



Artist chosen for Ashland project talks about his approach to public art

By Jeffrey Gillespie For the Tidings

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Napa Valley artist Gordon Huether was recently selected by the Ashland Public Arts Commission to develop a concept for the \$113,000 Theater Corridor Project in Ashland. We caught up with Huether to talk a little about his work, his artistic process, and his vision for the project.

JG: Gordon, your work is inspired by the effects nature has on man-made material. Can you speak a little about that?

GH: This is only one area of inspiration for me. What interests me about the man-made versus the forces of nature is how Mother Nature always takes back what belongs to her. It is this transformation of a freshly painted surface or a metal that is rusting, for example, which creates patterns that fascinate me.

JG: You speak of your decision to make large-scale work as a mechanism towards a more confident approach to your art in general. How is that important for you?

GH: Working on a large scale has been a part of my creative essence for many years. I love working on this scale for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the ability to reach a bigger audience and to enhance the spirit of humanity by bringing beauty and meaning into this world through my work.

JG: When it comes to your public work, how do you find a starting point from which to proceed?

GH: Throughout the years I have established a three-pronged approach, which has become a paramount, basic element in my conceptual development stage. It is consistent for each new project. What is the context for the artwork? Is it a

landscape, streetscape or a building? We want to create a visual dialogue between those contextual environs and the art. Who are the viewers? Who experiences and interacts with the art on a regular basis? A hospital project in Connecticut, for example, has a very different audience than that of an airport in Houston. The overarching idea is to create art that is relevant to those viewers, to those who experience my work in said environments. The third element in my approach is more difficult to quantify. It is simply reaching down into my artist spirit, drawing upon my personal inspirations, observations and experience and let that spirit lead me.

JG: Outside of stained glass, do you have any particular materials that you use consistently in your work, and why?

GH: Stained glass is where I started my career more than 30 years ago. What drew me to stained glass then, still inspires me today, which is the idea of working with light and color as well as the idea of something being made and crafted by hand. Although my team and I still work in glass, it is a small percentage of the materials we work with today. Composite materials, various metals, repurposed materials and even fabric are all on the table. I let the project, its context and the intent of the story dictate what materials we will gravitate towards and which ones we will use.

JG: What drew you to participate in the Ashland project?

GH: I love this part of the country and very much embrace the idea of the public's participation in the creative process! I was also drawn to the project because there are so many limitations and challenges, which make the project particularly interesting. It is like assembling a puzzle before knowing what the final outcome will be. It has been my experience that the greater the limitations the more the project pushes the creative process into areas which I might not have explored otherwise.

Ashland resident Jeffrey Gillespie is a Daily Tidings columnist, arts reviewer and freelance writer. Email him at gillespie.jeffrey@gmail.com.

(Jan. 16: Story updated to reflect that the budget is \$113,000, not \$130,000 as originally indicated.)

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