


PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN



ANNOUNCING THE 2018
**MASTERS OF THE
SOUTHWEST**
AWARD WINNERS

7 Inspiring Designers, Artists and Local Icons

MARCH 2018
PHGMAG.COM \$4.99
0 3>



0 74820 63100

PROFILE



The World Within

Sculptor Jennyfer Stratman explores the relationships between self, others and elements seen and unseen

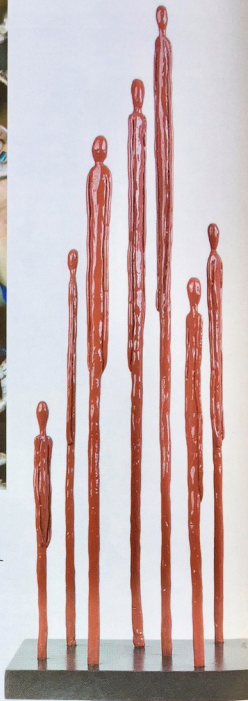
BY REBECCA L. RHOADES PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL MARKOW

My work is ultimately about connections," says artist Jennyfer Stratman. "Connections with the universe, with nature, with each other—things we can't even see or know and how it's all related." Human figures quietly emerge from the boughs of trees—a metaphor for growth. Uprooted branches transform into arms that gracefully unfold toward the sky. On one outstretched palm are several figures; a lone form on the other looks out over the gap—two sides, two worlds, connected by a common base yet isolated at the same time. Random splashes of metal are fused into circular designs—an allusion to explosions and the force of gravity pulling everything together.

"Whatever comes out is a reaction to my inspiration or what's happening in my life."

Known for her delicate figurative, botanical and abstract bronze sculptures and wall installations, Stratman displays her artworks around the world. But it's her own international lifestyle that manifests in the metal. A graduate of Dobson High School and Arizona State University, the Phoenix native splits her time between two homes: one near South Mountain and another halfway around the world in Melbourne, Australia.

Stratman first became attracted to sculpture while studying ceramics at ASU. Her skinny, extended clay forms were difficult to mold and



ABOVE LEFT: Artist Jennyfer Stratman with an in-progress bronze wall sculpture.

ABOVE RIGHT: Elongated figures—a signature of Stratman's work—are seen in "From Our Own Perspectives"; bronze, steel and enamel; 22"H by 8"W by 8"D.

PROFILE

would often break during the firing process. A professor, Mary Bates Neubauer, suggested she try casting them in bronze, changing the way the young artist looked at the world and at her own work.

"I fell in love with casting," Stratman says. "It's quite empowering to know how to use these tools. It makes you look at how things are built, and you begin to reference that when you're creating."

A semester in Europe brought even more changes. It was there, in a hostel in Scotland, that she met her husband, Brad, who lived in Australia. After residing in Phoenix for about five years, the couple decided to return to his homeland. "It was my turn to move to Australia. I said I would give it four to seven years. It's been 16 years," she says with a laugh.

After moving to Melbourne, Stratman worked in a foundry that casts bronze for artists, where, she says, she "learned to do things more quickly and efficiently," a skill that comes in handy in her current work process. With studios at both residences, she divides her workload between hemispheres. Wax figures and molds are made in Australia and brought to the foundry to be cast in sections, depending on their size. Stratman then fills her suitcases with the metal components and brings them back to the Valley, where, in her garage and converted shipping container workshops, she welds, polishes and assembles the completed works.

"Living in two countries has definitely had an effect on my art," she says. "Visually, my work often has two sides. I see that as a reference to me, but it's also about the way I work. I often make things in components so I can physically move them from



ABOVE: "The work itself dictates whether or not I add color," says the artist. In "Above the Sea," bronze, 35" in diameter, highly polished figures are surrounded by a turquoise ocean of abstract shapes.



LEFT: In her Phoenix studio, Stratman heats up the bronze before applying a patina. "The process opens up the 'pores' in the bronze, allowing the patina to penetrate and react with the metal to create the color," she says.

PROFILE

one place to another for installations or so I can come back here and weld them into bigger things.”

Elongated human figures—a signature of Stratman’s art—can be seen in sizes ranging from just a few inches high to life-size and taller. Because they lack facial features and defined limbs, they allow the viewer to connect with the piece and project his or her own story onto it. Organic shapes, such as flowers, trees—both roots and branches—and vines weave around the forms, surrounding them with flowing lines and often merging the two elements together.

“What I’ve always loved about Jennifer’s work is the aesthetic that her sculptures have,” says Kimber Lanning, former owner of Modified Arts in Phoenix, who gave Stratman some of her first exhibits in the early 2000s. “Sometimes they spring to life; sometimes they look restrained. We’ve had pieces that look almost like a pot of flowers growing out of the ground, where the elements of steel ebb and flow. Physically, she uses a really hard material, but everything she makes has a kind of soft, delicate feel about it.

“She’s developed a very distinct aesthetic, even though her subject matter can be very diverse,” Lanning adds.

For Veronica Graffius, managing partner at Calvin Charles Gallery in Scottsdale, which has represented Stratman for more than a decade, the evolution of the artist’s work is mesmerizing. “When Jennifer started with the gallery, she titled one of her shows ‘Uprooted and Transplanted,’ which hints at her being a Phoenix native living in Australia. That’s why she includes a lot of figures with roots and trees, because no matter where she’s at, she always refers back to being rooted in her hometown.”

Newer pieces take on a more abstract form, using the splashes of metal left over from the casting process to create otherworldly constellations in which figures float among cloudlike masses and organic gardens are filled with flowers, pods and other botanical forms. “They reference the cosmic ideas that interest me about this whole universal

“Blossoming From Within”; bronze, steel and pigment; 81”H by 15”W by 15”D.



LEFT: “Connected To My Roots”; bronze, copper and wood; 21.5”H by 20”W by 7”D.

TOP: Stratman enjoys a quiet moment with her iguana, Cosmo, on her property in South Phoenix.



interconnection," says Stratman. One such installation "Cultivating the Wild," is a 4-foot-high by 10-foot-long rectangular grouping of leftover bits intermixed with the artist's elongated figures. "It's this very formal shape made up of completely random splashes," she adds, noting that the entire concept was completely experimental. "It's not always clear when I start making something, but sometimes the materials or just the process itself will lead me where I wasn't expecting to go."

Denver-based collector Susan Jepsen has enjoyed following Stratman's progress throughout the years. She and her husband, Mick, own eight of sculptor's pieces. "We first saw her work in a gallery in La Jolla, California. It was a beautiful wooden tree branch with a solitary figure on it. It really resonated with us. You could feel the artist in it. To see this female artist growing and developing her own way and becoming her own person is just delightful."

While not one to settle when it comes to creating, for now the artist finds herself content in her work and in her bicontinental life—whether it's growing veggies in her garden in Melbourne or enjoying the fresh air on her farm in Phoenix, which she shares with a friend's goats and horses and her 28-year-old iguana, Cosmo, which she has had since high school.

"I'm not looking to become a famous artist. That doesn't interest me," she says. "Happiness interests me. If I can keep doing what makes me happy, then I think that's a life well-lived." ■



Stratman incorporates a variety of materials in her work. "Spired Anatomy," 41"H by 34"W by 11.5"D combines redwood, mahogany and bronze.

"I want to explore public art a little bit. It's exciting to have your work out in the world where people can interact with it," says Stratman. Her temporary steel and bronze installation, "Connection Point," 8'H by 6'W by 4'D, can be seen in downtown Gilbert through June.

See Sources.

