

Charles Arnoldi

Charles Arnoldi has become a popular California artist best known for his brightly-colored, abstract paintings that incorporate the use of wood as an expressive medium, often using tree branches and twigs.

He was born in 1946 in Dayton, Ohio and never imagined himself having a career in art. By the age of eighteen, Arnoldi had turned his back on a destructive and abusive childhood and moved to Los Angeles, California. He arrived in Southern California in 1965 and spent two years at Ventura Junior College before receiving a full scholarship to the Art Center School in Los Angeles. He only lasted two weeks at his new school before becoming frustrated with limitations imposed upon him as an illustrator. He soon enrolled in the Chouinard Art Institute and gained immediate recognition for his skill when he received a Los Angeles County Museum of Art talent award. When the funding for his tuition ran out, Arnoldi was suddenly faced with having to establish himself as an artist outside of an academic environment.

He experimented with various painting techniques and struggled to find a solid interpretation of his artistic vision. One day he collected some tree branches with a friend from a nearby area, brought them home and positioned them against the wall inside his studio. He observed the pieces and found that they resembled hand-drawn lines. He began to use branches and twigs to make up the lines within his paintings, "building" a painting with them. His earliest works were almost primitive in their simplicity and shape, resembling woven stick baskets delicately balanced. Arnoldi concentrated on his twig painting for eight years constructing many different forms, freestanding structures, sticks and string, twigs taped together densely or openly.

In the 1980's color started to become more important to him and he used bright pigments to give even more definition to his three-dimensional pieces. He also started to paint on canvas, always reflecting the elements of his wood paintings. In 1980 he painted his interpretation of the logjam that occurred as a result of the Mt. St. Helens volcano eruption. He juxtaposed his earth-toned canvas against a similar painting created entirely of sticks, mimicking the image on the painted canvas.

He was constantly redefining his artistic approaches, and in the late 1980's started working with large plywood sheets. He glued the layered sheets together, deconstructed the piece using a chainsaw to cut jagged scars into the wood, and then painted it. The work that emerged during this period was fueled by emotional energy that developed from both personal tragedy and personal joy. His mother and brother had both died, but Arnoldi had also experienced the birth of his first child, a son. He was able to direct his intense feelings into his art, often with dynamic results. He was now involved in a new process of building up and tearing down. His ever-evolving style took yet another direction when he started using heavy blocks of wood brightly painted and mounted on the wall. He made a point of preserving the integrity of wood by not sanding away any exposed grain.

In the 1990's Arnoldi departed from the rigidity of his wood creations by painting on canvas. His paintings from this period are predominantly black and white and display free-flowing organic shapes like twists and loops with a sense of motion not seen before in his work, which he continues to explore today.

Awards + Collections

Young Talent Award, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Contemporary Arts
Wittkowsky Award, Art Institute of Chicago
Artist Fellowship, National Endowments for the Arts
John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship
Maestro Fellowship, California Arts Council
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado
Guggenheim Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California
Menil Foundation, Houston, Texas
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois + San Francisco, California
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.

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