

Lucy Sherman: Twin Cities embrace public art, artist Hugh Lassen

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If there is one thing I learned last summer as I lived and worked in Lewiston, it is that this city is dedicated to the public arts and sees legitimate value in the unexpected encounters of a mural, a series of photographs along the road, or sculptures that either light up, rattle, or linger peacefully.

BY LUCY SHERMAN SPECIAL TO THE SUN JOURNAL



One of the newest pieces of public art in Auburn is "Bud Form" created by Maine sculptor Hugh Lassen. The abstract sculpture at the entrance of the Longley Memorial Bridge overlooks the Androscoggin River. *Russ Dillingham/Sun Journal file*
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Hugh Lassen speaks to an Art Walk participant at a celebration of his piece Bud Form in Auburn. Lassen is a wild Maine blueberry farmer and got his inspiration for this piece from the bulging buds in early spring that foretell a prosperous season. He enjoys working with marble for the durability of the material. “Kids can climb on it, they can snot on it, they can get sunscreen on it,” Lassen said, “The oils give the piece a patina that is quite beautiful.” *Andree Kehn/Sun Journal file*

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For those who are new to the Twin Cities — Lewiston and Auburn — or for those that had not already noticed, please note one of our new public art commissions happily nestled in the James B. Longley Memorial park.

The 6-foot tall, 9,300-pound, granite sculpture titled “Bud Form” is one of many “rocks” that artist Hugh Lassen magically transforms. While this sculpture proves itself as an artwork of refined craftsmanship, it is, nevertheless, an abstract work. Thus, an average visitor sees no immediate recognizable forms — like a dog or a face — associated with a particular meaning. However, even an abstract work, or its creator, tells us something, or perhaps waits to evoke something out of the viewer.



installation of “Bud Form“ was not a walk in the — James B. Longley — Park: it required serious crane maneuvers and heavy-lifting of this unseemingly fragile object onto the ground. To mount the object requires careful offsetting of the base of the sculpture in order for it to rest evenly on the curved topography of the park, an engineering tool that Lassen developed over many years of installation.

His sculptures take approximately one year to complete, somewhat of a slow and contemplative process, though he finds the culmination of every project extremely gratifying.

Lassen often finds inspiration for his figures within the rock itself; the busier the rock, the simpler the form. His work is sculpturally more reductive than additive, such that the focus is tied to one medium: the rock.

He is particularly interested in depicting human and animal forms, though the abstraction of his works elicit almost incalculable interpretation. Perhaps what he really wants to depict in his sculptures is the essence of an object reduced to its simplest form. Consider the polysemous nature of the word sculpture, how many forms it can take, how many mediums, and how many meanings.

Lassen’s work “Rhino,” currently exhibited at the Edith Wharton estate in Lenox, Massachusetts, was one of 30 sculptures chosen for an art initiative called [SculptureNow](#). He was struck by the diversified approaches to the artists’ sculptures, and how the meaning of sculpture not only looked different, but also functioned.

Lassen has been commissioned to create another sculpture for the city of Lewiston, expected to be installed at the beginning of the new year. This work, “Arboreal Figure,” will be mounted in Kennedy Park, among its fellow arboreals — trees.

A Lassen sculpture is meant to be touched, climbed, poked. It is not something we are expected to “understand,” but rather something to feel, something to unify the landscape.

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In this way, I think Lassen's "Arboreal Figure" will rest nicely in one of our most cherished parks.

Lucy Sherman is a student at Bates College, where she is majoring in art and visual culture.