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# SEDONA MONTHLY

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# 10

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# A Boffo Second Act!

Sculpture takes center stage in Sedona artist Liam Herbert's life after a memorable 27-year run as a prop master on Broadway

When he was just 8 years old, Liam Herbert had already begun carving under the tutelage of renowned abstract wood expressionist Raoul Hague in Woodstock, N.Y. After formal training at New York's School of Visual Arts, Liam stepped away from art for a long career as a prop master on Broadway. Seeking a change, he and his wife packed up and came to Sedona, where he poured his energy back into his passion for sculpture. Liam's slender, angular wood carvings and limited-edition bronzes flow with inspiration, diversity, and beautiful expressions of love. We spoke with him about his fascinating life's journey.

## Did you always want to be an artist?

As a kid I was always drawing or using my hands or making something. I always knew that I was going to be an artist, but I got diverted.

## You mentioned your father was involved with Broadway shows.

Dad was a production property master for all [producer] David Merrick shows – 105 of them. I did my apprenticeship with Dad and them. And I have done 50 Broadway shows personally.

## Did you make props or did you have to acquire them?

If you can't acquire them, you have them made. If you can't have them made, you make them yourself. So I was always being creative making the props. [Shows us a wooden sword] See this? This was the sword Sandy Duncan used in *Peter Pan*. She signed it for me: "To Liam, it's not big enough." That's Sandy Duncan!

I've worked on a lot of shows. Yul Brenner in *The King and I*. Woody Allen, Jane Fonda, Elizabeth Taylor, Jane Alexander...so many people. Christian Slater – he was a little kid when we did *The Music Man* with Dick Van Dyke. I did two shows with Donald O'Connor. He played Captain Andy in *Showboat*. I did that one. And then there was a show that no one ever talks about: *Bring Back Birdie*, a sequel to *Bye Bye Birdie*. Donald was in it and Chita Rivera was in it. It was a total flop. But I left the show before it flopped, because I went to do the Elizabeth Taylor show, *Little Foxes*.

## What was Elizabeth Taylor like?

She was incredible. With all the Broadway shows that I'd done, she was the most fun to work with. We would spend time on the *Monkey Business*, the boat Gary Hart got into trouble with when he was a presidential candidate. It was wonderful. Then we went from Washington D.C. to New York. They chartered one of the cars on the [Amtrak] Metroliner. They would have a big party in there catered by a fancy restaurant. Everywhere

we would go with Elizabeth, she was great.

## So what changed? What made you decide to make the break back to art?

I always wanted to carve, sculpt or create. After school I planned to continue sculpting. But I got diverted for 27 years to the theater. It got to the point in New York that I couldn't take it anymore and I wanted to get out. I said to Sylvia [Liam's wife] we are leaving. I quit my job and came to Sedona.

It's taken me longer to get going [in sculpting] than I thought it would. But when I think back on it, I had a wonderful, very unique career. I worked for so many wonderful people, so many famous people. I worked with Sir Laurence Olivier. How many people can say that?

## You seem very prolific; how many pieces you have done since coming to Sedona?

I have no idea. I do keep track, but off the top of my head, I don't know. I have whimsical work, which I used to do, and the bronzes I'm working on.

## You also have pieces you are sculpting in clay; is being able to switch back and forth to different types of material something you like to do?

No matter what the piece is, I want it to be a simple form that has emotion, with some form of feeling to it. I've had some people look at my work, and they have tears in their eyes, which is a wonderful feeling.

## We've heard artists say when someone buys a piece, the buyer feels like family. Is there a connection you feel with people who buy your work?

It is a definite connection. I know the art makes the people who buy my work feel good; that means a lot to me.

## Where do you get ideas?

My ideas come from above, obviously, and I allow this. Sometimes I have to meditate. I get an idea and

it has to flow through me into my hands, my fingertips, to create this work. I feel my work is different, unusual.

## If you could know what, a hundred years from now, people will think of or appreciate most in what you've created, what would you want it to be?

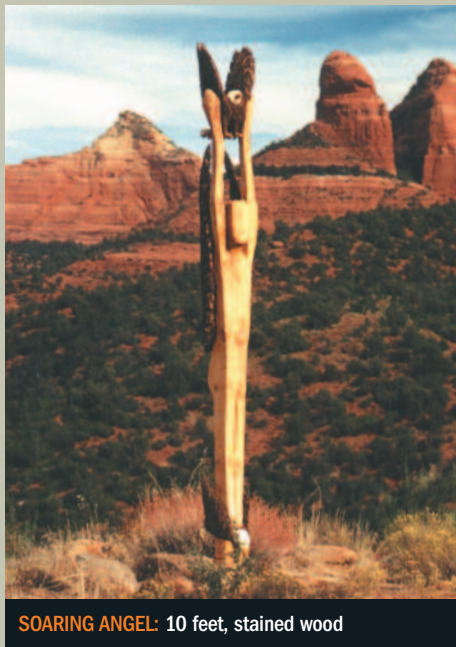
I just want to be remembered for my art, as being able to express feelings in my art, as someone who was compassionate, or had vision that no one else had before.

## Obviously you found your voice in art, in the simplicity of form.

I just want to be able to help people through art. What more can you ask for?



**BROADWAY BABY** Herbert masters new props



**SOARING ANGEL: 10 feet, stained wood**



**ANGEL OF COMPASSION: 11 feet, painted wood**