

Public Artist: Simi Dabah

By Dennis Wahl

For the Hi-Desert Star

Anyone who has ever driven along Twentynine Palms Highway from Morongo Valley to Twentynine Palms has seen the art of Simi Dabah. Dabah has been building welded steel sculptures from industrial scrap for more than 30 years. He is a prolific artist who has worked in diverse media, but creating steel sculptures is his passion and primary mode of artistic expression.

Simi's sculptures range in size from six inches to 32 feet in height, many weighing over a ton. The steel surfaces are left in their natural, unfinished state and allowed to continue rusting to a warm patina.

These nonrepresentational sculptures are left untitled, inviting the viewer to interpret the work.

Dabah has studios in Los Angeles and Joshua Tree. In Joshua Tree, his sculptures are displayed on eight acres of land on Sunfair Avenue in a sculpture garden that has intrigued passersby for years.

Many of his sculptures can also be seen in various locations throughout the Morongo Basin.

He often donates his work to non-profit institutions for installation or for fund-raising activities.

"I enjoy seeing my work in public locations, and I can afford to donate them because I'm not a commercial artist," said Dabah.

Dabah wasn't always so devoted to sculpture. He worked other media, but one welding les-

son changed everything.

"Before, I did ceramics and painting and mobiles, and more than 30 years ago, I got a welding lesson and then started doing nothing but metal sculpture after that."

He proudly explained, "I make sculptures all the time, always bringing up new sculptures. I'll continue working. I've done over 1,000 sculptures. I'll do as many more as I can."

He recently worked on a sculpture called "Half Henge" in collaboration with Copper Mountain College's art department director, Spelman Downer.

His favorite sculpture at Copper Mountain College is a large piece shaped like a half moon that looks like it has harp

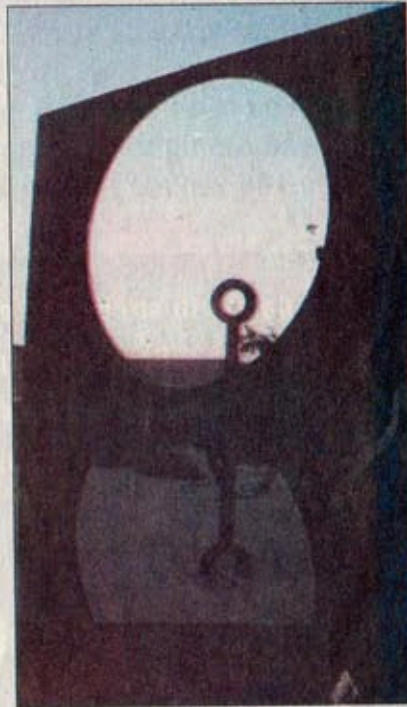
strings. It frames the San Geronio Mountains.

In addition to the college, his sculptures are featured at the Joshua Tree Retreat (formerly Mentalphysics) and Turtle Island in downtown Joshua Tree. In Yucca Valley, his work is featured in front of the California Welcome Center and the Yucca Valley Park-And-Ride.

In Twentynine Palms, Dabah's large-scale steel sculptures are displayed at Parker Ranch on Mesquite Springs Road, Pizza Hut on Twentynine Palms Highway, Monument and Twentynine Palms high schools, Rio Ranch Market, Wonder Garden Cafe and in Veterans Park on the City Hall lawn.

For more information on this Italian-American artist, visit www.gallery29.com/simi. The site also contains photos of 53 of Dabah's sculptures.

Portrait of the artist



JIMMY BIGGERSTAFF / Hi-Desert Star

Simi Dabah's sculptures are featured on the grounds of Copper Mountain College.