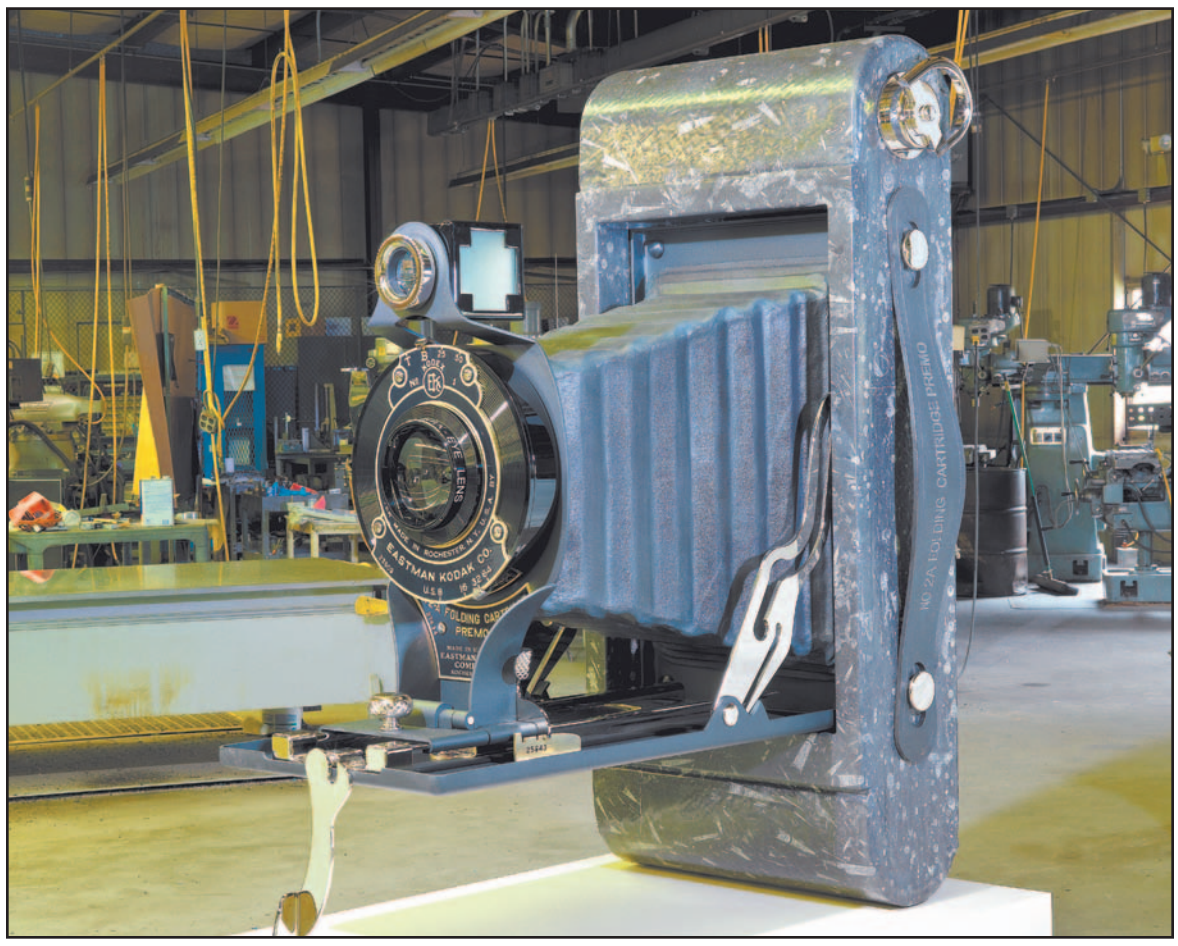
U.S.1
PRINCETON'S BUSINESS & ENTERTAINMENT NEWSPAPER

Does Art Imitate Technology?



Eye to the Past: *'Premo' (brass and nickel plated brass, steel, aluminum, enamel paint, powdercoating, cast bronze, and glass) by Daniel Henderson.*

Photos this page and opposite: Bruce M. White

by Ilene Dube

Remember the rotary phone?

Around about the time of the Studebaker, these solid black machines with a dial were the common denominator in telecommunications until the 1962 World's Fair, when the Touch Tone phone was introduced. The rotary's dial, about the size of your fist, had holes for your fingers to dial the numbers. You had to wait for the dial to return to its resting point before you could stick your pointer finger into the hole for the next number to go around again.

It was the waiting that led to the demise of the rotary, after about half a century of use. We humans just don't like to wait.

Sculptor Daniel A. Henderson has created a six-and-a-half-foot long rotary phone out of black Belgian marble, bronze, steel, vinyl, aluminum, and wood, weighing in at just over 5,000 pounds, including the base.

He has also created the iconic pink Princess phone in pink marble. For those of the texting generation, the Princess was developed mid 20th-century for the bedside stand and came in feminine colors. In the '60s you might be watching "Bye Bye Birdie," doing your nails, and talking to your best friend on the Princess in a color that matched your polish.

Henderson, whose work will be on view in the Domestic Arts Building at Grounds For Sculpture beginning Sunday, May 1, through October 2, travels the world to get the materials he uses in his sculpture. In Pietrasanta, Italy, where Michelangelo had his own quarry, Henderson was searching for the perfect brown marble to suggest Bakelite for the four-and-a-half-foot Marconi radio he was making. Bakelite shares the same era as the rotary phone. It was one of the first plastics developed for its non-conductive, insulating properties, used for appliances and later for jewelry, billiard balls, Mahjong tiles, and pieces for checkers, dominoes, and other games. (For the Marconi radio, he eventually found a Rouge de Roi stone that conveyed Bakelite.)

In a stone yard that specializes in imports from Iran, Henderson spotted a beautiful light through a corner as the sun came through. He sprayed the stone with his water sprayer to see how the stone would look after it was polished and found the pink onyx that suggested the Princess.

"It was the first time the stone suggested the object for me," says Henderson in a phone interview from Medford, Oregon, where he is visiting family. "It made me think of what Michelangelo said about releasing the object trapped in the stone."

Remarkably, Henderson is not only a sculptor, he is an inventor, with 26 patents to his name. He assisted Kazuo Hashimoto, the inventor of caller ID and the modern answering machine, and also worked with Jack Kilby, inventor of the computer chip. On his own, Henderson founded several technology companies and invented the wireless picture phone.

In 2007, when a prison security guard used a cell phone to videotape the execution of Saddam Hussein, and it quickly spread around the world via the Internet, so that even small children — including Henderson's own children — could watch it, he began to question the use of the technology he was creating.

'I am interested in the global impact of technology on humankind,' says artist Daniel Henderson.

The wireless video was something Henderson had contributed to developing. "This event propelled me to think deeply about the use of technology and how it connects us interculturally yet somehow divides us interpersonally," he writes in an artist statement on his website.

One reason phones feature so prominently in his work is because he wants to provoke people to talk about technology, not just use it to talk. Just as today, when visitors to Stonehenge wonder what the objects meant in their time, Henderson hopes that his stone sculpture will tell future generations about the times we live in. "It's not just nostalgia, looking at objects from the past, but where we came from, and looking ahead to where we're going," says Henderson, who spends a lot of time in New Jersey. He is on the board of New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark and fabricates his sculpture at various facilities in Hamilton.

Henderson also travels to Xiamen in Southern China, where he has been invited to participate in the Shanghai Biennale, and is working on a few pieces that will evoke shared memories for China, just as his Black 500 phone does here.

"I am interested in the global impact of technology on humankind," he says. "We all have an identity with the black rotary phone from earlier times. We may remember when Grandma called on it, and the stories she told. That phone may be different in Russia or China. I want to create something that activates dialogue and discussion for them."

Henderson's mother was a homemaker and his father was a commercial artist. An award-winning creative director for a TV station, the elder Henderson exposed his son to art early on, and he spent his youth painting signs, sketching, wood working, and restoring cars.

"My father took me to car shows where we'd study the design of racing cars and lettering. We went out fishing, taking a sketch pad, and we'd talk perspective and drew things from nature," says Henderson. "Ironically, I wanted to be everything my father wasn't."

He graduated from Southern Oregon University with a bachelor's degree in business in 1984. He had interned at IBM, selling display writers, small business computers, and typewriters.

"The IBM Selectric II was a great machine," he says. "I loved that it was so tactile, and I miss that. You really connected with the machine, and we've lost that con-

U.S.1
PRINCETON'S BUSINESS & ENTERTAINMENT NEWSPAPER

Face Time: *'Talk Show' (Chinese black granite, nickel plated brass, and enamel paint) by Daniel Henderson.*

nection with touch screens." He is speaking on an iPhone as he says this. "The electronic impulse opens up the Internet. In days gone by we had to search through card files.

"The iPhone is a magnificent device, don't get me wrong," he continues. "These phones that receive pictures and video are becoming the remote control of our lives, helping us stay in touch with family and check stock quotes all on one device."

And yet, while it "opens up a world lots of us never had before, a lot of labor-saving devices contribute to an ever increasing acceleration of change. The Black 500 was around for 50 years — compare that to the nine months the average cell phone is meant to last — and multiple generations had that common experience. These iconic objects are mile markers of our past."

The very waiting for the dial to return allowed contemplation, Henderson points out. "You could compose your thoughts and maybe hold off if you were angry. Today we quickly fire off a canceled order or a military instruction made in haste, and it can have long-lasting and dire consequences."

Another cost of all this technology is that we have lost the ability to connect face-to-face. Henderson believes this has led to road rage and a decline in civility. "We need face-to-face time with friends, family, and colleagues to express how we feel and what is important in life."

Henderson laments what he describes as the erosion of tactility. He observes that human beings were created with arms and legs so they could work, but now that we only need fingers to activate handheld devices, and children don't even go outside to play anymore, obesity is epidemic. "We're not very good at thinking through how these devices should be used. They're powerful in affecting social change but lead to computer-based crimes," he says.

Being both inventor and artist is one and the same, he says, using creativity to solve problems never solved before. "Yellowstone," a three-foot piece weighing in at a ton, including its base, is a black Belgian marble Viewmaster — a sort of handheld slide projector with two eye pieces like binoculars, used by Henderson in his childhood, long before the advent of video games or the Internet. "I wanted to challenge myself to make a large-scale piece that is hyper-realistic, that would look and feel like the real device," he says.

The problem he had to solve as an inventor and an artist was what would a viewer actually see in this combination of stone, metal, and electronics. The result is an LCD display of the Yellowstone geyser, Old Faithful, erupting.

"Premo" is a seven-foot-tall work, made in Moroccan black marble, bronze, and glass, that recalls the Kodak Primo camera with its collapsible bellows. "In some cultures, if you take their photo, they believe you are stealing a part of their soul," says Henderson. "But in 'Premo,' you're looking inside the soul of the camera. Looking into its dark abyss, it looks like a human eye."

Henderson will be featured on Wednesday, May 4, at noon, for one of Grounds For Sculpture's new Salons — events that include conversation with an artist and lunch at Rat's. Art Salon III: Sculptura is described as "a relaxing and stimulating meet-the-artist event over a gourmet meal at Rat's Restaurant while sharing ideas with artists and fellow patrons of the arts."

Spring and Summer Exhibition, Grounds For Sculpture, 18 Fairgrounds Road, Hamilton. Sunday, May 1, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. First day for shared exhibition featuring "In Balance," 11 large scale wood and metal works by James Surls; "The Art of Invention," sculptures by Daniel A. Henderson; and "Plugged In," interactive artworks by seven electronic media artists. Gallery talk by Surls at 1 p.m. On view to October 1. Three new sculptures in the park are by artists India Blake, Peter DeCamp Haines, and Seward Johnson. **609-586-0616 or www.groundsforsculpture.org**.

Also, **Art Salon III: Sculptura**, Grounds For Sculpture, 18 Fairgrounds Road, Hamilton. Wednesday, May 4, noon to 3 p.m. Daniel A. Henderson is the featured artist. Register. $50 for GFS members; $55 non-members. Includes lunch and a glass of wine (for those over age 21). **609-586-0616 or www.groundsforsculpture.org**.