



The Humboldt Arts Council
in the Morris Graves Museum of Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Date:

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Exhibition Headline: *John McAbery Magic, Music and Motion*

Exhibition Dates: July 29 –September 24

Reception Date: First Saturday Night Arts Alive, August 5, 6 to 9 p.m.

Museum Hours: Wednesday - Sunday 12 p.m. - 5 p.m.

John McAbery lives and works on a remote and rugged stretch of the northwest coast. His home is a small handmade cabin without electricity or telephone. His workspace is a small table with a vise attached, a few hand tools and nothing else. "Simplicity and serenity are important to me. Power tools and telephones are incompatible with my style of living."

John's sculptures, however, are anything but simple. His free flowing creations are all carved by hand from solid blocks of windfall California bay laurel, sometimes weighing over 100 pounds. The finished sculptures can weigh as little as 4 ounces. "I enjoy working with bay laurel. It is a fast growing native hardwood, both tough and flexible, with a tightly interlocking grain. The colors in the wood move independently of the grain, so I never know exactly how this will influence the finished piece." Out of respect for the environment, John only uses aged logs from trees that have fallen naturally. John and his partner, Gretchen Bunker, also grow and plant native trees in the local watershed.

To begin the process, John uses ribbons, clay or foil to create a three dimensional model of the sculpture. He also uses seaweed and shells found on the beach as models. The design is drawn on both sides of the block and the carving begins. "I have to remove a lot of wood before I can actually see how the sculpture will flow together. It is like searching for a hidden treasure."

John uses a Japanese keyhole saw to rough out his piece. Then he continues to refine the sculpture using smaller keyhole saws, gouges and microplanes. After many days of cutting and shaping, a rough sculpture finally emerges from the block. John uses sandpaper in successive grits to continue refining every twist and curve. The piece is finish sanded down to 600 grit, then polished with a blend of beeswax and carnauba. When John is carving, he doesn't play it safe. "I like challenging both the wood and my abilities. I break a few, but it is all part of the learning process. Every piece I do teaches me something new. So although my tools remain the same, my approach and application are always evolving, which is what really makes carving fun. What I learn is much more important than what I create."

The beauty and power of John's natural surroundings inspire many of his designs. "The coast is alive, full of magic, music and motion. Some of that is bound to show up in my work." John's peaceful lifestyle in such a pristine setting and his passion for carving are an inspiration to many.

The Morris Graves Museum of Art, located at 636 F Street, Eureka is open to the public noon-5p.m., Wednesday through Sunday. Museum admission is by donation: \$4 for adults, \$1 for seniors age 55 and older; HAC Members and children age 12 and under are admitted free. Admission is always free for everyone during each First Saturday Arts Alive!, 6-9 p.m.

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