

ARTS

Stone carver, sculptor leases his work

Former headstone creator moves family to Key West

By Michael Haskins

Craig Berube-Gray came to Key West is August 2013 as part of The Studios of Key West's residency program and to teach a class on stone carving. It didn't take him long to realize how vibrant and exciting the artist community in Key West is or how well artists are received on the island.

"Florida, as a whole, is more open to art than most of New England," Berube-Gray, a long-time resident of Maine, said from his workshop on Stock Island. "The cities and communities display sculptures in public in Florida because they know the tourists enjoy them. In the past year I've had 13 sculptures placed around the state."

He gave as an example his concrete "citrus fruit slices." The colorfully painted wedges come in various sizes, depicting the citrus fruits of Florida. The smallest piece weighs in at 250 pounds.

"I brought the idea to the city of West Palm Beach," Berube-Gray said. "They leased the pieces."

Governments in Florida are living within budget restraints, he said, but they still have money set aside for art and cultural events.

"Many of the city and county governments in Florida have an arts department or committees," Berube-Gray said. "To get the most for their buck they will lease art, like West Palm. Occasionally, I've received a call at the end of a quarter and hear those magic words, 'We've got money left in the budget and want to rent your sculpture.'"

Leasing has worked well for me.

Not a bad lifestyle for a young man that began as an apprentice to a headstone carver at a cemetery in 1988. Eventually he branched out into doing angels, then helping performance artists with large, outdoor installations in parks and fields.

"I got to see that many of these artists only had ideas," he said. "They hired people like me to create their project. You know, the larger-than-life displays. I suddenly realized I had better ideas than some of them."

Berube-Gray began college art classes when he was in his 30s. He took four or five classes before abandoning the pursuit. One of his first projects after college was two 7-foot lobster claws.

"I leased them to the Boston Public Sculpture program," Berube-Gray said.

At his work studio on Stock Island, Berube-Gray mixes his carving with wire sculpture, steel and even creates wooden paddleboards that are finished by his wife, Angela.

"I'm not good at coatings, and Angela is," he said.



Stone sculptor Craig Berube-Gray will teach a class at The Studios of Key West in April.

In the short time he and his family have lived here, the Keys has given him native images that he has carved and the freedom to work outside almost daily. The family has also settled into the Keys lifestyle and now calls Key West home.

"We'll be selling our place in Maine this year," Berube-Gray said. "My kids like it here, my wife found a good job. We all agree the weather is better than Maine's."

Berube-Gray said he's not much for art shows, but his work has been displayed at Sculpture Key West and at the Harrison Gallery, 825 White St.

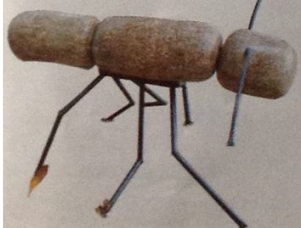
"I had one reviewer refer to my project as something a child could understand," he said. "I was told it was a negative review, but I liked the idea that children could appreciate my work. I did the display for the children's museum in Boynton Beach and the city manager told me, 'It will encourage the children to be creative.' Personally, that's the kind of review that makes me proud."

The Studios of Key West is hosting Berube-Gray's carving program each Tuesday in April.

"I supply the one-foot chunk of stone," he said. "Those interested in the class have to bring a concept and open mind."

For more information on the class, check www.tskw.org/category/classes/. To learn more about Berube-Gray, go to www.cgraystonecarver.com.

The artist routinely leases art for outdoor installations, such as his "PAC-MAN" and "Gran-ant" pictured here.



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