

“The Artist Reframed”
by Michael DePalma
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One man finds his muse in stone, the other in a junkyard. One is shy to discuss his work, while the other is all too willing to completely unravel the process behind his mad scientist projects. Trying to pin down why Larry Terrafranca and Robert LeDonne share the same spotlight in “The Figure Re-framed” Student Gallery exhibit at Pikes Peak Community College (PPCC) is not an easy task, but it was the challenge presented to those in attendance at the “Meet the Artists” session on October 28th.

Laura Ben Amots, adjunct faculty member at PPCC, manages the gallery. She told those present, “Part of the mission of the exhibit is to re-frame the way you experience concepts and realities.” She further clarified, “It is about taking identifiable geometric forms, or objects, or beings, and re-framing them from a new vantage point.” Terrafranca and LeDonne presented those unique angles in both their behavior and their contrasting styles of sculpture.

In opposition to his precise craft, Terrafranca dislikes discussing his art in *detail*: the tools used, the time spent, the materials. After the session, he confessed, “I’ve never really liked talking about the work. If it stands on its own, it’s like you write something, and somebody reads it – well, there it is.” Terrafranca’s reluctance gave way, in measured strokes, to words like “focused” and “deliberate.” They revealed him with the slow, methodical approach of his sculptor’s hands. His apprenticeship at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., helped him hone an exacting practice. “When I was learning at the cathedral how to carve, we had to take a block and make it flat and square, which sounds kind of dumb, but we had to do it with chisels,” Terrafranca intimated.

Terrafranca’s inherent appreciation for the materials and precise craft parallel his sculptures’ blend of the organic with the mechanical. *Geronimo’s Cadillac* integrates a classic figure bust with icons of industry such as wheels, cars and guns. The sculpture stands as a memorial to the decimation of Native Americans in the West, according to the artist. *Muse* further displayed Terrafranca’s attention to specifics. A godlike, modern figure stands embedded within a classic, primitive statuette of a baby – all mounted on a wheel. Terrafranca triumphs in his ability to convey warmth, and draw the audience in to the work, despite the calibrated craft with which the pieces were brought to life.

Try to get LeDonne to *stop* talking about his work, displayed or otherwise. Whether detailing how he has been able to consistently acquire grants to continue his art, or outlining the process of securing patents for his many creations, LeDonne comfortably discusses all at length. His inventive mind has brought forth a potter's wheel for the physically challenged. He broke down while describing the joy that people confined to a wheelchair felt when finally able to manipulate clay on the wheel. That emotional display echoes LeDonne's appreciation for the technical nature of his found objects. His TouchSound system uses vibration to enable the hard of hearing to feel and experience the vibration of sound. All of LeDonne's engineering comes as no surprise, as he stated "You creatively get excited about form that industry has manufactured, and may cost you twenty bucks."

LeDonne's sculptures are the products of materials recovered from junkyards, scrapheaps, and good fortune. They may be welded structures or crude amalgamations. *Woman* is a welded piece combining gear shapes with a hand and other forms. It casts a magnificent shadow on the wall behind it, as configured by gallery director Ben Amots. *Man*, on the other hand, is an industrial set up of pulleys and parts that evokes a phallic projection, laid bare. The piece has no clear permanent connections, as the artist eagerly demonstrated by disassembling it for the audience. A series of bowling balls cut in half adorned the back corner of the gallery. LeDonne explained the pieces as influenced by objects in outer space. "I'm interested in what happens in space. In space when you have a liquid, it doesn't flow, it goes 'boing.' And I thought if I were in space, instead of a square frame, what happens if you pushed that canvas out and it were a bubble?" While LeDonne's work clearly exists as the product of a fertile mind, his explanation of the process involved in creating the art often outshines the pieces themselves. That likely satisfies his teacher sensibilities.

These artists stand so similar in their use of abstraction, but so apart in their process and values. One can imagine that Terrafranca's sense of craft makes him squirm when LeDonne describes his materials gathering process. "You go to Western Scrap, and you look down, and this plow blade is over there, and then you walk over here, and this steel plate is over there...I just started picking really interesting metal stuff. If it's really interesting, you can't go wrong...I don't struggle. I don't labor...I stay away from all that labor. I want to do the creative stuff." This is not to say LeDonne is imprecise. His background making ceramic sets and executing multiple copies demonstrates his skill on a potter's wheel. But for Terrafranca, the precision is in the craft itself, while LeDonne admires the

precision of the parts he acquires. Objects speak to LeDonne, while Terrafranca coaxes an image out of an object.

There is a common ground between these two artists: they both respect their materials and they both enjoy when the audience sees something that the artist didn't originally intend. "It's fun when someone makes an observation like that, because it's something that I hadn't seen. It makes it even more fun for me, having done it, when someone says, 'You know, that kinda looks like...,'" Terrafranca conceded. Reacting to how Ben Amots had positioned his *Woman* sculpture to cast a distinct shadow mass, LeDonne said, "What's really important is not where I started, but where *you* took it. To me, this is the evolution." Both these artists will continue to fascinate and challenge their audiences – *that* evolution will persist.