Fulfillment of potential is a beautiful thing

Sarasota Arts & Culture Magazine featured the artwork of the Sarasota Season of Sculpture, the International Invitational Exhibition that dots the Sarasota Bayfront on U.S. 41, in its January/February issue. Readers were invited to go online and vote for the “One You Love” and the “One You Love to Hate.” Thousands of votes came in from Sarasota and all over the world. The results were published in the March/April issue.

I am sure you all would have guessed correctly that the “One You Love to Hate” is Dustin Shuler’s “Dance.” It’s the installation that has all the cars piled up against each other. I liken it to a foreshadowing of what that corner would look like if they created a roundabout. But never mind what we love to hate.

“Wave 2 Me,” a stainless steel sculpture of a huge wave, created by Scottish sculptor Malcolm Robertson, came in first as the “One You Love.” It’s easy to understand why most everyone falls in love with Malcolm Robertson’s incredible “Wave 2 Me.” It doesn’t shock, provoke indignation or mystify the viewer. It’s aesthetically inspirational. The sacred connection of land and sea just seems to wash over you with an ethereal quality that nurtures the spirit. I am always happy to be reminded of why I chose to live near the ocean.

“Wave 2 Me” is the second sculpture in a series of artworks that seeks to explore and portray the relationships we as land-based beings have with the sea and fascination for distant horizons,” said Malcolm.

“My first ‘Wave’ sculpture, shown last year in the Season of Sculpture, took the form of physical labor that she helps me with when I create my sculptures.”

Malcolm created the open book gateway structure for the Fruitville Public Library. The Robertsons have a primary residence in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, but have purchased a home in Sarasota and plan to eventually spend six months a year here.

If you haven’t seen Malcolm’s polished stainless steel sculpture titled ‘Open Book Gateway’ at the Fruitville Library, it is well worth the trip. The library is east of U.S. 41 by about a quarter-mile on Fruitville Road. (Yes, there is civilization east of I-75!)

This gateway structure is visually very stimulating. Malcolm chose open books to express the concept that libraries are accessible to everyone. The symbolic gateway structure invites people to enter into the exciting world of books. The pages feature quotations cut out in English, Arabic and Chinese that were selected by a quotations committee. Light from the sun or the moon passing through the pages cast word shadows on the ground. I saw it just a few days ago for the first time. It was glorious and gleaming in the midday sun.

Malcolm created the “Open Book Gateway” sculpture in Florida while staying with his wife at the Manasota Key, on the Gulf of Mexico. He was the first artist to be selected in 2003 to be in residence at the retreat, which is on an 8.5-acre preserve located on the Fruitville Road. (Yes, there is civilization east of I-75!)

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The People’s Choice Awards were hosted by Brian O’Connell, owner of The Hodgell Gallery. Pictured, from left, is Wes Craven, publisher of Arts & Culture Magazine; Miriam Cassell, artist; Renee Silverstein, Sarasota Season of Sculpture board member, Mike Silverstein and Stuart Cassell.

Malcolm Robertson and his “Open Book Gateway” at the Fruitville Public Library, a historic site, founded by community activist and philanthropist Syd Abel. The Sarasota County Arts Council contracted with Sarasota County to use the buildings on the preserve as an artist retreat. Writers, painters, poets, playwrights, sculptors and composers are selected by nomination only to bring nature and art together.

Malcolm graduated in sculpture from the prestigious Glasgow School of Art in the mid-1970s. He met his lovely wife Kathryn when he had just finished his final year and had gotten a major commission.

“She was watching me work and asked if there was anything she could do. I told her to lift up and move a wheelbarrow, which was full of materials and to empty the dumpster, which she did. I said to myself, ‘I’m keeping this one!’ After a career as an elementary school teacher, raising two daughters and now busy writing children’s books, she’s still doing the ‘press gang’ work,” he said.

“Press gang work? I asked.

“Yes, you know when the Royal Navy needed new recruits they would hire gangs to go to the pubs and bang people in the head and when they woke up they were sailors,” laughed Malcolm. ‘They were literally pressed into service. Kathryn is busy helping me with a commission for a condo high-rise in Naples. There’s a lot of physical labor that she helps me with when I create my sculptures.’

Malcolm has an impressive background. After a brief career in teaching he became known internationally for his work as town artist in the thriving Scottish new town of Glenrothes. He formed Town Art Studios in 1991 and has successfully managed to create an extensive and varied portfolio of site-specific sculpture and artwork in a wide variety of materials in the U.K., U.S.A., Germany and India.

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