

BIG IDEAS

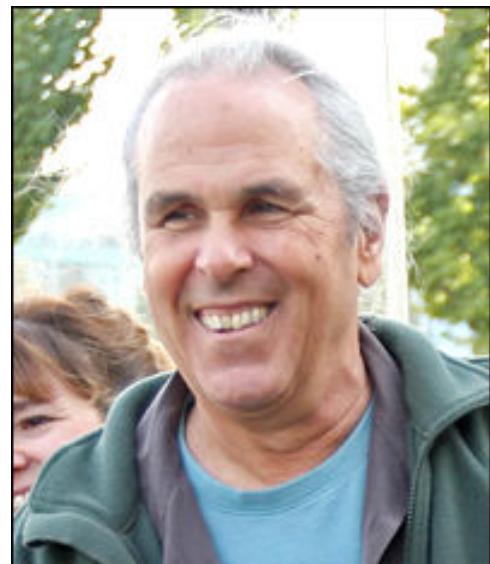
HUMAN STRUCTURES VANCOUVER Jonathan Borofsky (Maine, USA)

"In all of my work, I seek to convey the feeling that everything is connected." – Jonathan Borofsky

WHO MADE THIS ART INSTALLATION?

For American artist Jonathan Borofsky, his role as an artist is to explore questions about human life, the collective consciousness of humanity, and remind us of our connections to one another as we build our world together. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, he has been studying art from professional instructors since the age of 9, first in the medium of oil painting in his youth. In 1964 he received his BFA from Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, with a specialty in painting and sculpture. Two years later he completed

his MFA in sculpture from Yale School of Art and Architecture in New Haven, Connecticut. His large-scale work was interactive, multi-media installations and he often incorporated spiritual themes and ideas around the human psyche during a time when Pop Art and Minimalism had been dominant movements in the Western Art world in those years. His works drew from dreams, self-portraits, media and technology. Some were interactive with the audience, others used video and light projections, and he referenced historical figures like Dali, Picasso and Elisabeth Taylor. Through the 1970s and 80s, Borofsky became a key artist in the growing 'installation art' movement. Installation art is many objects that connect together in a room, space or environment, rather than a single object or sculpture. His works were layered and inventive, and he viewed all art in those years as a kind of self portrait. His works were shown around the world including New York, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis to Tokyo, Rotterdam, and Stockholm.



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Since 1990, he has lived in Ogunquit, Maine, and shifted his focus from smaller works inside galleries to large scale work outdoors. Over the past 20 years he has devoted his practice to creating large-scale public works that have been displayed around the world. So far over 35 works have been realized, including the 30-meter tall Molecule Man standing on the Spree River in Berlin, the 21-meter tall Hammering Man in Frankfurt and Seattle. The theme of the worker, the laborer, is familiar and accessible to the viewer passing by, a role they can all relate to, especially those who work and create with their hands. His 30-meter tall Walking To The Sky in Seoul, South Korea captivate, as the eye marvels at the human figures that seem to be walking up into the clouds, walking together into the unknown. His works often incorporate the human form, emphasizing and exploring our interconnectedness. His ideas in this phase of his career are distilled down to accessible ideas that resonate easily with viewers, regardless of language or cultural differences. Whether an art lover or a passing jogger sees his art, a politician or student, he wants the nature of his public works and the ideas they symbolize to be understood and digestible for any audience.



Outside the walls of the gallery he hopes to reach across demographics with his art, and create work that resonates with the public specifically in public places—their public setting is key to his choice of communicating ideas relating to humanity and our interconnections to one another. He intentionally narrowed the focus of his ideas compared to his work in the 1970s and 80s in order to make public art that would appeal to diverse audiences, city councils, communities and all those who are involved with the support of public art. Creating art for public spaces is different, he feels, than working in solitude in the studio. Instead his work takes into consideration a very different, super human scale, outdoor setting, surrounding architecture and daily public engagement. Not all art succeeds on a monumental scale, but Borofsky has devoted the last 20 years to exploring and creating precisely for this unique sector of the art world, embracing the challenges of congested cities and diverse publics with each large scale work he creates. His work has been met with support in countries worldwide, with projects proposed

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in sites Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Japan, Korea, and the U.S. No matter the local language, political climate or cultural differences of the cities where his work has been shown, his human centered ideas and messages continue to transcend barriers, and to engage audiences.

WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS ART INSTALLATION?

This work continues his ongoing work with the figurative form and the connections of humanity. He has adapted his human figures in many other public works too, including running figures, dancers, molecule men, stick figures, and figures with briefcases. This *Human Structures Vancouver* work connects with his Molecule Man and Walking to the Sky sculptures, and of course, in the series of Hammering Man sculptures (his symbol for the worker in all of us) that are all hammering together in different locations around the world. The modular construction of this *Human Structures Vancouver* tower of forms offers the possibility that it is not finished, that—as in life—we continue to build something together, each of us, piece by piece. As with all of his figurative installations, the viewer can immediately relate to, and identify with his works as we see ourselves in the human forms. Borofsky intentionally plays with archetypes of the human form, not individual people or portraits because archetypes can symbolize anyone and everyone, inviting the viewer to engage with the human forms they see before them.



Human Structures Vancouver is part of a series that includes similar pieces in Beijing and San Francisco. All the figures are human scale. The setting and context where each of Borofsky's works is shown influences his choices, and he takes into consideration the ways viewers interpret his work in a given public setting. Depending on where each work is shown, viewers bring different associations to their experience of the work. By opting to install *Human Structures Vancouver* in the former Olympic Village here in Vancouver, the human figures in the work easily evoke memories of those games and the diversity of countries represented by the athletes at the 2010 Winter Games, and the connections between all of humanity no matter race or other differences. Today the Olympic Village, even the entire region of the Vancouver area, is a growing community of people from all over the world, a crossroads of many communities and this installation reflects those multiplicities and connections between us all, emphasizing the potential to embrace and accept difference because we are in fact connected as we build and create a city, a society, together. The title, *Human Structures Vancouver*, is a universal title. It means humanity building the world that they live in. Humans use structures to build our world, not only architectural, but psychological and philosophical structures.

VANCOUVER BIENNALE EDUCATION

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HOW WAS THIS ART INSTALLATION MADE/INSTALLED?

Human Structures Vancouver is composed of 64 painted steel figures, interconnecting to form several cylindrical towers. Each of the 64 life-size figures is water-jet cut from steel plate in a factory in California, then transported to Connecticut to add color and given its structural folds. Before painting, the figures are galvanized, followed by a self cross-linking acrylic primer, and finally a coating of ambient cured single component acrylic color. 7 pre-coded colors are used, including several figures remaining in their primal, shiny, galvanized state. The 64 figures are bolted together hand-to-hand and head-to-foot with a series of multicolored connector plates.

Artist Website : <http://www.borofsky.com>

Photo Credits : Artist Website, [Walking to the Sky with Jonathan Borofsky](#), The Korean Times, Oct, 2008

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