

Life as Art, Art as Life

Dear Students,

Here is some of my story. I share it with the hope that some of what I say may not only ring true with your own hopes and desires but also to encourage you to more fully explore and express them.

I was 19 when I discovered sculpture—and my life was forever changed. I was on a leave of absence from college. I had expressed to someone an interest in doing artwork. He told me of a sculptor who allowed students to come in and work in his studio. This sculptor, Victor Robinson, became my mentor, and for the next 5 months I was led to discover previously unknown worlds of art, sculpture, dreams and the unconscious, mythology, and family.

As a result of this experience, I transferred to State University of New York at Purchase, NY where I continued my work in sculpture. The funny thing is, I never was interested in ART or being an artist. I was concerned in discovering who I was and being true to my experience of life. I felt that the best way to do this would be to work with my hands, so after I graduated from college, I enrolled in a welding trade school. I then worked seven years in a boat yard as a welder and fitter in Mamaroneck, NY with an excellent Portuguese work force making custom yachts. In 1988, I moved to Maine to learn about wooden boat building. It wasn't until 1990 that I felt ready to be a sculptor and to have my own studio.

Over the following eight years there was plenty of struggle. Most of those years I had to support myself with a job in a warehouse working odd hours so as to get all the more time in the studio. But in the end, these years were wonderful and unforgettable- full of working at all hours of the day and night, struggling with a piece until arriving at the joy of completion.

With each piece there was a journey. Sculpture was a form of prayer, a way of asking, a way of searching. One day, I wrote the passage below and pinned it on the wall of my studio. I returned to it often.

*There have been rumors.
There have been sightings.
There have been reports of something incredible,
Something wonderful---
at once terrifying and awe inspiring.
And I wait crouched by the path, waiting
to see.*

I engage in art not necessarily to represent anything but to affirm the integrity of the very process itself, to bring that process to a completion and by so doing to arrive at a sense of unity. What compels me is not only a deeply felt desire to see, but also the desire to respond to space as something palpable and tactile. The process of each sculpture concludes with a sense of awe and wonder as I find myself in a place where I never expected to be. For me, art is a place within oneself; a place which one continually discovers as if for the first time, and a place to which others are invited to share and explore.

In doing sculpture, what I discovered that it was not so much what I did that was important. What was crucial was that through all of my searching, I allowed myself to be available and open, and vulnerable to....well, call it grace or the Infinite, but certainly energies beyond my normal sense of self. Whereas, I assumed I was the one shaping the clay, I discovered I was the clay being shaped. Once I realized this, I began to discern a religious vocation and eventually sought to join the Capuchins.

It is my hope that as students you discover for yourselves your own processes and vocabulary of art making- to know what works and what doesn't, where the line you draw, the form you shape, the space you discover becomes something of your life, your identity, your future.

Brother Sam Fuller, OFM Cap

Novitiate year
Spring 2002
St Lawrence Seminary High School
Mt Calvary, WI