



Karen Yank



LIVING LANDSCAPE

Tonya Turner Carroll Karen Yank is a rare type of artist. She is a teacher, a student, a mother, a woman, a welder, and an environmentalist. Yank carves her own individualized path, always following her natural instincts, even when they lead her far afield. Yank's passion for studying metal sculpture took her from Wisconsin to New York, and along the way, she met very few other female steel sculptors. Yank was a pioneer in this field, and even today, the world of steel sculpture includes less than 5% women.

Yank's determination to pursue her career took her to Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, where she met her unlikely artistic mentor—iconic minimalist artist, Agnes Martin. In an unlikely twist of events—since Martin was a painter and Yank a sculptor—Martin took Yank under her wing. In Yank, Martin saw a similarly independent artistic soul; one who was not afraid to listen to the voices inside her and allow them to guide her artistic practice. Just like the simplicity of the horizon line that defines the earth and the sky, Martin and Yank were the perfect contrast of ethereal and dense, line and curve, fragile and durable. Ironically, Martin and Yank were both going from Skowhegan back to New Mexico, where they had independently decided was the place that inspired them to create their art. The two remained artistic confidants until Martin's death.

Yank chooses to live quietly with her family and sculptures in the mountains of New Mexico, embraced by the landscape, grasses, and sky. She has raised her child and created all of her most well-known sculptures in the same place she originally settled near the Vista Grande Community Center in the East Mountains.



This is her artwork's community, her family's community, and the community of friends that has watched all of them grow to maturity. It was in this community that Karen Yank taught art classes to children when her daughter was young. She recalls looking at the clouds and flowers with them, remembering the way the kids interpreted their shapes and some of the drawings they made during her classes.





Those poignant impressions are what Karen Yank's work is made of. It is made of relationships with people and with the land. In her two-part "Living Landscape" sculpture commissioned by Bernalillo County Public Arts Commission, her love for this place is obvious. The sculpture is composed of the memories and hope for the future community members of all ages find at Vista Grande. Sunflowers, lightning-bolts,

prickly pear, running horses, moonlight, sunset: these elements are timelessly rendered with aspects of child-like drawing combined with stylized geometric line. Yank employs dynamic handling of her materials in "Living Landscape," as well. The sculpture pair is made with metal coming from the depths of the earth—an allusion to the depth of her feeling for this place.

Yet, she varies the finish on the steel, with some parts being glistening stainless steel; other surfaces oxidized as if they've been part of the landscape of the place for generations.





It's almost as if she has created a true portrait of the community's multicultural heritage, allowing the sweeping vista to shine through the sculpture's center.

Karen Yank has found community and created a successful career in a portion of the artwork long-dominated by men. By remaining true to her artistic vision, and by remaining true to her community, Yank has become one of the most







sought-after public art sculptors in the United States. Her works can be seen on the grounds of universities, museums, and public campuses across the country, and at Turner Carroll Gallery on Canyon Road in Santa Fe, New Mexico. ■





Living Landscape was permanently installed in 2019 at the Vista Grande Community Center in Sandia Park, NM

Otis Negale, owner of OCW & FAB art fabricators worked directly with Yank in the fabrication and installation of the entire project.





Karen Yank began her formal art career at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where she earned her BFA. From there, she moved to Rutgers University, earning her MFA. She finished at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, but has since returned to New Mexico.

Throughout her career, Yank has established herself as the most prominent sculptress in the state of New Mexico. She has created 40 large-scale public sculptures to date, which have won her a number of awards, such as for Aesthetics and Public Involvement; the PRIDE Award from the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, the Golden Cumbre Award from the New Mexico Public Relations Society of America, and the Americans for the Arts Kris Art of Giving Award.

Heart and Soul, 2019, Chadron State College, Chicoine Center/Beebe Stadium Project, Commissioned by State of Nebraska 1% for Arts Program.





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