

Press Release

For Immediate Release
Contact: Mary Jane Dean
Director of Communications
mjidean@museumsc.org
(707) 579-1500 x 101
Museum of Sonoma County
425 Seventh St
Santa Rosa, CA 95401
museumsc.org
Images below



Museum of Sonoma County presents *Art of Risk: The Innovative Sculpture of Michael Cooper*

December 10, 2022 – May 28, 2023

The Museum of Sonoma County (MSC) is pleased to present *Art of Risk: The Innovative Sculpture of Michael Cooper* from December 10, 2022 through May 28, 2023, in the Museum's contemporary art gallery.

Michael Cooper, a longtime resident of Sebastopol, makes art that exists in a space beyond categorization, at the intersection of fine art sculpture, innovative craft, engineering, and custom car design. MSC presents this major exhibition of Michael Cooper's work in keeping with our focus on North Bay artists and with the goal of highlighting Sonoma County based artists as part of a broader view of contemporary art.

Michael Cooper's work transcends convention and the historical movements of the art world and exemplifies the individualism, originality, and eccentric creativity for which Sonoma County is known. He is well known locally for his extraordinary contributions to MSC's annual *Artistry in Wood* exhibition of the Sonoma County Woodworkers Association. Beyond Cooper's woodworking talent, his sculptures consistently stand out for their inventiveness and unparalleled craftsmanship in wood, metalwork, and functioning engines. Executive Director and Art Curator Jeff Nathanson says of Cooper's work, "Although his sculpture demonstrates innovation in engineering, and superb mastery in wood and metal, Cooper has also used his sculpture to address themes such as the environment and gun violence. His pieces are at times whimsical, surprising, and occasionally, shocking. But his sculpture never fails to inspire examination into the complexities of how the work is made."

The technical brilliance of Cooper's work should be of interest to not only the art community, but also to students and all who are interested in the exploration of engineering, science, and to all who value creativity, invention, and originality.

About the artist:

Born in 1943 in Richmond, California, Michael Cooper is a multimedia sculptor whose works incorporate engineering, mechanics, and traditional craftsmanship. Initially hesitant to work in

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fine art – but fascinated with making, Cooper pursued a BA in commercial art and later a MA in sculpture at San Jose State College. While completing his MA, Cooper was introduced to Fletcher Benton and other influential artists. Cooper cites the exhibition “American Sculpture of the Sixties,” which featured the work of his new professor, as a professional turning point. Motivated by the exhibition, Cooper went on to complete his MFA in sculpture from UC Berkeley in 1969. After completing his MFA, Cooper was hired as a full-time art instructor in sculpture and drawing at Foothill College in Los Altos. He was hailed as a superb teacher and his 34-year career as a college art instructor continued at UC Berkeley, DeAnza College, and California College of the Arts. Cooper retired in 2004 and relocated to Sonoma County. Cooper work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions at galleries and museums internationally. He has been recognized with a fellowship in sculpture at the American Academy in Rome (1979 – 80), a fellowship at the Crafts Council of Australia (1979), and a Craftsman's Fellowship Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (1978). Michael Cooper was elected a Fellow of the American Craft Council in 2016.

To support this and other upcoming exhibitions contact: Deidre Hopp dhopp@museumsc.org
707.579.1500 ext 104.

Programs and Events

***The Art of Risk* Exhibition Opening**

Saturday, December 10, 2022

11 AM – 5 PM

Pay What you Wish all day at the Museum of Sonoma County

Reception for the artist

3-5 PM

Join us at the opening of our newest exhibition *Art of Risk: The Innovative Sculpture of Michael Cooper*. This solo exhibition exemplifies Cooper's individualism, innovation, and eccentric creativity for which Sonoma County is known. *Art of Risk* is an exhibition that should be of interest to not only the art community, but also to students and all who are interested in exploration of engineering, science, the environment, and to all who value creativity, invention, and originality. His sculpture demonstrates innovation in engineering, and superb mastery in wood and metal. Delve deeper into Cooper's artmaking; to understand the importance of how and why he has used his sculpture to address themes such as social justice, the environment, and gun violence. Michael Cooper uses unconventional materials to comment on topical concerns he finds to be critical to address and bring to his viewers. Michel Cooper himself will be on hand to meet visitors and answer questions.

This event is free for Members and pay what you wish for non-members. Light refreshments and beverages will be served.

Public programs related to the exhibition will be posted on our website:

www.museumsc.org/events

[About the Museum of Sonoma County](#)

Located in Downtown Santa Rosa on Seventh Street between A and B Streets, the Museum of Sonoma County (MSC) presents exhibitions of modern and contemporary art and local and regional history. MSC is open year-round with changing exhibitions, public programs, school tours, and special events. MSC preserves and manages a regional art and history collection of over 18,000 objects, the region's largest object documentation of Sonoma County's history and culture.

[Mission](#)

The Museum of Sonoma County engages and inspires our diverse community with art and history exhibitions, collections, and public programs that are inclusive, educational, and relevant.

[Smithsonian Affiliate](#)

The Museum of Sonoma County has been a Smithsonian Affiliate since 2009. Smithsonian Affiliations establishes long-term partnerships with museums, education, and cultural organizations to facilitate the loan of Smithsonian artifacts and traveling exhibitions, as well as to develop innovative educational collaborations locally and nationally. Created in 1996 by an act of the Smithsonian Board of Regents, the program is overseen by the Smithsonian's Assistant Secretary for Education and Access and is one of the pillars of the Institution's national outreach efforts. There are more than 200 Smithsonian Affiliates in nearly every state, Puerto Rico, and Panama. Affiliates represent the diversity of America's museum community—size, location, and subject—and serve all audiences. More than 8,000 Smithsonian artifacts have been displayed at Affiliate locations for the past 20 years.

[Admission](#)

Adults: \$7.00

Seniors, Students, Disabled: \$5.00

(discounted prices until Spring of 2023 when *Sonoma County Stories* opens)

EBT Cardholders: FREE

Museum Members: FREE

Children 12 and under: FREE

[Museum Hours](#)

Open: Wednesday through Sunday, 11:00am-5:00pm

Images (Click [HERE](#) for high-res images)



Ruby, 2010, 37H x 43 x 59", Laminated hardwoods, chromed and painted steel, anodized aluminum, Photo credit: Michael Chase



You Can Make Art of Almost Anything 2021, 71H x 53 x 69", Maple, Photo credit: Michael Chase



Tubester, 2001, 52 x 74 x 159", Modified 1935 Ford PU, steel, aluminum, wood, engine and mechanicals, paint, chrome, wheels, tires, Photo credit: Michael Chase



Ceiling Flapper, 1968, 67H x 72 x 28", Aluminum, wood, fabric, motors, plexiglass, Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California, Photo credit: Michael Chase



Chain Reaction, 2022, 30H x 71 (variable to 132) x 126" Laminated oak, steel, aluminum, plexiglass, 1910 Harley-Davidson engines, pneumatic system, bicycle wheels, tires, Photo credit: Michael Chase