



DECEMBER 29 2023

Retired local investor contributes sculpture to town's 250th

Dec. 27, 2023 | Rich J. Wirth

WEST SPRINGFIELD — We all have the potential to move mountains, but it takes a creative visionary to build one.

In anticipation of West Springfield's 250th anniversary in 2024, a new abstract sculpture by late-life artist Harold Grinspoon, titled "Everest," was installed last month at the corner of Park and Elm streets near the town's Veterans Memorial.



"Everest," the newest sculpture by Harold Grinspoon to be installed in West Springfield, sits in the Town Common at Park and Union streets with "High Five," another Grinspoon work, behind it.

Photo credit: Madeline Calabrese

"Carly Camossi approached Mr. Grinspoon regarding what sculptures could be added to the commons area to help celebrate the town's 250th anniversary," said Madeline Calabrese, curator for Harold Grinspoon Art Works. "She wanted fun, lighthearted sculptures to fit in with the [impending] celebrations."

"Everest" is composed of more than 200 green glass floats from the Asian fishing industry. Sourced at the Brimfield Antique Flea Market, where Grinspoon often finds inspiration, the glass spheres were originally used to keep fishing nets afloat. "Everest" was featured in the SculptureNow 2023 exhibition this summer at The Mount, historical home of noted American author Edith Wharton, in Lenox.

"We love to work with locals to enhance our community, especially the downtown," said Camossi, the town's chief of operations and co-chair of the anniversary celebration. "With the 250th anniversary right around the corner, we thought 'Everest' would be a nice addition as we prepare for a year's worth of events."

Grinspoon's art evokes a sense of nostalgic familiarity and the joy for the beauty of a completely new form.

"Harold can process thoughts from many directions, and allows them to overlap or collide to form a new sculpture idea," Calabrese said. "He's always on the lookout for new components. Some he locates by attending the Brimfield Fair; or from friends that have collections of antique industrial machinery; or he spots them while out hiking or rafting. He wanders through the components in his work area or in his mind and creates combinations.

"The real 'fun' happens during assembly," she added. "All elements have intrinsic properties, and sometimes they don't want to do what you first imagined. The elements co-create with him to make the final outcome."

Visionaries come with unconventional resumes and scores of unique experiences. Grinspoon, 94, is the retired founder of West Springfield-based Aspen Square Management, a nationally recognized real estate investment and property management firm. After beating cancer 30 years ago, he and his wife, Diane Troderman, established the Harold Grinspoon Foundation in 1993. Since its founding, the philanthropic organization has dispersed more than \$110 million dollars to the Jewish world globally in programs, grants, and operations. Its flagship program, PJ Library, delivers more than 680,000 free Jewish books monthly to children in 32 countries. He also founded the Harold Grinspoon Charitable Foundation, which provides grants and awards supporting education, farming, and entrepreneurship in Western Massachusetts.

Art "is only a tiny part of where his energies go," Calabrese said.

Today, Grinspoon, who was born in Newton and lives in Longmeadow, is redefining retirement.

"In 2014, at the age of 84, I had a personal awakening, and began a third career as an artist," he said. "Something as simple as a large cherry tree falling in my backyard shifted my whole perception of life, mortality, immortality, beauty and form. For reasons I cannot fully explain, I did not want this downed tree removed from my yard. I wanted to transform it into a work of art. 'The Beauty of Nature' became my first sculpture, propelling me along an unstoppable path of creativity.

"In the years since, I have produced over 140 sculptures," he continued. "Many are large-scale exterior works made from reclaimed trees, branches, and driftwood, inspiring me to experiment with form, movement, and color. More recent sculptures include working with amber, reflective steel and glass spheres, acrylic and steel rods, and other objects."

Rather than selling each piece, Grinspoon loans them out — for a minimum of two years — and covers the installation costs himself. Several are now installed in public spaces across Massachusetts and nationally. Minerals, fossils and bones from Grinspoon's private collection are currently on display at the Museum of Science in Boston.

Another loaned sculpture on the West Springfield Town Common, "High Five," was created using reflective steel spheres that are separated by brightly colored acrylic tubes around flexible fiberglass that allow the piece to move with the wind. Grinspoon's goal in creating the piece was to elicit joy in the passersby who interact with it, Calabrese said.

The origins of "Everest" predate Grinspoon's acrylic and stainless steel sphere collection. The most recent version includes a large pyramid connected to a smaller pyramid by a "river" of glass spheres. It took almost two years of trial and error to come up with a stable structure for the larger 9- by 9- by 9-foot pyramid.

"The name was born out of the struggle, challenge, and perseverance [required] to make this mountain-like sculpture," Calabrese said.

Additional works on loan are located at the Eastern States Exposition, the intersection of Riverdale and Elm streets (near Tom's Launch), and the entrance to Mittineague Park.

New this year, Grinspoon started creating sculptures using old industrial machinery.

"Each sculpture or new series Harold creates is a brand-new research process, [be it] engineering stability, properties of the components, finishes, adhesives, or sourcing materials," Calabrese said. "His mind loves the challenges intrinsic to fashioning each sculpture."

His most recent creative endeavor is poetry, chronicling a long life well lived.

"I've spent a lifetime evolving as a person, attempting to grow and expand my thinking and capacity for caring and generosity and being present in the moment," Grinspoon said. "Art has ultimately been the gift that unlocked more understanding than I could have imagined. My work with materials that were once alive are being given a new life, and appreciating their beauty in a new way has allowed me to grapple with themes of mortality and immortality."