



BARBARA SCHANTZ PHOTO

Steven Carpenter works full time with his stone wall business, but sculpting full time is the direction he's headed.

SCULPTING A FUTURE

■ *Stone wall artist Steven Carpenter turns to sculpting of a different kind*

BY JEANNÉ MCCARTIN
features@seacoastonline.com

"The path to get to the point I'm at now was a really interesting one," says Steven Carpenter, of York, Maine. "Everything I did was leading up to it, whether I realized it or not — and mostly not. It was going towards where I'm at now."

The steps included years in commercial art, the jump to landscaping, and a leap to stonewall design/art smack into his current burgeoning career as a sculptor.

Carpenter took his first official sculpting instructions only four years ago at Sanctuary Arts. Already he's landed a spot as a stable regular at the Bowersock Gallery in Provincetown, Mass., and his first public arts project commission, along with Sanctuary Arts owner/director Christopher Gowell.

See SCULPTING, Page B3

GO & DO

WHAT: "The Artful Dry Stone Wall," with Steven Alden Carpenter

WHERE: Sanctuary Arts, 117 Bolt Hill Road, Eliot, Maine

WHEN: Oct. 4 to 11 (Saturdays) 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

COST: \$100

CONTACT: (207) 438-9826, www.sanctuaryarts.org, or info@sanctuaryarts.org

SCULPTING: Steven Carpenter's stone work is like art as well

Continued from page B1

The pair will collaborate on a memorial that honors fishermen lost at sea, commissioned by a group of Maine fishermen. The finished sculpture will be installed on the Portland, Maine, wharf.

The concept is set and OK'd and the group is going about the business of raising funds for the project. "It could be several years down the line," he explains.

For now Carpenter continues full time with his stone wall business, reserving an average of three days for sculpting. Once the commission project begins, when funding is secured, he plans to swap those hours around. Carpenter loves the wall work, truly made it an art and will continue with some projects. But sculpting full time is the direction he's headed.

It's easy to see how the current business and earlier interests led him to this latest chapter.

He moved east from Illinois 22 years ago "generally for a change," but also to pursue a career in freelance illustration.

"I did commercial art for some time. But I always ended up to pretty much make ends meet with other stuff. That's when I got into landscaping," he says.

This first stone job occurred when the landscape company he worked for got a stone wall job. They suggested he tackle it. "I said OK; what's that about? They said 'You put one over two, two over one.' That's all the instruction I got. That and 'Now go,'" he says, laughing. "By the time I had finished that wall, there was a realization there's something going on here; the touch, the feel, whatever, a real connection. So I took that and ran with it."

A few more moves and he went out on his own; "I knew stone was where I wanted to go. I got serious about it."

To imagine his work as lovely, low, rambling walls like those of our New England forefathers is truly a mistake. Asked the term for his style and level of expertise he bumbles a moment. He's long been at a loss to define it, he says. "...stone art, but that's kind of weird, stone artist? Don't know. Stonescaping? Not sure that



Sculpture by Steven Carpenter

covers it ... Some look at it as sculptural form and function."

The latter seems fair enough. His stone walls, with embedded natural embellishments would look equally at home in a metropolitan museum; his walkways often suggest waterfalls; whereas the waterfall features are simply

acquaintance suggested he should give it a go, and told him about Sanctuary Arts. "It's really crazy I didn't think of it till then."

Initially he worked at sculpting on his own. After a year or so he headed to the Eliot school. "Once I got over there — that was like crazy. The first class I had one of those moments again that 'Oh! Ha! This is what I should have been doing all along!' ... Literally I just dove into it. It was amazing."

He took every class he could, even cutting down on the stonework to make sure he was either in a class or working on a project. "That was it. I found the fit."

Gowell says she remembers his first class, garden sculpture with Steven Lee. "He did an interesting piece, but not incredibly sophisticated," she recalls. "Then he took classes with Kate Aichele and me. It was astonishing, the innate talent he had bottled up that was allowed to flow. It was just truly astonishing. Very early on I was quite jealous of how talented he was," she says.

"When I do the stone work it's as much art as anything I do. ... The way I approach (stonework) is how shapes fit together and how light affects textures and how sunlight will take a different course during the day and highlight stones or a stone wall." It's why the next move was a natural, he adds.

"Working in all that 3-D a little light bulb went on. I'd been interested in sculpture but I'd never done it." An

artistic magic. All of it certainly says art.

Carpenter's sculptures are representational, figurative and generally cast in bronze.

"I've always been interested in the human figure. I've done a bit of athletics in my day, used the body in my stone work. I know how it works and that gives me an edge," says Carpenter. "After doing physical work over the past 12 years, I have a sense of what the body goes through in its motions and such." The work is narrative, he says. "It's trying to tell a human story."

"When you look at a piece I would like you to look at more than an object, something more there to be said."

In addition to being a regular member of Bowersock's stable, he also has shown at the Barn Gallery in Ogunquit, Maine, two years in a row.

He sees the Maine fisherman monument as the transition marker. It will take a year or so before the pair gets started on the project. Once they do it will require full-time attention. At that point he'll cut back dramatically on stone work. "I won't give it up. I do love it that much, but I'll be selective."

"If (the monument) is going to come to full fruition there, it will change life for me dramatically, just because of the exposure and PR ... and it will take a year if not more to produce that. That alone will mean focusing a little different. And hopefully that's the spring board — sculpting full time."