

Ludvic Saleh's Sculpture Garden in Scottsdale *By Echo Surina*

# ENGINEERING ART



Photo by John Rowlands.

Summer 2005, a car beelined from New Jersey to Arizona packed with two people, two dogs and a bird. Artist Ludvic Saleh, his wife, Lauren Edgar, and their family of animals had arrived at their new home in Scottsdale. After searching for a studio and home (in that order), they found an ideal place—off an indelible dirt road and a butterfly migration path—to call home. Numerous sculptures positioned next to cacti and rocks in the front yard foreshadow the personality and flair of their creator.

Born in Sudan, raised in Egypt, educated in Europe and having lived in Canada, renowned sculptor and painter Ludvic creates art born of an intricate composite of life experience. Over lunch at his home, Ludvic pauses to emphasize his American citizenship and Christian roots, lifting a mug of instant Folgers coffee to his lips, his favorite. "I'm very complex. I'm a product of Western culture, thinking and psyche. America stimulates me completely," he says. "The beauty of American art is to encourage the spirit and creativity."

He worked with Andy Warhol, met Picasso, sold paintings for six figures and has had his work featured in many museums. This 62 year old's stamina is nowhere near abating. Inspired by many things—his wife, bread (especially when on a no-carb diet), other artists—a new flame ignites his imagination, the Sonoran desert.

"I feel like I'm hovering between earth and heaven," Ludvic says of the landscape. His wife adds, "You come here to live, to enjoy life. It's so much better than we thought." So much better, in fact, they intend to sell their home on the East Coast and stay in Arizona year round.

Just beyond a flagstone patio is a small backyard decorated with sculptures, a prototype of what is to come. The couple is looking for 10 acres nearby to create into a sculpture and mural garden. The goal is to use the desert landscape as a stage to show art.

Steel is the perfect marriage with the desert, says Ludvic, as it naturally lends itself to the Southwest landscape. He shows steel, a man-made material, contrasted with nature co-exist



Ludvic's sculptures play with color and horizontal and vertical lines. Just as the artwork complements the desert vegetation, the surrounding nature also enhances the sculptures. Photography by Lauren Edgar.

in a symbiotic relationship, complementing one another.

Not knowing anything about automobile mechanics, Ludvic scours junkyards for car and motorcycle parts to use for sculptures. He calls these parts "leftover debris from civilizations" he uses to "cook into something new, re-breathing life into it." Shunning the description "recycled" because it connotes a second-tier use, Ludvic says he "heightens materials' use into a state of art and inspiration."

Ranging in size from baby to adult proportions, the sculptures intrigue for their use of vertical and horizontal lines. The vertical represents the spiritual, the growth of man, Ludvic explains, while the horizontal indicates expansion and materialism. "Art is like engineering: content and technique," he says. His pieces, mostly composed of neutral colored machinery, often incorporate splashes of color with brightly colored pieces or painted metal parts.

A tour of his sculpting and painting studio, a standalone garage next to the house, raises eyebrows. Surprises include 10,000 tubes of paint kept on premises, a collection of 5,000 DVDs he plays while working (a music video of Prince lay among stacks of discs) and the studio's remarkable tidiness. Despite the amount of materials—numerous paintings neatly propped against a wall, welding machine, torch, packed bookshelf of art books, and paintings in progress on easels—the space is remarkably orderly.

"I don't force art. Art has to appear by itself. When the moment is right, everything happens," says Ludvic. "I don't think about anything except form, space, volume, rhythm. I subconsciously know. It's subliminal and intuitive." He stresses the importance of having a point of reference for creating art. "Professionals work from reference. Amateurs work from their mind....If you don't know the rules first, you can't break them."

Ludvic's paintings and sculptures are on display at the Robert Roman Gallery at artspace in Scottsdale.



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