

## In Memoriam: Gary Haven Smith '73

He saw beauty and whimsy in stone

Tuesday, May 1, 2018



While studying art at UNH, Gary Haven Smith found his creative niche working with wood and bronze. But when his travels to Europe introduced him to working with marble, it became his primary medium until the mid-1980s. In a rented house on a Greek hillside, Gary experimented with sculpting marble using hand tools he had brought with him. Later, he worked in Italy, a country that captured his heart and to which he would return with his wife, Susan Pratt-Smith, many times.

Sculpting marble piqued Gary's curiosity about finding other types of stone to work with, along with new ways of cutting it. By the 1980s, he was using pneumatic chisels and working with native

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granite glacial boulders he found in New Hampshire gravel pits. Tossed and rolled about throughout the centuries, the boulders develop a crusty patina that Gary loved, says Susan. “He was captivated by how the rough exterior contrasted to the delicacy of the crystalline interior of the stone.” He invented a special carriage to support a stone as it turned slowly and used a wire saw to cut through it. The result was his distinctive lyrical and curvilinear sculpture.

Gary often spoke of “finding what the stone wants to do.” With that in mind, he teased stone into looking like a cresting ocean wave or soft ringlets that invite a viewer to touch them. Speaking to UNH Magazine several years ago, Gary explained that he thought of cutting stone as a metaphor for human existence. “We’re dense,” he said. “We have an outer core. But, there is this fragile thread that goes through our very existence. You can be an ox of a person and the next day you get some bad news and you become like an eggshell.”

Well known throughout the art world, Gary’s work was featured both nationally and internationally, including showings in The Netherlands and Japan. Closer to home, he was the first recipient of the

“He was delightful to work with — positive, brilliant and humble.”

Artist’s Achievement Grant from the Greater Piscataqua Community Foundation. In 2006 he received a Lifetime Fellow Award from the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts. On campus, one of his sculptures stands in front of the main entrance to the Paul Creative Arts Center. Others have been exhibited around New England, including popular installations in Maine at the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens in Boothbay and the Ogunquit Museum of American Art.

Independent arts consultant June LaCombe, who recommends

and selects sculpture for exhibitions and private collections, worked with Gary for almost 30 years. “He was delightful to work with,” she says, “positive, brilliant and humble.” They celebrated each installation or sale by treating themselves to lobster rolls. Thanks to Gary’s popularity, “We ate a lot of lobster,” she says.

June remembers him as a true Renaissance man. He was a talented painter, whose canvases often included the geometric forms of his sculptures. He built his own home and studio and, together with Susan, an artist in her own right, landscaped their property. Lush gardens surrounding their home are filled with plants ranging from delicate peonies to sturdy bamboo, with his sculptures forming a backdrop.

Gary studied French at UNH and had a flair for languages that put him at ease traveling throughout the world and meeting people from different cultures. A few months prior to his death on Sept. 28, 2017, accompanied by Susan and their son Devon Smith '13, he made a final trip to his beloved Italy, the country that had so inspired him.

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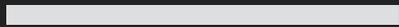
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