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VOLUME I ISSUE II

LUXEMAGAZINE.COM



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A SCULPTOR TRANSLATES SUBTLITIES INTO ART

WRITTEN BY PETER J. WOLF PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN SARTIN

Curt Brill's sculptures reflect both his education—art and design studies at Cornell—and his experience, including his early years as a potter. But there's something else evident in his work, something that doesn't fit as neatly into a resume: call it intuition or spontaneity. Since his earliest days as an artist, Brill has been open to life's possibilities. Indeed, it was precisely this openness that brought him from upstate New York to Tucson nearly 35 years ago. Upon graduation, Brill and a friend—both of whom were seeking a warmer climate—contacted an agency that moved cars cross-country. "There was a car going to Tucson," recalls Brill, "and we took it."

Brill says he's always been drawn to sculpture, and knew from an early age that he wanted to be an artist. "I was one of those kids," Brill says, "who was always just making things." These days he's still making things. At any one time, Brill is sketching, creating study models and working on what he calls his "monumental" pieces—figural sculptures three and four times life-size. He says the decision to cash in a successful pottery career and venture into large-scale sculpture was "never a conscious thing. I never said to myself, 'I'm going to start making big things.'"

Like its creator, Brill's art seems to work on a subconscious level, tapping into what he calls "the very small things that sort of distinguish people from one another." An avid people-watcher, Brill has developed a keen eye for the nuance of movement—those inscrutable qualities that allow us, say, to recognize a friend from two blocks away. "I look for a very subtle movement," says Brill. Translating these subtleties into massive bronze castings is the real trick. "Rather than making it obvious motion," says Brill, it's as if "they're almost ready to move."

The complexities of working large-scale are both challenging and satisfying for Brill. "I've never made a movie, but I would guess it's like making one," he says. "You've done all these separate parts, and within a few days, it goes from a pile of pieces to this big piece—all that life force and energy comes back into it."

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