

ARTIST STATEMENT

For many years I have been fascinated by our oceans' coral reefs. Not only am I drawn by their sculptural beauty, but also by their complexity, and the way they create these amazingly abundant ecosystems. More recently, I have become alarmed over the deteriorating health of these reefs. The stress on the reefs is manifold. Both natural and man-made events are causing massive destruction. While we have little ability to control natural occurrences like storms and earthquakes; man-made stressors like greenhouse-gas-driven rising ocean temperatures, pollution and over fishing are preventable. We must take action to decrease the amount and intensity of agricultural runoff, ship based pollution, deforestation, coral mining and many others .

“In 2007 Live Science reported that coral reefs in the central and western Pacific were disappearing twice as fast the rain forests. In 2009, CBS News linked rising ocean temperatures of 1 to 1.5 degrees to coral destruction. The heat kills the sensitive algae that coral eat, and scuba divers say that reefs they once saw standing tall and colorful are lying dead and broken on the ocean floor.” (Bangor Daily News 2011)

Parallel to my growing concern for the health of our coral, I have been developing a new sculptural medium. The result of this work is sculpture that is capable of possessing a complex form and texture suggestive of coral. The finished appearance of my sculpture is not a literal copy of coral but rather, suggestive of the living organisms that make up a coral reef ecosystem. The color and texture of my work is ultimately driven by artistic concepts while, at the same time, it is intended to elicit responses to my art and to the challenges of saving the coral reefs.

I dedicate this sculpture to our coral reefs in hope of inspiring their preservation. I hope my art will encourage expanding thought about the inter-connectivity of all systems. Every action we take has implications for the planet whether or not the connection is immediately apparent or visible. On a positive note this concern has manifested efforts in the Maldives Islands to repair the coral. Ironically, significant damage has been caused by large numbers of tourists wanting to see the coral reefs.

About five years ago I started experiment with a new material based on cotton fiber waste. This can be easily shaped in its raw form but is quite rigid when cured. At the same time that I started these experiments I became aware of the degradation of the coral reefs and the similarity of the forms I was creating and those of the coral. I decided to base much of my subsequent sculpture on this issue. I had a solo show “Octopus's Garden” based upon my coral-inspired sculpture. I have also exhibited similar sculpture in Finland. I continue to be concerned about this environmental issue.

Reflecting back on thirty plus years I find elements of inspiration from my native Finland, Africa, my home in Maine and environmental politics moving in and out of my work. Over these many years I have not lost my desire to experiment with material and to remain technically skilled enough to fabricate almost all of my work.