

An artist's journey: From clay to cardboard

Featured Chehalem Cultural Center artist creates massive sculptures out of cardboard

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Tall, graceful sculptures will fill the Chehalem Cultural Center for its opening and the months to follow.

Reminiscent of spires or giant chess pieces, the works may elicit some surprise from visitors — not due to their interesting shapes or their impressive height (up to 16 feet tall), but more likely because of the unusual medium: cardboard.

“Infinite Possibilities” features the work of San Francisco Bay area contemporary sculpture artist Ann Weber. The cultural center’s inaugural gallery exhibition will open March 22 and run through July 2.

The focus of the exhibit will be 10 or so sculptures, some including as many as 26 parts. The organic forms, made of recycled cardboard woven together, may resemble pods, gourds, figurative shapes — the interpretation is largely in the eye of the beholder.

“(The pieces) can read a lot of different ways. I don’t want it to be just one thing,” Weber said. “I like it when people have different ideas of what (a piece) is. I never say exactly

what it is.”

It’s fun to watch people react to her work, she said.

“Usually people are surprised that such large sculptures can be made from such humble material as found cardboard. It comes from the streets, from Dumpsters.”

Weber began her art career in 1970 as a potter, after learning to throw at Purdue University in Indiana. She started a pottery shop in upstate New York, then moved to New York City in

1980 and continued her work there. But after 15 years in the business, mostly spent making “functional” pottery for her shop and other galleries, she needed a change.

“I just got sick to death of production — I’d thrown so many bowls, plates and vases,” she said.

She moved to the West Coast, enrolled at California College of Arts and Crafts (now California College of the Arts) in Oakland, and began studying with Viola Frey, an artist known for her large figurative ceramic sculptures. “My eureka moment was when Viola said, ‘Go look at some real artists. Go look at Kandinsky.’”

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The focus of Ann Weber’s exhibit at the Chehalem Cultural Center will be 10 or more sculptures, some including as many as 26 parts. (Photo courtesy of Chehalem Cultural Center).



Ann Weber’s art is centered around creating massive sculptures weaving used cardboard into light but sturdy works. (Photo courtesy of Chehalem Cultural Center).

Weber: Left pottery behind after earning master's degree to pursue large sculpture

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Weber checked out a library book on Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian painter and art theorist who helped pioneer modern abstract art. And then, instead of her functional bowls, plates and vases, Weber began throwing shapes.

Inspired by Viola, she wanted to “work large.” So after graduating with a master’s degree in fine arts, she decided to leave clay, which is too expensive and heavy for large creations.

She began sculpting with plaster and canvas until 1991, when she ended up in a second-story studio. Plaster is lighter than clay but still on the heavy side, and plaster creations are fragile, making it difficult to transport them up and down stairs.

Weber was sitting in her new studio, surrounded by cardboard boxes from the move, when inspiration struck. “Who cares what it’s made of?” she thought. “It’s the form that matters.”

And thus was born her signature method: creating sculptures out of recycled cardboard. She takes strips of cardboard and staples them together, creating massive pieces of art that take the shape of whatever is in her mind.

“Usually I just have a loose idea in my head, and I just go for it with my staple gun,” she explained. After the sculpture has taken shape, she makes drawings from it.

Asked how long each piece takes to craft, she laughs: “I usually say it takes about 10 hours — and 40 years.”

The “40 years” is for experience.

Weber will lead an informal discussion of her artwork at the opening reception from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. March 26 at the cultural center. She will also be on hand at the center’s grand opening March 27, giving a presentation on her exhibit at 12:30 p.m.

For more information, visit annwebersculpture.com.