

## Man of Steel: A Sculptor and His Unusual Art



By Kristen Page-Kirby

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Dan Gioia is a man of steel. His interactive sculptural works include "Sphere," a giant, spinnable ball of sod, suspended in a steel contraption. It's on display at the Conner Contemporary Art Gallery as part of ACADEMY 2011, the 11th annual invitation survey of outstanding work by area MFA/BFA students. (Gioia graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art with a BFA in interdisciplinary sculpture.)

**When you make art that's intended to be interactive and people just walk by it, does it irritate you?**

Well, a lot of people interpret art differently. I made a piece in the fall that people found really intimidating. But the sphere is something they want to interact with.

**Which piece scared them off?**

It was the breathing machine. It was a wind-powered machine with bellows on each side that made [people who put their mouths on its tubes] breathe in and out. It wasn't up to the viewer when to breathe. People said it was a combination of a torture device and playground equipment.

**How important is location?**

Site-specificity is really important. I had wanted to place the sphere in a large grassy plaza at MICA, but it ended up surrounded by concrete. But putting a sculpture like that in a place starved for greenery really helped people interact with it.



**Does the scale of your work encourage people to interact with it?**

Absolutely. Steel can be so intimidating, but the sphere looks sturdy. You can do what you want to it. You can kick it. There's a comfort in that.

**Do you have family and friends that just wish you painted sunsets or something more typical?**

Oh, yeah. My mom. Don't get me wrong: She loves my work, but I feel like she would be just as happy with the paintings I made as a freshman.

» *Conner Contemporary Art, 1358 Florida Ave. NE; through Aug. 22, free; 202-588-8750; Connercontemporary.com.*

*Photo courtesy Conner Contemporary Art*