

Style and Form

Sculptor Archie Held's fluid works inspire tranquility and contemplation. Jodi Murphy reports.

While you may not know the name Archie Held, chances are you're familiar with his work. Over the last decade, Held has earned prestigious high profile commissions for his dramatic sculptures from the likes of the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas, Four Seasons Hotel in Hong Kong, Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessey offices in San Francisco, Robert Mondavi Winery in Napa, and the San Mateo Public Library, just to name a few. Held's prolific commissions keep him and a team of 14 talented artists and metal fabricators busy, to say the least.

Surprisingly, Held started out as a pre-med student at UCLA but eventually found his passion in art, graduating with degrees in Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Arts. "I began spending time in the sculpture studios, and I was lucky to become the assistant to the head of the department, Oliver Andrews." In Andrews, Held found a great teacher and mentor. And in art and sculpture, Held discovered his life's work and passion.

Held loves the permanence of metal—how bronze changes and stainless steel stays the same. These are the mediums he uses most often. The majority of his work also incorporates water. "I use water in a subtle way, with most pieces just covered in a thin film of it. Most people have a natural affinity for water," notes Held. "It is a basic common denominator we all share—water adds life." He'll occasionally venture into other materials. Right now he's working on a 20-foot-tall commission in granite for Genentech's new campus at Oyster Point.

Most of Held's work starts with a pencil and paper and is further developed in clay, plaster, or wax models. His inspirations come from being a quiet observer. "Many of my pieces are born of observations of people and their gestures," says the artist. "I am drawn to forms that embody the essence of growth and strength. Held certainly succeeds. With over 500 commissions to his credit, he is one of Northern California's most lauded sculptors. He notes proudly, "The majority of my work is repeat business or referrals, and I take that as the highest compliment."

Held's wife, Janet, runs his office from home where she can take care of their three boys. Their middle son has autism so the Helds have become active in the special needs community. "We were able to donate the centerpiece sculpture at The Village in Corte Madera Shopping Center with some help from generous clients," says Held. A foundation for special needs children sells engravings on and around the base of the sculpture and when all the spaces are filled in, they will have raised approximately \$500,000 to directly help children with special needs.

Held says humbly, "I know how lucky I am to make my living at something I love to do and I never take it for granted." He often hears his parents' advice: "The harder you work, the luckier you get." ■

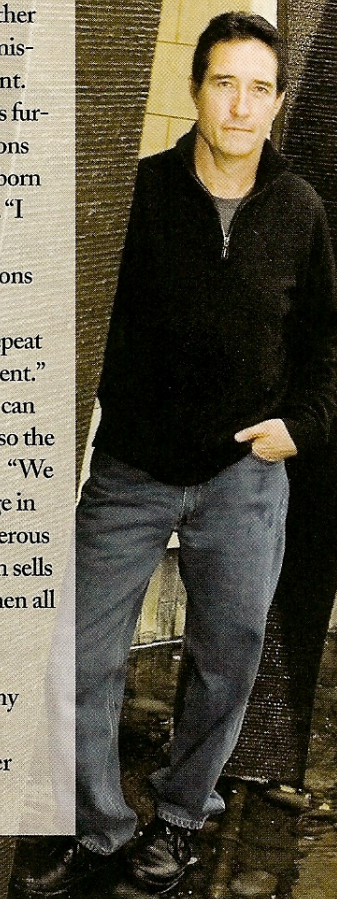


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