

Josh Tobey tells the human story through animal sculptures

His late father was a major artistic influence

Scott Iwasaki, The Park Record
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Bronze sculpture Joshua Tobey, who will open a show at the Thomas Anthony Gallery, 340 Main St., got his first taste of fine art through his stepmother Rebecca, and late father, Gene, who were well-known Southwest artists. "Before he met my step-mom, he was a college professor and taught Raku, a type of Japanese pottery in Oregon," Tobey said during a phone call from his studio in Loveland, Color. "He would put me in a corner with lump of clay to keep me quiet while he taught the classes, so I started sculpting wildlife when I was four or five years old."

When Tobey was six, his father moved to Santa Fe, N.M., determined to become a full-time artist.

"Growing up there, my dad took me to the galleries and the foundries, and being exposed to so much art and so many artists was just a part of life," he said.

Still, when Tobey went to college at Western State in Gunnison, Colo., he chose the school for it's fly-fishing program.

"I started out to get a double major in business and recreation," he said. "I was guiding fly-fishing and ski tours and things like that, because I knew that I had to enjoy my classes in order to graduate."

To this day, Tobey thanks the heavens for pre-requisite classes.

"I took a couple of art classes and they were the most fun I had ever had," he said. "I ended up graduating with a degree in fine arts, with an emphasis in sculpture."

At that time, Tobey's father had developed a lung disease from working with ceramics.

"So I went back to Santa Fe and apprenticed with him," he said. "I basically started my professional career and marketing my artwork immediately out of college back in 2000."

During the early stages of his career, Tobey sculpted statues of the human experience, but found himself drawn to animals.

"Art is a process and part of becoming an artist is to figure out what you want to do," he said. "My first couple of professional pieces were human figures, and then I started mingling in wildlife, an elk or a wolf."

While developing that process, Tobey found he could tell a human story with wildlife. "sculpting multiple subjects that include the animals, the idea and concept of the human story became more obvious to me," he said. "As I worked with that, I started imparting a human quality to a bear. I have seen my audiences recognizing a part of themselves in my sculptures of bears or elk. They identify with the subject even though it is an animal."

Although Tobey had been sculpting with clay since before he was in elementary school, he developed a fascination with bronze during his college years.

"I like the permanence of it and I like the fact that throughout history, bronze endures forever," he said. "Some of our oldest bronze sculptures are more than 5,000 years old and these things are tremendous pieces of work."

He also likes the patina, the colors and textures he uses on his bronze pieces.

"My dad was one of the first sculptors to do contemporary patinas, which are finishes that have a unique and untraditional color value," he said. "Traditional colors that most sculptors use are dark greens and browns and blacks, but my dad started utilizing reds and other colors on his bronzes years ago.

"It's a limited palatte, but if you can be creative in patina, you can create patterns and feeling," Tobey said. "In some of the bronzes I make, I use what we call a stone matrix and the bronze looks as if it is made from a different material.

"I hope the next 30 years my work continues do develop," he said. "I want to keep sculpting not only wildlife, but impressionistic and interesting work."

The show at the Thomas Anthony Gallery will feature more than 40 different sculptures.

"It's a large body of work, and I've been fortunate enough to produce enough bronze sculptures these days that I need a couple of foundries in order to supply my demand," he said. "I moved to Loveland because of the foundry services. There are several foundries in the area and a lot of independent technicians that work in the industry."

Tobey, who has shown in Park City before, is looking forward to the return engagement.

"I've been fortunate to be able to come to Park City to show the pieces," he said. "That's part of the fun, because I feel the best paycheck is going to a show and speaking with people about my artwork and watching their response and reactions to what they see."

The Thomas Anthony Gallery, 340 Main St., will open Josh Tobey's exhibit "Beauty in Bronze" and host a free reception that will be open to the public on Saturday, Feb. 18, from 5 p.m. until 8 p.m. For more information, visit www.thomasanthonygallery.com



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