

Basalt sculptor starts on University work

By MOLLY INGRAM
Of the Emerald

Eugene artist Steve Gillman can take basalt and restore it to a creatively refined piece of sculpture.

Stepping into his studio is an experience in a true sense of involvement reflected everywhere in his work.

"In the past, I was never so engrossed in one kind of medium. The plentifulness of a material was always a major factor. In the case of basalt, I

really like it. I wouldn't leave this area unless I could find it somewhere else. I'm really in love with the material," Gillman says.

Gillman was recently commissioned to decorate the south wall of the University's Geology Building with a basalt rock sculpture.

A jury of various University personnel chose Gillman's entry — an integrated group of polished slabs of basalt — for its sensitive, effective use of a volcanic material, particularly appropriate to an earth science theme.

The basalt Gillman uses comes from a rock quarry, off Interstate 5, near Harrisburg. "It's practically free," Gillman says, "about three dollars can buy two tons of basalt."

Gillman's work begins at the rock quarry where he selects his basalt, chooses suitable pieces and has them loaded in his pickup. Back at his studio, Gillman uses a chain hoist to unload his rock treasures.

"A lot of time is spent just moving the rock into different positions," Gillman says. "Many artists aren't involved in the whole thing. I do everything myself. Driving to and from the rock quarry, choosing my own materials and maneuvering those materials once I get them back to my studio."

Gillman uses an interesting assortment of tools. When working with a medium like basalt, he uses mostly carbide tools because they are much sturdier and can withstand the rock's hardness.

He usually begins working on basalt by removing large pieces of stone with hammers and chisels. For working deeper into the stone's surface, Gillman uses a Skillsaw by removing the guard and adding a masonry wheel.

Near the completion of a project, Gillman uses a hand-rubbing brick to remove lumps from the surface. Then he hand polishes his basalt pieces using water to keep the dust from caking on the rock's surface and to give it a smooth, buffered shine.

"Machine tools leave surfaces that are obviously machined. It is almost impossible to



Photo by Jimmi Harris

Eugene artist Steve Gillman takes large hunks of basaltic rock and turns them into refined pieces of sculpture. His work will be a permanent addition to the south wall of the University's geology building.

get a tool mark out with a machine tool. The only thing power tools are, is quicker. You don't have the control with a machine tool," Gillman says.

Gillman earned a M.F.A. in sculpture from the University of Oregon in 1976. He taught an Adult Education Class for two years at Lane Community College and currently exhibits seven of his sculpture pieces at the Vorpall Gallery in San Francisco.

When Gillman isn't involved with commissioned projects, he

substitute-teaches for high school shop classes to supplement his income. Eventually however, Gillman hopes to do only commissioned projects for a steady means of support.

"The marketplace can be a deadly pitfall for artists. It can stop a lot of exploration in your art. That is what art is all about, exploring your new ideas," he says.

Gillman's sculpture will be on display at the Geology Building by October 1, 1979. Gillman says the sculpture will be named, but he is still undecided.

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