



Douglas Walker: Water Music

By David Morrison

Fantastical machines have fascinated me since childhood, my first obsessions being the Mouse Trap™ game and Professor Pat Pending's Convert-a-Car 3 from Wacky Races. The crazy contrivances of W. Heath Robinson and Rube Goldberg also fired my young imagination, both men producing illustrations of convoluted devices designed to perform the simplest tasks. A contemporary take would be the wonderfully silly "Cracking Contraptions" of Wallace & Gromit animations. I'm also in awe of the submersibles and flying machines from the mind of Jules Verne, ideas clearly referenced today in the Victoriana-meets-sci-fi design ethics of the "steampunk" art movement.

So when I first encountered the exquisite creations of Black Creek "free-style sculptor" Douglas Walker, a comforting warmth of familiarity enveloped me. Much of his work bears aspects of all of the above. There's the technical angle, some pieces providing an overload of geeky distractions. There's an abundance of retro elegance, being the foundation of steampunk art. And there's whimsicality promoted by its key components, echoing Robinson and Goldberg's trademarks of including a plethora of everyday objects, like cutlery and fruit, within the unfeasible mechanisms of their gizmos. As a sucker for creative recycling, this factor is key to my attraction to this stuff.

At the heart of a lot of Walker's works are brass musical instruments set amongst copper tubing and complimentary miscellany, manipulated and embellished in any way the artist thinks works. Depending on where the instruments take him, these sculptures could end up two or twenty-two feet tall.

Configured to optimize and amplify every curve of their structures, the largely hollow instruments have taken on new lives as components in ornamental watercourses. Water fountains and bird

feeders are Walker's main pursuits, but he also crafts garden gates, lamps, non-functional sculptures and on, happy to make something less flamboyant, more contemplative, upon demand.

Looking at his stunning creations, it's incredible to think that he only started doing this just five years ago, even then pretty much by accident.

"I built a little brick pond and wanted something that looked appropriate in it," he begins. "I saw a piece of scrap copper pipe in a coil at a garage sale and fashioned it into a fountain. But I didn't see

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the potential until someone came along and wanted to buy it. So I built one for that person and then became fascinated with the whole idea of incorporating different bits and pieces."

Just sixty-odd months since that random piece of piping set him on his way, Walker has produced a staggering 600-plus individual pieces—30-40% of which were commissions—and sold every single one. The clutch of wondrous pieces he had displayed around his front and rear yards when we met represented his entire stock at the time, so some may now be sold, but it seems safe to say his prolificacy will always bolster a scant gallery.

Walker sources his materials from a variety of suppliers. A network of music teachers from schools near and far provides some essentials, Walker ensuring that what he pays for them stays in the schools' music departments. He picks up stuff from repairmen and donors, while other adornments like goblets, sports trophies and candleholders—in fact, anything non-ferrous and attractive to his eye—are found at thrift outlets, including two supportive Salvation Army stores in Courtenay.

Consequently, Walker's busy shop is a dazzling array of cluttered glinting



lustre. Horns and trombone slides hang in clusters from the ceiling and the shelves of one wall are packed with scores of shiny things that will all be handed roles in future designs.

The charming quirkiness of Walker's art certainly reflects his gently eccentric, slightly larger-than-life personality. Nevertheless, he maintains a pragmatic and humble attitude to his craft. Considering what he appears to me to be driven to do as simply a job of work, Walker's grounded outlook surely helps explain how he can produce such consistently inventive, beguiling pieces of art at such an extraordinary rate.

"I often get asked if I have a muse and my response is that I just work for a living," he says, matter-of-factly. "I go out in my shop and I make stuff. That's my job. What it boils down to is I make things and people purchase them. They enjoy purchasing them and come to me to buy a piece of art. That's a rare thing for people: we don't purchase a lot of art in our lives, so for me it's a huge privilege to be able to do this. Keeping an attitude of appreciation towards my clients—not just those who buy, but those who enjoy my work—is extremely important to me; it's where I try to put my focus."

For more information about Douglas Walker's art and studio hours, please visit his Waterworks Garden Sculpture website at www.waterworksgardenart.com. Email inquiries: info@waterworksgardenart.com / Telephone: 250-337-8417

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