

Wounded Buffalo: art or awful?

By Tom Vranich, Editor

Ever since Charlotte and Bob Streit placed sculptures of an arrow and hole filled buffalo, de-limbed gorilla and wounded grizzly bear at their Twisted Fish Gallery on U.S. 31 at the south end of Elk Rapids, they have received a wide variety of comments. "Some like it and some don't," said Bob Streit of the controversial pieces. He suggested the News contact the sculptures creator, Scott Hocking, so we accepted his invitation.

Hocking, from the Detroit area, enjoys expressing himself in a variety of mediums including photography and, more recently, sculpture. He especially enjoys industrial tinged installations, beginning his animal series last October.

"It's born from a specific project," he explained, "as commentary on art shows around the world where one town picks an animal." He mentioned towns he had seen that had "adopted" animals such as the bears and fish seen locally to decorate with pleasant colors and imagery.

"My reaction was that I didn't like the shows," Hocking said, rejecting the so-called positive qualities they reflect and revenue they generate. "In general, they are decorative and don't offend anyone," he pointed out, adding that there seemed to be a lack of contemporary public sculpture in the area pushing ideas.

"In Europe, art work is seen as a way to make comments," he said. "Chicago is more open, while in New York the sculptures would be something common." He said that in an art contest in an area like northern Michigan, the winner would usually be something that is going to be attractive and make money, or "digestible" as he labeled it.

As for the pieces he has on display at Twisted Fish, he had an "intention for irritation with where the public was headed," being desensitized to the true nature of what has in fact happened to each animal in their relationship with man. "They were altered true to history or the



Photo by Tom Vranich

Scott Hocking's Buffalo sculpture at The Twisted Fish Gallery makes a statement about the reality of the animal's plight.

present day, then painted to be digestible," Hocking commented.

He said that he drilled about 2,000 holes into the buffalo piece, after it was painted, to represent bullet holes representing over hunting by white hunters. He added far fewer arrows to represent the ratio of arrows from Native Americans, who preserved the herd for sustenance. "Between 1830 and 1880, 100's of thousands of buffalo were killed, which decimated the population," he said. "By the early 1900s, only about 300 were left."

Of the gorilla leaning against a tree facing a different direction than the buffalo, Hocking said that he is making the point of the reality of the bush meat trade in Africa. He hired a graffiti artist that will remain unnamed to paint the grizzly bear seen with its paw gnawed off as a symbol

of how they were harvested in remote areas. "It's not about animal rights," Hocking stated. "It's about reality."

He referred to a cow piece he created that is painted like a globe and "mutilated" by aliens, bringing in conspiracy theories as an example of his provocative style.

"It's not out there for people to be thrilled," he concluded. "Others will find it mean and cruel, while others will investigate it to be understood."

Twisted Fish owner Bob Streit reported that reaction to the piece at first was mostly negative, with more positive reactions more recently, once people better understand the artist's perspective. To see more of Scott Hocking's art, visit www.scotthocking.com.