this sculpture took me to make," he asks, pointing to a bronze figure of a musician playing a lute-like instrument. "Eight hours," he answers with pride.

It is not surprising that Rankin's work is finally attracting this kind of attention; as a sculptor who is comfortable working in wood, bronze, and stone, and whose works range in scale from six inches to seven-and-a-half feet, Rankin is prolific in his art-making. As he leafs through notepad after notepad of sweeping architectural drawings, pointing out which ones were realized as sculptures and which remain works in progress, it's obvious that the breadth of his oeuvre is staggering. "Guess how long this sculpture took me to make," he asks, pointing to a bronze figure of a musician playing a lute-like instrument. "Eight hours," he answers with pride. He is so attuned to thinking in three dimensions that completing a sculpture in the course of a business day is just regular business for him.

Rankin's works are as diverse stylistically as they are varied in media and size. Clearly influenced by Picasso, Henry Moore, and cubist sculptor Jacques Lipchitz, Rankin has moved deftly over the course of his 30-year career from non-objective to figurative to total abstraction. But beyond his fluidity in styles, there is a consistent evocation of place and a distinctive stamp of ingenuity, one that comes through in details like the unique palette of patinas and finishes with which he finishes his sculptures.

Rankin's impulse to express himself through his art yields works as varied as they are emotionally evocative. Visiting his studio is like peeking into secret relationships, foreign lands, and imaginary spaces, and there are surprises around every corner.

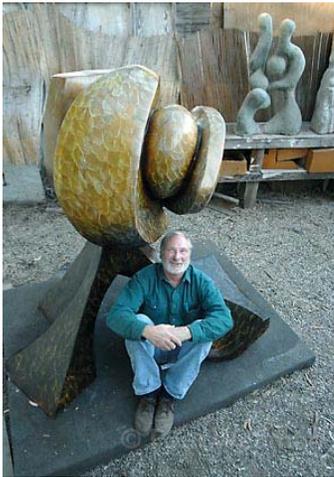


Photo: Paul Wellman



"Golden Moon", almost finished.