

Featured Artist: Sue Anne Foster

By Melani Grube



1 Sue Anne Foster and her sculpture, "OM"

It's a sunny, mild day in February which is unusual, but lucky for me, as I am meeting with artist Sue Anne Foster outside the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento. We've met here to visit her sculpture, "OM", in person. It is set outside the buildings in an expanse of lawn and trees.

The term “Om” is said to be the primordial sound of the universe in Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Her sculpture is a circular, metal disc with a smaller circle cut out of it, three vertical rods that push upwards and a curved band that tops off the disc.

Sue Anne tells me that the small, circular cut-out is off-center, but the piece is about balance. The three vertical pieces thrust upwards with energy, but the curved band keeps the lid on. A path leads to and around the sculpture. We can see the winding path through the circular cut-out continue on and beyond.

Sue Anne says, “We are compelled to exercise patience and compassion while we seek personal and collective solutions.”



2 Sue Anne Foster's sculpture, "OM", as seen through the windows of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

Sue Anne Foster's path has led her on a winding journey and it is reflected in her art and in her demeanor.

I ask her about her first memorable encounter with art. Sue Anne tells me it was with her mother who had them make raffia owls out of packing materials. From the very start, she learned to re-purpose cast-off materials for creating art. Now her artwork recycles found objects and other materials into sculpture.



3 Sue Anne Foster and her sculpture, "ROLREX", created from discarded blood pressure gauges (the eyes) and old watches (the collar).

Sue Anne also tells me that her father worked with her a lot with tools. In her adult life, she went on, to take classes, along with her friend, artist Anne Bradley, in casting and welding metal. Sue Anne would go on to create many of her sculptures in metal, such as "OM".

Sue Anne has had four two-woman shows with Anne Bradley and they have set up many sculpture exhibitions together.



4 Sue Anne Foster and Anne Bradley

I ask Sue Anne to tell me about her work with the Peace Corps in Uganda, East Africa.

"I graduated from Kansas State University with a BS in interior design and worked as an interior designer in Topeka then in Chicago. The experience and culture shock moving from rural Kansas to inner city Chicago opened my mind and expanded my awareness of ethnic diversity and being a minority in the neighborhood where I lived. Interior design was my ticket to be there while I became less naive. I witnessed discrimination, political corruption, and gang violence and also met amazing new people, saw dedicated attempts to address community restoration. I was there for the riots, the democratic national convention and assassinations of Martin Luther King & Bobby Kennedy."

"These things and more made joining the Peace Corps a safer adventure?, so after two years of helping people arrange their floor plans, coordinate colors and buy furniture, I was accepted to be a teacher in Uganda, East Africa. Another rich cultural learning experience fraught with contrasts: amazing plants and animals, eager students and gentle people, other Volunteers and primitive living (no stores with tons of things to buy) tribal conflicts, Independence from England /Indian dominated businesses. What was in 1969 the most stable country in Africa, by 1972 when we were pulled out of the country With the military coup of Idi Amin ...it became perhaps the least stable."



5 Sue Anne Foster and her sculpture, "Let Your Hair Down", made with Tiki torches (body parts), copper wire (the hair), and covered in copper repousse.

Sue Anne went on to achieve a Masters in Art with a focus on Art Therapy, and receive her PhD. in Education when she returned home to the U.S.

Sue Anne Foster's influence in the art world ranges from art teacher to art therapist to art community leader. She has taught both in public schools through the Sacramento Metro Arts Commission's program, Artist in the Schools, as well as in the university setting, as professor and lecturer at California State Universities, Sacramento and Chico, and at American River College.

And Sue Anne studied art therapy at Good Samaritan hospital in Ohio. She then moved to California and worked for two years at Kings View Private Psychiatric Hospital in Reedley near Fresno. She moved to Stockton to be the first Visual Arts Director of the Alan Short Center, a new program providing music, art and poetry for adults with disabilities.

In the art community, Sue Anne curated the first exhibition and competition to repurpose solar panels into art with the Sacramento Metropolitan Utilities District. She has served as president of the Valley Sculpture Artists for three years and served on the board of the Sacramento Fine Arts Center. And we're proud to point out that Sue Anne is also a member of the Creative Arts League of Sacramento.



6 Sue Anne Foster and her sculpture, "The Guardian", on display at the Sacramento Municipal Utilities District. This piece is made from two repurposed solar panels and the arms turn, making it interactive. Inside the arms are threaded rods with washers that fall up and down making a visual and audible effect. It has since been converted into a wine rack.

Sue Anne noted two artists who were major influences on her art. The first, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, an Austrian-born New Zealand artist, worked in environmentalism and was known for his use of bright colors and organic forms.

The second, Ken Morrow, was an art professor she worked alongside with at CSU Chico. After his passing, Sue Anne put on a show of his paintings and sculptures at the Sacramento Fine Arts Center.

Sue Anne's personal journey has taken her across the globe to the Soviet Union with Grandmothers for Peace and led her through her inner realms as she battled breast cancer and then, went on to climb a mountain in Argentina in her 50's with a group of cancer survivor.



7 Tibetan monks creating a sand mandala

Sue Anne opened her doors to a group of traveling Tibetan monks for several weeks, and watched them construct a sand mandala. She then arranged for the Crocker to have them back for a 9-day demonstration of traditional sand mandala creation. The Crocker experienced record attendance during this time. The event culminated in a ceremony including chanting and horn-blowing, then sweeping the sand mandala into jars with a procession of people carrying it to the river. Sue Anne explained that it symbolized the value of impermanence, of fully experiencing the present moment and then, letting it go.



8 The sand mandala created by the Tibetan Monks

She currently lives in Carmichael, California, with her husband, Gary, also an artist and a retired teacher. Sue Anne says, “He’s been so supportive. He’s the only kind of person I could have been married to.”

They have two grown daughters, one of whom is also an artist and lives in Australia. Their other daughter works in commercial property management and lives in Sacramento, CA. Sue Anne is also happy to dote over and spoil her many, many pets.

Sue Anne’s artwork can be seen at galleries and art centers in the greater Sacramento region. A large quantity of her artwork is on display at the High Hand Art Gallery in Loomis, California, where she has been a member for ten years.



9 Sue Anne Foster and her sculpture, "Pipe Dreams" repurposes the old pipes from a pipe organ from a church in Oak Park, CA.

Sue Anne's newest sculpture, "Pipe Dreams" re-purposes the wooden pipes from an old organ from a church in Oak Park, CA. We visit the sculpture at the Magnum Opus Show at the Sacramento Fine Arts Center, where "Pipe Dreams" has been awarded the NCA 2019 Innovation Award.



10 Sue Anne Foster getting a card from her sculpture for recording a pipe dream on.

“Write down your pipe dream,” Sue Anne hands me a small card and pen. Then, she has me slip it into the opening of one of the organ pipes. As the card falls the length of the pipe, it triggers a recording of organ music to play.

I think of her “OM” sculpture with its view of the winding path beyond and of the winding path of Sue Anne’s life.

Sue Anne says, “You don’t know. Though it’s highly unlikely, some pipe dreams do come true.”



11 A detail photo of Sue Anne Foster's sculpture, "Pipe Dreams", which won the NCA 2019 Innovation Award.