



BEN WOITENA

WEST TEXAS TRIANGLE
2015

WEST TEXAS TRIANGLE

2015 exhibition dates

The Grace Museum

Abilene, Texas

May 14 through August 8, 2015

Museum of the Southwest

Midland, Texas

June 5 through August 16, 2015

The Old Jail Art Center

Albany, Texas

June 6 through September 6 2015

Ellen Noël Art Museum of the Permian Basin

Odessa, Texas

June 18 through September 6, 2015

San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts

San Angelo, Texas

July 9 through September 6, 2015



WEST TEXAS TRIANGLE

The West Texas Triangle

The West Texas Triangle, established in 2006, is a collaboration between five nationally accredited fine art museums all located centrally between El Paso and Dallas, Texas. The consortium includes the Grace Museum in Abilene; the Old Jail Art Center in Albany; the Museum of the Southwest in Midland; the Ellen Noël Art Museum in Odessa; and the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts in San Angelo. Collectively, the West Texas Triangle produces an annual exhibition of the work of a single sculptor with a Texas connection. The 'Triangle' meets four times a year, rotating each meeting's location between the institutions to share resources, ideas, and plan the annual exhibition. The participants—a team which is comprised of curatorial staff, museum directors, education, and marketing staff—jointly choose each featured artist. Featured artists have included Ken Little (2014), Danville Chadbourne (2013), Catherine Lee (2012), George Tobolowsky (2011), Sherry Owens (2010), James Surls (2009), Joe Barrington (2008), and Jesús Moroles (2007). This year, the West Texas Triangle is pleased to present the work of Ben Voitena.

Ben Voitena has lived and worked in Houston since 1971, when he began teaching at the Glassell School of Art at The Museum of Fine Arts Houston. Over his long career as a sculptor, he has created a large body of work which ranges from small, intimate pedestal pieces to monumental outdoor works. Several of our West Texas Triangle museums either have Voitena's works in their collections, or have displayed his work in past exhibitions. Throughout the summer of 2015, selections of Voitena's work will be on view at each of the West Texas Triangle museums. Visitors are encouraged to travel to all five venues to experience the breadth and versatility of Voitena's sculpture, as well as the vast cultural heritage of our region.

— Rebecca Bridges, Registrar, The Grace Museum
and Laura Romer Huckaby, Collections Manager, San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts

artist statement



Following a parochial education with an emphasis on music, I came of age during the tumultuous social and political changes of the 1960s while attending the University of Texas at Austin. Classes in sculpture at UT were based on traditional representation of the figure in drawing and modeling, bronze casting, and carving in stone and wood. While maintaining the highly disciplined work ethics of my parochial education, the spirit of openness of the 1960s counterculture left a deeper impression on my ideological beliefs, which remain translated into my works. I graduated in 1964, with a BFA from the University of Texas at Austin, attended the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, and received a MFA in sculpture in 1970. In 1971, I moved to Houston, Texas, to become head of sculpture for the next twenty-seven years for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston — now the Glassell School of Art.



The sizes of my sculptures range from pedestal to life-size, large-scale to monumental. I do not produce sculptures from drawings; however, my drawings are derived from the same process utilized in my sculpture, as they are also produced from materials collected over time. A process of cross-pollination can occur when colors and textures in the drawings become surface textures in the sculptures, and sculptural materials become components of the drawings. An early educational emphasis on the figure — modeled in the round — led to my belief that sculpture should be viewed in the round with components forming different configurations and relationships engaging the viewer to walk around the work. It was Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy who said: "Art is an imitation of the nature of things, not of their appearances."



Carving is based on an uncompromising process derived from the removal of material involving a commitment to form that once made cannot be replaced. Although additive processes are more easily manipulated than subtractive, they can be combined. In combining these two processes my sculptures become a spontaneous, intuitive manipulation of materials in much the same manner as jazz musicians employ free musical associations before returning to a recognizable melody. Similarly, Jack Kerouac believed that the unedited drafts were the best of his writings, and Jackson Pollock relied on intuitive gesture to remain in contact with his drip technique in painting. This gesturing process allows expansive expression to intuit forms. Sculptures included in these exhibitions exemplify the belief that the creative process is a transformational experience whereby thoughts become tangible via the manipulation of materials. Each intuitive gesture is not dated in time, but archetypal in content.

It was with gratitude to the West Texas Triangle consortium of museums that I accepted their invitation to exhibit as artist of the year 2015. I have enjoyed meeting and working with their representative curators and designated art critic Jake Weigel, with several of whom I have visited my current exhibition at Heritage Plaza entitled, *The Lyricism of Ben Waitena: Selected Works in Wood, Steel and Stone*, January 6 through June 1, 2015, made studio visits and excursions to Houston's museums, and shared memorable dinners. I look forward to each of the installations and the respective 2015 openings at the five member museums of the West Texas Triangle.

— Ben Waitena

Top to bottom:

Sword Dance. 2013. Patinated silicon bronze plate, polished edges. On view at the Museum of the Southwest

Break Thru. Painted stainless steel and steel. On view at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts.

Night Shade. Polished and patinated silicon bronze, black granite. On view at the Ellen Noel Art Museum of the Permian Basin.

infinite visions

In a prolific career stretching over 50 years, Ben Voitena has developed an extensive personal vocabulary that undulates, twists and speaks as the physical art he creates. Continual expansion of material, scale, subject, technique and aesthetics forms a complex voice difficult to find among his contemporaries. Largely acknowledged for his large public sculptures, collected and exhibited nationally, Voitena's creative acumen transcends medium and style, working in sculpture, collage and painting that display an intelligence and honesty of both hand and mind.

Voitena studied figurative sculpture at the University of Texas in Austin and later at the University of Southern California before heading up the sculpture program at Glassell School of Art in Houston for 27 years. From this time he has transformed his knowledge of traditional approaches to sculpture, ultimately breaking from representation of the body to an essence of form and action. With acute awareness of the base and central axis, he creates tension by manipulating the viewer's sense of movement and time in the work, honing this sensibility in each sculpture. Although physically static, the artwork evokes an emotive spontaneity with contorted volumes and linear progression that, consequently, remain figurative.

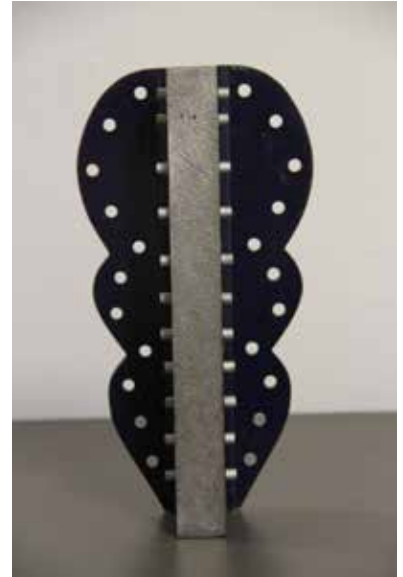
Monumental sculptures force the viewer to navigate around the occupied space, constantly taking on an expansive and engaging perspective. Many of the outdoor works by Voitena have a hard and angled geometry of shifting planes not found in the shapes of carved stone, wood and bronze components of the smaller sculptures. The direct carving of stone and wood inherently assumes the organic lines in each medium, making a hard-edged definition elusive. A combination of art and craftsmanship define the small-scale sculptures best by wily juxtaposition of allusion, material and process.

In either case, the physical weight of the sculptures is transformed through the manipulation of mass, line and movement indicative of ephemeral characteristics within his work. Voitena's quest to capture the fleeting glimpse of the immaterial by means of the physical without reservation is clear. Fabrication methods without prior planning allow for creative action to occur with few limitations, the art occurring as a distended jazz rhythm, developed in response to each preceding gesture of hand. The results are a unique visual poetry, composed of personal narration and abstract notions that are not necessarily melodic but often harmonious when brought together.

The most spontaneous of Voitena's creations are his abstract collages and paintings. Fluid and subconscious movements of the brush are lost in even quickly rendered sculptures but central to this work. The creations appear mandatory for the artist as an additional manifestation of a passing moment and freedom to explore. Once the first marks are laid down, each addition is in response to prior movements until the entire area is filled using a vibrant color palette and an expressive mark that cannot translate directly into sculptural form.

By understanding the limitations of specific content, Voitena draws out universal images that can be interpreted from multiple vantage points but are also based on personal experiences. Derived from strong and passionate conviction to reveal a mastery of time, space, material and thought, he demonstrates what few others are able to comprehend. Though seemingly disparate, each finished work of art claims it's own time and place while the various components work collectively as an extension of Ben Voitena's creative and elusive vision.

— Jake Weigel, University of Texas of the Permian Basin Gallery Manager
and Instructor in Sculpture



Top to bottom:
Vida Blue. 2013. Painted steel and stainless steel. On view at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts.

Sentinel. Steel, Colorado Yule marble. On view at the Ellen Noël Art Museum of the Permian Basin.

Light Lure. Painted steel, silicon bronze plate. On view at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts.

The Grace Museum

The Grace Museum welcomes Ben Woitena back to Abilene as the West Texas Triangle's 2015 featured sculptor. Woitena was an early participant in the Abilene Outdoor Sculpture program of the Abilene Cultural Affairs Council that began in 1980. His sculpture, *Rainmaker*, is permanently installed at the corner of North 6th and Pine Street adjacent to the Abilene Civic Center. *Oasis* was exhibited as part of the 19th Annual Abilene Outdoor Exhibition in 1999. This year, *Echo* will be on view in Abilene through 2015.

Woitena's large-scale steel sculptures proudly assert their materials, the process and the vision of the artist. Speaking of *Echo*, he states that, "this body of sculptural steel work was influenced by an exploration of the essential nature of the medium, its suggestibility, and the processes utilized in combining dissimilar shapes of materials typically used in construction." Process and materials are tethered in the final outcome as fragments collected over the years inspire new work. For Woitena the spontaneous combination of disparate materials is a reflection of the transformative power of sculpture. The artist's abstract constructions echo a gestural and symbolic presence that bares the mark of the maker and his creative process.

— Judy Tedford Deaton, Chief Curator



Echo: Waves of Reflection.
Steel, aluminum and granite.

The Grace Museum maintains a unique position among West Texas attractions, building connections through new experiences in art, science and history within the evolving Texas story through exhibitions, programs and collections. Housed in a historically significant 102 year-old former hotel building, The Grace Museum is recognized as an asset for its cultural heritage as well as its educational opportunities. The art collection of more than 1,500 works is composed of paintings, fine art prints, artist's books, sculpture, photographs and works on paper, including drawings, watercolors and pastels. The permanent collection features works by such artists as Ansel Adams, Edward Eisenlohr, Charles Taylor Bowling, Peter Hurd, Thomas Hart Benton, David Bates, Robert Rauschenberg, Vernon Fisher, Melissa Miller, James Surls, Andy Warhol, Alexander Calder and many others.

Art exhibitions at The Grace Museum focus on historic and contemporary American art and artists with Texas connections. Three exhibitions of fine art photography are presented annually in the Alice and Bill Wright Photography Gallery. Additional galleries change regularly to accommodate ten to twelve unique art exhibitions each year. The 2nd floor Children's Museum serves as a hands-on, discovery-based learning center for children and families. The 3rd floor history gallery is dedicated to displaying exhibitions of historically significant objects that tell the story of the evolving cultural and social history of Abilene and West Texas between 1880 and 1950. Period rooms display parlors and kitchens from 1910, 1928, and 1948, bringing bygone eras to life. The Mallouf Boot Shop presents a recreation of the 1940s-era workshop of longtime Brownwood boot-maker, Albert Mallouf. The history gallery also presents changing exhibitions of artifacts curated from The Grace Museum history collection.

In 2010, the Texas Commission on the Arts recognized Abilene as one of the five most important cities in Texas with historic downtown arts districts, with the Grace Museum at the heart of the district. Accredited by the American Association of Museums, the Grace Museum is dear to the people of Abilene and is respected throughout the state for its outstanding exhibitions and programs.

The Museum of the Southwest



Windswept. 2001. Painted steel and abrasive blasted stainless steel.



Oaxaca Real. 2009. Painted steel and wire rope.

Visiting Ben Waitena's studio in Houston is like walking into a wonderland of forms, shapes and materials. He works in multiple sculptural media, from cast bronze, constructed steel, carved marble and wood, to drawings and wall mounted mixed media. Viewers who visit all five West Texas Triangle museums will have a taste of what its like to explore all of the works in his studio, from huge outdoor sculptures to small maquettes. For 2015 The Museum of the Southwest is exhibiting Waitena in two locations, with a large steel sculpture *Windswept* will be located outdoors between the Fredda Turner Durham Children's Museum and the Marian Blakemore Planetarium. Two smaller pedestal sculptures, *Oaxaca Real* and *Sword Dancer* will be located inside the Planetarium, creating a dynamic interplay between indoor and outdoor works that will inspire many interactions and conversations from Museum visitors.

— Wendy Earle,
Curator of Collections and Exhibitions

A nonprofit organization located in Midland, Texas, the **Museum of the Southwest** inspires discovery, interaction and exploration of art, science, culture and history, enriching the lives of people of all ages. Founded in 1965, the Museum is comprised of an Art Museum, a Children's Museum, a state of the art Planetarium and an outdoor Sculpture Garden.

The permanent collection of art includes the Hogan Collection of paintings by the Taos Society of Artists, as well as paintings and prints by important American artists including Norman Rockwell, Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton. Highlights of the works on paper collection include hundreds of prints from the Texas Regionalists collective, including Jerry Bywaters, Otis Dozier, Alexandre Hogue and Merritt Mauzey; a large collection of John James Audubon's Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America; Joseph Imhof's drawings and studies of American Indians; and many of Karl Bodmer's prints from Maximilian Prince of Wied's Travels in the Interior of North America. Other areas of focus include Texas and Southwestern modernists; works by modern Native American artists including T.C. Cannon, Fritz Scholder and Maria Martinez; as well as paintings and sculpture of the American West.

Campus hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 2 to 5 p.m. Sundays. The campus is closed Mondays. For more information on the Museum, membership and upcoming exhibitions and events, visit MuseumSW.org, call 432.683.2882 or send an email to info@MuseumSW.org.

Old Jail Art Center



Jack of Diamonds. 1975. Welded and painted steel.

Ben Woitena's outdoor sculptures in the OJAC permanent collection vary greatly in how they are made and their interaction with the surrounding space. Yet, each employ subtle manipulation of planes, shadows, mass, color, texture, and positive/negative space.

The seemingly stagnant elements, created from iron and steel, interact with the intense Texas light to cast ever-changing shadows that are associated with time and movement.

— Patrick Kelly, Curator of Exhibitions



Glass Rock. 1975. Welded and painted steel.

The Old Jail Art Center opened in 1980 with four small galleries that once served as the first permanent jail built in Shackelford County, Texas (1878). The museum's core collection has grown from the private collections of four Albany natives and now numbers over 2,200 works of art. The largest area comprises modern drawings, paintings, prints, and sculpture by such well-known Americans as John Marin, Charles Demuth, Alexander Calder, and European artists Amedeo Modigliani, Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. In addition, the collection contains a sizable number of works by contemporary Texas artists; smaller regional collections of the Fort Worth Circle (1945-1955) and Taos Modernists (1945-1979); an impressive Asian Art Collection, principally ancient Chinese tomb figures; and an equally stellar Pre-Columbian Collection. Currently, the OJAC actively collects and showcases the work of emerging Texas artists with temporary exhibitions related to the permanent collection.

Outdoor works of various media are installed in the sculpture courtyard and throughout the museum's grounds. The museum's Sallie Reynolds Matthews Gallery, which honors the author of the acclaimed pioneer chronicle *Interwoven*, presents a view of the area's ranching heritage in a setting that recalls the headquarters of the Matthews family's historic Lamshead Ranch. The museum also contains the Green Research Library with a collection of art books, and the Robert E. Nail Archives, a regional history and artists' papers archive. The OJAC's overall aim is to serve as an educational and cultural center focused on the visual arts through collections, exhibitions, programs, and regional history resources.

An accredited museum, the OJAC is free and open to the public Tuesday - Saturday 10 am - 5 pm; Sundays 2 - 5 pm; closed Mondays and major holidays.

Ellen Noël Art Museum of the Permian Basin



The work of Ben Weitena can be found in the McKnight Gallery at the Ellen Noël Art Museum. His abstract sculptures, with their bronze, steel or wood construction, marry the organic and the industrial. Weitena interprets the world not as it appears; instead he expresses the realities of life through abstract forms. Weitena's meticulously planned designs, sense of space and craftsmanship make for an exhibition that challenges the visitors' own perception of reality.

— Daniel Zies, Curator



Above:
Poets Gate. Walnut, paint, wire rope.

Left: *Silhouette*. Painted steel, limestone.

Center:
Dusk Light. Cast silicon bronze, wood sand cast form.

Right:
Shadow Land. Painted steel.

The Ellen Noël Art Museum of the Permian Basin is the culmination of years of grass roots fundraising efforts by the citizens of Odessa to build a fine arts museum. Originally opened in 1985 as the Art Institute for the Permian Basin, the Museum was renamed in its tenth year to honor the leadership and philanthropy of Mrs. Ellen W. Noël. Known for its active exhibition schedule and outstanding education programming, the Ellen Noël Art Museum is accredited by the American Association of Museums and is part of the Smithsonian Institution Affiliations Program.

The Museum has a growing Permanent Collection with a special focus on works from artists in Texas and the Southwest. The Museum also features the George and Milly Rhodus Sculpture and Sensory Garden, which contains a variety of fragrant and tactile plants as well as "hands-on" experience with bronze and granite sculpture. The Museum uses the garden to enrich the lives of the visually impaired as part of its programs to provide a sensory experience for visitors of all ages and abilities.

The Museum is a catalyst for art education in the region, offering children's, teen and adult art classes, artists' workshops, community art days and school tours. These features plus many more help ensure that the Museum's programming remain dynamic, vital and responsive to the community's needs.

San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts

We first became familiar with Ben Weitena's sculptural genius when he entered our annual Richard and Pam Salmon Sculpture Competition two years ago. His monumental steel sculpture, *Windswept*, was chosen for the show and awarded First-Prize by Competition Juror Scott Hicks, Director of Shidoni Foundry and Galleries. We were surprised to learn, however, that Weitena is just as proficient at creating small scale bronze and carved pieces as he is with large, outdoor, steel sculptures. For this exhibition, we selected a range of pieces for indoor display, with one outdoor companion piece. What I particularly love about Weitena's sculptures is that they grab the viewer from any angle, and when viewed from different angles, one sculpture can seem like multiple artworks—and he does this with his mastery of form, color, and patina. *Tumbler*, for example, changes as you walk around it, shifting its shape and its skin in the viewer's perception. Metal, wood, and stone seem to quietly come alive as you experience Weitena's works.

— Laura Romer Huckaby, Collections Manager



Above:
Mirror's Edge. Green travertine, Colorado Yule marble, bronze, paint.

Left:
Horizon. Mesquite, patinated copper, marble, brass.



The San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts opened in 1985, originally located in the historic 1864 Quartermaster Building at Fort Concho National Historic Landmark. SAMFA's present facility was opened in 1999, and the distinctive architecture has received international acclaim. The mission of the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts—through its collections, exhibitions, and programs—is to serve the general public in San Angelo, Texas, and the rural communities of the Concho Valley. SAMFA has been nationally recognized for its dedication to the community, and was presented with the National Museum Service Award in 2004.

The overall exhibit program encompasses all media, cultures and time periods, with a major exhibit annually focusing on the ceramic arts. And in 2012, SAMFA organized and hosted the first annual Salmon Sculpture Competition, a juried exhibition of outdoor sculpture. Among the Permanent Collection's areas of concentration, the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts has established a distinguished collection of contemporary American ceramics, which has expanded to include ceramics from Europe, Canada, and Asia. Other focus areas of the collection include early and contemporary Texas art, and Spanish Colonial and Mexican religious art.

SAMFA is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. It is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Closed Monday, major holidays, and between exhibits. Admission is \$2 for adults, \$1 for seniors, and free for students, members of the military, and families with children.



exhibition checklist

The Grace Museum

Echo: Waves of Reflection. Steel, aluminum and granite.

Museum of the Southwest

Oaxaca Real. 2009. Painted steel, wire rope.

Sword Dance. 2013. Patinated silicon bronze plate, polished edges.

Windswept. 2000. Painted steel, abrasive blasted stainless steel.

The Old Jail Art Center

Jack of Diamonds. 1975. Welded and painted steel.

Gift: Mr. & Mrs. I.H. Kempner III. 1996.001.

Glass Rock. 1975. Welded and painted steel.

Gift: Mr. & Mrs. I.H. Kempner III. 1996.002.

Ellen Noël Art Museum of the Permian Basin

BRONZE, CARVINGS & SMALL SCULPTURES

Dusk Light. Cast silicon bronze, wood sand cast form.

Gray Mist Passing. Italian marble, steel.

Night Rider. Polished and patinated silicon bronze.

Night Shade. Polished and patinated silicon bronze, black granite.

Sentinel. Steel, Colorado Yule marble.

PEDESTAL SCULPTURES

Cumulus. Painted steel, rust edges.

Easy Rider. Painted steel, burnished brass.

Poets Gate. Walnut, paint, wire rope.

Silhouette. Painted steel, limestone.

Sword Dance. Painted aluminum, burnished edges.

Windswept. Painted steel, abrasive blasted aluminum.

Mandatory Dogs. Painted steel.

Lines Gait. Painted and patinated steel.

FLOOR SCULPTURES

Palancar. Painted steel.

Shadow Land. Painted steel.

San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts

PEDESTAL SCULPTURES

A Lure. Cast silicon bronze, wood sand cast form, granite.

Around Midnight. Painted steel, copper tubes, silicon bronze.

Bleu. Painted steel.

Horizon. Mesquite, patinated copper, marble, brass.

Light Lure. Painted steel, silicon bronze plate.

Mirror's Edge. Green travertine, Colorado Yule marble, bronze, paint.

Sunfall. Mesquite, mahogany, copper.

Thruway Rhythm. Mesquite; Patinated silicon bronze base.

Tumbler. Polished silicon bronze, brass, paint.

FLOOR SCULPTURES

Break Thru. Painted stainless steel and steel.

OUTDOOR WORKS

Vida Blue. 2013. Painted steel and stainless steel.

WALL PIECES (2D)

Boogie Nights. Oil and enamel paint, graphite, white glue, solder wire.

Cumulus Rise. Ball point pen, Marks-A-Lot, graphite, enamel paint.

Flash Point. Florescent Plexiglas, paint, white felt, wood screws.

Image Loop. Masonite, graphite, felt, ball point pen.

Matrix. Masonite, paint, plastic, ball point pen.

Meow Mix. Paint.

Mise-en-Scene. Graphite, enamel paint, ball point pen.

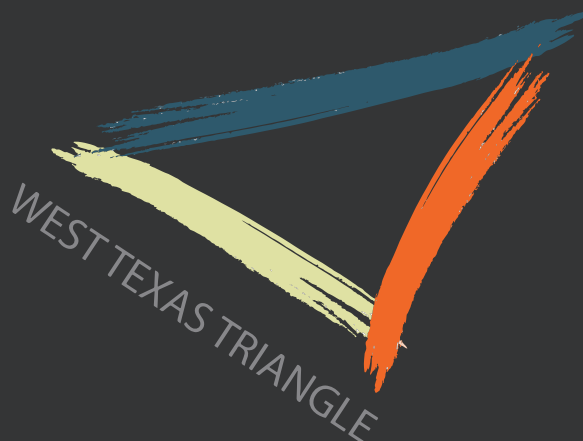
Night Sounds. Blotter paper, glue, ball point pen, oil paint, graphite, felt.

String Theory. Enamel paint, graphite, ball point pen, string.

Above:

Meow Mix. Paint on paper. On view at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts.

WEST TEXAS TRIANGLE



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