

There's Fine Art in Nothing If You Look in the Right Place

ABOUT HALFWAY BETWEEN PHOENIX and Laughlin, Nevada, along scenic U.S. Route 93, Mare and I pulled the bike into the parking lot of the only gas station and store for miles. She spotted a nearby trailer filled with artwork, and we wandered inside. A woman followed us, saying, "He ain't here, and I don't know how much he wants for that junk."

"This stuff is neat," Mare said. "Where is the artist?"

"Probably out at his shack, about 2 miles off the highway on a rough road."

"What is this place?" I asked.

"This is Nothing, Arizona, and only four of us live here," she said.

Curious to meet the artist, we rode the twisted, rutted dirt road that crossed dry, sandy washes, and finally reached a square concrete structure standing next to a rusted camper. Our approach roused two mutts

that started to bark before a slightly bearded old man with scraggly gray hair appeared. George Brucha was short and thin and wore a pair of glasses with only one lens, for his one eye. After a few uncomfortable moments, he said, "Nice bike. What do you want?"

Mare said, "We saw your art at the store. I might want to buy a gift for a friend."

"Well, come on. I'll give you a tour since you came all the way out here."

Brucha showed us several outdoor sculptures. One was a piece of weathered wood that stood upright and resembled a dolphin. Another was a robot made from discarded hubcaps, license plates, rusted wire and springs. He explained, "I use whatever object I find and make something beautiful out of it. I live my art seven days a week, 24 hours a day."

For some reason we were overcome with emotion when we stepped inside the concrete shack of this hermit artist. A blanket served as a door, and it was relatively cool inside

the small room. Paintings covered the walls.

In his tiny home, Brucha explained that living simply and at his own pace allowed him to use all his time and talent toward art. "I've lived in this old power company line-shack for 20 years," he said. "I thought you were a friend bringing water when I heard you coming. I ain't got no electricity or running water. Sit down and I'll show you my paintings." Brucha lit a candle.

He showed us many paintings on canvas, some on pieces of wood and others on old car parts. He grew more animated as he shared the meaning of each. He said his artwork was therapeutic, and told us he is a recovering alcoholic originally from Pittsburgh, where he grew up in an orphanage. He lost one eye at the age of 2 from an acid spill, speculating that it was an intentional act by his stepmother. He became a ward of the state after his recovery.

He learned to drink alcohol while working as a gravedigger for the county when he was 12.

"I was so poor," he said, "that whenever I got a piece of paper, I drew all over it, front and back, because I never knew when I'd get another one. I almost killed myself with alcohol. Then I left and traveled the back roads of this country and haven't been back since."

Brucha quit drinking in 1975 and started painting on discarded wine bottles because he could not afford good paper, and painting on canvas intimidated him.

"What type of person is the gift for?" he asked.

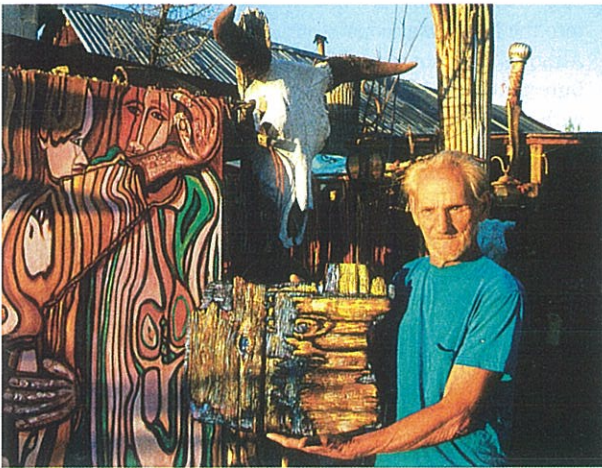
Mare said, "It's for a white woman who, after living several years on an Indian reservation, is getting married."

He retrieved a sculpture of an old, metal brake line painted to look like a peace pipe. It was attached to a cholla cactus skeleton, mounted on an old board painted with Indian designs. Colorful feathers were tied to each end.

It was perfect, and Mare gave him 10 bucks for it. He told us each to pick one work of art. Mare chose a painting of an Indian woman, and I chose a skeleton head painted on a piece of barn wood. The art hung out of the bike's saddlebags. Brucha wouldn't take any more money, so I gave him a flare and roll of electrical tape.

We rode on to Laughlin, but the highlight of our trip was our encounter with the artist of Nothing. ■■■

AUTHOR'S NOTE: George Brucha's art is no longer at the store, but can be viewed or purchased online at www.lngarts.com.



[ABOVE] He may not have running water or indoor plumbing, but George Brucha has artistic inspiration aplenty at his home in the desert near Nothing, Arizona.

[BELOW] This fanciful creation resides in Brucha's sculpture garden.

