

World-Class Green Artist: Re-examining the Usefulness of Objects

By Cathy Gray

Joe Thompson, a Merritt Island sculptor, is like most Floridians – from somewhere else; he's originally from Atlanta. He didn't start out as an artist, he studied business and finance in college. Fate sent him to Vermont for a job where he not only met his wife-to-be, but also a wood sculptor who inspired his interest in the medium. He's been a sculptor for nearly 15 years – starting with wood, evolving into welding metals and his current sculpting medium, found objects.

During his college years, Joe became an expert on Southeastern Indians archeology. In studying Mississippian Indian's midden mounds (the Indians' trash piles), he was struck that the mounds were quite small for the 500 years they lived there. He never found anything in one piece, or not used to it's full capacity. A broken bowl was cut down and used as a smaller bowl. Every bit of an animal, including the bones was used. They repurposed everything, which brought him to the realization that we do not use objects beyond their original purpose.

Joe began using second-hand components for his work, feeling there is good karma in them. Each of the 90 sets of pliers used in his school of fish sculpture had another life and purpose before he found them at pawnshops and flea markets. "The area's landfill would be a lot higher without me," he jokes.

The striking thing about Joe Thompson's work is the quality and attention to detail that have been put into them. According to a collector in Orlando who bought a sculpture titled "Sandbill Crane", he valued the originality of the work as well as the time and care spent on each piece. Joe said, "Just because you are using something recycled, doesn't mean it can't be



Artist Joe Thompson



Timeapple

fine quality." His Timeapple piece is being used locally by Sotheby's Real Estate in one of their high-end advertising promotions.

Joe's art is catching on. He's had several visiting installations at the Melbourne Airport, the Planetarium at Coco Beach, and recently won several high-profile awards in Vero Beach and Sanibel.

Looking to the future, Joe wants to find a larger audience to promote recycling and awareness of just how much is thrown away. You can see much of Thompson's work at www.joethompsonart.com, the Fifth Avenue Art Gallery in Eau Galle, website www.fifthavenue-artgallery.com.



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