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SPECTRUM

Whitaker likes art in motion

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Guest Writer

ST. GEORGE — Lyman Whitaker likes to use the word "kinetic-pertaining to motion," to describe his sculptures, some of which will be exhibited during the 5th annual Pioneer Courthouse Invitational Art Exhibit.

The exhibit begins Sept. 27 and continues through Oct. 12.

Motion, however, is not the quality most noticeable in the sculptor himself. One could picture him in his Kayenta desert retreat, barely flexing a muscle as he contemplates the ever-changing patterns of sun and rock and shadow visible from his home and studio.

And yet, enormous energy has been required in creating his works of art as metal is his favorite medium. Rods must be bent into desired shapes, sheets of brass or copper must be cut and hammered into eye pleasing patterns, parts must be welded to each other, and assembling near-lifesize figures, born of diverse metals, takes physical strength as well as vision.

His creations do move. A wind sculpture has its delicate parts arranged to capture the power of the passing breeze, giving it

motion.

While this kinetic energy has been deliberately employed by Whitaker, his goal is movement of another sort. He wants the viewer to be moved emotionally as well.

"A work of art is incomplete," he said, "unless the beholder can put something of himself into it. I invest my own emotion in the creation, but if the viewer gets none of it back, something is lacking."

The partnership between artist and audience is not always easy to achieve. Some conventionally-trained eyes cannot help asking if a clock is art. A fountain? A conglomerate of discarded machine parts welded into a new entity — a "found" object?

"The concept of art is like the concept of God," said Whitaker. "There is no easy definition of it."

This is not to say that Whitaker's creations do not often find instant acceptance.

"What joy it is," he exults, "when what you like to do is what people want."

"But Lyman is always pushing himself," said his wife, Stacy. "He does something the public really goes for and then abandons it to experiment with something new."

Even though he is frequently trying the untried, Whitaker does

not believe in innovation for its own sake.

"If you try to jolt the public with something new, something shocking," he said, "it often turns out to be merely something old, done years ago."

Perhaps this somewhat conservative viewpoint stems from his classical training in sculpture at the University of Utah where he studied under Avard Fairbanks. From portraits in clay and cast bronze, he went on to the study of more contemporary forms with Angelo Caravaglia.

Or perhaps his own style has evolved through the influence of his life experiences. Relying on a basic and marketable skill, carpentry, Whitaker made his way around the world, remaining for months in Hawaii, before proceeding on his way.

What other Utah sculptor can say he constructed a sun dial at the South Pole?

So after the South Seas, Antarctica, New York, and elsewhere in the world, how does he see his future from his base in Kayenta?

"I don't have a tremendous desire to be rich and famous," he said.