

ENTERTAINMENT

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Sculpture by the numbers

By John Seven

North Adams Transcript

ADAMS — For his new show at Greylock Arts, sculptor Richard Harrington uses his wire mesh creations to not only stand as representations of abstract geometric concepts and equations, but as investigations of matter and light combined with the supposedly intangible.

“Zero Sum” opens tonight at 5:30 at Greylock Arts in Adams.

The title of Harrington’s show refers to the equation for a tetrahedron — Vertices minus Edges plus Faces minus Cells, which equals zero.

Almost all the sculptures in the show are built-up from tetrahedrons — or four-sided pyramids — into more complicated geometric shapes known as platonic solids.

There are five varieties including tetrahedrons, all of which figure into Harrington’s wire-and-mesh sculptures. These are hexahedrons, also known as cubes, octahedrons, which are eight-sided figures consisting of two tetrahedrons; dodecahedrons, which are a 12-sided object vaguely resembling a soccer ball, and icosahedrons, which are 20-sided objects that can be built up from tetrahedrons.

Each sculpture, large or small, is a visualization of a mathematical description — something that exists abstractly and which describes our universe, but which cannot be viewed.

Harrington’s objects investigate the idea of the unseeable being seen thanks to their mesh design, which dictate that the human eye can only see one aspect at a time — there is no totality in our perception.

“Perceptual psychology states that when you’re looking at an object, you can be looking at the object or through the

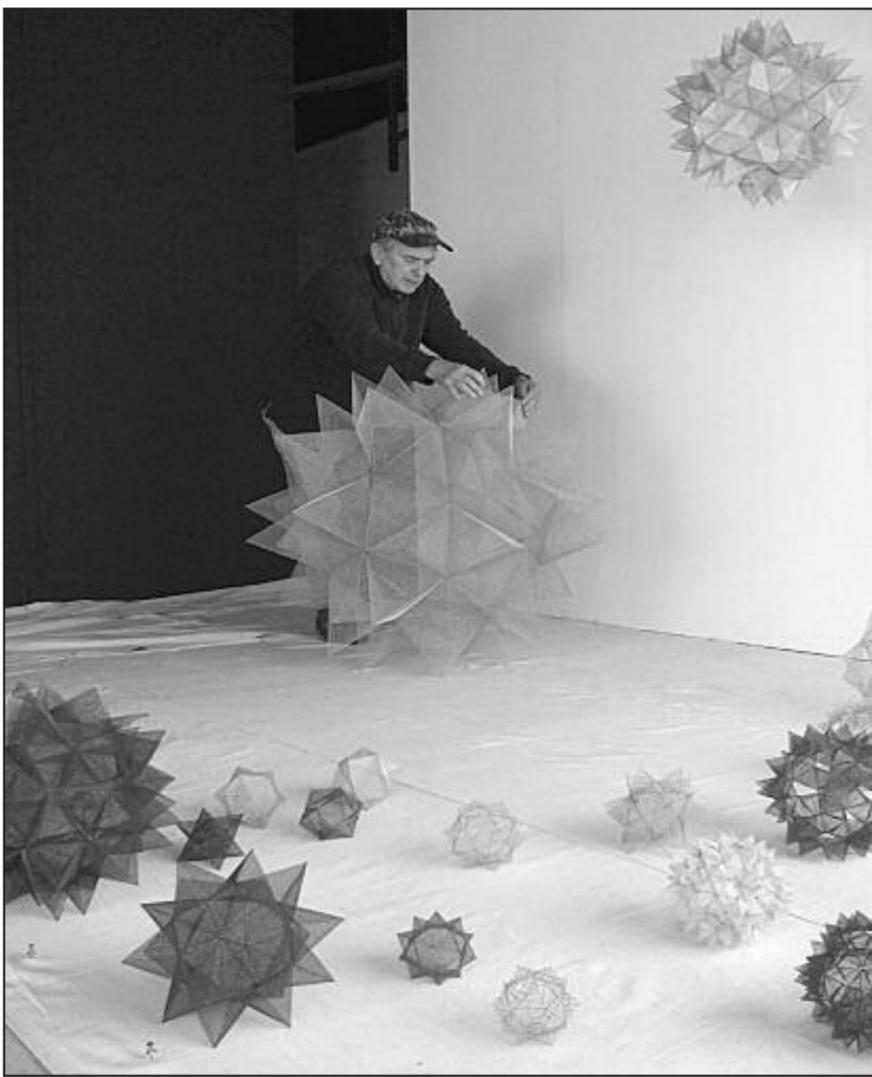
object, but never both at the same time,” Harrington said. “What these things do, it’s a flip-flop between seeing the surface of these things, but you start to see things on the other side, so you’re looking at the object and then through it. So building these, that’s what it’s really about, this is an efficient technique for addressing those issues.

Harrington hangs the sculptures from the ceiling and shines light through them, which casts a shadow on the wall and creates an entirely other perception of the geometrical realization.

“With the cast shadow and solid object, I’m drawing an equivalency between matter and light,” he said. “If there is a more profound message, that’s it. You’re building objects which are marginally objects.”

Harrington’s inspiration for the work began decades ago while still a student at Mass Art. He was able to take classes at MIT and was particularly moved by a course in the fundamental ideas of symmetry and efficiency in structures that stuck with him and were built upon through his years working at an MIT psychology lab and as an apprentice to a Japanese sculptor who specialized in suspended sculptures for atriums.

“At the time, Buckminster Fuller and people like that were really, really popular and so the tetrahedron itself was a thing that he was the best popularizer of,” said Harrington, “but also the profundity of that structure, the fact that it’s as efficient as it is, is one of the prime elemental structures in nature. And so, when you build things out of it, it has a structural integrity that you could continue expanding and ex-



John Seven/North Adams Transcript

Richard Harrington works with his menagerie of mathematic sculptures.

panding the scale of these things and they still have a rigor to them that almost defies gravity.”

Harrington’s structures begin with a simple small screen, the component from which his

entire body of work began years ago in class. Someone dropped a piece in his lap and he immediately began folding. Now he employs that same origami-like starting point and mixes in a method that is similar to sewing

and patch-working by using the same mesh material to weave the sections together.

“For the edges along and the edge of the structure, you use the same material to close it,” Harrington said. “You feed it

through every half inch; you just put a stitch through, twist it shut, hold it and then the vertices where two of the pyramids intersect, you use slightly heavier gage wire to close that.”

Harrington will also add a bit of glue to reinforce some of corners in order for the shape to stay in the configuration. These smaller components are shaped form a physical process that has him utilizing a couple two-by-fours and a vise to create a guide for proper folds.

“You feed the material over, tap it a couple of times, form a perfect crease, rotate it, tap it, and you end up with a cell,” he said.

Each cell comes together with Harrington’s guidance to form a system of shapes that builds on itself into a larger geometrical form of replicating elegance. In Harrington’s eyes, this could go on forever — or at least a while longer than he’s allowed it to.

When he constructs the larger ones, he leaves them unfinished in order to take apart the piece and rebuild it in the gallery — it’s a lesson learned from his days with the Japanese sculptor. It also makes any unit easy maintainable in any space.

“The entire unit is modular,” Harrington said. “If something is broken, you snip it out, make another one and patch it right back in.”

The only thing limiting Harrington is own capacity to create a larger piece, as well as some other spatial concerns that might pop up.

“I can easily visualize building one twice this size,” he said. “The only limitation is whether you can get them into the building where they’re supposed to go.”

Richard Harrington can be found online at lughfineart.net.

Turbulence in love and boating

By John Seven

North Adams Transcript

DVD

“Strangers” (Zeitgeist Video) Becoming a couple isn’t easy in the most normal of circumstances, but “Strangers” illustrates the subtle ways in which cultural and political concerns creep into your private life and affect your relationships, even if you’re doing everything in your power to push such influences back.

The Kiosk

Likable lunthead Eyal (Liron Levo) is visiting Germany for a World Cup game, built around some naive promise made to an old girlfriend years ago. They broke up and, no surprise, she’s not answering his phone calls, which leaves Eyal loping around Berlin looking for a roof over his head.

A brief mix-up on the subway

results in Eyal carrying around a backpack identical to his, but belonging to Rana (Lubna Azabal), a Palestinian woman living in Paris and on short holiday for the World Cup. They end up connecting emotionally even as they return each other’s wayward backpacks.

What results is a film of varying tones, following the awkwardness and sweetness of their burgeoning affair through the inevitable heartbreak and separation, and then into a realm of solid partnership and reliability.

It’s a hard thing to achieve — like some hen-pecking, hateful grandparent, the television is constantly interrupting shared moments by injecting news of the violence in Israel. Eyal’s cell phone continuously intrudes on sweet moments, usually his father despairing about the latest horror in the conflict — meanwhile, Rana’s own circumstances unfold in such a way that the wider issues become person-



Photo courtesy of Zeitgeist Video

Lubna Azabal stars in ‘Strangers.’

alized, inescapable and even dangerous.

Shot in a neo-realist style and driven home by an improvisational feel — bolstered by the fact that both actors deliver the bulk of their lines in English, obviously a second language to both — the film is set-up to succeed or fail on the strength

of the two lead actors. This is really the core of the film’s power. Levo has a restrained charm that unveils an earnestness to his character’s political and emotional awakening.

Azabal, meanwhile, distributes the same power that was unveiled in the recent films “Incendies” and “Paradise

Now,” as well as the British mini-series “Occupation,” but couples that with a necessary flirtiness and lightness that balances the intensity and makes it attractive.

Together, they enact a love affair that could be anyone, with history marching behind them and always threatening to overtake them if they don’t stand strong together against it.

Web
“Little Boat” (<http://vimeo.com/22894261>)

Cal-Art student Nelson Boles’ “Little Boat” fashions a fable of life with simplicity and elegance that pulls from the scenario used in old films like “The Red Balloon” and “Paddle To The Seas,” but creates something even more darker and true.

“Little Boat” is just that and it floats on the water and across the small screen with surety. The ocean brings multiple encounters though — different animals, stormy weather, even war — and numerous

land and water scapes that all make their mark on the craft. It keeps on its path regardless of the shape it’s in, and in the final moments pushes on thanks to the kindness of its connections.

Boles’ animation manages to push back its digital heritage with strong use of soft textures that often recall some of the best Golden Books, as does the scenario.

Imagine “Scuffy the Tugboat” taken one step further as an allegory, and that’s where “Little Boat” comes in. Boles uses the repetitive nature of the animation to strong effect, creating the impression of a life cycle for this ocean craft visually as well as thematically.

Films like this are a testament that animation isn’t dead, it’s just gotten smaller, more intimate. Let the big studios have their spectacles, the day belongs to people like Nelson Boles and where their talents take them.

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