

William Skiles:


# An Imagination Run Wild

by Lorraine A. DarConte

**W**illiam Skiles is an artist most definitely in possession of an imagination run wild. His sense of humor and irony are evident in his sculptures, which include everything from giant shoes to a trailer where Oz's tin man resides. "I do like the idea of everything being kind of whimsical; there's something a little funny about each piece I create," explains Skiles. "I never take myself too seriously, which is reflected in my art. Generally, I make very emotional statements that have a light side to them, because that's who I am."

Skiles's sculpture has systematically evolved over the years; he began by creating mostly small pieces using a carved wax/casting method. "But there were limitations to how quickly I could work," he says. "When you're carving wax, the 'brush' is very small, and I decided I needed a larger canvas—a broader 'brush' to work with. So I started working in steel and welding, which was quick and satisfied my need to work fast."

Skiles found that steel also had a very rough feel to it, which led him to cover it with other materials. "The steel provides a great starting point or skeleton for a sculpture, but I wanted to add



Pendant from the  
"Got All Your Marbles" line

other elements to produce a softer and more detailed look," he says. "Because of my background in jewelry [35 years], I like things to have a somewhat detailed, finished look even if they're rough." Skiles found that metals such as aluminum, bronze and copper worked well as finishing materials.

"I have settled on a few designs that are simple shapes," explains Skiles. "I like to reproduce those in different forms again and again. For instance, I have a half-dome round shape that I really like. It looks like the *capillas* you see in Mexico; they have flowers, photos, candles and other items in them. I like the idea of driving by these little cathedrals that are sitting by the roadside. *Capillas* have a great shape that convey a sense of loneliness, yet at the same time, they are elegant and simple. I put all sorts of things in my *capillas*—puppets, burning hearts and skulls, to name a few.

"I can build the skeleton of a sculpture in four hours," he adds. "The hard part is to cover that framework with pieces of copper, and drilling, etcetera. The finished pieces almost look haphazardly put together. Although I'm capable of making absolutely perfect things, I don't. Perfection doesn't appeal to me; what appeals to me is the technique, the idea, how it feels, and the personality of the piece. Not just what it's made out of, but how it's put together.

"I could make my sculptures out of tin cans," explains Skiles. "They have that 'trash art' feel about them. But it doesn't look like trash because I do it really well."

People often think Skiles uses found objects on his sculptures, but he actually creates each and every piece from



Capilla de Corazon sculpture features Skiles's classic capilla encasement.



Closeup of a "puppet" sculpture that looks surprisingly like Skiles himself.

scratch, including tiny pairs of shoes and his popular flaming hearts. "People think I purchase objects somewhere else and stick them on my art." "But I don't; and I do it intentionally because we all have a tendency to look at things and not see them. So, I figure, why not disguise things to begin with? And then only a select few people will really get it."

Skiles has a few outrageous ideas bouncing around in his head that he hopes to bring to life sometime soon. For example, he'd like to build a large shoe with wheels on it. "A stiletto shoe with two wheels up front and a single wheel on the heel; something a Martian might wear," says Skiles. "Inside the shoe there would be a nice padded driver's seat with a big

steering wheel. Wouldn't that be fabulous? The shoe itself is not just a shoe," notes Skiles. "It's the fact that shoes, especially women's shoes, have a utility about them that is almost cartoonish, which allows them to take on personalities. To me, shoes are sexy, but not sexual, and the idea of this beautiful, but oddly shaped shoe, designed, perhaps, for a Martian is both irresistible and amusing. I've done one already where the shoe's toe spreads out like a pod but has a graceful high heel, so it looks like it came from another planet. There's a joke," he concludes, "but I'm not sure what it is."

Skiles is also an accomplished jeweler. "I've been a jeweler my whole life; I started when I was 18 in my parents' garage, with a propane torch and some solder," he recalls. These days, Skiles and his partner and wife, Lisa Stotska, have a jewelry line—Got All Your Marbles—that helps to fund his sculptures. The line, which features handcrafted silver, bronze and gold pendants, earrings and rings with interchangeable marbles, was created in 1999 when Skiles took it upon himself to design a jewelry line that was both fashionable and affordable (prices range from \$19 to more than \$160). It has taken off both here and abroad.

To see more of William Skiles's work, drop by Studio 220 at 220 E. Congress St. (call 624-2283 for hours), or visit [www.gotallyourmarbles.com](http://www.gotallyourmarbles.com).

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