

NOTES ON THE SCULPTURES AT VOLLAND MADE BY MARK MCHENRY

I come from a family with deep roots in the Flint Hills, so I'm honored to show these works together on the lovely rolling grounds of Volland. They were made over the course of half a century from the same kit of parts: carved wood, metal and limestone bits and pieces, attention to the joining of things, and time. I don't like the noise of power tools, so they're mostly made with hand tools – especially sharp chisels. The sculptures were built with an eye to how they would weather, so now I'm enjoying watching them as the seasons change.

There's no doubt that making these things has also been a healthy counterbalance to all the left brain demands of my architectural practice. For these, the clock has never been ticking and there's been no budget.

One fact that I would like to acknowledge is that anyone who has the experience of carving in wood will have a special sense of the vital force that trees bring to our "sweet swingin' sphere." These sculptures have given me the opportunity to engage that force directly, and I'm grateful.



PALO ALTO 1972

The original version of this piece was suspended from a California Live Oak in the foothills of the Bay Area. It's the first time I explored working with the center of gravity of a complex form in suspension. The original disappeared from the location shown in the photo to the right, but in the Fall of 2012, I remade the piece for a show at Tom Deatherage's Late Show Gallery in KCMO. Ryan Jones calls this one "The Pi Piece," and I'm fine with that and encourage all manner of free interpretation of these things.



ERLING STRAND

From 1975 to 1984, I worked seasonally as a commercial fisherman out of Petersburg, Alaska, and Erling Strand was a friend and mentor to me. Erling was born in Norway in the late 1890s and came to Petersburg as a young man. He was a master of knots and splices, and he taught me things that are part of these sculptures.

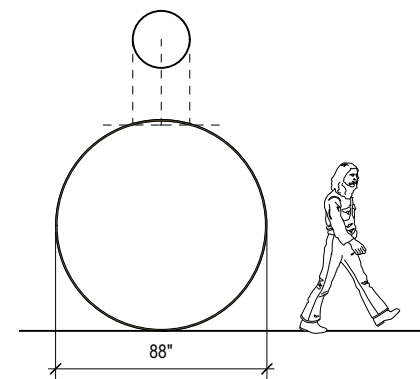
The chunk of stone that makes the fulcrum is from a single slab of Cottonwood Limestone that was once a chimney cap at "Kaw Haven" (see below). The cap – weighing close to 65 lbs – was lifted off its pins by internal pressure releasing up the chimney by a tornado-force wind that carried it several hundred feet where it broke on the ground into two pieces. So the element of chance provided me with the fulcrum (and after sawing with the base pieces, too).

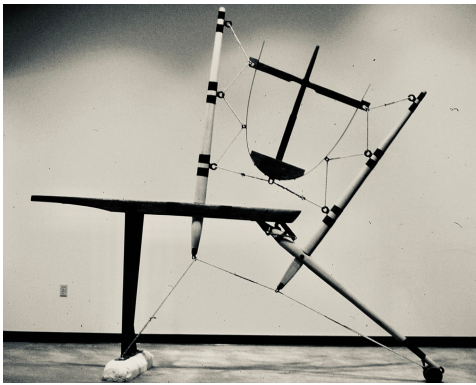


THE MIDDLETON

During my Alaska years, I worked on a classic wooden boat, the Middleton, which celebrated its centennial in 2023 and is still actively fishing in the Gulf of Alaska. The nautical themes and techniques – like eye splices and lashings with tarred seine twine – have been a way of keeping me in touch with that part of my life.

The core of this piece comes from two heavy stainless steel discs that I scavenged in the early 70s along an abandoned railroad right-of-way north of Topeka. These lens-shaped discs can only have been cut from large, stainless steel orbs that were 88" in diameter. There's an element of mystery here, so if you have ideas on where such orbs may have been used, please fill me in.





IMPLEMENT (for Richard Gillespie)

In the mid-'80s, when I was in the architecture program at KU, I had all my tools in the Lawrence Turnhalle, a stately limestone building dating back to the Civil War era when it had been the center for the German community. This piece and several of the others were built at the Turnhalle. During that time, I had the opportunity to get acquainted with one of the finest artists that this part of the world has ever produced, the sculptor Richard Gillespie. One of Richard's friends was Al Levy, who had a store called Federal Surplus and Hardware on the east side of downtown KCMO. Al was a certified hoarder and to enter his store was to pick your way through mountains of stuff with many rare finds to be discovered. The three lathe-turned ash members in this piece came from Al and were originally made as pump handles.



KAW HAVEN (for Lena Baxter)

Though this is the most figurative of my works, its title refers to a Place – a farm north of Topeka – that my family had for many years and where the piece was first installed. The farm was named "Kaw Haven" by my grandmother, Lena Baxter, a Flint Hills farm girl from Dover and a fine horsewoman. She kept a beautiful Morgan horse, Duchess, out in the pastures at Kaw Haven.

The two metal pieces – welded together and held out at arm's length – came from the Kaw Haven barn and stayed with me for many years before they found their use in this piece. The base is the third of the steel discs also used for *The Middleton*.



OBYSODOBI (in response to D.H.L.)

This is my most recently completed sculpture, and Volland is its first installation. The armature is formed by a broad pine plank with cropped corners that my dad collected. The plank must be at least 150 years old. It's also very human scale, and in pondering its original use, I'd thought that perhaps it came from a morgue. Then as I was finishing the piece, I saw this haunting photo from Jacob A. Riis, c.1890 and titled "Police Station Lodger, a Plank for a Bed."

I enjoyed steam-bending the white oak ribs for this one with the help of Deni, Duncan and Anh in the Fall of 2020, in the midst of the Pandemic. I felt some real concern then that I might not get the sculpture launched in time. A number of aspects of this piece harken me back to treasured experiences building boats in my Petersburg years. The title is a riddle, and I only ask that if you solve it, please let me know. markmchenry5805@gmail.com.



I appreciate the proximity of the Volland site to the railroad tracks, especially since a number of these rail brackets are used in the sculptures. I thought I might be the only one to appreciate the expressive strength of their form, and then I saw these ancient Hawaiian petroglyphs in a Linda Connor photograph. Here's a detail from that photo.



I hope these notes provide some insight into how my sculptures came to be. I'm hard-pressed to say exactly where their forms came from with the exception of OBYSODOBI, which springs from an image in a favorite book of my childhood, [Eight Little Indians](#), by Josephine Lovell.

