The Tin Man

by Gillian - Tuesday, February 10, 2015

http://3storymagazine.com/rand-carlson/

He’s the ultimate recycler, an artist known for his metal collages. Tucson’s own Tin Man, Rand Carlson, answers our Q&A. By Joan Calcagno.

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Early bird or night owl? “Definitely early bird. I get up in the dark now - about five or six. I read the paper. Then I trudge in. I try to get into the studio [at Citizen’s Warehouse] five or six days a week. I’m what I call a ‘lunch pail’ artist - you go in, you do the work. I call it my office - it’s my mess. I started my own business, Random Arts, in 1987 so you have to be self-disciplined, be a self-starter. You can’t work for yourself and expect somebody else to say ‘Alright, get on with it!’”
**Favorite accessory?** “My purse. I don’t know what you call these – briefcases or whatever. I carry it wherever I go. It has all the crap - my cell phone, garage door opener, my papers, my pencils – all kinds of stuff. So it’s my purse.”

Rand Carlson. Photo by Jocelyn Warner-Brokamp

**Favorite faux pas?** “I keep expecting the voters of Arizona to do the right thing and they always let me down. From the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor to the Legislature to the – I mean, you name it! It’s like ‘What the hell happened?’ And I keep thinking ‘Maybe this time.’”

**Who is your dream customer?** “There are two kinds. There’s a family that owns about 25-30 pieces. The daughter’s husband has a huge game room. She gave me a bunch of money and said ‘Do it. [Make something] wonderful!’ I asked some questions of course. Then they sent me a picture of him with the art. It was a gas - a blast. Being part of people’s gift-giving is great. It’s a joy. The other kind of collector is rare but it’s the person who kind of knows what they want and they push me to try - because finding tin is an act of randomness. It’s not something you can just pull a color out of a tube. You have to find it. So those collectors who say ‘I really want a particular subject’, then you’re really pushed to make it.”
If I weren’t an artist I would… “I’d be a scientist. Astro-physics, archeology, botany. The idea of analysis of information - my curiosity is off the charts. It’s my curiosity that really drives me.”

Photo by Jocelyn Warner-Brokamp
If I could change one thing I would… “I’d change the politics of Arizona. I’ve been doing the Random Shots Tucson Weekly cartoon for 27 years. I did a cartoon about the gem show. It’s new dinosaur bone finds. One is butt-head-osaurus, which is Congress. The other one is consumer-osaurus – huge, with a short life-span. And the last one is Ducey-osaurus Rex, only found in Arizona. It eats its young. That refers to the fact that he’s starting to cut education. [With all Ducey has been doing] I think we’re in for quite a ride. As a political cartoonist, I love that sort of s**t. The bigger idiot, the better – but from that perspective only.”

How did you get into tin collage? “I started in 2003. It was really an accident. I covered a birdhouse with tin and really liked how that looked and thought ‘I can do something flat.’ I found some car letters on the side of the road and I broke them apart and I rearranged them, and that’s what started all the letter stuff. I used to do the alumni art show at the University of Arizona for a fundraiser. I had done some paintings and I didn’t sell anything. I was discouraged. The invitation for the show came the next year and I almost tossed it. Then I thought ‘Wait, I’ll throw in my tin.’ And most of it sold.
Rand at work. Photo by Jocelyn Warner-Brokamp

"Doing the tin, it’s basically an intellectual exercise. It’s cutting apart printed lithographic tin – sheet steel that’s been run through a printing press - cookie tins, candy tins, and commemorative tins, and sorting it and either keeping some of the subject matter or disconnecting it completely. And then reassembling it into another form without touching the tin in any way.

"I had been wanting to do paint on tin. So for this Wee Gallery show, I’ve assembled a tin collage and then I got my paint brushes. Blues Man is a good example (see photo, top). This is one of my favorite pieces in the show. I’ll paint around the tin pieces and make them disappear. You really can’t tell [what’s paint and what’s tin.] That’s what I want!"
Pink Lady Photo by Rand Carlson

*Find out more about Rand on his [website](http://website), the Citizen’s Artist Collective [website](http://website), and the Wee Gallery [website](http://website). Follow him on [Facebook](http://Facebook). His show at Wee Gallery runs through March 1st.