



Photo courtesy of Kohler Co.

David Franklin

DAVID FRANKLIN moved to the northwest in the early 1990s and learned to carve from noted carver Duane Pasco. He has done public commissions for the Bremerton Transportation Center; the Fire Station 21 in Portland, Ore., the Seattle World School and the Burke Museum, to name a few. Inclusion in the Washington State Arts Commission roster for pre-qualified artists was also a boost to David's public art career. In 2011, David completed a commission for Cheney Stadium in Tacoma, Wash., where he used aluminum and LED lighting to create a dozen salmon lanterns. In 2013 and 2015, he completed three-month arts/industry residencies in the pottery department of the Kohler Co. factory in Wisconsin. He has twice won the Public Artist Network's Year in Review award for his work. He has also worked with and for noted native artists such as Marvin Oliver, Preston Singletary and Brian Perry. David lives in western Washington.

On the Professional Side

David's first carvings date back to high school when he began to whittle sticks. His tool of choice was a simple pocket knife.

"I just liked working with my hands," he says. "Art was alluring to me, but in those early days I struggled to figure out how it might manifest itself in my life."

He loved to draw, but had a difficult time with realism, which led him as a youth to creating "public art" (better known as graffiti). Cutting stencils and painting them in abandoned rail yards near downtown Denver was an inauspicious (not to mention undisciplined) beginning.

It was the cutting of those stencils for art that made David acutely aware of his deep-seated desire to connect with humanity through large-scale work.

"Those stencils took on a life of their own with each layer of paint," he says. Even in the darkness of night David could see how his art was transforming into sculpture. He dreamed of moving into the world of professional public art but that seemed an impossible dream. He had no formal training in sculpture and no training in art, so instead he enrolled at a vocational school, Colorado Aero Tech, to become an airplane mechanic.

It was the early 1990s, and with his mechanic's degree in hand, David moved to Seattle in hopes of landing a job at Boeing. Boeing wasn't hiring, so David fell back on what he loved most: public art. One day his wife, Joanne, brought home a few books on the subject of northwest native art. He was fascinated by the history, sculpture and color of native totem poles. So without hesitation he started carving all the scrap wood he could get his hands on into totem shapes.



Photo by Wally Hampton

CEDAR ELDER (2000).
*Western red cedar, horsehair,
shredded cedar bark. 16" x 18".
This mask is carved in the style
of the Tsimpian tribe of British
Columbia. "To me it was the
traditional style best suited to
achieve a more naturalistic
facial structure and look,"
David says. "This is my attempt
to see how far I could push my
skills in this style to achieve a
more naturalistic look."*

EAGLE CHIEF (1998). Red cedar, acrylic. 22" x 5" x 5". "Much of my work from this period is a reflection of what I was learning about the cultures whose art I was exploring," David says. "Most of my study for this was in poring over books full of artifacts, and my favorite old masterpieces from the coast. This pole is an attempt to take a basic theme, the "Eagle," and assemble as many elements of what a high-ranking member of this clan might wear, head-dress etc., and surround and intertwine him with the totemic representations of this clan. As a white person who worked in these styles I could only ever work from the perspective of an observer looking from the outside into a culture I could never really call my own. Many of these works ultimately represent my fantasy of the traditional work of the northwest coast more than one based on any real cultural connection. Despite this, learning these sculptural and graphic skills was like getting my black belt in art, giving me real craft skills and helped to evolve my work beyond what I could have imagined at the time this was made."



Photo by Wally Hampton

As David moved into larger totem poles, he sought people who could teach him the methods of carving in the coastal tradition. On a whim, he sent photos of his work to one of the most celebrated and successful regional artists, Duane Pasco, who was part of the revival of northwest coast native art and carved monumental freestanding sculptures.

Duane was impressed with David's raw talent, passionate drive and work, and invited him to his home in Poulsbo, Wash., where he helped David make a set of tools. Then he showed him how to use those tools to carve two masks. David spent nearly a decade as an apprentice to Duane to gain the graphic and sculptural skills he needed, and also learned how to make large-scale art productions. During these years David learned everything from concept and design to fabrication and installation of public art sculpture.

As time went on David started to realize that carving in the Pacific coast native style was just carving a story that had already been told. Although the carving was his, the design wasn't.

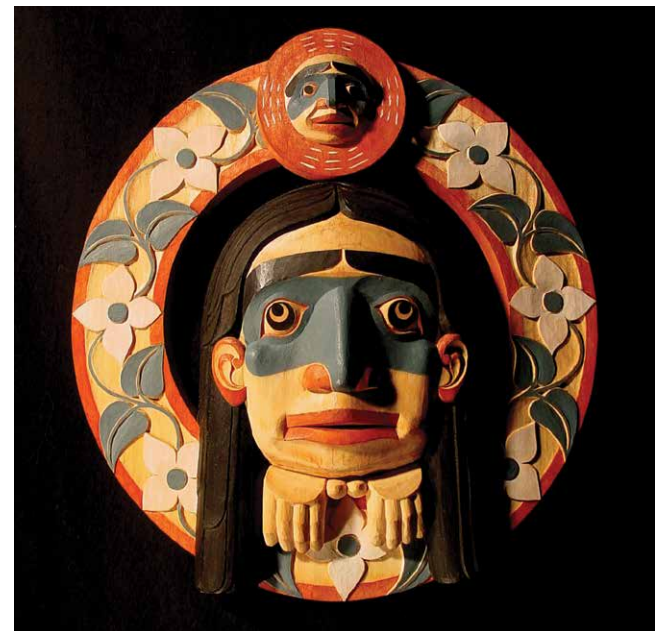
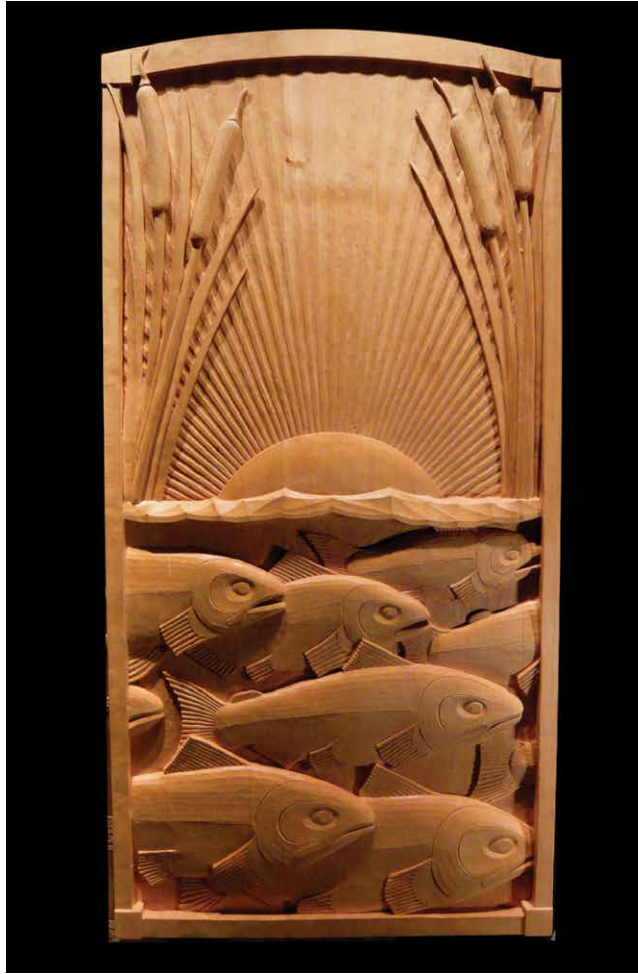


Photo by Wally Hampton

DOGWOOD PRINCESS (1998). Alder, acrylic. 11" x 11" x 2". "This piece is in my personal collection and as my home has grown full of children it somehow seems to belong at home," David says. "It is

very stylistically reminiscent of my carving teacher Duane Pasco's work. I was carving on a number of projects with him during this period and doing my best to emulate his style."

UPPER WILLAPA VALLEY FOREST FIELD AND FARM PANELS (2010). Douglas fir. 33" x 67" x 2". Commissioned by the Upper Willapa Valley High and Junior High School in cooperation with the Washington State Arts Commission. "This series of three relief carved panels are designed to represent the key aspects of life in the Upper Willapa Valley," David says. "With the Willapa River as a focal point, the history of logging and dairy farming fill out the concept. The radiating sun rays and ridge and water lines unite the panels as well. The arch in the top of the central panel and angles of the side panels also unite the three and relate to the shape of the wall on which they have been installed. This was the carving that first showed me the potential the traditional carving skills I had learned translated into the ability to carve nearly anything I could draw."



JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY (2004). Douglas fir. 36" x 36" x 2". This deep relief carving represents a Tlingit Shaman being guided by his Octopus Spirit helper and was the beginning of David's love of carving tentacles.



Photo by Wally Hampton



EAGLE HEAD CANOE BOWL (2004). Alder. 6" x 7" x 6". "This was made as a trade for a new transmission in my minivan at a time when I was pretty broke," David says. "Trading artwork for goods or services has always been part of the way my family has survived my career over the years. Russ Ferguson asked me to make a bowl for him in this particular style of Haida canoe and this was my best effort. Russ passed away recently and I will never forget his kindness to me and my family."



Photo courtesy of Kohler Co. and the Arts/Industry Residence Program and the John Michael Kohler Arts Center

THE GHOST SCHOOL
(2015). Vitreous china, braided nylon string, Venetian glass beads, plywood. Project Partners: Kohler Co. and the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. This was made during David's second John Michael Kohler Arts Center Arts/Industry residency program at Kohler Co. "In the waters around

my home on the Salish Sea numbers of herring, an important small fish that once gathered there by the millions, are depleted, leaving a crippling hole in the food chain," David says. "In Lake Michigan near the Kohler factory the local bait fish, the alewives, are down and the salmon fishery has also been affected by the

lack of their main food. This project resonated extremely well with the associates in the factory who have a deep love for hunting and fishing and the outdoors in general. It also became very apparent what a universal metaphor this was, everyone could put themselves into this concept on some level. The drama

of the 2015 UAW strike at the factory only illustrated this point more as the workers, many of whom had signed their names on the fish, had gone out on strike during my residency. All pieces were cast from my woodcarvings – two sharks and seven fish."

“I came to recognize the structure as not my own,” he says. “I came to see it as someone else’s sculptural language that I had learned to speak, one that did not contain all of the words to tell my own story.”

So David made a move with his work to push new boundaries, working outside the northwest coast native art style. He worked with no guidelines and no boundaries – simply to develop his own style.

It worked. David’s commissions for public art grew. He gained a mastery of other materials, such as ceramics, metals and glass. His work included sculptures for Cheney Stadium, the Portland Regional Arts & Culture Council, the Kitsap County Administration Building, the Port of San Diego and the Public Art Program for the Washington State Arts Commission.

The success of David’s public art has led to two stints at the prestigious John Michael Kohler Arts Center Arts/Industry residency program at the Kohler manufacturing facilities in Wisconsin. While there, Ruth Kohler challenged David to create ceramic art that was personal. It was this experience that led him to the art of mass tentacles.

Today, by integrating his roots in graffiti with his training in native sculpture and graphics, David continues to create a connection between the viewer and his art.



DRIFT INVERSION (2017) with Aaron Whelton. Aluminum, paint, steel, plastic. 18' x 128' x 32". Project Partners: Forest Hills; Park Creek Metropolitan District; Denver Parks and Recreation; Mortenson

Construction; Civitas. “In a developing Denver neighborhood, growing where Stapleton Airport once was, this corner of the Denver metro area was once covered in sand dunes,” David says. “They were the inspiration

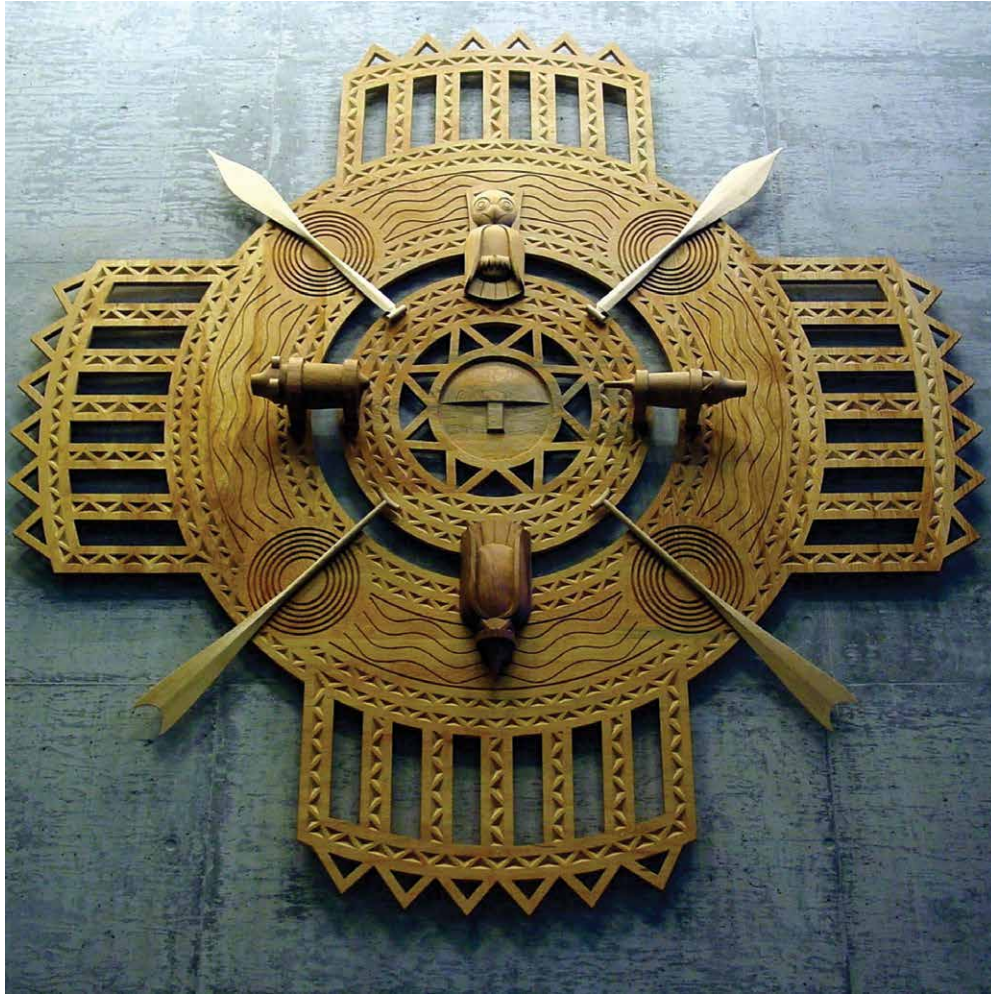
for ‘Drift Inversion,’ a painted aluminum installation that turns the original landscape upside-down, and transforms an otherwise cold and dark space into a place of wonder and warmth.”



Photo by Architectural Photography Inc.com

CALIFORNIA RAIN (2015). Aluminum, steel. 38' x 440' x 1'. Project Partners: John Portman & Associates Inc., IDE Engineers, Hensel Phelps. “And it never failed that during the dry years the people forgot about the rich years, and during the wet years they lost all memory of the dry years. It was always that way.” – John Steinbeck. “California Rain,” located in the Port of San Diego, is a large-scale installation representing ripples. “Water is an increasingly precious commodity in California, as well as symbol of the concerns of the future of the coast with global warming and rising sea levels and volatile

hillsides,” David says. “Water is a particularly powerful resource in the west with its ability to drive economies and populations. Each individual blade is made from aluminum and its shape resembles a sine wave. The artwork uses over a thousand fins made from aluminum to capture the light, color, and shadow of the natural light that changes with each day. This creates a passively kinetic sculpture that changes minute by minute, sunrise to sunset, and season to season, due to the neutrality of the aluminum and its ability to absorb and reflect the natural ambient light so spectacular in sights like this.”



CHINOOKAN SUNSET
 (2007). Fir, spruce, cedar. 14' x 14' x 12". Project partners: Washington State Arts Commission, SRG Architects. "This 14' diameter panel is an abstract sun based on elements from the indigenous art forms of southern Washington and northern Oregon," David says. "The inspiration for this work was to bring attention to site-specific art forms that at this time were not being practiced but were historically significant. These types of designs would also have been found in Puget Sound. On the panel there are four spruce paddles. The upper pair are a Quinault type of paddle, while the lower

are a type associated with the Chinook tribe of the Columbia River area. The creatures are made of red cedar and represent (clockwise from top) an owl, coyote, gull and bear. It was important that wood of a large spruce tree from the construction site would be utilized for this art project – this was milled up and became the paddles. The panel is made of four large panels with the seams hidden under the paddles. All the circles were cut by anchoring my router to a center point hole in the floor of my shop and making many passes with my router on a 7' arm to cut the circular shapes of the sculpture."

"I want people to 'get' my art the way we all 'get' petroglyphs – on an innate level, independent of history or heritage," he says.

On the Personal Side

I'm a Disney fan. Not because of the cartoons or movies, but because of the creative spirit they incorporate into every aspect of their business. One of my favorite architectural Disney details is the totem poles that adorn the main hall of Wilderness Lodge. Those poles are 5' in diameter at the bottom, 3' in diameter at the top and 55' tall. They were carved by Duane Pasco.

Intrigued by the incredible workmanship of those poles, I reached out to Duane to see if he might be interested in teaching a class on Pacific Northwest totem carving. At first, he seemed on board but as we got close to setting a date his retirement got in the way. Instead he recommended his young apprentice, a man by the name of David Franklin. To be honest, I didn't want the "B" team; I wanted the "A" team. And because Duane was unavailable, I let the idea of a class on totem pole carving slip away.

Nearly a decade later, Tim Celeski, a brilliant arts and crafts maker from the Seattle area, recommend a friend of his as a possible candidate to teach at MASW. His name was David Franklin. I had forgotten about David until I looked at his web page. I rummaged through my notes and found that he was the person that Duane had recommended years before. As I viewed David's website, I was blown away. His carvings were exceptional, and his works of public art were outstanding. David was now on my radar not as an apprentice, but as a well-recognized craftsman. I made the call and within the first few minutes of our conversation I could tell he was a perfect fit for our program. Now all I had to do was convince him to come to Indiana.

As it turned, out getting David to commit to teaching was easy – getting students to sign up for his workshop was the challenge. There isn't a lot of demand for totem poles today. David chose to call his first class "Carving a Haida Bear Totem Pole," and to my surprise we had seven students that first year. Every student committed to return to any class David teaches — he is that good. It's too bad I didn't listen to Duane back in the early 1990s; everything he told me about David was true.

David has this really cool history of being a graffiti artist: a real midnight-to-daylight, dress-in-black, hop-the-fence graffiti artist. I do often wonder when David is here if I might wake up to see colorful graffiti of native Pacific art on the side of one of my buildings. Actually, that would be cool.



THUNDERBIRD D ADZE. Maple, axe blade, screws. 1 1/4" x 4" x 8". "This is the tool I sculpt with on a nearly daily basis," David says. "Great for heavy shaping, this versatile traditional northwest coast carving tool is also the main

tool I use to carve the shallow rows of texture in many of my carvings. It is made from cutting down an axe head to about an inch in width and attaching it to a handle. My thumb rests inside the back of the thunderbird's head when I use it."



BENT KNIVES OR CROOKED KNIVES. Yew wood, high carbon steel, seine twine. "This is more or less my daily set of carving tools," David says. "The blades are bent to a variety of curves and are versatile enough to do the work of a vast set of chisels with just a few knives. They have the advantage over chisels in that they can be used with one hand, freeing the other to hold the carving project."

David Franklin

BIRTH

April 29, 1972, Denver, Colo.

EDUCATION

Bishop Machebeuf Catholic High School, 1990
Airplane Mechanic, Colorado Aero Tech, 1992

FAMILY

Married Joanne Franklin, 1995; children: Sarah, Mikel and Ruby

HOBBIES

Music, fishing and crabbing

CRAFTSMANSHIP STATEMENT

"Craftsmanship is less achieving perfection as it is the compulsion to strive for the illusion of perfection. That is to say that for any craftsman true perfection is never really accomplished. The craftsman is aware of this, and works toward

improving his or her weaknesses and to strive for better design. Also, to actively strive toward a deeper understanding (in his or her work) both mentally and in his or her hands. Over time and with experience the people who hold these values are the ones that truly achieve craftsmanship, though in the eyes of the artisan, him or her, it may never be the pinnacle of perfection they desire and strive for.

The work I make, carved or otherwise, is merely the byproduct of this drive to be a better artist, a better craftsman. As I work to broaden and sharpen my skills I make many things large and small and in a variety of mediums. When they are complete, I tend to focus on the flaws and what could have been better. This knowledge I take into the next project to try to work in a way that is informed by those shortcomings and to achieve the next level, a better and more fulfilled vision.

It is this process that drives me and most committed makers that I know. Creativity is a constant puzzle unfolding itself in front of you. It is to this that you apply all the skills you wield in the journey to better craftsmanship and being a better craftsman."

WEBSITE

www.davidfranklinart.net

HANDED

Right-handed

WHO INSPIRES YOU

Duane Pasco, Melinda West, Eric J. Garcia, Marvin Oliver, Michael Beitz, Banksy, Dave Meyers and Kelly Asadorian, Harry Lyrico, Stephen Proctor, Ruth Kohler, Aaron Whelton, Preston Singletary, Marc Adams, and my wife and our great kids.