

An artist comes around to her father's medium

Heide Messing McDonald turns to sculpture

Heide Messing McDonald's 25-year retrospective at the North Country Cultural Center for the Arts chronicles her artistic evolution.

As a child, she loved to do art and make plaster casts in her native Germany, where her late father, Konrad Messing, a prisoner of war was released when she was 8-years-old.

<He had done beautiful sketches,> McDonald said. <He was a big influence in my life. When we immigrated to Canada in 1953, he opened up a metal-fabrication shop. He did sculpture for this own pleasure that are family heirlooms now.>

Years ago, she did not possess her father's interest in sculpting.

<I could not share his passion of sculpture with him. It would have been a real exchange of technique. (Now) I feel part of him is guiding me.>

In Quebec, McDonald has been active in the arts scene since 1977.

Her work is represented in galleries internationally and she has exhibited in New York, Tokyo, Germany and Canada.

She converted her garage into a studio, where she sculpts most of the time.

<The retrospective allows me to see what I did earlier. For the very first time, I'm exhibiting everything. I have all kinds of ideas of what I want to do next, and painting is one of them.>

Through the 1970s, she did figurative oil paintings of portraits and street scenes.

When she went to university in the 1980s, she learned engraving and silk-screen printing.

A decade later, her traditional and modern approaches fused when she became passionate about stone sculpture.

<It's the three-dimensional aspect. You have to imagine the volume, what can be inside, what you can realise with it. It's tactile. You can touch stone and bring up beauty, the veining and the color of the stone.>

She started with soapstone and works in marble and limestone, but her preference is alabaster from around the world. < Lovely stone from Africa, Colorado and the south-western United States. The Italian alabaster is beautiful. The color depends on where the stone originates from and ranges from opaque whites to pinks and darker colors with greens.>

Her retrospective includes her very first, small, geometric abstraction title <Aura Borealis.>

<It has all these reddish and green lines> <Stone sculpture is sculpture by reduction. You take away. What you take away you can't put back. It's not like clay modeling.>

Once she discovered sculpting, she explored other methods including bronze. She makes her own rubber molds and plaster casts. Her bronzes are cast at an art foundry.

<Sculpting is hard work. It's much more hard work than painting. It's very rewarding. Once you complete a piece...'Wow I did that' It's a great feeling.>

Her sculptures have moved from the abstract, to fluid, simple human form which thematically examines the multifaceted roles of women in contemporary society.

She featured <Woman as Mother and Work> at a solo exhibition in Germany. <Women have to fulfill many roles. They have to be wives, mothers, lovers, partners and have careers also. We need to be honored. We need more recognition. We need medals. We need halos. We're also being fulfilled.

IF YOU GO

What: <Heide Messing McDonald: A Retrospective of Sculptures, Paintings and Prints,> exhibit and sales

When: Through, June 8.

Where: North Country Cultural Center for the Arts, 30 Brinkerhoff St., Plattsburgh.

Hours: 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

Related Event: <Stone Sculpture Workshop> conducted by the artist. 10a.m.,-4 p.m., May 16-18, \$75 fee plus \$1.50 per pound of stone, tools provided.

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par Robin Caudell