

Sculpture Day taking shape in the Couv

Vancouver gallery devotes April to sculpture in run-up to festival

By SCOTT HEWITT
Columbian staff writer

Once upon a time, sculpture was something shaped by human hands and simple tools made from bone, clay or wood. Today, sculpture may involve high-tech miracles such as computers, scanners and 3-D printers. It might even involve Proto Pasta, a "printable" hybridized thermo-plastic filament manufactured right here in Vancouver.

"People express themselves with the tools they know. There are no new ideas, just the evolution of technologies," said Kathi Rick, of downtown Vancouver's Art at the CAVE Gallery. That's where you can see all types of sculpture this month, during and after the run-up to the fourth annual International Sculpture Day festival —

which has jumped this year from Portland's Sellwood area to downtown Vancouver.

"What a great facility," organizer Terri Eliof said of the spacious, elegant CAVE, which opened last year at 108 E. Evergreen Blvd. "It's great to be able to show sculpture here in a museum-quality gallery."

Get your first taste of the event with the exhibit "Sculpt/3D Alchemy" during today's First Friday Art Walk opening. That exhibit continues through April 28 and features artworks by 30 Pacific Northwest sculptors — including Vancouver's noted husband-and-wife public-art team Jennifer Corio and Dave Frei of Cobalt Designworks, as well as Felida's Bill Leigh. Then, come back on April 21 for the International Sculpture Day celebration, featuring artist talks about their inspirations, demonstrations of their techniques and even audience participation in some of that high-tech, experimental, sculptural fun. Proto Pasta, a Vancouver company, will demonstrate its

printable, sculptural material.

"We already knew we can command an audience for art from this side of the river," said Corio, but in recent years many Portlanders have also discovered our First Friday Art Walk. They tend to avoid traffic, show up late, explore the galleries until they close and then enjoy the growing restaurant and bar scene, she said.

"People interested in the arts know that quality artists are here," Eliof said. "It took a while, but they found out."

Lifting off

When she was a child, Corio said, she used to perch atop a doghouse with an umbrella in the wind, trying to fly. That never happened, but today Corio and husband Dave Frei are on a mission to inspire smiles and inject a little levity into this wet, gray part of the world through their growing metal sculpture business.

The couple met when they were both engineers at Hewlett-Packard. Engineering was and still is an unusual career for a woman, Corio said, so she pursued it singlemindedly — until she couldn't ignore her creative, artistic side any longer. She took a leave of absence from HP and studied welding and sculpture at Clark College, where she bonded with peers and formed a powerful public art posse called Women Who Weld. That group is responsible for already-beloved local landmarks such as our waterfront Wendy the Welder statue, as well as "Pillars of Fulfillment," a metal memorial to the late assistant professor Lori Irving on the campus of Washington State University Vancouver.

Corio and Frei — whose respective roles are designer and engineer/builder, generally speaking — founded Cobalt Designworks in 2008, just as the economy was faltering. To keep cash flowing, they immediately got busy with nonartistic work, such

as gates, railings and signs, Frei said; more recently, they've managed a course correction so artistic projects and proposals are always underway. Cobalt Designworks has won commissions to install big, whimsical abstractions in apartment complexes, waterfront walkways and downtown cores in places such as Bremerton, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and, of course, Vancouver; nowadays, they're also trying to develop smaller pieces that are practical for individual art lovers to buy and display at home.

Meanwhile, they hope that sometime within the next year Corio's memory-in-metal — a running girl who looks ready to lift off — will rise atop their McLoughlin Boulevard workshop like a beacon of artistic fun for all to enjoy.

"All we want to do is make people smile," Corio said.

SCOTT HEWITT: 360-735-4525; scott.hewitt@columbian.com; twitter.com/_scotthewitt



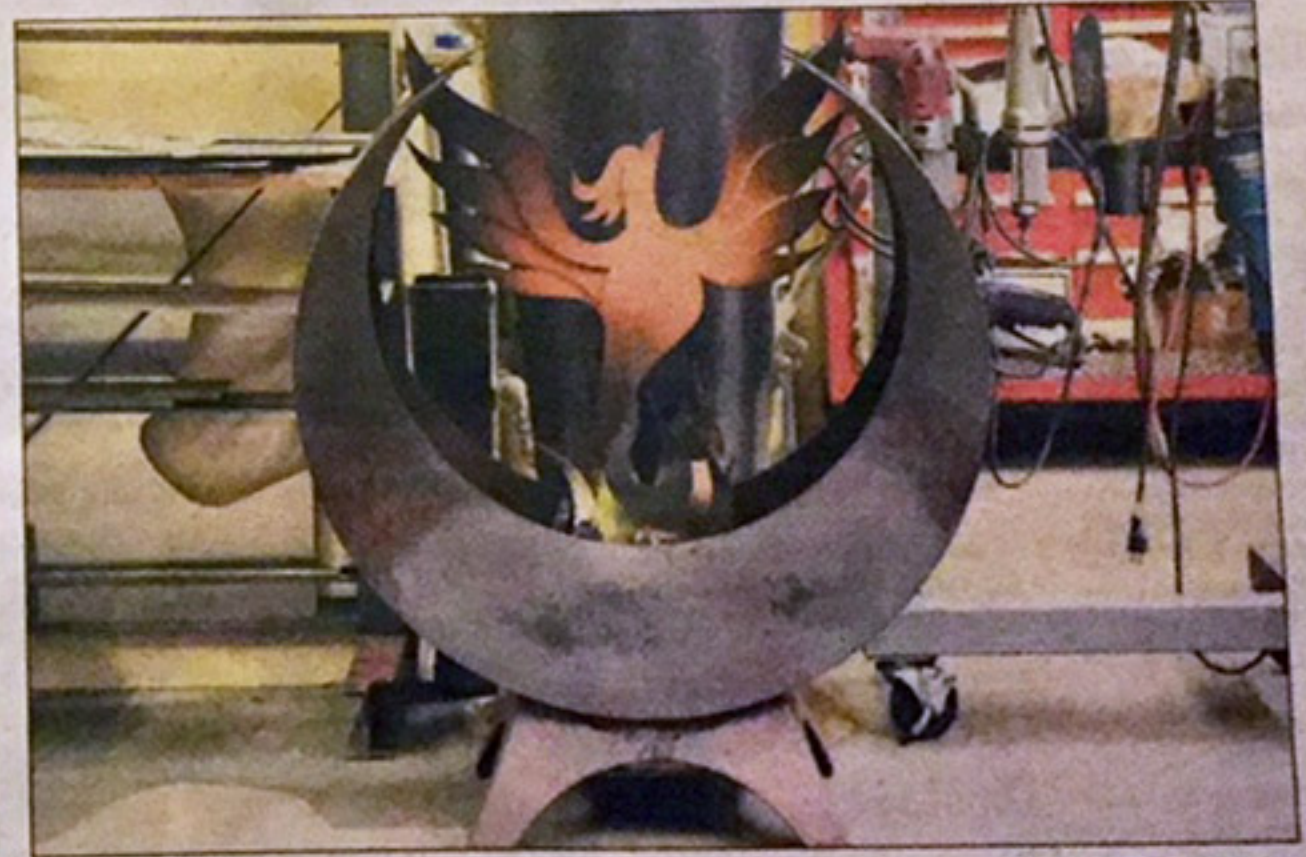
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The latest artistic concepts from Cobalt Designworks include origami-inspired metal sculptures such as this sharp elephant face.



Contributed photo

"Awake," by Julian Voiss-Andree.



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This metal fire pit is the kind of creation that Cobalt Designworks' Dave Frei and Jennifer Corio are hoping will catch on with individual, residential art lovers.