



BEN WOITENA

WEST TEXAS TRIANGLE
2015

infinite visions

In a prolific career stretching over 50 years, Ben Voitena has developed an extensive personal vocabulary that undulates, twists and speaks as the physical art he creates. Continual expansion of material, scale, subject, technique and aesthetics forms a complex voice difficult to find among his contemporaries. Largely acknowledged for his large public sculptures, collected and exhibited nationally, Voitena's creative acumen transcends medium and style, working in sculpture, collage and painting that display an intelligence and honesty of both hand and mind.

Voitena studied figurative sculpture at the University of Texas in Austin and later at the University of Southern California before heading up the sculpture program at Glassell School of Art in Houston for 27 years. From this time he has transformed his knowledge of traditional approaches to sculpture, ultimately breaking from representation of the body to an essence of form and action. With acute awareness of the base and central axis, he creates tension by manipulating the viewer's sense of movement and time in the work, honing this sensibility in each sculpture. Although physically static, the artwork evokes an emotive spontaneity with contorted volumes and linear progression that, consequently, remain figurative.

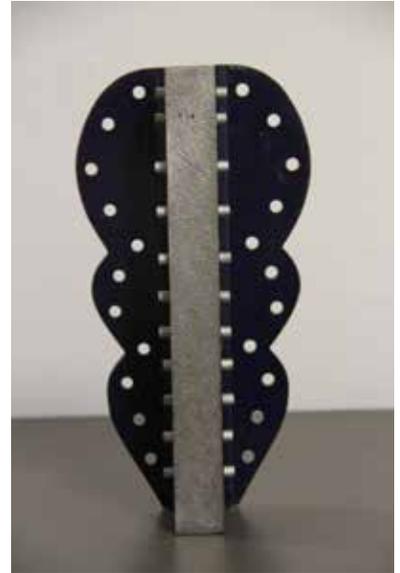
Monumental sculptures force the viewer to navigate around the occupied space, constantly taking on an expansive and engaging perspective. Many of the outdoor works by Voitena have a hard and angled geometry of shifting planes not found in the shapes of carved stone, wood and bronze components of the smaller sculptures. The direct carving of stone and wood inherently assumes the organic lines in each medium, making a hard-edged definition elusive. A combination of art and craftsmanship define the small-scale sculptures best by wily juxtaposition of allusion, material and process.

In either case, the physical weight of the sculptures is transformed through the manipulation of mass, line and movement indicative of ephemeral characteristics within his work. Voitena's quest to capture the fleeting glimpse of the immaterial by means of the physical without reservation is clear. Fabrication methods without prior planning allow for creative action to occur with few limitations, the art occurring as a distended jazz rhythm, developed in response to each preceding gesture of hand. The results are a unique visual poetry, composed of personal narration and abstract notions that are not necessarily melodic but often harmonious when brought together.

The most spontaneous of Voitena's creations are his abstract collages and paintings. Fluid and subconscious movements of the brush are lost in even quickly rendered sculptures but central to this work. The creations appear mandatory for the artist as an additional manifestation of a passing moment and freedom to explore. Once the first marks are laid down, each addition is in response to prior movements until the entire area is filled using a vibrant color palette and an expressive mark that cannot translate directly into sculptural form.

By understanding the limitations of specific content, Voitena draws out universal images that can be interpreted from multiple vantage points but are also based on personal experiences. Derived from strong and passionate conviction to reveal a mastery of time, space, material and thought, he demonstrates what few others are able to comprehend. Though seemingly disparate, each finished work of art claims it's own time and place while the various components work collectively as an extension of Ben Voitena's creative and elusive vision.

— Jake Weigel, University of Texas of the Permian Basin Gallery Manager
and Instructor in Sculpture



Top to bottom:
Vida Blue. 2013. Painted steel and stainless steel. On view at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts.

Sentinel. n.d. Steel, Colorado Yule marble. On view at the Ellen Noël Art Museum of the Permian Basin.

Light Lure. n.d. Painted steel, silicon bronze plate. On view at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts.