

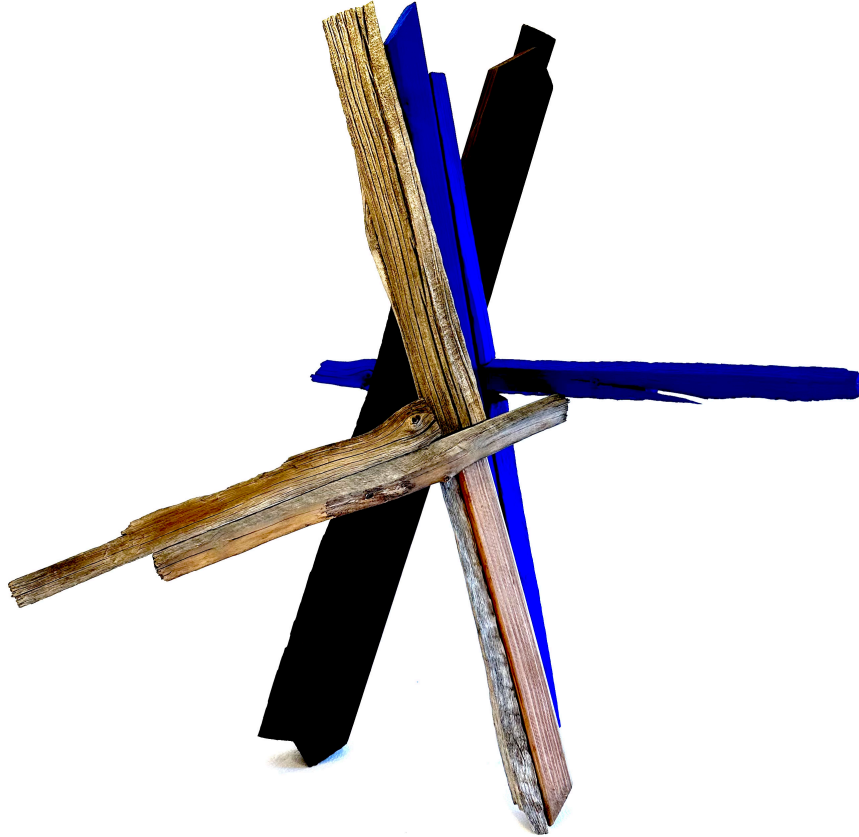


Yarrott Benz

K E A D Y V I L L E

Essay by Leonard Folgarait

A Suite of Ten Sculptures



KEADYVILLE 30 x 23 x 28"

Keadyville

This object presents itself as autobiography. Not of the artist, but of itself. It tells its own story in a non-linear, seemingly incoherent and unresolved fashion, but is insistent that that life story it tells is truly its own and must be accepted as such. Normal rules don't apply.

The wood seems to come from some manufactured state, perhaps pieces of discarded furniture, remnants of a former life, but also at times seems like wood in a raw state only partially worked and perhaps discarded before finding a home in finished woodwork. All the individual pieces of wood are in a state of abjection, rejection, homelessness. That anxiety of rootlessness has brought them together into some makeshift semblance of connection, of belonging, the pieces barely joined, but joined by some unnamed impulse toward the collective. This collective exists despite seemingly disparate states of origin of the individual pieces, different colors and textures, and states of finish.

The autobiography so far seems to be about origins of displacement and trauma, but now joined in some state of mutual support. But how did this story start?

Do the pieces that look most raw suggest that they existed first, before others that look painted or stained? Some pieces have white paint that is either starting to be applied or has worn off through use. Do the ones that offer jagged and perhaps burned edges suggest the end of a lifespan, now barely hanging on? And yet all these suggestions of occupying separate periods of time and existence all now **co-exist**, insist on occupying the same time.

And why shaped as they are, standing on three points, suggesting a vertical orientation? But surely the entire structure can be tipped to stand on other points, in a handful of other possibilities of standing. This particular position therefore seems arbitrary, not in a confused sense, but in a sense of opening up other options of standing, of being.

As for the colors, we seem to have raw wood, some painted in parts, some painted all blue or all brown. Let's look at the all-blue parts for a second and realize that they might not be made of wood at all, that they might be made, indeed, of the color blue itself, blue not as applied pigment but as the only material present, blue from inside out, shaped like but actually not wood. The same phenomenon applies to the brown parts, not wood but just brown. Are these materials of pure pigment natural or not, as strong or weaker than wood, younger or older in age, formed by humans or by their own will?

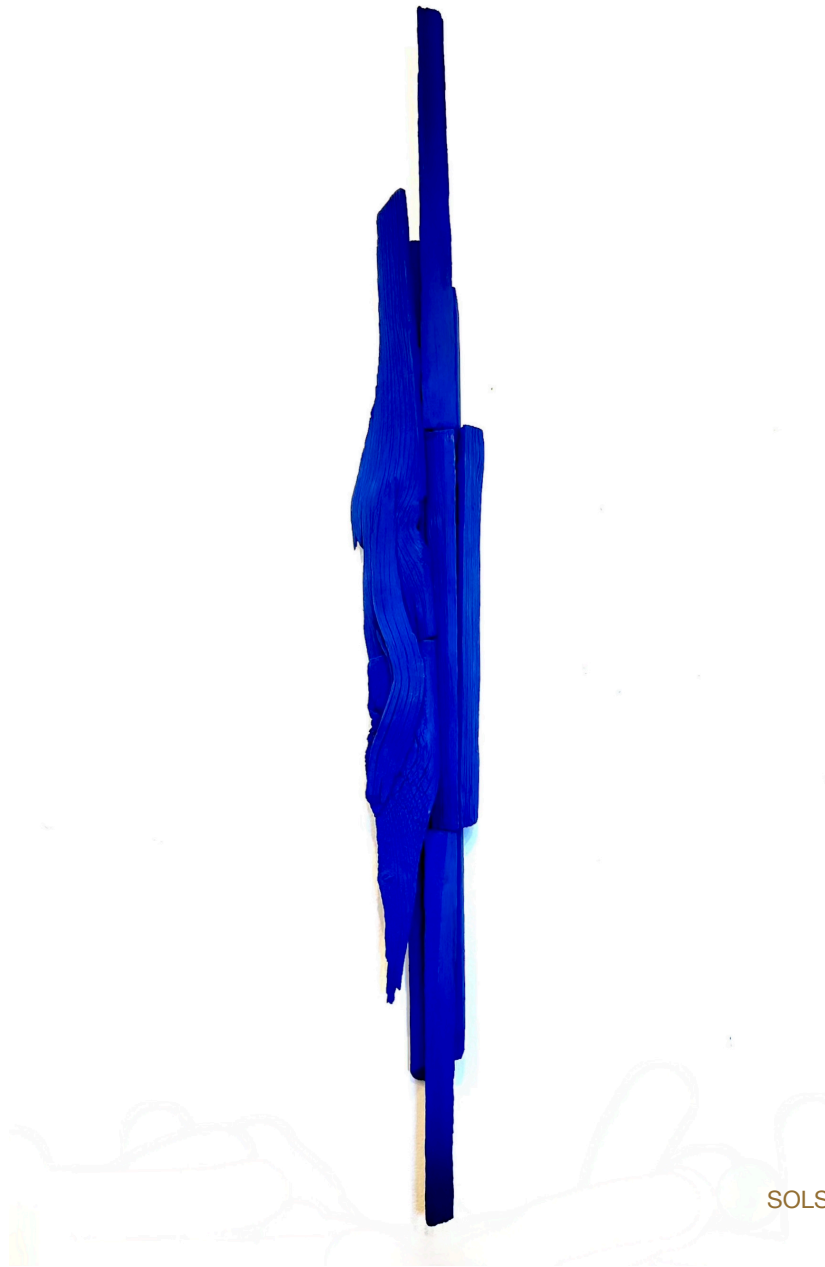
The central suggestion of these remarks is that as abstract and non-linear and incoherent as some contemporary art seems to be, that it seems intent upon confusing and confounding its viewers, this object actually works toward real and human meaning by insinuating openings into the creative process such that the viewer may accept these invitations to ponder how our human condition, even in its social and political dimensions, might be grasped more convincingly by abstract rather than by realistic art. Realistic art tells us **what** to think; abstract art welcomes us to ponder **how** we think.

In pondering the **how** of human thought, we realize that we need not accept the world of binary oppositions imposed upon us by conventional society, that we do not need to accept either only male or female, only black or white, poor or rich, democrat or republican. By accepting the challenges of this object on the apparent non-linear narrative that it tells about itself, that normal up and down do not matter, that what seems to be wood might actually be blue, that a discarded status might end up as the conceptual glue that holds this grouping of materials together, that weakness leads to strength, we might realize voices of salvation and success might come from the most unlikely places, and that we need to see and hear possibilities of resolution and recovery from the most unexpected voices, from sticks of material coming together to insist that there are viable alternatives after all.

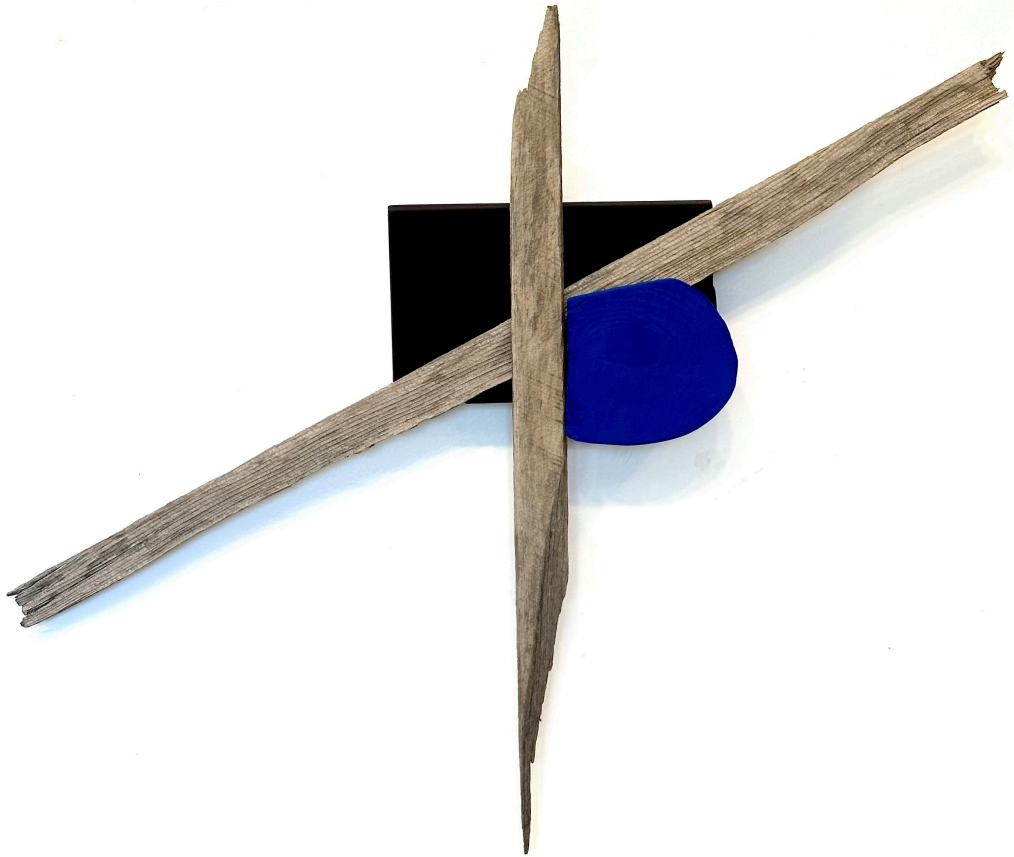
Finally, this as autobiography means that it is ultimately up to each of us to decide what terms of our life are worth telling and sharing and how to tell that story. We can decide what is up and down in this object, what is left and right, what is wood and what is not, what is the logic that works against worn-out rules, and how the simple act of placing this in our living spaces can change the quality of life itself.

Disparate and separated elements and episodes can be brought together by autobiographic memory, as we recall both trivial and profound moments and people of our past in a non-linear and sometimes discordant manner, seeking some harmonic resonance, even if barely connected by willfulness. As tree limbs, driftwood, debris of furniture, and human skeletons can be disassembled, so can they be reassembled, but not in any fully reconstructed manner, only an approximation of one. However, the will and need to reassemble, to reconnect, to recover, cannot be denied, and sometimes the attempt is enough, and the object of such an attempt will trigger our deeper imagination to complete the repair, to our full satisfaction.

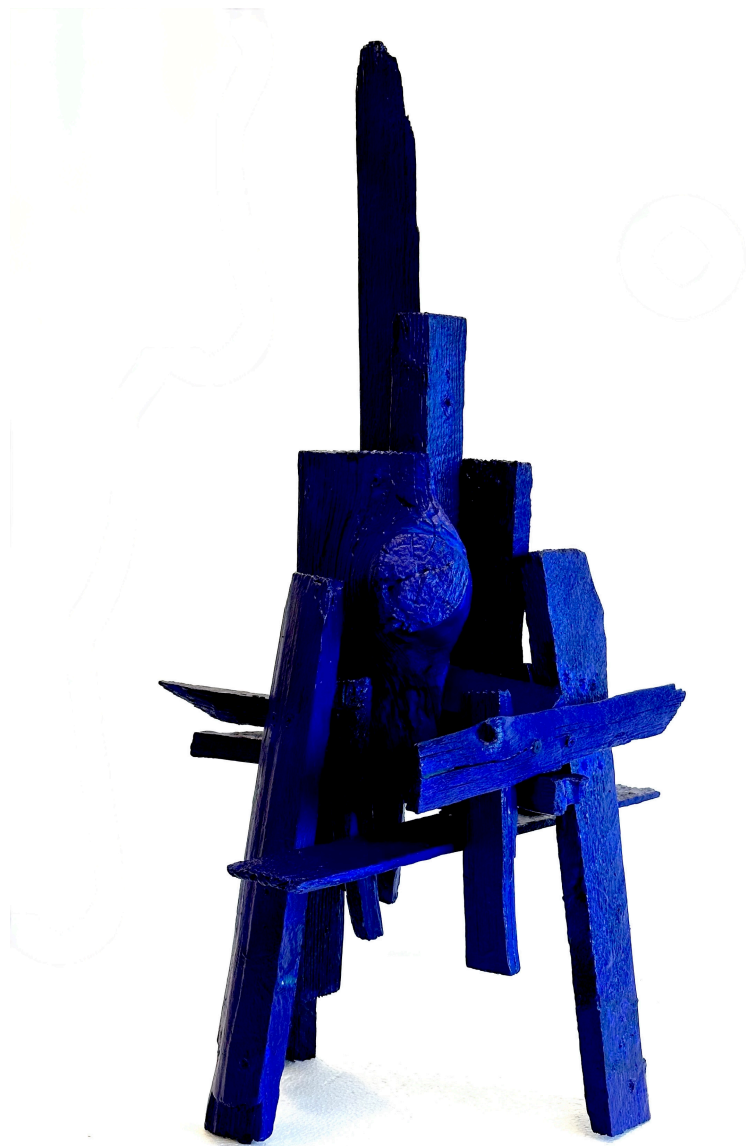
Leonard Folgarait
Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History of Art and Architecture,
Vanderbilt University



SOLSTICE 46 x 6 x 3"



PLEASANT HILL 31 x 26 x 5"



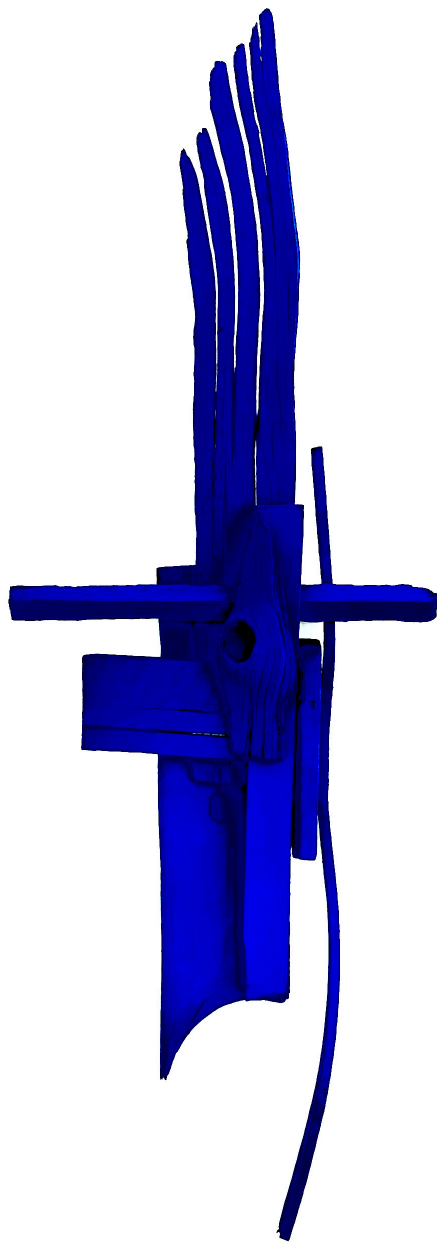
MEETINGHOUSE 30 x 19 x 12"



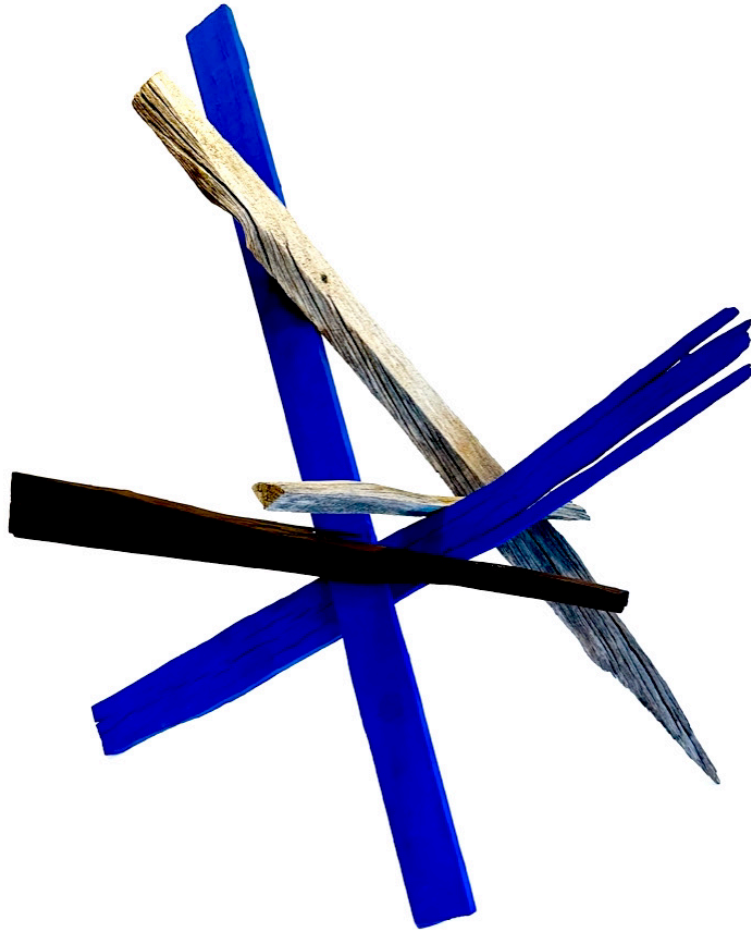
CARROWCUBIC 34 x 4 x 2"



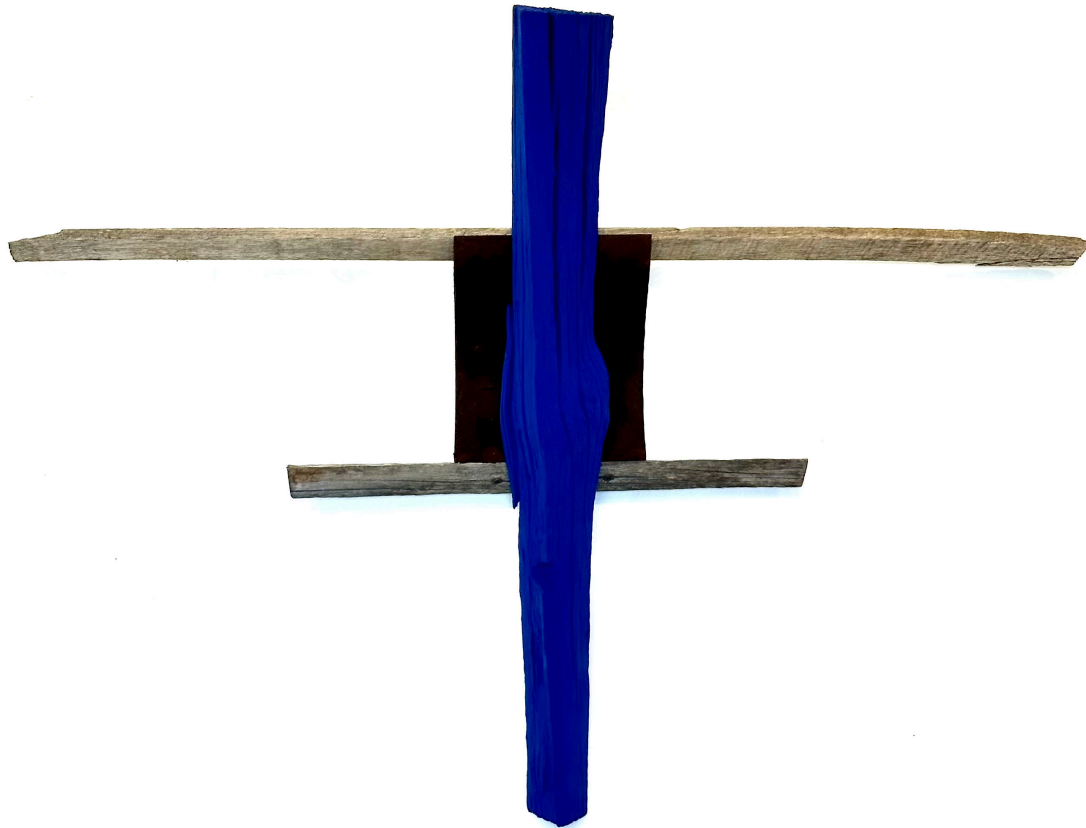
HARVEST 15 x 15 x 3"



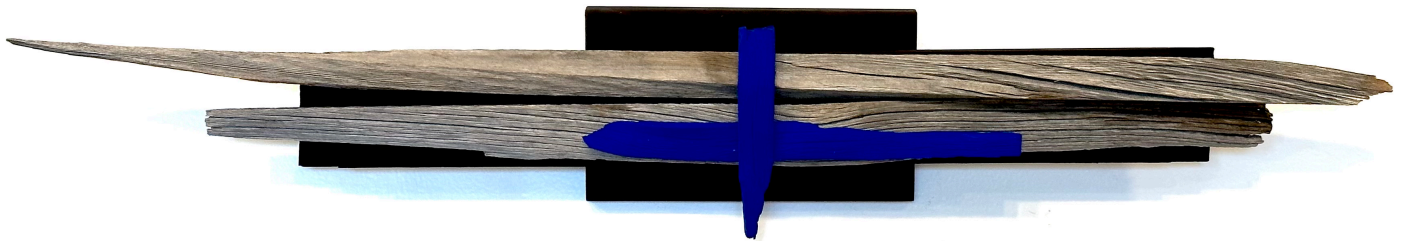
BLUE LARIAT 46 x 16 x 4"



DUNMAR COTTAGE 26 x 25 x 20"



MOTHER ANN 24 X 31 X 6"



High Bridge 7 x 40 x 5"

Biography

Yarrott Benz, writer and artist, was born in 1954 to a family with German roots in Nashville. His father was a surgeon and professor of medicine at Vanderbilt University, his mother was a nurse, and two of his three siblings became medical professionals. While sciences figured prominently in his family as he was growing up, visual arts instead came more instinctively to him. It was also in his DNA. His great grandfather Maximillian Benz (1848-1932) was a noted furniture designer, inventor and cabinet maker trained in Germany's Black Forest, arriving in Nashville in time for reconstruction after the Civil War. Maximillian left behind in Germany another consequential designer in the family, his first cousin Karl Benz (1844-1929), considered the inventor of the world's first automobile and the founder of the company bearing his family's name.

Benz received a BA degree in art history from Vanderbilt in 1976, and BFA and MFA degrees from the University of Pennsylvania in 1980, studying with sculptors Robert Engman and Maurice Lowe, painters Alex Katz and Neil Welliver, and visiting artist Isamu Noguchi. After living in Italy for several years, where he was an assistant to sculptor Beverly Pepper at her studio in Todi, he later opened his own studio in Ancona on the Adriatic Coast.

He has exhibited sculpture, painting and photography in solo exhibitions in Italy, New York, Philadelphia, and Nashville. Articles about his work have appeared in *The New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, among other publications in the United States, Italy and Australia, and he has been the subject of interviews on NPR's program *Fresh Air*, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, and ARD, German public radio.

In the early 1990s, Benz was an activist with Visual AIDS in New York City, and he was one of seven colleagues who designed and implemented the iconic and ubiquitous red ribbon, arguably the world's most recognizable symbol of AIDS activism and support. A year earlier, he had led the Visual AIDS committee for *Night Without Light*, extinguishing the lights of buildings, monuments and bridges in New York City for fifteen minutes on World AIDS Day to reflect on the devastating impact of AIDS

For twenty-seven years he taught and chaired the departments of visual art at both Friends Seminary in New York City and Sierra Canyon School in Los Angeles. As a result of the successful architecture programs he developed at both schools, he was commissioned by the National Architectural Trust in 2005 to write *Building Blocks: A Curriculum on Architecture*. Several of his students in architecture and photography have gone on to achieve prominence in their fields.

He authored the memoir *The Bone Bridge: A Brother's Story* (Dagmar Muira, Publisher), which met with enthusiastic reviews and received an Independent Publishers Award (IPPY) gold medal in 2016. Vinton Rafe McCabe wrote in the *New York Journal of Books*: "The Bone Bridge is a book that deserves a large and appreciative audience for the simple reason that it is the best memoir written in recent years, one that hits the reader like a punch to the gut and leaves him, in turns, devastated, inspired, traumatized, and enlightened."

Since 2020 Benz has lived near Santa Fe, New Mexico with his husband, Jeroen Jurg.

Exhibitions / Representation (selected)

2005 - 2021

Jayne Baum Gallery, NYC

2002

Oregon, solo exhibition, Degan Scharfman Gallery, NYC

2001

Degan Scharfman Gallery, NYC

Leslie Lohmann Gallery, NYC

2000

Degan Scharfman Gallery, NYC

1999

A Field Apart, solo exhibition, Degan Scharfman Gallery, NYC

Great Photography of the Twentieth Century, Curated Invitational to benefit
GHMC, NYC

Denise Bilbro Fine Art, NYC

1997

Three Artists, Mary Anthony Gallery, NYC

1992

East Village Portraits, group exhibition, PS 122 Gallery, NYC

Bitter-Larkin Gallery, NYC

1990

New York/Nashville, with artist Red Grooms, Metro Arts Commission,
Nashville Downtown Gallery

1988

Ten Times Twelve: A Decade of Fleisher Artists, Samuel Fleisher Art Memorial of the
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Storm Turning, solo installation, New York University

Confessions, solo exhibition, Red Column Studio, Philadelphia

1987

Objet D'art, juried exhibition, Moore College of Art, Philadelphia

Animals in Art, solo exhibition, Cadme Gallery, Philadelphia

Atlanta Biennial, juried exhibition, Nexus Center for Contemporary Art

1986

East Coast juried exhibition, Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, Hempstead, NY,
juried by NYTime's Grace Glueck and Bernice Steinbaum

In the Animal Kingdom Come, solo installation in the Sheridan Building,
Philadelphia

1985

A Common Purpose, permanent solo installation, The American Red Cross
Mid-South Headquarters Building, Nashville

Three person show, Butcher-Young Gallery, Philadelphia

1984

Group exhibition, Nexus Gallery, Philadelphia

Testimonial, permanent installation, Hospital Corporation of America,
National Headquarters Building, Nashville

1983

Challenge Exhibition Series, solo exhibition, Samuel Fleisher Art Memorial of the
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Ghost Armada, temporary site-specific 300 foot long installation on the Port of
History Museum, Penn's Landing, Philadelphia

1982

Sculture da Parete, Galleria del Falconiere, solo exhibition, Ancona, Italy

Group exhibition, Galleria La Polena, Genoa, Italy

Altari, Galleria di Franco Cicconi, solo exhibition, Macerata, Italy

Fire Scaffolds, temporary hillside solo installation, Inteatro Festival, Polverigi, Italy

1981

The Faculty Club, University of Pennsylvania, solo exhibition, Philadelphia

Bibliography (Selected)

New York Journal of Books, "The Bone Bridge: A Tremendous Achievement, A Work of Truth" by Vinton Rafe McCabe, March, 2015

Lambda Literary Review, "Yarrott Benz: On Revisiting a Harrowing Adolescence", by Christopher Bram, April 30, 2015

Publication of *The Bone Bridge: A Brother's Story*, Dagmar Muira publisher, March, 2015

Interview, ARD German Public Radio, interviewer Jan Tussing, December 1, 2013

The Montreal Review, "The Heart of Florence", January, 2013

Gulf Stream Magazine, "Wars", May, 2013

Vintage Magazine, "Blue Pictures from Los Angeles", June, 2010

Art & Understanding, "Stolen Lives: Yarrott Benz's Snapshot of Loss", Lester Strong, June, 2001

Blue Magazine (Australia), "Moving Pictures: Yarrott Benz", Richard Waller, January, 2001

Art & Understanding, "Writing a History of Tears", Lester Strong, January, 2001

Great Photography of the Twentieth Century, catalogue, curated exhibition to benefit Gay Men's Health Crisis, 1999

The New York Times, "One Historical Place Swapped for Another", Barbara Whitaker, May 10, 1998

Art at Friends: Today, Catalogue by Michael Kimmelman, April, 1992

New York Magazine, "Fast Track: Heart of Darkness", Stephen Dubner,
December 17, 1990

The Philadelphia Inquirer, "Rethinking Traditions", Stephen Salisbury,
August 14, 1990

Art and Antiques, "Titans and Tornadoes", Andrew Boynton, December, 1986

The New York Times, "A Show that Explores the Contemporary", Phyllis Braff,
November 9, 1986

The Philadelphia Inquirer, "Yarrott Benz's 'In the Animal Kingdom Come'",
Edward J. Sozanski, July 16, 1986

The Philadelphia Inquirer, "Three Artists at Fleisher", Edward J. Sozanski,
December 15, 1983

The Philadelphia Inquirer, "Sculpture at Penn's Landing", Edward J. Sozanski,
July 8, 1983

Fresh Air, interviewer Julie Burstein, National Public Radio, WHYY Radio, Philadelphia,
July 12, 1983

The Philadelphia Inquirer, "Modern Sculpture Goes Up in A Big Way",
July 28, 1983

Inteatro 82, Velia Papa and Roberto Cimetta, editors, Edizione delle Marche,
July, 1982

Il Resto del Carlino, "E intanto uno scultore degli Stati Uniti propone una fontana per Piazza
Monina", Franco Elisei, August 6, 1982

Interview, Televisione Rete Quattro, Italian state television, interviewer Gianni del Morro,
August 17, 1982

Il Corriere del Adriatico, "Yarrott Benz: Uno scultore che ha trovato nelle Marche
l'ambiente ideale per la sua vena artistica", Stefania Aracci,
October 31, 1982

Il Resto del Carlino, "A fuoco le sculture di Benz", Franco Elisei, July, 24, 1982

Interview, Radio Arancia, Ancona, Italy. Interviewer Franco Elisei, July 24, 1982

The Daily American, Rome edition, "The Fire Scaffolds by American Artist Yarrott Benz",
John Francis Lane, July 12, 1982

The Tennessean, "Three Exhibitions in Italy of Yarrott Benz", Clara Heironymous,
July 10, 1982

www.yarrottbenz.com

info@yarrottbenz.com

Copyright 2023 Leonard Folgarait All rights reserved.

Copyright 2023 Yarrott Benz All rights reserved.