



BEN ROTH ARTIST + CONSERVATIONIST

By Teresa Griswold

"Nothing makes me happier than when I'm making my art," Jackson-based artist Ben Roth says with a smile. He's stoked every day when he wakes up in Jackson Hole, finding pleasure in the creative process and in collecting found objects from which he can create his next art piece. When skiing or fishing vies for his time, he wakes up early to carve the first tracks on Glory or to take a float down the Snake before hunkering into his art studio. Monday nights are reserved for Tango dancing.

A vintage, classroom-sized green chalkboard covers a full wall in Ben's living room. The adjacent window opens to an expansive view of Flat Creek, the National Elk Refuge, and the distinctive silhouette of the Sleeping Indian. The chalkboard speaks to Ben's creativity, the window to his inspiration. As for the Igneous skis, long board and a yoga mat in the corner, they are there for balance.

Often, the chalkboard is covered with powdery-white sketches of what is destined to be Ben's next art piece. There is always a lengthy list of ideas scribbled in the top corner of the chalkboard, hinting at the meanderings of his creative mind. Occasionally, there is a message written by a grateful houseguest or local friend. The entries on the chalkboard are ephemeral. Ben's art is not.

His art is functional – and fun. He has created bike racks, gates, chimneys, tables, wall hangings, animal sculptures, bras (for a cause), paintings, tumbleweed Christmas trees, giant steamroller prints, and more in his 13 years as a fulltime artist in the valley. He most recently completed a topographical sculpture of the Tetons that is now housed in the second Stio Mountain Studio™ in Chicago's Bucktown neighborhood and brings a little mountain soul to the city life. The 5 feet by 30 inch tall sculpture was formed from steel screen and designed to be an accurate reflection of the majestic peaks near Stio's headquarters, reflecting the mountain lifestyle and Stio philosophy. Ben worked from topographical maps and Google Earth to capture all perspectives so his finished 3D rendering is accurate enough to showcase familiar climbing routes, trails and canyons.

Much of Ben's artwork can be viewed in public spaces in the valley. There is his bright yellow, seven-foot tall mushroom "growing" from

a lawn next to a busy street and park. At the swim center, his shiny aluminum manta rays float high above swimmers in the pool below. His animal-shaped bike rack at the National Museum of Wildlife Art welcomes bicyclists. He made the graceful deer along the pathway through town from hammered stainless steel and surplus spoon handles.

While his art makes Jackson's public spaces beautiful, it is meant to hit on conservation as subject matter. Often creating pieces from reclaimed material, Ben is able to show environmental impact through his art, giving voice to his conservation ethic. He once made a life-sized polar bear from a huge piece of Styrofoam. He fashioned an otter, Komodo dragon, and python from metal screens for a show called "Speciation". A 48 x 30 inch American flag is made from recycled bicycle chains – 100 bicycle chains – molded, welded, and patinaed to create the familiar icon.

Walking the walk, Ben bikes to his studio whenever possible – about eight months out of the year – in a town that can get snow year round. He tries to minimize waste, lives without a lot of luxuries, and essentially exists as softly as he can on the earth. If he hasn't worn a piece of clothing in six months to a year, he donates it to the local thrift store.

Consciously contributing to the community he loves, he is part of the open space council with the Jackson Hole Land Trust and serves on the board of the Teton Art Lab, which advocates for artists and provides subsidized studio space for working artists. He regularly works with kids on art projects through active volunteering at the National Museum of Wildlife Art.

Giving back has its rewards, but the best part of being an artist in a mountain town? "I don't get paid vacation, but I live in Jackson, so I get to go fishing."

Teresa Griswold is a writer and designer based in Jackson, Wyoming. A conservationist who relishes the wild, open, natural spaces of the valley, she is dedicated to preserving the environment through her writing and passionately pursues creative projects that inspire a healthier world.

