

PAT MUSICK RETROSPECTIVE 1990 ~ 2015

THE SCULPTURE RANCH

JOHNSON CITY, TEXAS

SEPTEMBER 2016 - MARCH 2017

"Musick's work has the power to move us, even in these world-weary times.

Within each of her refined constructions, the viewer finds the artist using all the tools at her disposal to create a sublime recipe...culture and nature, man and the earth, forever and inextricably linked... for extraordinary beauty."

Don Bacigalupi
 Founding President
 Lucas Museum of Narrative Art

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"So simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real. Probe the earth to see where your main roots run." New England's nature preacher Henry David Thoreau said that, but if objects could speak, then artist Pat Musick's works would say something similar, too. Swelling with earthly warmth and energy, striking at the bass notes of life and nature as it were, Musick's art returns us to resonant fundamentals. Over the past twenty-five years, as seen in her retrospective at The Sculpture Ranch in Johnson City, Texas, the Los Angeles-born artist has hit at the clear and solid facts of things, stressing what is necessary and irresistibly real. Her work seems to say—and say again—go to the source, and we obey. We fall back earthwards.

We might see Musick's interest in the source or "main root" of things as consistent with her background in psychology. (The artist received her doctorate in psychology from Cornell in 1974, and worked in the field of art therapy at the University of Houston. Psychology is nothing if not the study of roots: of thought, emotion and conduct. Yet, more crucially, Musick's interest in uncovering the essential is a formal, artistic concern. Creating plain-spoken objects from bronze, steel or stone, she is able to convey a hushed magnitude that arrives at us like a breath, as if the works were waiting for us to kneel down and lend them our ear with a special sort of intimacy.

But if getting to the essential root represents a formal concern for the artist, it certainly represents an environmental one as well: It is a call for getting back to the bare facts of nature, for a renewed sense of stewardship toward "our fragile home," to borrow the title of one of the artist's work series. Musick's art operates within those very fissures from which our thoughts and beliefs emerge about the natural world. Working there represents an effort to correct, to mend. She confronts a fragility.

Earthnest (2010) is characteristic of the artist's preoccupations. In this work curled black plates suavely form an enclosure around bronze-casted twigs, rankled and with bits of moss, together with two alabaster egg-shapes. The sculpted arrangement sits upon a simple timber block and one of the artist's signature steel stands, originally inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's architectonic chair designs. (The stands, fabricated by her husband, Jerry Carr, often resemble tables—a form prevalent across Musick's work. In many respects she presents her art up like an offering: It always has the suggestion of hospitality, warmth.)

Three years before generating this work, Musick had started creating highly detailed, illusionistic nests from bronze after she and Carr happened upon a nest of wild turkey eggs on their property in the Kings River Valley of northwestern Arkansas. Later, she chose to simplify the vocabulary of the sculptures, slimming them down to the essentials of line and shape. The result is a formal work with fresh movement, fluctuation and promise. With respect to the eggs, we are reminded of Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957), famed for his use of the egg or ovoid shape, who called it an "ideal form," the truest embodiment of

birth and regeneration. He once remarked, "With this form I could move the universe."

In Musick's *Earthnest*, too, we find that the eggs emanate with some burning potential. And when we position ourselves over the nest, we become powerfully involved in that potential, as if we were critically responsible for either its consummation or failure. Characteristically, Musick situates us at a birthplace, a beginning. We confront a source. And we sense from the work's mingling of naturalism and abstraction that some vital revelation, some reconciliation, is close at hand. But as if never fully completed, Musick's objects reach out to us; they require our presence.

Put another way, Musick's work is never tethered to an "unsullied" vision of nature, free of human presence, culture or imagination. We complete the objects in meaningful ways. In doing so, we confront those most basic, underlying assumptions about our lives, which seem to reside *here*, and the world, which seems to reside somewhere out *there*. In Musick's work that perceived distance ceases to exist—the two merge and become a chorus.

In the *Epilogue* series from 1992, for example, this occurs powerfully. Musick's wall sculptures, like three-dimensional landscapes, emerged after witnessing a series of harsh storms and natural fires that swept through the environs beyond the couple's home in Arkansas. Collaged from materials such as stone, glass and steel, the works effectively combine both

the natural and industrial, which further complicates the strict divisions between the two.

Yet what is especially noteworthy about the works is how they successfully reconfigure the traditional experience of landscape art. The nature of the sculptures, with their shapes and colors jutting outward into our space, is such that it disrupts the passive and pictorial. It is as if Musick pulls the landscape inwards, toward us. We are not merely looking upon it, but instead inhabiting or imbuing it. The works seem to tell us, *You are nature*.

They recall, in fact, an untitled poem from 1924 by German-language poet Rainer Maria Rilke. In the poem Rilke discusses the significance of projecting our personal space onto natural objects in order to lend them life:

Space, outside ourselves, invades and ravishes things:
If you want to achieve the existence of a tree, Invest it with inner space, this space
That has its being in you.

The *Epilogue* works are receptive to a comparable "inner space."

Musick's approaches to landscape are also fascinating to consider in relation to Pop artist Allan D'Arcangelo (1930-1998), with whom she studied while at Cornell. Musick has described D'Arcangelo's instruction as transformative. (He would counsel her, for example,

"Pick a subject you are familiar with and paint it larger than life.") In fact his work provides a productive foil for thinking about Musick's. D'Arcangelo is best known for paintings completed in the 1960s that depict the monotonous post-WWII American highway: a boundless strip of asphalt that slices across a fantastically banal landscape. D'Arcangelo presented postwar America as a no-place—standardized, tightly controlled and regulated, everywhere the same.

By contrast, Musick's work carves out and restores a distinctly felt sense of place, where a certain spontaneity and glad abandon still reign. A work such as *Meander* (2000) exemplifies this beautifully. A snakelike configuration of variously shaped and colored rocks on the wall, *Meander* evokes unprogrammatic dallying, the kinds of physical and intellectual digressions that D'Arcangelo elegized at around midcentury. Musick collected the stones from a riverbank on the couple's

property in Arkansas. She discovered the rocks there contain fossils that are some 350 million years old. (Musick dwelled daily and intimately with the hugeness of time in that place.) And in its circuitousness, *Meander* seems to evoke a certain unhurried, nonlinear experience of time, too—and time, the visceral experience of history, is the blood that animates any spirit of place.

In the same passage that started this essay, Thoreau asks, "Why not see—use our eyes?" Musick's art asks something very similar of us. Getting back to the essential, to what is real and necessary, starts with seeing. And when it comes to Musick's work, what we end up seeing is the obvious thing, the thing that was always there before us but that we consistently failed to discern. With a new clarity, then, we fall back earthwards.

—James H. Miller, Art Critic



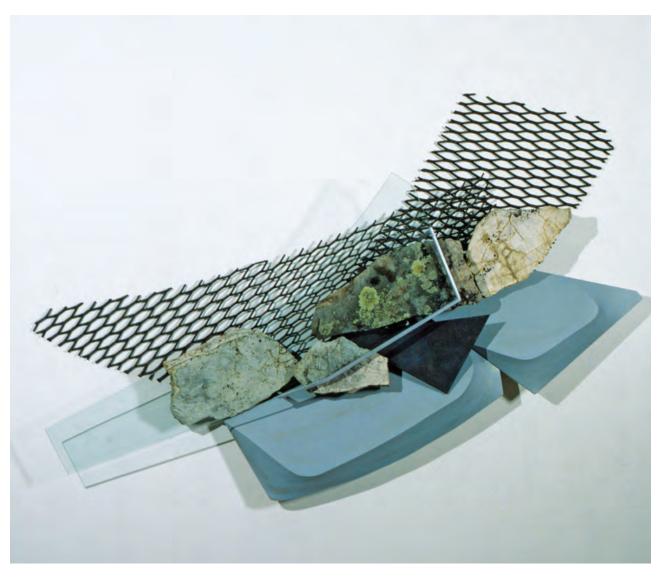




Our valley was devastated by the forces of nature in the form of a forest fire and a twenty-year flood. I despaired at the destruction, but the following year found new growth, new life and a rebirth of the environment. I called it the *Epilogue* and created uplifting forms to express my joy.



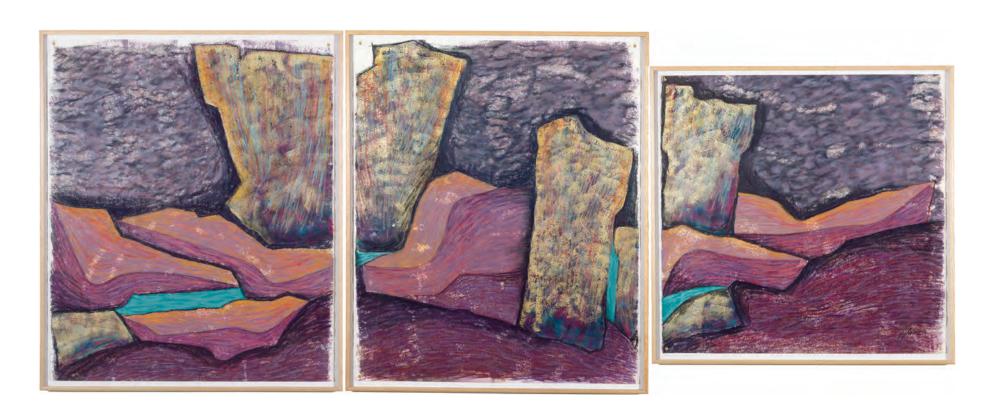
Epilogue 18 1991 » 84"x63"x9.5" stone, steel, wood, canvas, acrylic



Epilogue 25 1991 » 55"x85"x9" stone, steel, glass, canvas, acrylic



Epilogue 6 1990 » 72"x85"x18" hydrocal, steel, wood, canvas, acrylic



Epilogue D-22 1990 » 54"x133" pastel and acrylic on paper

After studying the ancient native culture that lived in our valley, I examined other primitive peoples and found remarkable similarities... particularly in the gods they worshiped. Frequently I found a theme of a female goddess, the power of fertility and nurturance.



Gods and Goddesses 1 Sisyphus 1992 » 64"x40"x12" stone, steel, wood, canvas, acrylic



Ra 1996 » 108"x108"x17" steel, canvas, acrylic, wood

The heartbeat of Pat Musick's work has always been her interaction with the natural environment around her. She has painted or sculpted throughout her life. It has been a very personal journey...one often imbued with universal thoughts.

"There are certain themes that are universally expressed in art, " Musick said. "... These universals suggest that there is really nothing new under the sun except each artist's chosen time and way to express them."

Following her years in academics and teaching, Dr. Musick has been intent on the discovery of natural elements that relate to these rhythms and forces of life. Year after year, she honed this expression.

Throughout her life, she sought out and created what inspired her, whether it was twigs and pebbles, or pilgrimages to Italy to seek out the work of Piero della Francesca, as detailed in her 2014 book, *The Piero Affair*. The result has been bold and unforgettable creations – sometimes free-standing stone and steel, others assemblages of metal and wood to hang freely or on a wall.

I write of Musick's sculpture, leaving the two-dimensional work to others, because I have had a love affair with her three-dimensional pieces for more than 25 years. I still remember her 1997 show at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock. In the muted space, large compositions sprung forward from the walls with a deliberate punch, while others pulled us in with their timeless songs.

Ranging from intimate pieces to monumental constructions,

Musick maintained a steadfast reverence for what she finds and combines. In her hands, the sculptures become more than just the tangible elements. It may be her background in philosophy that tempers the pieces from being straightforward genuflections to Nature. Beyond the obvious, they carry a strong conceptual force.

I relate Musick's work to a kindred creative soul, Annie Dillard, who went into the woods around her home in Virginia and wrote the Pulitzer-prized *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek*. Dillard's depth of philosophy and literature blended with her experiential creative process. So too, Musick ventures into the environment, her mother lode of inspiration. She transforms found treasures and studio creations into a potent visual vocabulary uniting nature with personal philosophy. And it is not a diminutive view.

Boulders, chunks of wood and huge branches come into the studio. The dimensions, the weight and the pressures of the components demand serious armature and production processes. In this, she partners with her husband, Jerry Carr.

Following a major flood of the Kings River near their former studio in northwest Arkansas, a bundle of branches had been caught in the fork of a high tree by raging waters, detritus for a wandering artist. Musick nestled this cluster, intact, in a boat-like base creating her sculpture *The Final Place*, standing in tribute to the power of water. It is on the outdoor trails at The Sculpture Ranch.

When Benini and I visited Musick and Carr at their home and studio 25 years ago, we were welcomed as artists to see the working spaces. I remember feeling it was privileged access to the source of the artwork. The only other time I experienced this sense of awe was in the studio of Clyde Connell in Shreveport, Louisiana, another powerful artist with a tiny O'Keefe stature, yet a giant in expressive sculptures born of her hand and natural materials.

Musick's work never pandered to the times, the art movements or the critics. She has been a beacon for women artists without the feminist chatter. She just made the work. Strong, bold and powerful.

Unafraid to take on the big themes in life, in 2002, Musick moved easily from the gallery setting to the outdoors, to create a powerful tribute to the Trail of Tears. In a traveling exhibition that had 23 sites along the famed trail, Musick and her team constructed and moved huge beam arches one could walk with and through, following the steps of the Cherokees on their forced and doomed path. This "moving sculpture" is detailed in the book, "Stone Songs on the Trail of Tears: The Journey of an Installation."

Now 90, and less mobile, Musick's studio in Vermont must be a cache of wondrous items. For years, as she added to her inventory, she immortalized the elements she adopted. The work speaks beyond those physical elements. We have a first glance. And we have a chance for more.

A bronze nest clustered with twigs holds stone eggs. Beyond the tangible, "The Nest" can imply the beginning, the source, full of promise and energy, or even reference the ancient worship of the egg through civilizations. Or, the springtime renewal of vegetation and life, time cycles of regeneration.

The chance to glean from Musick's work archetypes of the natural and spiritual world are endless. The tree is a constant in her work. Jung, fine tuning a psychological view, considered it an evocation of the self, with roots extended into the unseen to the minerals and elements of earth.

In Musick's reflection, "The tree is very anthropomorphic. I see the skeleton, muscle, sinew of the human in its craggy surface. But more, I also envision the soul of the tree – the heart and the inner core as lifelike.

"It is feminine, nurturing, protective and annually sheds its outer garment to stand naked to the elements. It is a very important model for me and is often my medium."

In *Commence*, the model was a sycamore tree. Musick chose a section of the tree that responded ideally as she placed a smooth round rock into the body to suggest the cycles of life. Tall and elegant, this bronze sculpture, as so many others, holds a call for contemplation.

Pat Musick has had 54 exhibitions to date. This show of 29 works at The Sculpture Ranch encompasses a quarter-century of potent artwork. It is not only visually arresting, but on quieter level, just as captivating, as it reveals the heartbeat and the essence of Musick's work...cycles of life and energy, with an open invitation to inquiry, and the gift of beauty and hope.

-Lorraine Link Benini, M.A.

...and then the eagle came into my valley. Something caused me to pause. A shadow rippled over the cedar deck; my eyes lifted to its source. Gliding in the updraft, fifty feet overhead, a lone bald eagle shudders and flicks the piercing light of the noonday sky.



Awoha-li 4 1995 » 49"x61.5"x8"canvas, steel, bronze, barnwood, acrylic



Eagle Feather Chimes 1995 » 48"x60"x18" stone, steel





Skydancers 1-4 1995 » 48"x48"x6" pastel, acrylic, wood, silk, lexan





This is a series that portrays the various "Gates" we pass through on our journey of life. Many of these sculptures contain an element that resembles some kind of barrier, on the other side of which is the destination, the goal, the enlightenment.



Flirt 1997 » 56"x60"x19" wood, steel, sisal

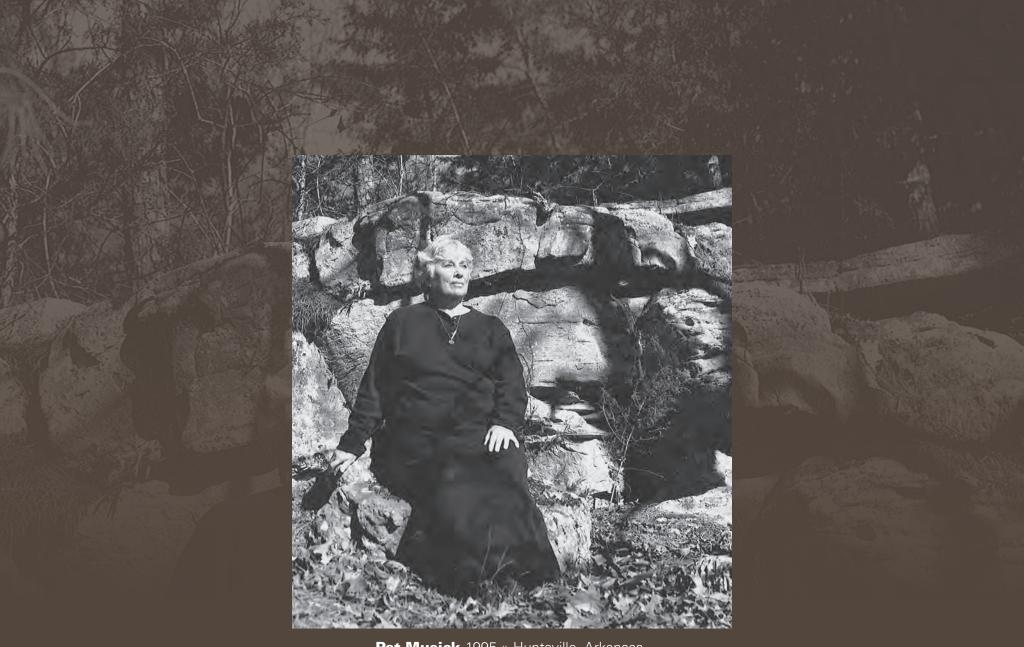


Gate 1 1996 » 40"x80"x20" steel, oak, sisal



Harmony 2004 » 41.5"x74"x8" wood, stone, steel





Pat Musick 1995 » Huntsville, Arkansas

For an artist the rewarding thing about a retrospective exhibit is that it provides an opportunity to identify consistencies in the work over time. One can search for common themes, repeated shapes and patterns, comparable materials and other aspects that the art shares even though many years may elapse between the making of one object and another.

This exhibit consists of ten series of works that I created between 1990 and 2015. Although the series seem to express many different themes, they are really sub-themes. These are intimately bound together by threads of concern about the fragility of our planet... the delicate condition of our earthly home. I use a variety of media to express this. Steel, hydrocal cement, and acrylic paint are manmade. Wood, natural stone, paper, pastel and beeswax are materials from the earth itself. In the selection of these I am saying, "Let us use tools that are both manufactured and organic to bring the world into a harmony, a balance." Various combinations of these artistic media can be found in my work at all stages.

The sculpture and drawings are notable for their sense of peace and quiet. They are meditative, soft and emotional. The art is not marked by vigorous activity. Even their energy is that of the spirit more than the physical. *Epilogue 18, Gate 1* and *Tea* reflect this Zen quality.

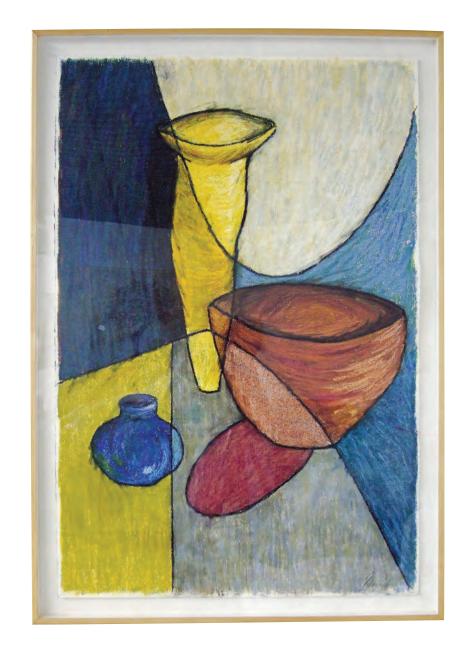
Another common thread is seriality or repetition. This may be found in many of my creations. It provides a sense of rhythm that moves the viewer's eye from one element to another. At least half of the works in the exhibit contain reiteration as an element of their design. Note such examples as *Thought Streams*, *Eagle Feather Chimes*, and *Infinite Variations*.

A muted palette runs through all of the work. Earth colors root the work to the earth. Subdued color serves as a ground for rebirth and renewal...a common theme in both my artwork and our earth's survival. The idea of recovery from a disaster became important in the art in 1990 after the land we lived on in Arkansas had recovered from a forest fire and a flooding river. I began to use regeneration as an inspiration for almost all of my work, and this continued until the present. It follows that there is a sense of rising, lifting up, almost levitation in much of the work. The *Epilogues, Harvest*, and *Commence* all have this upward thrust.

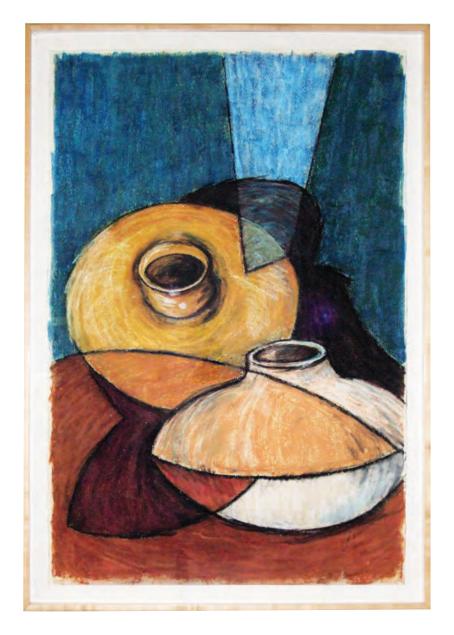
What a thrill it has been to select these works and have them installed on the walls of the Sculpture Ranch. What a thrill it has been to see my work consistently growing, evolving, and expressing this theme. I am humbled.

—Pat Musick, 2016

The Vessels are about nurturance. Used since ancient times to hold sustenance for mankind, they address not only the body but the spirit. Ancient amphorae also emulate the female body, implying gestation and protection.



Vessel D-5 1997 » 64"x44" pastel on arches paper



Vessel D-2 1997 » 64"x44" pastel on arches paper

There is a conduit, a series of points of contact, throughout Pat Musick's exploration into the immense and enigmatic fragility of the universe and of earth. Musick is relentless in her investigation of the effect and pressure we put on the natural systems and the balance of our planet.

Her search is far-reaching, finding and creating echoes and expressions of timeless truths. Everything is immediate. Standing in one place in the present, you stand in the exact same place billions of years ago.

In a 350,000,000 year old canyon in the Ozarks, Pat Musick experienced the compression and sedimentation of geologic time. This canyon is a lens to ephemerality. Moments or units of time are an externalized human metric for people to ascribe meaning to their lives and what is tactile. By living at the edge of this ravine, she realized that everything is fluid, not embedded with the perceived stillness of time.

Musick's installations, paintings and sculptures speak in a haiku-like, pared down voice, in careful and exacting timbres that lead the viewer - quietly asking questions with weighty resolve. All her work resonates with this chorded undercurrent.

Our vision, in itself, is limited to the ability to see and observe. We can't fully conceive the mystery and breath of the whole. And Time is simply one construct to discern a vantage point or plinth - a flash or shadow.

Concepts are limited because the universe is in a state of motion, much as sedimentary rock formations or the total devastation of a forest fire offer echoes of their former states. Regardless of the passage of time, they are in a state of metamorphosis, never finding a final manifestation or completion.

Time is non-linear, a shadow of the transformation of all things. From the elemental to the complex, there is transition, a state of flux-vibrating at the same pitch or bandwidth, a universality.

There is no beginning or end; life and death are silhouettes, and even the phoenix is a transitional state between matter and energy.

Pat Musick forays into contextual research - avoiding dichotomy, viewing the origins of life, and balancing what is substantive or existing as not in any kind of polarity with death.

Getting to know Pat Musick's installations, paintings and sculptures for the past decade, I realized she is one who voraciously attempts to grasp the ubiquitous and inherent essence of phenomena through an existential approach, a process-based meditation.

Each work of art is a swatch or vignette, underscoring its partialness or fragmentation of the whole, rooted in the hope that everything matters, every moment, substance, dream or memory. The cosmos exists simultaneously from both a micro- and macro-perspective. Experiencing a curated collection of Musick's work, the viewer sees these trace expressions as connected, forging a cadence of visually and contextually charged alchemic narratives. She depicts the duality in human nature - the careful sense of proprietary and stewardship, the awe of the universe, also informed by a dialectic of genocide and solipsistic atrocities. In the end, we have a choice for our collective future and the longevity of the planet.

Jerry Carr and Pat Musick have collaborated in a symbiotic union for twenty years. An astronaut, Jerry has a unique viewpoint that few people have known. From space, he could bear witness to the ramifications of the human presence on the earth. He was exposed to the fragility of the planet and its relationship to the universe.

The woven and collective voice of Pat Musick and Jerry Carr is unprecedented. It must be experienced. Through them, the question is asked what the human race will do with our immediate future, our current set of pressing questions.

They share an appreciation of the beauty of all things. They are awake to the underlying rhythm and hum in the cosmos. It is in this that we can glimpse that which is unequivocal.

—Anthony Cafritz Founder/Director Salem Art Works, Salem, NY



The valley we lived in for twenty-five years was three hundred and fifty million years old. The view from our deck was one of receding meadows, cliffs, hills and sky intersected by a shimmering river. I abstracted the forms and rearranged them.



Valley 3 Spring 1998 » 60"x60"x7" oak, steel, canvas, acrylic

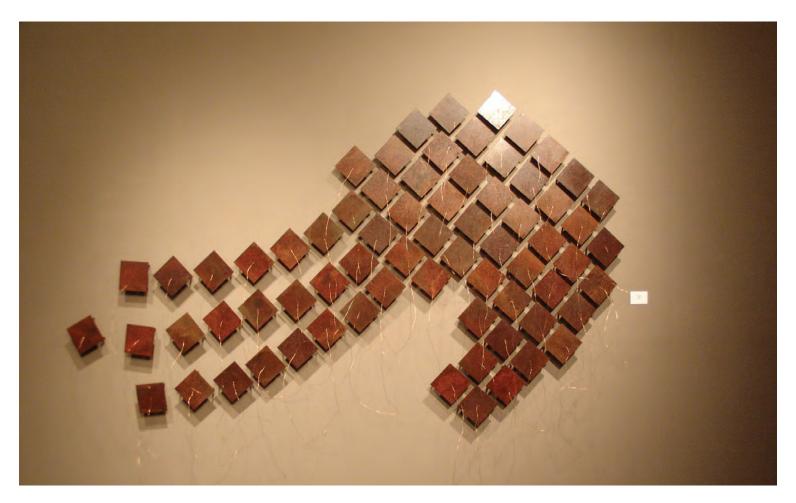
In this series the goal was simplification of the visual material. There is no single thread of meaning in the different works. The commonality is a sense of peace and harmony.



Fifteen Sunsets Every Day 1994 » 44"x57"x12.5" stone, steel, wood, canvas, acrylic



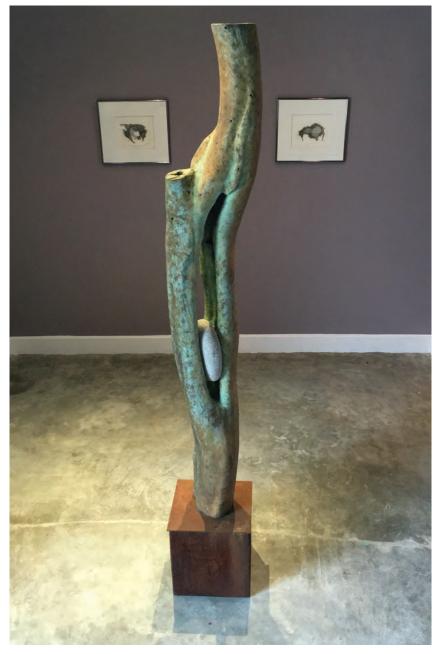
Meander 2000 » 44"x180"x4" stone, steel



Wind 2004 » 70"x115"x4" copper filament, steel



Final Place 2002 » 110"x205"x45" wood, steel



Commence 2002 » 86"x12"x12" bronze, stone, steel

After many years, I saw the work step off of the wall and into the surrounding space. What a thrill to find that the eye creates the illusion of movement as you walk around the sculpture... the process of motion parallax.



Tea 2004 » 8.5"x42"x30" stone, steel, wood



Infinite Variations 2003 » 8.5"x11.75"x12.5" per unit, wood, steel



Harvest 2000 » 40"x36"x36" wood, stone, steel

Every Spring we had the pleasure of the company of a returning mother wren to a nest cuddled in our lamp post. We watched the amazing cycle of building, laying eggs, sitting, birthing, teaching and leaving that humbled us and minimized our life concerns.



Earthnest 2010 » 6.5"x10"x9" steel, wood, bronze, alabaster

"Our Fragile Home" was inspired by the words space travelers use when they view the earth from space for the first time. They all use the SAME words in different languages... fragile, protect, nurture, beauty, steward. Across many boundaries, they say the same thing.



Comfort 2012 » 50"x4"x12" steel, wood, beeswax, kozo paper, ink



The Words Were All The Same 2015 » Height varies: tallest 9'x14"x15" steel, stone, wood



From the Void 2013 » 20"x15'x3' steel, slate, wood, glass



Fragile Home 2010 » (seven available) 38"x15"x15" bronze, slate, lexan, alabaster, steel, wood



Thought Streams 2012 » 9'x22" per unit, kozo paper, acrylic, beeswax, stone, steel



CHECK LIST » PAT MUSICK RETROSPECTIVE 1990-2015

Epilogue Series

Epilogue 6 1990 » 72"x85"x18" hydrocal, steel, wood, canvas, acrylic

Epilogue D-22 1990 » 54"x133" pastel and acrylic on arches paper

Epilogue 18 1991 » 84"x63"x9.5" stone, steel, wood, canvas, acrylic

Epilogue 25 1991 » 55"x85"x9" stone, steel, glass, canvas, acrylic

Gods and Goddesses Series

Ra 1996 » 108"x108"x17" steel, canvas, acrylic, wood

Sisyphus 1992 » 64"x40"x12" stone, steel, wood, canvas, acrylic

Awoha-li Series

Skydancers 1-4 1995 » 48"x48"x6" (each) pastel, acrylic wood, silk, lexan

Eagle Feather Chimes 1995 » 48"x60"x18" stone, steel

Awoha-li 4 1995 » 49"x61.5"x8" canvas, steel, bronze, barnwood, acrylic

The Gates Series

Harmony 2004 » 41.5"x74"x8" wood, stone, steel

Flirt 1997 » 56"x60"x19" wood, steel, sisal

Gate 1 1996 » 40"x80"x20" steel, oak, sisal

Valley Series

Valley 3 Spring 1998 » 60"dia x 7" wood, steel, canvas, acrylic

Vessels Series

Vessel D-2 1997 » 64"x44" pastel on arches paper **Vessel D-5** 1997 » 64"x44" pastel on arches paper

Recent Works Series

15 Sunsets 1994 » 44"x57"x12.5" steel, wood, stone, canvas, acrylic Final Place 2002 » 110"x205"x45" wood, steel

Commence 2002 » 86"x12"x12" bronze, stone, steel

Wind 2004 » 70"x115"x4" copper filament, steel

Meander 2000 » 44"x180"x4" stone, steel

Off the Wall Series

Harvest 2000 » 40"x36"x36" wood, stone, steel **Infinite Variations** 2003 » 8.5"x11.75"x12.5" per unit, wood, steel **Tea** 2004 » 8.5"x42"x30" stone, steel, wood

Earthnests Series

Earthnest 2010 » 6.5"x10"x9" steel, wood, bronze, alabaster

Our Fragile Home Series

Fragile Home 2010 » (7 available) 38"x15"x168" bronze, slate, lexan, alabaster, wood **Thought Streams** 2012 » 9'x22" per unit kozo paper, acrylic, beeswax, stone, steel **The Words Were All the Same** 2015 » height varies: tallest 9'x14"x15" steel, stone, wood **From the Void** 2013 » 20"x15'x3' steel, slate, wood, glass **Comfort** 2012 » 50"x45"x12" steel, wood, kozo paper, ink, beeswax

PATMUSICK.COM

Pat Musick's mixed media, large and small scale, wall and freestanding artwork is a personal response to the fragility of our planet. A dedicated environmentalist, she is inspired by her husband and collaborator, Jerry Carr, retired NASA astronaut. Together they work to express the imperative that we care for and protect the earth. Her art evokes a quiet, harmonious, peace and in doing so has a transforming power to inhabit a space and relay their message to us.

SCULPTURERANCH.COM

The perfect place to decompress along the Hill Country Wine Trail. Situated on more than 140 acres of trails, formerly LBJ's deer hunting ranch, over 100 sculptures by more than 40 artists from around the world are available for purchase. Inside a converted 14,000 square foot aircraft hangar, find indoor sculpture and other works of art in multiple galleries.

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