

Section B

THE BOZEMAN MONTHLY

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Gallatin Art Crossing Featured Artist

Ole Nelson by Riley Pittenger



Eric "Ole" Nelson is a man with whom you are familiar, though you may not realize it. If you have ever looked up at a local business sign downtown, chances are you've seen one of his attractively sculpted love children of steel and light.

Ole has been crafting steel for nearly two decades in Bozeman and loving every minute of it. A Madison, Wisconsin import, Ole moved west to study graphic design at MSU. Initially working with hand-welded pieces, Ole soon grabbed an introductory position at Ridgeline Metal Art, where the need for a plasma cutting table operator with no experience and an artistic background instigated his career. His love for this technology and steel fueled Ole's drive across the next few years as he graduated and began work in his current area of expertise. Ole's work can be found in numerous locales throughout Bozeman,



including the Co-op downtown and Jewelry Studio.

Originating in his studio, fortuitously an abandoned sign warehouse, Ole's abundant and prodigious brain-spawn is indeed everywhere. Upon entering the studio, one

finds the standard artistic madness spilling from every shelf and table made only more aesthetically animated when the neon signs come to life with the same exuberant crackle one might expect in the bowels of an eastern European castle, high atop an unholy peak of which villagers refuse to speak. Fortunately, this mad scientist is solely captivated by artistic expression. Actively employing positive and negative space, several of Ole's memorable works are permanent Art Crossing fixtures, open year round to the collective awe and appreciation for the unique of passers by. The next time you find yourself in Soroptimist Park or outside Starky's, take time to lingeringly gaze upon these mighty and stark pieces (Fishface and Treesail).

The Art Crossing exhibit hosts a variety of artwork, successfully introducing viewers to various artistic approaches. With the goal of adding at least one piece to the permanent collection each year to support further expansion, the Art Crossing effectively merges the mundane with the miraculous, bringing unique art to optimal downtown locations. The entries for this year will be posted on the Art Crossing website and open for public voting until the installation date, allowing for substantial community



involvement and interaction with the art to be placed for the public's benefit. The Art Crossing is funded by charitable individual and business donations and community challenges; its work is made possible by the support of committed board members and dedicated volunteers.

Gallatin Art Crossing—Q&A with Erik “Ole” Nelson

BY RILEY PITTENGER

Erik “Ole” Nelson is a contributing mainstay of the Gallatin Art Crossing (GAC). The custom decor and artifacts of a life filled with friends and hard work encircle the table where he sat to answer questions concerning the Gallatin Art Crossing.

Riley: The GAC began in 2008, what can you say having been involved since?

Ole: A local, free artistic presence works so well. Transporting my pieces blocks instead of states is a plus, but public convenience is more important. The presence of the installation represents the program’s availability to Bozeman. With all 50 sculptures seen daily in an expansive venue, knowledge in the larger artistic environment ripples involvement. These pieces could be and are readily at home in the private settings as one way to present such a collection, but having a large and public venue increases awareness in such an incredible way.



Riley: Is the GAC helpful to you as an artist?

Ole: Involvement carries the reputation of the GAC with me wherever I go or apply. My pieces are not scattered across private collections, they are part of an established installation lending showable credibility.

Established representative space goes beyond the eyes of Bozeman to other towns and programs, opening greater possibility for artists to be seen. To me, it is a community art institution. To be taken seriously I need a body of work that is applied, not just existent. The GAC is the layer of reality and tangibility to what I do.

Direct involvement is important and crucial to the idea of public art: How involved is the community and is the art representative of that? The GAC engages the public with an important opportunity to involve more local sculpture and business.

People are taking tours and photos and newcomer to Bozeman has a fresh perspective. The community presence and restoration of historic architecture is one thing, a program making a unique first impression is invaluable. The GAC is representing people in this region and town, awareness on the rise because of this momentum.

Riley: What are important steps to the next evolution?

Ole: If nothing changed it would still be a fantastic place to exhibit, but every year the GAC finds a way to evolve and expand exposure and infrastructure. The yearly improvements and expansions only help; more pieces, more artists and more connections are always necessary in my mind.

Riley: Are such programs important to community?

Ole: Art makes a huge difference in the feel of place; a community open to having this program speaks to the spirit of Bozeman. Art in any presence benefits community: the idea that success can be found without formula or set structure allows exploration and trial of new ideas with no wrong method. For me, public art engages a space, lending energy alongside architecture and public involvement.

The GAC exhibit hosts a variety of sculpture in Downtown Bozeman and at www.Gallatinartcrossing.com. The goal of the program is to add one piece to the permanent collection each year.



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