

## How an abstract sculpture is teaching kids to see things differently, honoring artist's legacy

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A Catholic school is helping resurrect a large-scale abstract sculpture created years ago by a Nashville artist.

Previously in storage, the late Steve Benneyworth's "Interlocking Joints" now appears to float above the well-manicured lawn of Christ the King School.

The piece — all jutting angles formed by weathered concrete and oxidized steel — is not religious art.

But Principal Sherry Woodman still thinks "Interlocking Joints" has plenty to offer the students at the pre-K through eighth grade parochial school. She said it exudes a mix of math, science and whimsy.

"It's geometrical, but it's organic. He's taken something that's symmetrical and bent it out of shape," said Woodman, who noted it sits outside the windows of the art and math classrooms.

"When we're trying to teach kids to look at things in different ways, this is just so symbolic of that, of looking at an object in a new way, seeing things from different perspectives, appreciating that there's more than one way of seeing things."



The sculpture "Interlocking Joints," created by the late Nashville artist Steve Benneyworth, sits in front of Christ the King School in Nashville. (Photo: Holly Meyer/The Tennessean)

### Reintroducing the public to Benneyworth's artwork

Woodman had hoped to add more art to the Catholic school's campus, and the artist's children wanted to put several of his pieces back on display. The parents of a seventh grade student, Joe Kovalick and Sunday Camp, helped make it happen, she said. And a plaque on the base of the sculpture makes

note of that, naming the Kovalick family as the benefactor.

Benneyworth died in 2014 and left behind eight large-scale sculptures in rough shape, said Hannah Gardner, who is Benneyworth's daughter and now owns some of the pieces with her brother. A friend of the artist, Ran Batson, decided to spend a year restoring the artwork, she said.

"Our mission in this restoration has been to get them out in the public for people to get to see and appreciate his art and not have them just rotting away," Gardner said.

Gardner said she was too busy being a teenager to appreciate her father's art while he was alive. So she wants to pay that back and make sure he has the recognition today that she thinks he deserves.

"As a lifelong Nashvillian, I want his city to see his work," Gardner said. "It's a way to honor his legacy."

"Interlocking Joints" is the first to be placed, she said. It is on a three-year loan to the school from Benneyworth's children, but the hope is it will stay put for many years to come.

The school will dedicate the sculpture in a brief ceremony Wednesday morning.

"This seemed like a really wonderful way to make art available to the whole community," Woodman said.



Christian Moeller's "Stix" installation is at the Korean Veterans Boulevard roundabout. (Photo: Stacey Irvin)

### Benneyworth's impact on Nashville

Benneyworth, who was one of the city's first contemporary sculptors, was considered by some to be ahead of his time, but eventually

the city caught up to what he was trying to do, Woodman said.

The work Benneyworth was trying to create had an impact on what kinds of public art installations are embraced by Nashville today.

"The range and diversity of public art we have in Nashville is due in large part to artists like Steve Benneyworth," Anne-Leslie Owens, the public art project manager for Metro Arts, said in a statement. "His work challenged the accustomed norms of scale and mass with abstract and non-objective outdoor sculptures that encouraged conversation."

She pointed to other examples in the Metro Public Art Collection, like the more recent "Ghost Ballet for the East Bank Machineworks" by Alice Aycock and "Stix" by Christian Moeller.



In this 2003 file photo, Steve Benneyworth's "Web" sits on the corner of Belcourt and 20th Avenue South. (Photo: Shelley Mays/The Tennessean)

"Interlocking Joints" is not the only Benneyworth piece on display in the Belmont-Hillsboro neighborhood.

"Arial Triangle" is outside the Leu Center for the Visual Arts on Belmont University's campus.

Elsewhere in Nashville, there are five others on Vanderbilt University's campus.

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