

Roy Tamboli

Unsanctioned Renegade Public Art and other Statues

Roy Tamboli is a part of your life. You have seen his artwork, at the corner of Walnut Grove and Poplar, or at Harrah's on Cherry Road, or maybe at Baptist East.

At Poplar and Walnut grove a huge circular disk structure with a map on it, is called the Pangaen Disk. Tamboli dubs the piece "unsanctioned renegade public art", because it was not commissioned. The owner of the land gave him permission to place the art there, and Tamboli is considering putting other pieces there as well.

The sculptures are bigger than life. They tower above you, because Tamboli does not have small ideas. His ideas sometimes start out as maquettes, which are miniature sculptures, and then get recreated on a larger scale, in bronze or steel. Sometimes in the process, the sculpture changes and becomes something else.

Tamboli's working studio, at 1761 Madison, is shared space in an old gas station. Other residents of the building

include an auto shop and a wood carver.

Engines roar and loud clanging join with his blow torch to create an atmosphere charged with electricity. His studio has a large 15 foot, 2,000 pound steel table in the center with a huge circular steel piece chained to it. A winch hangs from the ceiling close by. Some of the steel pieces are so heavy that they must be supported in order for Tamboli to shape or move them.

Tamboli wipes his safety glasses on the smock soiled with metal filings and dirt, and turns on the Oxygen and Acetylen tanks. He sniffs to make sure there are no leaks, then lights the torch.

The process is slow. A piece of steel gives up its shape in small very hot increments under the ministrations of the blow

torch. Blue flame turns the metal bright red, and Tamboli puts a foot against the table and pulls. He may do this more than a dozen times in order to get exactly the right curvature. He also may undo what he has done. Some of the pieces are welded together, but Tamboli is particularly happy with a new piece, called The Bardo of Rose, which has connected pieces with curved steel pipes.

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"Sometimes I feel like I have to marshal some control over the metal with a sledgehammer and a torch, but then there are times when I have to listen to what it wants, so it's a give and take," said Tamboli. "I think about my art all day and I think about my life all day, so naturally they become one," says Tamboli of the large circular steel sculpture he is creating for the Memphis Art Council's show in March. This piece, *The Bardo of Rose*, is about alzheimers and his mother's struggle with his Dad's alzheimers. Part of the sculpture will be a glass ball intertwined in the broken pieces, symbolizing the smooth pearl that will come out of the hard parts of life. The glass ball will be suspended inside curved steel and will move freely.

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Praying through Clouds with Moon, another of the 5 pieces Tamboli will display at the MAP show, just grew as he created it. "Sometimes I feel like I'm facilitating the sculpture. I'm taking orders. There is something that wants, to be created," Tamboli said. He knew the piece was finished when he added the moon.

Tamboli did architectural models before he decided to pursue his art full-time in 1978. Since that time he has created large pieces that appear at Poplar and Walnut Grove and Harrah's and Baptist East Hospital. He creates statuary both in steel and cast bronze. As an artist he does not limit himself in materials. He uses film and old photographs as well as bronze and steel.

Many times he produces miniatures to show clients who commission a piece. This gives them several choices before the final version, on a much larger scale, is produced. Cast sculpture is produced with wire and wax, and molded carefully. The finished piece is then sent to a foundry where it is recast in wax. Tamboli will then remold the wax and from that a ceramic mold will be produced that will be used to cast the bronze. From one mold, a

few very exclusive numbered pieces may be produced before he destroys the mold.

Not all sculptures have such closure. At times Tamboli simply quits working on a piece because he is tired of it. That's when he knows it is finished.

Left: Tamboli silhouetted against Praying Through Clouds with Moon.

Top Right: Tamboli uses a blow torch to shape The Bardo of Rose.

Right Bottom: Tamboli shows where he will place the glass ball in The Bardo of Rose.

