

Local artist chosen for Great Basin residency

Joe Norman is a Gallery MAR artist
Scott Iwasaki, The Park Record



Sculptor Joe Norman, whose works have been showing at Gallery MAR since 2009, can add a National Park as another venue in his resume.

Norman has been named the autumn Artist-in-Residence for Great Basin National Park in Nevada.

The residency starts in two weeks and will last until mid-October.

A resident artist is nothing new to the National Parks, Norman said during an interview with *The Park Record*.

Each National Park puts out a periodic call for entries, he said.

"Some parks are focused on specific types of art because of the people who established them," he said. "For example, some only look for writers because a writer established it and so forth, but it depends on the character of the park.

"It's a way for the Parks to communicate what they are about through artistic mediums, rather than newsletters and the more traditional means," Norman explained. "It's also a way for artists to get exposure, which is always nice."

Norman applied to a few and was contacted by Great Basin National Park, which protects approximately 77,180 acres of east-central Nevada, 290 miles north of Las Vegas.

"I'm excited about this because the geographic range of the Great Basin is huge," Norman said. "There are so many fascinating things in the park. It has glaciers. It has caves, and it covers basically all of Nevada, but is fairly young, having been established in 1986."

Norman, whose sculptures are usually structured from used materials, doesn't quite know how his art will fit in with the park's ideas, he said. He plans to use the first two weeks to wander and absorb what the park is about, before starting a new project.

"My works are usually made from old wood from shipping pallets that are made with colorful wood from China, and India," he said. "I also use bullet casings, bomb fins, a lot of military hardware, actually."

Norman repurposes those items into something functional like a bench or a table.

He has also created non-functional sculptures from truck hoods, he said.

"I enjoy taking materials that have a (past) story and giving them more of a center stage to be looked at," Norman explained. "If you've never owned gun or bullet, you still know what a bullet casing is, so you have an emotional connection to it. As an artist, I take that emotional residue and use it to make something."

Norman was born into a creative family.

His dad is an architect. His uncle is a portrait painter and his brother, although a rocket scientist is also a photographer.

"My sister also has two degrees in Art History," Norman said. "Creating things was always part of our story."

Still, Norman didn't become a bona-fide professional artist right off the bat. He graduated from Stanford University with a degree in product design.

"I went down that road finding ways to make the world a better place and using business as the basis of social change," he said. "As I went along, I found I enjoyed turning up the volume on the artistic expression part and turning down the volume on attending the meetings where I had to wear a tie."

Norman jumped ship and became a teacher when he and his wife moved to Utah.

Two years ago, Norman took a leap of faith and became a full-time artist.

"I started with encaustic painting that uses beeswax and pigment," he said. "It's a fabulous medium because you can get these thick and deep colors, which is fantastic."

A combination of the encaustic textures and working with objects as a product designer pushed Norman into sculpture.

"I developed a feel for three-dimensional objects and learned the context of space," he said. "I found how you can direct how people interact with each other by designing a table.

"There is a specific table size that helps conversations flow if two people are sitting across from each other," he said. "If the table is a couple of inches wider, it feels too distant and if it's a couple of inches narrower, people feel too close to carry out a comfortable conversation."

Norman is looking forward to actually creating the works in the park.

"I know I'm not going to be collecting wood from a National Park to make something," he said with a laugh. "That will end up with nothing but trouble, but I am curious as to what I'll be using and what I'll be making that will help enhance my relationship and others' relationships with the park."

For more information about Joe Norman's works, visit www.blueboathomedesign.com.