

The world is his gallery

lugufelo is a sculptor with work across state, Venice Art Center



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Loadstone, by sculptor lugufelo, is at Commission Chambers in Orlando.

"Is there more cafe?" my guest asks, his boyish face a blend of hope and fear.

"Sí, amigo," I reassure him. "Mucho."

He smiles with gratitude, or perhaps anticipation. I return from my kitchen with the Italian moka pot and pour him a shot or two, then pass him the little carafe of hot milk. We are discussing art over café con leche.

With each cup, he becomes more animated, and I fear I've untethered a balloon that is going to bounce off my ceiling.

He is Luis Guillermo Fernandez

Lovera, a.k.a. "lugufelo" (he prefers the lowercase, either because he is humble or because he wants people to ask him; he loves attention). Venezuelan-born, -bred and -escaped, he is a sculptor in the abstract and kinetic schools of art. These days he works mainly in metal, which must give him less trouble than the biscotti he keeps dropping into his cup.

"Ay! These things make me crazy! I never know how long to sink them."

"Dunk them."

"Ah, sí, eso es."

We're speaking a linguistic salad of English and Spanish. His English is about the level of my Spanish. Sometimes both languages are in the same sentence. It works for us, but when he gets really excited about



Luis Fernandez is also known as "lugufelo," a sculptor.

art, and hopped up on espresso, he starts talking in tongues, and then I've no idea what he's saying. We met at the Venice Art Center, home of the Smart Set, and hit it off, our lapses in communication no

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JAMES BLACKBURN
Columnist

LUGUFELO

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hindrance.

Getting him to open up for a chat about art is no problem. It's getting him to clam up ... I mean, calm down that's challenging.

He has moved to Venice from Miami with his lovely wife, Sunny, a name suiting her disposition, and their son Simon, a tiny tornado with feet. Luis maintains his enormous workshop-studio in Miami where he creates large outdoor pieces. He has a team of assistants to help him, at times as many as 70. He needs them; these works are meant for display in parks and public spaces and can be quite large. Next time you're driving down Nokomis Avenue between Milan and Turin, note his sculpture "Torso" in front of the Art Center: one and a half tons of aluminum.

Just shipping them must be a logistical challenge. The thought of creating them boggles the mind.

Sunny hales from Cuba. She's a software engineer and as clever and capable as she is charming.

"We don't have a typical Latin marriage," she once told me.

She'll go toe-to-toe with her macho man if he should wander back to traditional roles. They have their careers and give one another the respect and distance they each need and deserve. (Besides, I think she could take him two falls out of three.)

"One of my earliest influences was Cubism," Luis says across the table. I'd asked him about his art, but thinking he was referring to his wife's homeland, figure he wants to talk about Castro and the Revolution.

"Well, President Biden will probably normalize relations again," I offer.

He pauses long enough to look at me quizzically that his biscotti again drops into his coffee. "Madre de Dios!" he cries, burning his fingers retrieving it.

Licking them off, he continues, "No. I'm saying that the movements in art in the early 20th century – Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism



Luis Fernandez, known as lugufelo, and Venice Art Center Executive Director Mary Moscatelli celebrate the new look for the Venice Art Center in August 2020. Fernandez is the artist who created the sculpture, "Torso."

– these were my teachers, they opened my eyes to art."

He goes on to give me a refresher on "geometric abstraction" and "negative space" and "non-representational compositions," all of which leaves me glassy-eyed. I excuse myself to make another pot of badly needed espresso. He shouts after me a naughty joke, something about a nun and a blind man.

And this is who he is: the man-child artist as amalgam of creative innocence and intellectual curiosity. He can deliver an off-the-cuff treatise on Picasso's invention of constructed sculpture, but show him a picture of a chimpanzee in a bra and he's falling out of his chair. He is the spectrum of the ages of a man, coexisting at one point in time: fighting, searching, discovering, questioning, and all the while creating and creating and creating.

"But why these enormous outdoor metal pieces," I ask. "It must be a tremendous amount of work to construct and move them."

"Si," he agrees. "Mucho. But galleries make me – how you say it? – closetphobic. The

world is my gallery, and my art is for everyone, not just the rich, not just people who go to galleries and museums. People in cars and buses, on bicycles and on foot; anyone outdoors can see and enjoy my work. They don't have to come to me; I go to them."

He describes his process. Once he has a sculpture design in mind, he uses a computer software and 3-D printer to create a scale model. This is not only for aesthetic reasons but to see if the structure will actually stand and balance under its great weight. He may then go to a smaller model in the metal, usually aluminum but sometimes stainless or Corten steel, before starting on the final work. Lasers and water jets are used to cut the pieces, and various types of welding are used to assemble them. All the while, forklifts, cranes and straps support, move and position the pieces. The process is more akin to ship building than "sculpting."

He does not limit himself to stationary pieces alone, but creates "kinetic sculptures" that move.

"Do you know Gabo?" he



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Patchwork Butterfly is at Sabal Pines Park in Coconut Creek, Florida. It was sculpted by artist lugufelo.

asks, pouring himself yet another cafe.

"Do it!" I exclaim, excited to be talking about something I understand. "I loved her in 'Ninotchka' with Melvyn Douglas. 1939. She laughs for the first time on film. Great flick!"

He knits his brows and stares. I think I hear him mutter "Americans" under his breath. He shakes his head and goes on. "Naum GAH-bo is considered the father of kinetic sculpture. He was Russian, part of the post-Revolution avant-garde. His "Standing Waves" from 1920 is considered the first kinetic sculpture. Gabo explored sculpture free from static constraints, either in space or time. "Why cannot

sculpture move?" he asked."

His voice flows across the table in melodic waves; his eyes dance. I pretend to understand just to listen to him, but he no longer sees me, his naive but devoted listener. He sees the works he describes to me and the artists who created them, who influenced him, who helped make him what he is today: a gifted and generous man giving beauty to the world, his gallery.

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lugufelo's work may be seen at www.lugufelo.com and at the Venice Art Center