

Creative Creatures

The ideas and the work of the American and European painters, songwriters, photographers, fiction and non-fiction authors, musicians, film makers, architects, designers, poets, and dreamers I met during my 20 years in America.



#6 / Brian Bondy, multi-media artist, Abiquiu, New Mexico

He's a rock hound. He walks just like my dog Zowie (a bastard fox hound) with eager eyes fixed on the terrain and sniffing for whatever the earth may have to offer. He collects fossils and finds them everywhere, in Utah, in Arizona, and also on the prairie in Kansas. He lives in north-central New Mexico in the house on the Chama River where I spent more than a year in the late 1990s, when he was still living in Chicago. After he'd kicked me out of his house because it was *his* time to resettle in Abiquiu, we became good friends and incidental hiking companions. While he scouts the earth for its leftovers, I scan the horizon. He stumbles onto treasures that I never notice—but I get the greater picture...

Brian Bondy like his mother and brother has artist's blood and was a little creator at an early age. Nevertheless, after a few try-outs including his marriage to a Spanish woman nowadays indicated as "Black Lola," he became a software specialist for an international investment bank in Chicago. He is still doing that job but by now for fourteen years already as a telecommuter working from his Abiquiu home. The job—Brian is sort of a high tech first aid person, or rather an emergency room surgeon—leaves him ample opportunity to explore his creative talents. He addresses all media, works with tin and left-over wood and tamarisk; with low-energy clay; with acrylic paint and collected objects. Some of his sculptures he calls "cabinets" because one can indeed store something tiny in them; they have

extravagant shapes, though, which no one will associate with a cabinet, and a striking presence on any wall. Other sculptures he calls “bird houses” if only because they hang from the ceiling and have a wide open mouth where, indeed, a bird could enter to build a nest if it so wished. Most of these sculptures are molded from his daughter’s, or a friend’s, head; their reproduced hands are directly attached to the skull. Each sculpture has a new story to tell. They are painted and sometimes decorated with small objects. Most wonderful is the head on which the waves roll in, a golden whale or a dolphin jumps high, mother-of-pearl glistens and Mount Fiji appears in the distance; one of these hangs in my Matfield Green kitchen. Brian made a similar one for my surfer-nephew Mike with a surfboard for a tongue on which a bird could land. Other sculptures are called “strumpets.” Most of these are big-assed ladies in different stages of dress and undress and in poses that relate to the story they have to tell. There’s ‘Gustav’s Friend’ and ‘Venus on Break’ and ‘The Long Arm of the Law’, to name a few.

Brian is a collector—from old pipes to fossils, from layer chickens and ducks to “elderly” computers. The last ones he fixes up; he gives them a tune-up or whatever they call this in the electronic world, then donates them to kids in his village, not-for-profit organizations, or needy friends like me who can call him day and night and even when he is traveling for advice if their machine has blown up or just refuses to work at the pace demanded by these modern times. Brian talks us on the phone through the procedure to make us happy users again.

He also collects all kinds of after dinner liqueurs. Brian isn’t a drinker—I don’t believe he ever touched beer, and wine he sips a little but only to keep his table companions happy. But he has a weakness—no, a curiosity—for “the good stuff,” as I discovered years ago when after finishing dinner six bottles with mysterious fluids were put on the table including a couple of my favorite grappas from Italy. Now grappa is strong medicine even for an experienced consumer of alcoholic beverages, but Brian has built up quite a taste for this stuff made from the residue of wine grapes (trampled by the bare feet of dark-haired Italian strumpets, we dream). Its high percentage of alcohol, ever changing quality and sublime taste are decided by the kind of grapes used, the area of growing, and, of course, the cleanliness of the strumpets’ feet. Anyway, it is always a feast to dine with Brian and watch this ordinarily so temperate guy enjoy his latest discovery. He knows about cuisine and elegant dining, too, and makes a great dinner guest because he always starts doing the dishes before I even want to acknowledge they got dirty.

Brian has some trouble with his hips or knees, I always get confused what exactly; he received a few replacements recently. I forgot about these troubles or a broken ankle that was just healing each time we hiked together, did so in New Mexico, did so last year in Kansas—which means we were out on foot for three, four hours, up and down prairie hills, stumbling across rocky surfaces or through hip-high grasses in the heat, and sometimes having to battle ferocious winds. He never complained, he never slowed down, he just didn’t bother to remind me of his predicaments. Although we are now living 11 driving hours apart, I hope to continue to hike now and then with Brian. At the end of the day, the good food will be on the table, and after that, there’s always a little grappa to rejuvenate us. The “cabinet sculptures”—he wisely designed these just spacious enough to hide one or two ultra-slim bottles of grappa after they make their arrival straight from Italy.