



KAREN YANK



GROWING STRENGTH

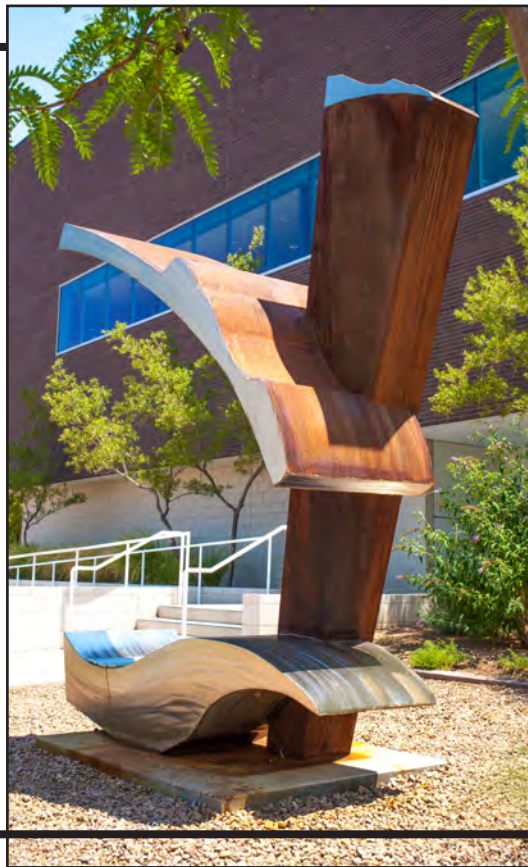
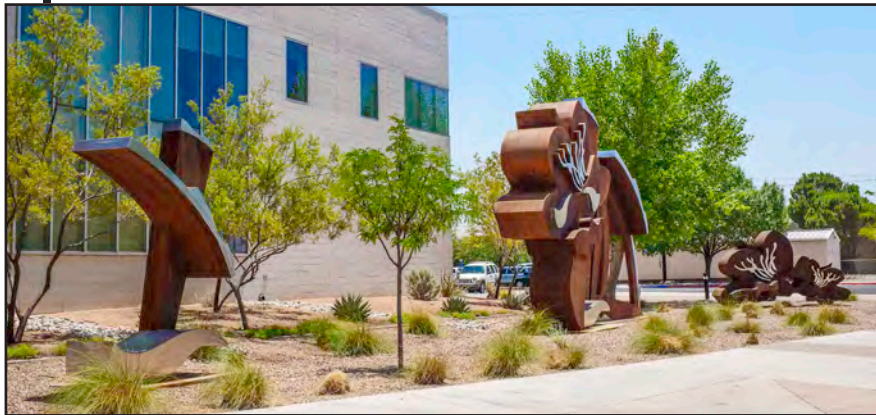
Peter Frank

One of the west's leading public artists, Karen Yank has formulated and fabricated sculpture for outdoor sites throughout the Mountain states and beyond. Yank is known for a rigorous geometric style normally dependent on the form of the circle. From time to time, however, she modifies her approach to fit the physical, functional, and symbolic factors operating at the site. No work of hers, however, has "broken the circle" to the extent that Growing Strength has. In order to celebrate the institution it inhabits and the ecology and society of the surrounding region, Yank has let her thoughts flower and her forms burgeon accordingly. Geometry still plays a prominent role in the formal language of Growing Strength, but organic forms have "invaded" rather deeply here, giving the sculpture (actually, sculptural arrangement) an overtly lyrical bent.

The newfound curvaceousness and amplified asymmetry of Growing Strength represent growth on Yank's part as well as on that of Central New Mexico Community College, the city of Albuquerque, and the State of New Mexico. The tough, wizened forms of desert flora – a (so far) rare case of quasi-naturalistic depiction in Yank's art – pop up repeatedly throughout the multipartite work, here emblazoned on the face of a panel, there defining the contour of another panel, evincing the persistence of life in the face of forbidding conditions. These plant evocations also address human concerns, suggesting that an educational complex like CNM nurtures minds and talents, functioning as a social greenhouse for the benefit of individuals and communities alike.



Growing Strength is also an interactive work. Yank's public commissions can certainly be open and inviting, but their elements have tended to be self-contained and even heraldic. Here, occupying its own spot before the Student Resource Center (specifically in front of the Jeanette Stromberg Library), seemingly growing out of a patch of small white stones, the five-part piece offers shade and even recumbency to passersby. The bumptious organicism of its profile gives the cluster of objects, twenty feet tall at its apex, a feeling of intimacy and (appropriately dry) wit without sabotaging its gravitas.





Yank cites fellow New Mexico transplant Agnes Martin as her mentor. As such, one would expect the younger artist to profess fealty to the kind of brittle reductivism for which Martin is famed. But, as anyone familiar with Martin's early work – or with the overall arc of her career – knows, a deep association with nature and light rather than any sort of rigid ideology was what drove her, and it drives Yank no less.



Working in scales and media very different from Martin's, Yank has also had to navigate the requirements of public art with great care, often subsuming her own love of nature into searches for the appropriate forms. (Public sculpture is nothing if not a compromise between institution, public and site.) But with Growing Strength Yank seems to uncork fully – not in defiance of the public sculpture discourse but in concert with it.



Is this a turning point for Yank? It certainly is no mere aberration. Working in this case only a few miles from her home, for a college that employs many of her friends and colleagues and has trained many more, she has allowed herself an unusual range of eccentricities in interpretation and design. But something about Growing Strength indicates that the genie is out of the bottle, that this sculpture marks a turning point in Yank's work generally. With this work, all about growth, Karen Yank's art has grown, too -and not just in one direction.





Yank works primarily in mixed metals because of their strength and durability, striving to reveal an organic nature with a sense of history in a material that is usually cold and industrial. Every weld and grind mark is an intentional decision. Yank loves to completely mesh different metals together, reflecting a beauty that can only be found in the organic.



CMY Inc. art fabricators worked directly with Yank in the engineering, fabrication, and installation of the entire project.





PRIDE, 2018

Karen Yank began her formal art career at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where she earned her BFA. From there, she moved to Rutgers University, earning her MFA. She finished at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, but has since returned to New Mexico.

Throughout her career, Yank has established herself as the most prominent sculptress in the state of New Mexico. She has created 40 large-scale public sculptures to date, which have won her a number of awards, such as for Aesthetics and Public Involvement; the PRIDE Award from the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, the Golden Cumbre Award from the New Mexico Public Relations Society of America, and the Americans for the Arts Kris Art of Giving Award.



DESERT PRIMROSE, 2017



BEAUTY OF THE WEST, 2017



LIVING LANDSCAPE, 2019
TWO SCULPTURES



HEART & SOUL
2019





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