

# Sculpture Northwest

NORTHWEST STONE SCULPTORS ASSOCIATION

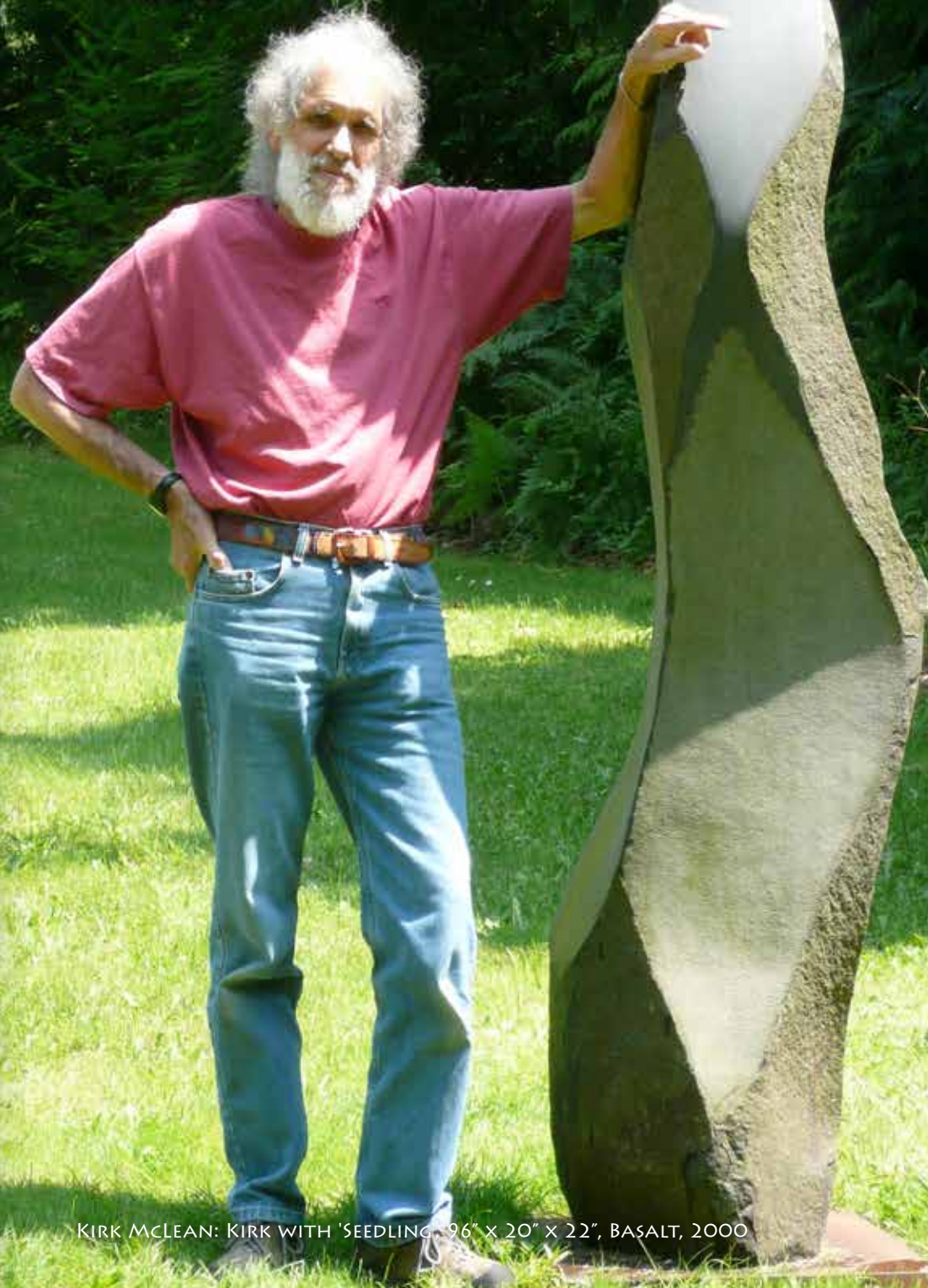
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

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KIRK MCLEAN: KIRK WITH 'SEEDLING', 96" X 20" X 22", BASALT, 2000



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The purpose of the NWSSA's *Sculpture NorthWest Journal* is to promote, educate, and inform about stone sculpture, and to share experiences in the appreciation and execution of stone sculpture.

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT...



Dear Sculptors,  
We are now in the “tween” period for the organization. By the time you get this the holidays will be upon us and our post-holiday party will be approaching.

Before I had a studio roof over my head, the carving season was over, called on account of rain and cold. Now I can keep at it all year, but I miss my stone buddies. Community is what makes this organization such an amazing group. Carl Nelson was in Eugene and he got lucky enough to coincide with a potluck with a bunch of our crew there. Up in the Seattle area we had a get-together at Dan Colvin’s studio to talk about using the natural rind of the stone to enhance the sculpture’s design. In early December we’ll have a get-together at my studio to talk about textures. Sure, I want to hear the cool stuff that others have done with texture, but I also relish the chance to be with my community.

The energy we all feel at the symposia seems to reside in each of us, every day.

If you have an idea for a fun get-together when the symposia are not in session, drop me a line.

Carve well, have fun, and wear a good respirator,

... Ken

*“I love those who can smile in trouble,  
who can gather strength from distress,  
and grow brave by reflection.”*

~ Leonardo da Vinci

*“It is not merely enough to have the  
ability to be persistent, you must also  
have the ability to start over.”*

~ F. Scott Fitzgerald

## FROM THE EDITORS...

The International Sculpture Conference was held in Portland this year, and NWSSA participated by way of a joint exhibition with Pacific Northwest Sculptors. Thanks to Jeremy Kester for documenting this venture and sharing his experience as both an artist and volunteer for the event. Our Artist Spotlight for this issue is Kirk McLean, who has generously shared his most recent series, Love and Loss. We are grateful to Kirk for his openness, and for exemplifying just how powerful the process of sculpting can be for communicating grief and stimulating healing.

It is hard to accept that the year is already drawing to a close. The hours of daylight get less and less and the need to get out and chisel some stone seems to grow and grow. This season is a good opportunity to reflect and express gratitude for our friends and colleagues who persist in this quixotic dream of stone sculpting. Whether you have a place to carve this winter, or will be counting the days until it’s warm and dry enough to be outside sculpting again, we wish you all the best in your health and creative pursuits.

... Maya & Benjamin



# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: KIRK MCLEAN

**M**y first serious encounter with stone was a mixed-materials piece in 1982, featuring a 300-pound granite glacial erratic that I had dragged from the woods. Working on this piece got me totally hooked on stone and particularly on granite. Since my training was in metal casting and fabrication and I knew nothing about carving stone, I naturally decided to become a stone sculptor.

My art in the three-and-a-half decades since divides into three phases: eighteen years of abstract granite and basalt sculptures in human scale, a decade of chasing the metaphor of a tree growing from rock, and my recent series using visual metaphors autobiographically. My process has always started from a vision that pops into my mind suddenly, although often after I've been thinking about a subject for some time. I work the design further in my head and on the stone, rarely using drawings or maquettes. When I did the Rock Becoming Tree series, the essence of my sculpture became conveying the metaphor using a limited number of symbols. In the Love & Loss series that I just finished, the most important feature was communicating emotion.

The recent change in my work came from my wife Judy's illness and death from Alzheimer's Disease. Family caregivers for someone with dementia die at a rate sixty-three percent higher than the general population, because the experience is so exhausting and traumatic. After her death, I felt totally crushed and floundering in a world with no meaning. Caregivers are encouraged to write about their experience in order to process their grief. I decided, instead, I would use my years of training to make sculptures about it.

Even though I didn't have time to sculpt while caring for Judy, visual images kept arising as a way of understanding what was happening. I began the Love & Loss series in the

fall of 2013 to turn some of these ideas into physical reality. Fortunately, I was forced to make new work since I would be one of the featured artists in a Green Art show at Karla Matzke's gallery in 2014. Because of the show's theme I used trees for the subject of the first sculptures in the series.

The first, 'Lost World', is a tree with two trunks emerging from the stone and winding around each other, leading to highly polished foliage flowing back into the rough, pale rock. Its companion piece, 'New World', is a photographic negative of the first work: a pale, shattered, single trunk that rises out of the dark rock and ends in pale, sparse foliage scattered across the top. The first symbolized the richness of my life with Judy while the second was my bereavement in a new world that lacked strength and substance.



▲ 'NEW WORLD', 9" x 10" x 5", SOAPSTONE, 2014

I exaggerated the roots and trunk of 'The Tree of Life is Watered with Tears' to emphasize solidity and contorted its shape to represent growth and struggle. The tree waters itself with its own tears. I carved them out of the same stone to show how integral pain is to life's experiences.

In 'Will The Circle', two trees arise from intertwined roots to form a circle interrupted by a gap that is slightly off center, as well as cracks lower on the trunks. The idea comes from the Carter Family song, "Will the Circle be Unbroken," which is about family members reuniting in heaven after death. Since neither Judy nor I believed in an afterlife, I chose the title and the form to state, no, the circle will never be intact again.

After the Green Art show, I shifted the series away from using trees and used a variety of forms. In these, associative



▲ 'LOST WORLD', 12" x 10" x 5", SOAPSTONE, 2013





▲ 'THE TREE OF LIFE IS WATERED WITH TEARS', 18" x 14" x 10", BASALT, 2014



▲ 'WILL THE CIRCLE', 12" x 11" x 6", OLIVINE, 2014

thinking played a major role: a nub of an idea would start a cascade of related ideas that I then would try to integrate into a coherent whole.

'Caregiver Finds Respite' came together from several thoughts. The flat face of the wedge-shaped basalt gave me the idea of using stone as a support for a narrative rather than carving it. I connected it with the myth of Sisyphus and how, as a caregiver, I woke up each morning feeling I had to roll the stone up the mountain, only to start over the next day. The eight ball in place of the stone popped into my mind from the phrase "behind the eight ball," meaning you were stuck. It morphed into the Magic 8 Ball of my youth with its ambiguous answers reflecting the constant uncertainty of caregiving. I made three different figures over the course of completing the piece, each progressively smaller as I reflected on the enormity of the daily task. The figure is taking a break from his labors, but briefly, and in a very precarious place.



▲ 'CAREGIVER FINDS RESPITE', 13" x 15" x 12", BASALT, BARITE, MAGIC 8 BALL, 2015

'Phoenix' expresses my feelings that caregiving was a journey through fire that ended in ashes. I'd bought two wooden birdhouses hoping that Judy would get interested in painting them, since people with dementia can enjoy crafts projects. Unfortunately, her dementia was too advanced, so they sat untouched until after her death. I decided they could represent my life before and after Judy's illness, and that the bole of a tree I'd removed at my new home could stand in for the journey. I painted one birdhouse as The House of Love with polymer clay figures of Judy, me and the dog on the porch and the second as The House of Ash with me hanging by my fingernails while

# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT *continued*



▲ 'PHOENIX', 94" H X 24" DIA, WOOD, STEEL, WOOD ASH, POLYMER CLAY, ACRYLIC PAINT, BARK, 2016



▲ 'JUDY'S MEMORY STONE', 82" X 22" X 18", BASALT, 2017

the dog watches. I carved and burned the trunk to symbolize the ordeal of the journey. The text engraved in the trunk is drawn from the behavior log I kept in order to try to improve my interventions in Judy's behavior. The sentences alternate between things she said that were hurtful to ones that were loving. I found this part very difficult: I was unable to open the journal for several months to look for text, until I realized that the painful ones were already seared in my memory. Finding loving remarks everywhere when I finally looked greatly changed my feelings about what had happened.

'Phoenix' gave me a chance to incorporate text, an idea that had interested me for some time. I thought using a folk art style might lure the viewer into thinking the work was supposed to be charming, giving the text and symbols a greater emotional impact when they looked more closely.

In 'Judy's Memory Stone', I used petroglyphs as the graphic element, placing them in a sequence that narrated her life, similar to what one might find on a stele. In 2010 when Judy's memories were clearly slipping away, I thought that depicting her stories might help her reminisce. I chose petroglyphs, because she had really enjoyed exploring rock art in the Southwest. Although I worked out most of the graphic design that winter, I was unable to do the piece until 2017. This sculpture is the one that is the most about the love in the Love & Loss series.



'IF (you really love me)' was my goal for the series, representing releasing Judy into the void. It is based on a dream I had the week after Judy died, in which she had returned to life but was still demented, so I was caring for her again. She then disappeared, and it was my fault since I obviously hadn't been watching her closely enough. She reappeared, and I gave her a big hug, saying, "I love you so very much." She replied, "If you really love me, you'll let me go." The sculpture centers on the void carved into the heart of the granite block. The walls are highly polished to contrast with the pitched, sawn, and ground exterior. The figures are carved from the same block, and the figure being released is polished to connect with the void, while the remaining figure is the same rough grey finish as the outside surface.

I finished the series this July with 'The New Normal', which I see as actually the first one. The title was a phrase the neuropsychologist used when he gave us Judy's diagnosis ten years ago: that dementia would be the new normal. I carved the piece out of a battered piece of cherry wood so that I could burn out the part of her head where Alzheimer's destroyed her mind and led to the "new normal" of confusion and fear. This was another slow one to finish, since I hadn't done a representational figure in almost forty years, had only done one wood sculpture previously, and mostly because I worked surrounded by a pile of different photos of Judy which kept overwhelming me emotionally.



▲ 'IF (YOU REALLY LOVE ME)', 14.5" x 8.5" x 6", GRANITE, 2018

Completing the series really did yield the hoped for result: I made the transition into another world that is no longer about grief and memory. I imagine that the passage of time has much to do with this outcome, since it's been six years, but I also think that my self-imposed art therapy played an important role. At a minimum, I've been able to transform the lead of grief into the gold of expressive sculpture.



▲ 'THE NEW NORMAL', 12" x 6" x 7", CHERRY WOOD, 2019



▲ 'TIME', 10" x 11" x 8", MIXED STONE, 2019

This summer I did a sculpture, 'Time', based on a vision that woke me in the middle of the night. It seems to be a contemplative look at time and change and has nothing to do with grief. It was a real delight to make. I'm now inundated with a range of ideas and a desire to work with a variety of materials. I'm looking forward to this new era in my sculptural life.



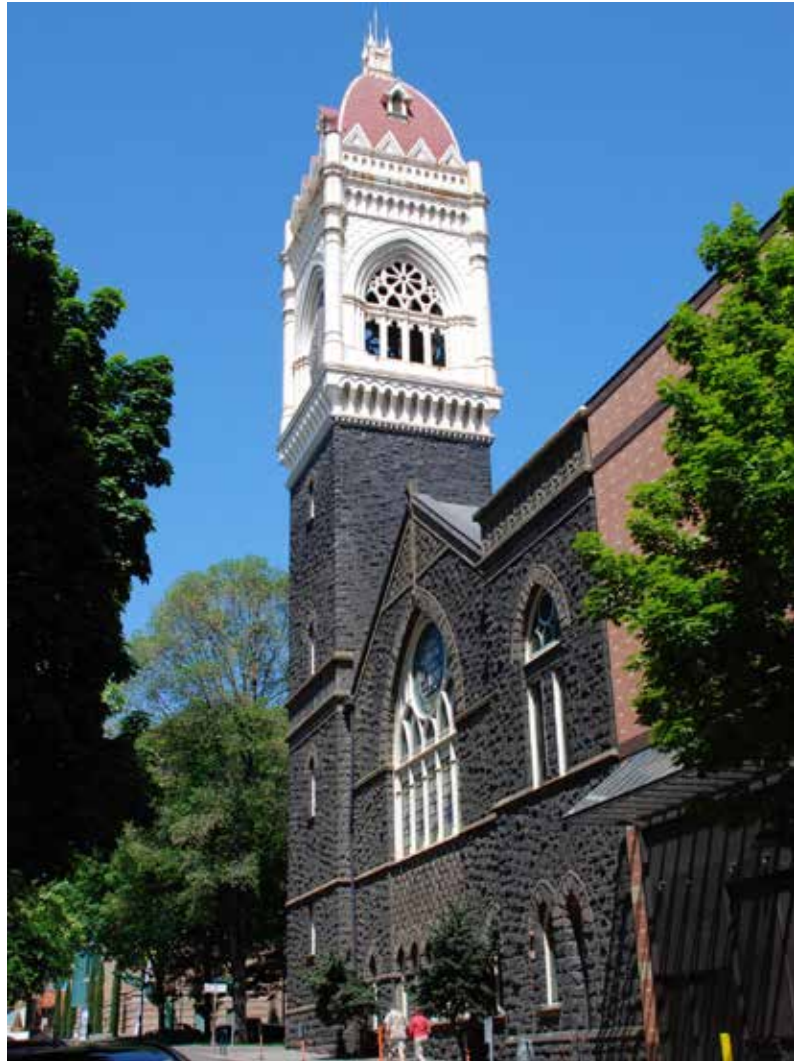
# MAKING SPACE

by Jeremy Kester

This October, The Northwest Stone Sculptors Association partnered with the Pacific Northwest Sculptors for the first time in a group show with thirty-one participating artists. The Making Space special four-day exhibit was held in the Art Reach Gallery at the First Congregational Church, across the park from the Portland Art Museum. Timed in conjunction with the International Sculpture Conference, the show allowed for many opportunities to share art, ideas, and inspiration with both new and familiar members of the sculpture community from around the world.

The First Congregational Church is one of the few examples of Venetian Gothic architecture in the United States and home to the oldest continuous art gallery in Portland. It has a rich tradition of supporting the arts, dating back to the first exhibition in 1875, which featured oil paintings and marble sculptures. The central location is within walking distance of the Portland Art Museum, the Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland State University, and many of the other galleries and studios that participated in the International Sculpture Conference (ISC).

The joining of the NWSSA and PNWS made for an eclectic mix of styles and media. The show was cohesively curated with something for everyone. Bronze was well-represented. Martin Eichinger's *Inspire* dances with graceful fluidity, while *Progression*, by Jason Johnston, has a cerebral narrative that continues to pull you in and provoke thoughts of



▲ FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF PORTLAND



▲ 'PROGRESSION', JASON JOHNSTON

endless, cooperative struggle. Fresh off the banker, *Sinuosity*, by Monika Hawkinson, in honeycomb calcite, glowed in the middle of the room, attracting touches of admiration. Raphael Sebba has convinced marble to swirl and fold with clean elegance in *Rebirth*. Tony Furtado's *Disappearing* makes its point about extinction with masterful figurative abstraction in ceramic and metal. The Sunday reception was well-attended, and the central location allowed for the stream of visitors attending the ISC to flow throughout the event.

For five days, members from all corners of the sculpture community descended on Portland for studio tours, keynotes, panel discussions, gallery shows, and social networking events.





There were BFA and MFA students, world-renowned sculptors, and young, emerging talents. There were gallery directors, museum curators, and collectors. By exploring the theme of “the multifaceted maker,” we received education in topics ranging from modern production techniques like VR sculpting and 3d printing to intercultural collaboration and the impact of public art in livable cities.

I had the opportunity to volunteer for the conference, and the staff was a pleasure to work with. The studio tours were fascinating. We visited the expanse of glass production that is Savoy Studios. Form 3D showed us the cutting edge of sculpture production, fusing techniques from traditional modeling and mold making to digital scanning, modeling, and production. The keynote presentations were eye-opening and inspirational.



It has been seven years since I was first made aware of the NWSSA during a visit to the Portland Art Museum, which rekindled my interest in sculpture. To now be displaying works of my own and working within the sculpture community at large feels like the end of a chapter for me. The week’s events left me feeling privileged to live in a city with such vibrant arts and with an itchy curiosity to explore it. On to the next chapter.

We thank Carl Nelson, Chas Martin, Dr. Nigel Sheldon, and the many other participants and volunteers for a finely-curated show.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:**

'SINUOSITY' - MONIKA HAWKINSON

'INSPIRE' - MARTIN EICHINGER

'REBIRTH' - RAPHAEL SEBBA

'DISSAPEARING' - TONY FURTADO





# IN REVIEW: THE MUSEUM AND THE HENGE

by Benjamin Mefford

Maryhill Museum has been on my list of places to visit for a decade, and I finally made a point to spend a day exploring. The 5300 acre property is located two hours drive east of Portland, Oregon on the Washington side of the river. This quiet landscape with sweeping views of the Columbia River Gorge is well worth a visit, particularly for sculptors. Founded by Sam Hill in the 1920's, the museum has a fascinating history. The museum itself is a large building, with some modern updates and a diverse collection. Inside you can find a permanent collection of more than 50 works by Auguste Rodin, primarily plaster studies. While these are perhaps less impressive as art objects compared to his larger finished works, I found them both more accessible and more informative of his process. Also of particular interest is the collection of Native American artworks that includes stone sculpture. Altogether, the Indigenous Peoples of North America Collection has more than 3500 objects. While there are just several moderate sized works that would clearly be considered "sculpture", this is more than I have ever seen of such stone artifacts from our region. For me, seeing these hand pecked carvings in basalt alone was worth the trip.

Spread out around the exterior of the museum, one can discover the outdoor art collection. A large concrete sculpture installation is sited within an overlook garden,



▲ 'MOON TEMPLE', 2006, LEON WHITE'

and was created by Brad Cloepfil of Allied Form Works of Portland, Oregon; this was an early project for Cloepfil and AFW, who have gone on to structural design projects for Wieden + Kennedy, Caldera Arts Center, and the Seattle Art Museum, to name just a few. Just southeast of the main building, Brushing (2009), by Mike Suri, playfully illustrates the effect of powerful winds that move through the Columbia River Gorge. Mike is not only a talented metal sculptor, but he has also helped many NWSSA members install their works in the outdoor exhibit Gallery Without Walls in Lake Oswego, Oregon. Just a short distance to the northwest of the main building, a tranquil green space includes about half of the outdoor artworks. There, I found the granite and steel sculpture Moon Temple (2006) - created by none other than long-time NWSSA member Leon White.



▲ CREATURE CARVING





Now let us travel east a few miles down the road. Have we left that original property of Sam Hill yet? Nope. Down a short ways from the highway and approaching the Columbia River once again, we find an immense memorial: a full scale replica of the ancient megalith Stonehenge. With only some minor variations, the Maryhill Henge is intended to precisely capture what Hill determined was the original design of ancient Stonehenge, at the time that it was built. This might be the earliest example of its kind of modern public art in the region. The structure was dedicated to the memory of soldiers killed during WWI. While the Maryhill Henge is made of reinforced concrete rather than massive stones - and I imagine does not have quite the same supernatural presence of the original - it has some distinct advantages that you won't get by trekking to England. Most importantly, you can walk all around it, within it, and touch the columns. It is free and open to the public every day of the year. There were some other visitors, but for a little while I had the whole place to myself. Standing within the massive structure really helps one to take in the scale of the original. We sculptors know better than most that pictures just do not do justice to the experience of interacting with three dimensions. By itself, stepping out from between the columns for a look at the Columbia River Gorge is spectacular. Basalt cliffs under open skies... what else could a stone sculptor ask for in a view?



▲ 'BRUSHING', 2009, MIKE SURI





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#### 2019 CARVING CALENDAR

##### **David Edwards Retrospective**

Olympia, Washington

November 15-17, 2019

##### **Textures & Finishes Studio Talk**

Seattle, Washington

December 6, 2019



**CULTURE**

And don't let us forget our friend Peter Becker who brings us stone ideas from around the world in the monthly, online stone-ideas.com.

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