



Balanced/Unbalanced Bolt, 1993

FLETCHER BENTON

CEDARHURST CENTER FOR THE ARTS

About the Artist Fletcher Benton

Early Life

Fletcher Benton was born in 1931 in Jackson, Ohio, to a father who worked as an industrial chemist at the Bureau of Mines in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and a mother who was a poet. His most vivid childhood memories involve his sensitivity to shape and color. He was drawn to the alphabet from an early age due to the geometry of letters, and he remembers seeing farm machinery painted in bright, bold, simple colors hundreds of times while walking to his father's office. At Cole's Art Store, the multicolored shelves of pastels, paint tubes, and colored pencils made him feel like he was "walking into a rainbow."

Beginning as a Painter

Benton's fascination with color, shape, and machinery, including toy trains and cars, has affected his work throughout his life. At first, like many young people who

want to be artists, he was a painter. After enlisting in the Navy in 1949, his interest in the alphabet led him to become the youngest journeyman sign writer in the United States at the age of nineteen.

Halfway between Painting and Sculpture

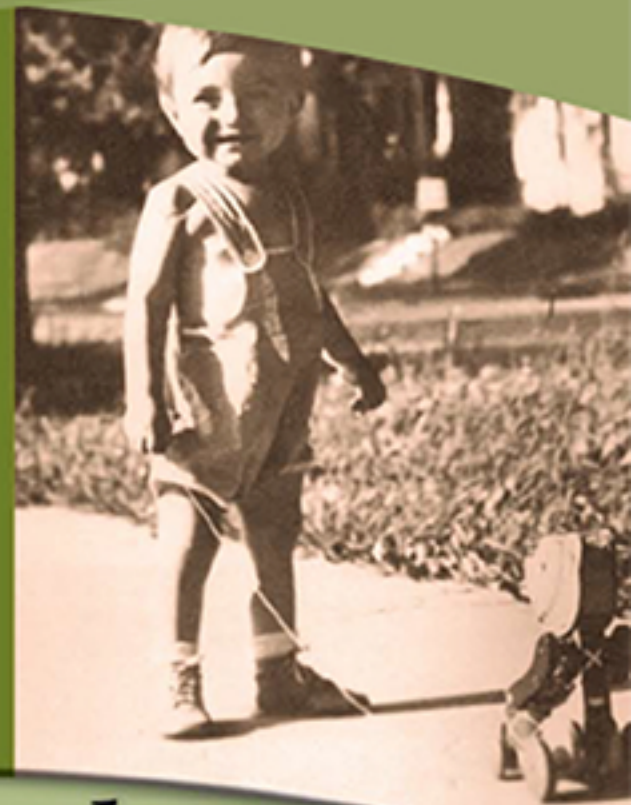
After receiving an honorable discharge from the Navy in 1950, Benton spent five years at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. He then traveled to Europe and New York before settling in California. In 1963, he married Roberta Nello Lea and continued to paint. After one of his first painting exhibitions was closed down due to nude being featured, he became disillusioned and turned to exploring the combination of small geometric paintings with motors. Works like these became known as kinetic sculpture and were very popular in the 1960s.

Turning to Sculpture

By the early 1970s, feeling he had taken kinetic sculpture and painting as far as he could, Benton again changed

the kind of work he was making, creating sculptures in steel and bronze. The first of these were made as an interpretation of his geometric drawings. He began with maquettes (small models of sculpture) choosing the best ones to fabricate as large outdoor sculptures.

He used this method over the next few years, creating the "Folded Circle" series, the "Double Folded Circle" series, and also the "Folded Square Alphabet" series, on long-term loan to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Benton has commented, "Yes, it is the mind and it is the soul. But it's an undisciplined mind that I'm trying to reach. In a way it's an untamed soul. I find children respond very directly to my work. They respond to the color, they respond to the shape, they respond with a kind of interest that asks, 'Oh does that really move, that circle hanging there on that thing?' Maybe what I'm trying to reach in everybody is innocence."

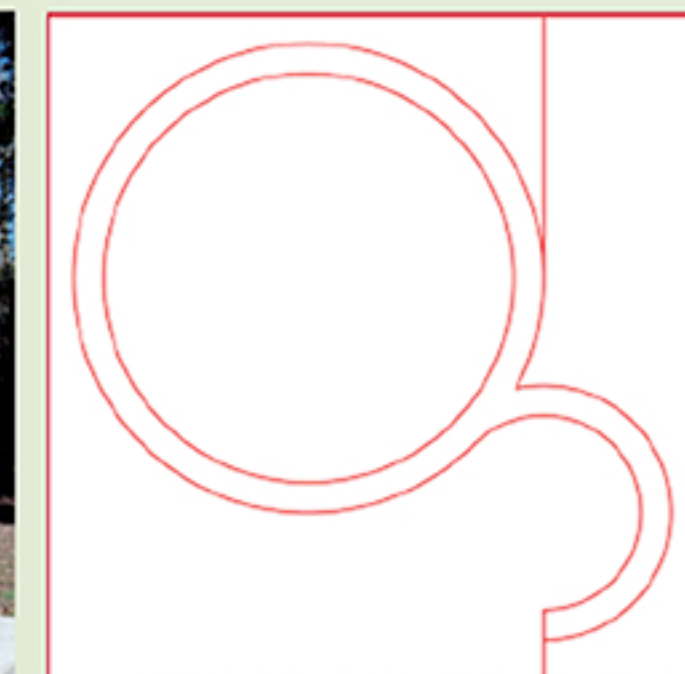


What is Sculpture?

Cedarhurst Center For The Arts Teaching Poster



Folded Square Alphabet Q, 2003



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Use these spaces to create your own alphabet designs.

Creating your own Alphabet Sculpture

We use the alphabet to create words and communicate. The alphabet lives for the most part in the two-dimensional world, on paper, in books, or marching across a computer screen. Have you ever thought about letters becoming a three-dimensional form? What would they look like?

Above is the drawing that Fletcher Benton began with to create his, *Folded Square Alphabet Q*, for his alphabet series. Sometimes, an artist starts with a small drawing that turns into a maquette or small model, before creating a sculpture in its final size. This gives the artist the opportunity to see how the sculpture will look before they start creating in large scale.

Pick a letter from the alphabet. Maybe it is the letter that your name begins with, maybe it is a letter you like because of the way it looks. Try to draw the letter within the empty square to create a design. Can you take this two-dimensional design and turn it into a three dimensional sculpture?

An activity of the John R. and Eleanor R. Mitchell Foundation.



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Folded Square Alphabet U, 2004

Lets take a look:

What do you think sculpture can look like?

How big or small can it be?

What kinds of shapes and textures can be made up in a sculpture?

What can it be made of?

What can it be about?

What sculptures can you think of?

Where can sculptures be found?

How can it be displayed?

Who can create sculpture?

Sculpture can be found in many forms and made from a diverse, and often unexpected, range of materials. At the beginning of the twentieth century, more traditional media and techniques were used, such as bronze casting or stone carving. Today, artists use anything to make sculpture, including everyday found objects and light and sound, and often use manufacturing processes in making their work.

The traditional definition of sculpture is taken to be 3D work which can be seen "in the round" or in relief, created by using materials shaped primarily by the artist. Sculpture needs to be experienced in the round and therefore demands that we walk around it and view it from many angles: from each side, from above, from below or through the middle. This more physical relationship brings questions to mind as we look.

What do you think it might be about?

What is your first one-word response?

How does it make you feel?

How do you think it was made?

What materials do you think were used?

What tools do you think the artist used?

What techniques?

When do you think it was made?

Is it big or small?

Is it the size of something in your house?

Make some comparisons with familiar objects. What kinds of shapes and textures make up the sculpture? How would the sculpture look in a different material, size, or color? Is there a front or a back? Are you meant to look at it from different angles? Is it figurative (based on human form) or abstract (about color, shape and form)?

This Lincoln Sculpture located at the Appellate Courthouse in Mt. Vernon, IL, is an example of figurative sculpture by Alan Cottrell.



Welcome to Cedarhurst

Nestled on a 90-acre site in southern Illinois, Cedarhurst celebrates the arts year-round with exciting visual and performing arts programs for the public. Explore rolling meadows and woods, home to Kuenz Sculpture Park, the museum's outdoor gallery with over 60 large-scale sculptures. Visit the Mitchell Museum with art exhibitions in three galleries, including the Beck Family Center. Enjoy works by Mary Cassatt, Maurice Prendergast, Childe Hassam and more, part of the museum's American painting collection acquired by founders John R. and Eleanor R. Mitchell.

Hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. & Sunday, 1 - 5 p.m.

EDUCATION

Beck Family Center

Located inside the Mitchell Museum, the Beck Family Center is a hands-on environment providing endless opportunities for visitors to experience the textures, color, and excitement of discovering art in the world around them. It is designed to encourage family members of all ages to discover and kindle their artistic interest.

Teacher Resources & School Programs

Cedarhurst provides opportunities for arts instruction through performing arts programs, in-school programs, student workshops, FREE tours of exhibitions and Kuenz Sculpture Park, and the Covington Resource Lending Library, offering materials for classroom instruction.

Family Events

Cedarhurst annually presents a series of family activities, which complement museum exhibitions. Conducted by the museum's Director of Education, Family Days are held throughout the year. Check our website for specific dates.

Shrode Art Center

Cedarhurst classes and workshops allow children to have fun while exploring the arts. Programs include the popular Cedarhurst Summer Camp, ABC's in Art for toddlers and the afterschool program Totally Tubular Tuesdays.

Photograph Credits: Top Left and Right Images of Fletcher Benton: Fletcher Benton, Balanced/Unbalanced Bolt, Folded Square Alphabet Q and Folded Square Alphabet U, Daniel Overlun, Lincoln Sculpture, Jack Flood.

Biography written by Nancy Spector, Associate Curator of Education, Courtesy of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Special Thanks to Fletcher Benton, Françoise Ricarte, Registrar, Fletcher Benton Studio and Jack & Joan Goldman for their assistance with this project.



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