

# Ferguson Has A History Museum

Ferguson, indeed, does have a Historical Society and a History Museum and we are moving forward with the help of our readers of the past weeks. We encourage any of you reading this article to join in the conversation. Contact information is at the bottom of this article. This month we will take a look at a current event which will be part of Ferguson history. Also, this month, my daughter, Emily Benner, who witnessed the event, will be the teller of the tale.

What follows is a story of one rising local artist's Yellow Brick Road-esque journey to Jeske Sculpture Park and how her welded steel friends weather the odyssey in style. On May 25th, 2026, the morning sun rose over the majestic trees of Ferguson to find a small group hard at work in Jeske Park. The park's founder (Bryce Robinson), the artist (Melanie Reichert)-assisted by two coworkers (Jake Mathis & Logan Fisher), the artist's family, some Jeske neighbors (including artist Phil Berwick), and one of Melanie's high school art teachers (me!) were among those in attendance. Two multi-faceted steel sculptures were being installed. They are both about 9 feet tall. The first can be seen from Nancy Place: "Per Aspera".



The second can be seen from Gerald Place: "Ciconia". This is the sculptures' first time in a park. The artist's work has previously been on view in Cape Girardeau and O'Fallon, MO.

The artist, Melanie Reichert grew up in St. Louis County and attended SEMO in Cape Girardeau. It seems Melanie has always been an artist-her skill quickly recognized by her high school teachers (including myself) but these large-scale sculptures are

quite different from the 2-d art Melanie was most known for as a teen. In fact, Melanie was a painting major during her first two years at SEMO. As Melanie explained, "I took a welding workshop in the summer before my junior year (2020) and it completely changed me as an artist. I did my last two years as a sculpture major with a specialization in large scale public art. Shout out to my professor Chris Wubbena! He has public artwork all over the country and two of his pieces are at Jeske as well (see "Victoria" and "Angele" at end of article)! My degree says Sculpture but I consider myself very interdisciplinary. As long as I'm creating, I'm happy." There are visible threads that reflect Melanie's style across her diverse creations, such as in the etched surface decoration on both sculptures and the origami-inspired form of "Ciconia". In my interview, Melanie recalled an award-winning 1-inch origami sculpture that she entered into the high school's juried Minumental Art Show.



The two sculptures now installed at Jeske are made of 16-gauge mild steel, welded & embellished through a multi-step chemical process. The resulting surface design is organic and fluid, contrasting with the structures' very angular facets. But the material itself plays an ever-changing role in the aesthetic. As Melanie explained, "The nature of mild steel is to rust and change over time and that's not something I fight. It's going to continue changing over its whole life cycle...part of my work mentality with art. I do really enjoy the rust. I appreciate the way it continues to change. I'm excited to see what it looks like at different times of day." And the evolution of

these works is a beautiful allegory for the artist's own experiences with them.

It was clear that installation day was very emotional for Melanie, who said, "After I graduated from SEMO I didn't have the facilities that I had there, the support, and, like, the money or time. It felt really hard to try and get back into this stuff and I thought I wasn't going to start working large-scale again. It's been kind of a little whirlwind for me since February because that's when these were stolen." When that happened, Melanie posted



about it on social media and found love and support in her community. One person stated that they thought they might have seen them at a scrap yard and went back to look, sending Melanie photo proof of their location (they had been sold for the worth of the steel-perhaps less than \$1/lb). Another shared the post with her husband, knowing that the subject matter would be of interest to him and (drumroll)...her husband is Bryce Robinson, the Chief Preparator & Facilities Manager at Laumier Sculpture Park as well as the founder & Curator of Jeske Sculpture Park (among many other accomplishments). Melanie reminisced, "A lot of people saw it and there were like half a dozen people that had seen my art before in Cape and were like 'I



remember when this was...' It felt so good and heartwarming. It reminded me that I have so many people and so much help that I can ask for...something that public art just reminds me of: it's always so community-based. There's always a silver lining and it's a reminder that there's more than bad in the world...it's just that bad things are so loud." But it seems that what spoke louder was the power of Melanie's art as Bryce Robinson reached out to her to ask if she was interested not only in displaying it at Jeske but in pursuing a sculpture residency as well! "He's kind of been my fairy godmother," said Melanie of Bryce, who is giving her access to a MIG welder to continue her work. He transported "Per Aspera" and "Ciconia" & guided Melanie through the installation, explaining tools, techniques & purpose of all of the steps like a master teacher. Bryce is a

Ferguson native (woo hoo!), large-scale sculptor, & college professor who "owes it all to STLCC Florissant Valley". As explained on his website, Jeske is a 7-acre sculpture park that was founded in 2014. Ferguson residents enjoyed the park for decades before it was elevated to a St. Louis art destination. It is free to the public and showcases biennial exhibitions of outdoor sculpture. Fun personal side note: it was one of the treasure hunt locations where a couple of

my favorite Ferguson residents (shout-out to the Klasings!) found a Zack Smithey painting during the Easter Art Hunt of 2015 that I still have displayed in my home!

So, in addition to her job at the Saint Louis Art Museum, Melanie is now enjoying the opportunity to hone her skills under the guidance of Noah Kirby, founder & Co-Director of Six Mile SculptureWorks in Granite City, Illinois' Art & Entertainment District. Noah is also a sculptor and college professor. Melanie's family is one of few that hold such a place in my heart: I have taught all of the kids in their family and remained friends with her mom. I am so grateful for that, because teachers don't always get to see how their students grow up and become amazing adults. Melanie's confidence, skill, and passion strengthen those community bonds that she feels uplifted her.

Her final words in my interview were "The worst thing anyone can do for themselves is think that they're all alone and that they have to do everything by themselves." So whether you're power walking, choosing a book from the little library box, or throwing a frisbee at Jeske, pause to feel Melanie's positivity radiating from these massive towers of steel and giving you a hug.



Sources: Phil Berwick's video interview with Reichert, [cwubben.com](http://cwubben.com), [americacentralport.com](http://americacentralport.com), 2013 St. Louis Beacon article about Kirby by Nancy Fowler via [stlpr.org/arts](http://stlpr.org/arts), [granitecity.illinois.gov](http://granitecity.illinois.gov), [bryceolenrobinson.com](http://bryceolenrobinson.com), [laumeiersculpturepark.org](http://laumeiersculpturepark.org)

If you have any suggestions, questions, or items to donate to the Ferguson Historical Society, please contact **Jerry Benner** at [fjbenner@mindspring.com](mailto:fjbenner@mindspring.com). If you wish to become a member or make a money donation, you can send it to Ferguson Historical Society at 716. N. Elizabeth Ave, Ferguson, MO 63135. You are also welcome to visit the History Museum. Please email me at the address to set a date and time to visit. Board meetings are on the third Wednesday at 6:30 PM. Interested people are invited to attend the meetings. We have capabilities to do oral histories and would love to add to our collection on any Ferguson or North County subject. ***"The Ferguson Historical Society preserves Ferguson's historical record and engages the public through programs, research and exhibitions that deepen understanding, strengthen civic pride and connect past, present and future generations."***

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