

Sue Taves' work "Torso" was made from pyrophyllite, a mineral.



No Looking Back

Sue Taves breaks new ground with her sculpture on Whidbey Island

written by Adam Sawyer

SUE TAVES' FIRST stone sculpture was a 6-inch Winnie the Pooh, made of honey alabaster for her high school art class. She still has it.

"I love everything about stone," she said. "Its color, history, solidity, how it changes in the elements to make forms, its variety, its plainness. Rock is everywhere, it's a functional material, it's an art material, it's the ground under our feet and the mountains that can be climbed. It's minerals, in all combinations, kind of like humans. Each with its own form, texture, color and hardness. It's the earth, it's got its own vibration, life."



In a parking lot next to a Wells Fargo on Whidbey Island, a nondescript warehouse is home to the Freeland Art Studios. It is where a group of twelve working artists of various disciplines collectively produce inspired works that belie the generic building's shell. Taves is one of them.

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See more of Taves' creations at www.suetavessculpture.com

Whidbey Island is known as an artist enclave and a community that welcomes creativity with open arms. "I'd lived in other artist-rich areas before," Taves said. "Here I was invited to show my work in a community

gallery, the Front Room Gallery, within six months of arriving in town, and the reception was packed, and I sold quite a few sculptures. That's the kind of support that you find here. People welcome you, artists and non-artists alike, and take time to get to know you and are generous with their time and expertise."

While the island's art-loving community has a well-earned reputation for fostering and supporting all creativity, Taves' talent and spirit possess their own eye-catching shine. Her extraction of color, form and emotion from stone through the use of sandpaper of every grit, chisels of all sizes, and even a diamond-studded chainsaw, can be arresting. The "Broken/Mended Heart" series, a collaboration with fellow Whidbey artist Zia Gipson, is a prime example. The figurative and literal exploration of heartbreak via heart-shaped stone renderings in various states of use, abuse, destruction and reconstruction is thought-provoking, wrenching and redemptive.

The yang to the "Broken/Mended Heart" yin is her "Wave" series—soothing, inspirational and texturally gratifying. The jagged edges and purposeful imperfections of the previous series are replaced here by flawless glass-like contours, complemented by natural rock textures. "I see stone and often I see what it can be—nature, beauty, the human figure, ideas. Mostly translating ideas and beauty into stone—making hard appear soft, rigid appear flowing," she said. "If people come up to my sculpture and automatically want to touch it, I feel I've been successful."

Taves was drawn to stone as a medium for a laundry list of reasons, not the least of which that stone carving or sculpting uses subtraction, or controlled removal from the medium, as opposed to additive forms of art where the medium is applied and re-applied, like painting. "I love subtracting stone. It's like unpeeling to see the beauty underneath. I love that the lessons of sculpting are life lessons—learning how much to take away and how much to keep, learning to listen and to work with another, learning to be patient. I learned that subtraction is a good method for me because I tend to perfectionism, or I used to anyway. And that led me to indecisiveness, wanting both things, so stopping at the fork in the road," she said. "With additive, you can always second guess your decisions and add that more material back. With stone, once you've decided, you have to keep moving forward. No second guesses. Good practice to accept the decision you've made, to move forward from the present moment."

As any artist will tell you, the creative process is about far more than just the end result. It is, in fact, the act that means



Don Wodjenski



Michael Stadler

FROM TOP Sue Taves works on a sculpture. Taves' piece "Wings," made from Pennsylvania blue on limestone.

as much as anything. But there are also the intangibles of doing what you do, where you do it, and who you get to do it with.

"Sculpting is my meditation, my therapy, my way to learn about myself, which all sounds pretty well-adjusted and mature," Taves said. "But it doesn't reflect the whole picture. It's also about having a community of like-minded friends who bond over rocks and stone dust. It's about playing with tools and lifting heavy things and working using my body. It's about tapping into the joy of finding 'the coolest rock ever,' just like when you're 5, over and over again."

Taves' love for her medium and the inspiration she draws from it are as abundant as her actual supply. "I've collected a lot of stone over time, literally tons—5 tons came home from Italy with me last spring to add to the pile," she said. "Spending time walking through it and sitting on it for lunch is one of my favorite activities." ■