



For Bend mobile artist, the concept is simple: 'I find the center point and then create the bend around it.'

# Life and Art In Balance

by Lori Gleichman / for The Bulletin Special Projects    Photos by Lyle Cox



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Seeking balance is somewhat of a recurrent theme in Mark Leary's life.

It has lead him through undergraduate and graduate degrees in religious studies; a varied career ranging from manual labor to professional copywriting with his own agency; and it drives his passion for mountain biking, where he escapes the everyday stress.

Seeking balance now has a new meaning for Leary as it's the foundation of his growing reputation as a mobile artist.

"I find the center point and then create the bend around it," Leary said, describing the process of building mobiles.

That could also describe how he arrived in Bend about four years ago, moving from Southern California after family convinced him that Central Oregon was so much better.

Seeking a center point, he wanted a simpler life. But for a time, he had to "bend around it," commuting to and from San Diego for work.

Eventually, the commuting stopped. "I didn't move here to get more

complicated," he said, "but to focus on core things and balance them."

These "things" included family, work and being outdoors biking or working in his garden. Now, his life is bending again to accommodate his need to spend time in his studio, working on mobiles that combine elegant shapes, rich colors and flowing movement, all in perfect balance.

In fact, his success with mobiles is amusing to Leary "because I've always been horrible with spatial relationships."

In contrast, skill in building mobiles depends on understanding negative space. Once Leary realized that it was best to start from the bottom and build

"Every piece below supports everything above."



up, however, he gained confidence in his ability to feel his way through the process.

"Every piece below supports everything above," Leary said, simplifying the physics into a single concept.

He starts with pieces cut from stainless steel sheets, then wires them together according to what he sees in his

head and the sense of balance he finds with his hands.

He describes his design aesthetic as "not organic like Calder," but more contemporary. In fact, many shapes reflect the gears on his mountain bike and other patterns he sees everywhere around him.

The results range from works of peaceful simplicity, featuring repetitive



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“It’s fun to see people’s reaction to things that move. A mobile can be still, and then the air conditioning comes on and it immediately becomes the center of attention.”

shapes spinning hypnotically on an air current, to whimsical jumbles of bright colors and bouncy motion that vibrate with energy and joy.

“It’s fun to see people’s reaction to things that move,” said Leary. “A mobile can be still, and then the air conditioning comes on and it immediately becomes the center of attention.”

He believes it’s because mobiles are so three-dimensional, combining color and shape with movement, that redefines art in terms of space and shadow.

Leary believes his fascination with mobiles comes from his fascination with the concept of place.

His master’s thesis explored how we think about nature, and how it shapes our concepts of the world. It’s this relationship with nature that Leary continues to explore, reflected in the shapes he chooses to work with, which imply feathers layering on a wing, leaves rustling in the wind, or bubbles rising into the air.

But his start as an artist was less philosophical and bit more pragmatic.

After being the guy with friends who were artists, he decided he also wanted to be the artist.

“I’d always done art,” he said of

gifting family and friends with paintings, wire sculptures and photographs since he was a child.

While cycling, he got another idea and started collecting pieces of scrap metal and found objects lying along the trail. The scraps became playful creatures he sells on etsy.com as Rusted Busted Stuff.

Then, at a friend’s suggestion, he began tinkering with mobiles and made it a goal to sell just one in 2008.

Instead he sold about 100.

So, he made another goal: to get one gallery to represent his work in 2009. By June, he already had four lined up.

Leary’s work is seen in Bend at Furnish, the Red Brick Gallery in Ventura, Calif., Rare Device in San Francisco, and the Made Gallery in New Orleans. You can also view his work at marklearydesigns.com.

“I really thought I was supposed to spend my life traveling the world,” said Leary.

But now, he’s content in Bend.

“It’s amazing that I’m living a life balanced between writing and art, and can also take a day off to go biking,” he said.



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