

TRASH TO TREASURE

COLUMBIA ARTISAN DISCOVERS AN ART FORM IN RECYCLING ■ By Stephanie Ruby



From left: Orange Woman, Fidel, Blue Nude. Below: Larry with caricatures of Arthur Miller and Jane Jacobs. Both were renditions of Ken Fallin drawings, which Larry credits as inspiration.

LAWRENCE “LARRY” L’HOTE is no dumpster diver, but from the depths of trash piles, scrap wood, metal, and other discards, he finds the necessary materials for his creations.

The Columbia native wasn’t always focused on personally recycling trash for his art; for thirty-five years he taught math and science at Hickman High School. After his retirement he experimented with woodworking for a few years, and in late 2004 Larry started to work on metal creations with his collected materials. Copper wire he had found down the street from his son’s house was brought back and used in his earliest renditions of Picasso sketches. He now creates lawn ornaments, wire sculptures, caricatures, and other objects.

His first finished project was a desk he made for his granddaughter. The drawer handles were created using parts of an old computer and copper wire. When he was learning the crafting process for caricatures, he used line drawings or sketches. “I could easily modify the drawing, make a pattern, and fabricate the piece,” he says.

Some of the most difficult material to work that Larry has encountered so far are rusty nails needed for an upcoming project. After two cycles through a cement mixer and the use of a lava landscape rock to get the dirt and rust off, the nails still needed some cleaning. Sheet metal and hanger wire are his preferred materials, “probably because I



understand how to make it behave,” Larry says.

An artist’s tools are vital to the process, and Larry’s are no exception. He uses an angle grinder with an abrasive wheel to cut sheet metal and a jeweler’s saw to make the detailed cutting, along with other types of saws and a torch. His screened-in back porch is his workshop.

Larry has come a long way in his art; he recently began to use photographs and advertisements. Once he scans them onto his computer, he enlarges them with Photoshop so he can make patterns. He is then ready to construct the picture, most often a person, into his own art.

His favorite pieces include his caricature of Arthur Miller, based off a drawing in the *Wall Street Journal* by Ken Fallin, whom he credits for inspiring many of his pieces, and “Orange Woman,” a metal and wire sculpture of a woman’s profile on an orange background, which he

includes on his business cards.

In the beginning Larry did not give his art a price tag but gave his pieces away to those who expressed interest or those who he felt would appreciate it. Now, he admits that he’s been corrupted.

But still, it is not the end product that gives Larry the greatest pleasure. What intrigues him the most is “the process of discovering the potential in a material and crafting it,” he says.

Larry’s work can be seen at www.lhote.com.