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... 1997: Celia
... of *Linderella*: longtime resident and
... his retrospective show at Coleman Gallery, and author Richard Currey for his latest
... *Lost Highway*. The award for Outstanding Volunteer in the Arts went to the long-unsung prop master at
the Vortex Theater, Justine Krueger, while the Arts in Education prize was awarded to performer, professor and
drama workshopper Paul Ford. Even the Albuquerque Public Schools and its outgoing superintendent, Peter
Horoschak, were given an honorary award, for (one supposes) not allowing APS' arts programming to become
completely decimated, so that more talented Albuquerqueans will be around in the years to come to win awards
just like these.

—Blake de Pastino
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Who Is Randy Cooper? A Look at Your Choice for 1998's "Best Visual Artist"

My first thought, after entering the Bardean Gallery on Indian School and approaching one of

ARTIST PROFILE

Randy Cooper's sculptures, was, "Why was he just voted Albuquerque's best visual artist?" The wire mesh torso I stood before was cool, yes, but lots of art in Albuquerque is cool. I had expected an epiphany.

I stepped a little closer and saw what many other people had seen before me: the classical composition, the subtle details—a tuck beneath the belly, a crease above the shoulder. Then Barbara Lohbeck of the gallery turned on a light behind the sculpture. Against the wall there suddenly appeared a human form so lifelike that I half expected it to move of its own accord, a body exquisitely rendered out of shadow and light. The sculpture and its shadow were a unified whole. I turned the sculpture on its stand, and the shadow revolved, revealing different angles of its pose by degrees. Randy Cooper had his newest fan

Cooper moved from bronze to wire mesh-sculpting three years ago, and the Bardean Gallery was the first to take him on. Now his work is in about 30 galleries across the country.

His work begins as rolls of mesh originally intended for fire-

place screens and other mundane things, but next to his Hoffmantown studio, in a large, bright room where artists meet to sketch live models, he uses his hands and a few simple tools (a wooden dowel, a large metal bolt) to twist and smooth his wire into a work of art. How long does each piece take him? He's not sure. But his secret is that, while he does his initial work, he's not looking at his medium; he's looking at the

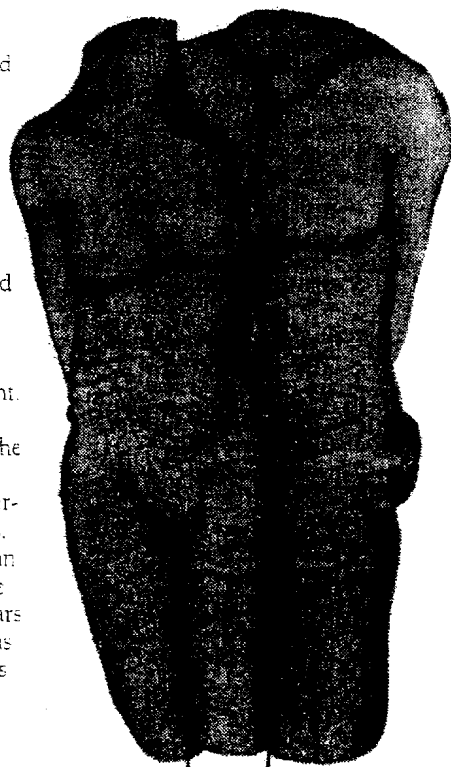
model. One feature all of his poses share is a fluidity of movement: legs apart, hips askew, one arm stretched. It is not by accident that Cooper's pieces are so dynamic. When he first came to Albuquerque, he worked as a model himself, so that he could gain an understanding of the body's possibilities and poses.

Each series of Cooper's sculptures is called a "pose." Every sculpture in a series is based on the same pose, but each is unique. To express this, each individual sculpture is named on a variation of the original.

Cooper's most popular piece, a male and female torso in embrace, is called *I Love You*, and each variant of the original has that name in a different language. While I was in the studio, I saw one named *I Love You* in Arabic and another in Klingon.

Cooper's first mesh sculptures were Native American faces. He's also done King Lear, horses and, more recently, lilies. But the demand keeps coming for female torsos. And Cooper doesn't seem to mind. He still has the same enthusiasm for his work, the wonder that comes from seeing your visions occupying the outside world, that he had when he started.

—Aaron Emmel



I Love You by Randy Cooper

The work of Randy Cooper is on display at Bardean Gallery, 2125 Louisiana NE. Call 881-1122.