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Creating a story in 3-D

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As a writer, I like to recharge my creative batteries by checking out an art exhibit or going to a concert. Using a different set of senses to take in ideas gives me a boost. So I was pleased to meet the artist Andrea Morganstern recently at the Westport Arts Center (<http://www.westportartscenter.org>)'s exhibit *Foodies* – where all the art has some connection to food. It's been one of their most popular exhibits, with good reason, and you can see it (provided they're open after the storm) until November 4th. Andrea's artwork stands out, though; for one thing, it's taller than she is. And it tells its own story.

In fact, the piece, entitled Corn Bird, was produced using a process similar to a 3-D printing, a fascinating thing in itself. I wanted to know more.

(<https://writeconnexion.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/cornbird-photo-for-gabi.jpg>)

GC: Please tell us something about yourself

AM: I am an artist based in Bridgewater, CT, a small rural town in the northwest part of the state. I relocated here after living in New York City for many years. The closeness to nature has been very inspiring for the development of my recent work. I have been exhibiting my artwork widely throughout the US since 1995 in galleries, museums and non-profit spaces.

GC: How would you describe the figures you are currently making?

AM: The sculptures, like all of my work, are about two main concepts. The first is the interconnectedness of all things in nature. I explore this idea by blending botanical, animal and human elements to create hybrid creatures. My work is also about the existence of other dimensions or parallel universes besides this physical one we normally perceive as reality, and an exploration into who or what might dwell there.

GC: It seems to me that your figures tell a story. Could you explain the ideas behind the corn figure, specifically, or the stories which influenced you as you were creating it?

AM: My work is inspired by the art of ancient civilizations, particularly Egyptian, Pre-Columbian and Hindu, as well as travel to places where traces of these civilizations remain. Corn Bird, for example was inspired by a trip to Peru where I learned that corn is considered sacred by the native culture and I was inspired to create a deity made of corn. I see the figures as spirit beings or deities from my own imaginary ancient civilization or parallel universe. I intended for Corn Bird to have a dignified quality, like an ancient Egyptian pharaoh or priest or some other kind of ancient wise being, with the corn husks doubling as robes. Every creature has a golden botanically inspired headpiece. I paint them gold to suggest an elevated status or high spiritual level.

GC: Most of your figures have been around a foot tall (correct me if I'm wrong here). What made you decide to make one that's taller than you are?

I decided that as separate artworks, the sculptures might have more presence and really come to life if I created them large-scale so I decided to experiment by creating a much larger version of Corn Bird.

GC: Please explain a bit about how you used technology to make the sculpture.

AM: For my small sculptures, I make the original out of clay, create a mold out of silicone rubber and then create castings out of urethane resin. I then paint the castings with acrylics.

For the larger scale version of Corn Bird, I worked with a fine art fabricator. I provided them with a small version of the sculpture which they scanned with a three-dimensional laser to create a three-dimensional model. This model was then used to create a machining path that was used to guide a three-dimensional milling machine. The sculpture was milled out at the new larger scale in high density urethane foam. A surfacing compound was then applied to the foam model to smooth out the surface and to replicate the detail of the original. The surfacing compound dried into a thin coat of resin which was sanded and finished.

A mold was created from the foam model using urethane rubber and rigid resins. The mold was used to create a hollow resin casting. The casting material consisted of fiber reinforced polyurethane. The casting was soda blasted (which is like sandblasting except using baking soda rather than sand) to remove surface residue. Then the casting was sanded. Finally, the casting was painted with a combination of automotive urethanes and acrylics and finished with a urethane automotive clear coat.

(<https://writeconnexion.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/flock1.jpg>).

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GC: Could you tell us something about how you use the smaller figures? Do you sell them as separate artworks?

AM: Originally I created my sculptures to be used as props in my photographs. I take the sculptures into nature and photograph them, incorporating many natural elements into the composition and narrative. Eventually, I began exhibiting the smaller sculptures in addition to the photographs as separate artworks.

GC: Where can readers find you? (website, art galleries if any are exhibiting, or will be exhibiting in the future, Facebook???)

AM: My work is currently on view at the Deborah Colton Gallery, in Houston, TX. My work can also be viewed on my website at: www.andreamorganstern.com (<http://www.andreamorganstern.com/>).

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