

Sculpture embodies the power of the arts

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When Kirk Williams was working on his most recent sculpture, he began to suspect it had a force of its own.

That's not unusual in a work of art, he says.

"Usually I have an idea of what I want to do when I start (a piece), and then it changes. It develops a force, a power that affects the way it turns out. Sometimes it doesn't even feel like I'm working on it — like I even have a part of it. I'm just there."

This particular piece, which incorporates a man clinging to a fish, was especially troublesome and willful. "I had a problem with the man's face. I had an idea of the expression I wanted for him, but this other expression came out. I kept changing it, wiping this one off and starting over, but the same expression would come back.

"I finally decided to quit fighting it. Sometimes these things have a certain momentum of their own, and there's not much you can do about it."

Williams has created several sculptures, ranging from small, whimsical items to large, outdoor sculptures, but this one is probably more complex and more significant than any of his others, he says.

"With this piece, I wanted to get serious and work with more of a life theme. I wanted to show struggle, show movement."

The man and fish are composed of three separate pieces, seemingly emerging from the ground. "The whole thing is symbolic — actually, sort of doubly symbolic.

"First, it's symbolic of man trying to conquer his dreams. The fish is the environment, and the man is trying to conquer the environment.

"Then, it could also symbolize me — the artist — trying to conquer my dream — to do this piece. It's the hardest thing I've ever done."

Building the piece posed its own conflict with the environment, Williams said. His furnace went out last winter when he was working on the sculpture, and the head por-



Journal photo by Bob Hammerstrom

Kirk Williams' bonded bronze sculpture gives the appearance of a man and fish emerging from the ground. The work, which took about two

years to complete, was displayed on his front lawn on West Cavour last week.

years to complete, was displayed on his front lawn on West Cavour last week. By using bonded bronze, rather than foundry-cast bronze, the work is less expensive to create, and the artist can control the weight of the finished piece. "I have a wall piece I made a couple years ago that's seven or eight feet wide, but it only weighs about 20 pounds," he said. The sculpture doesn't have a name yet. Or it has several names — "Man and Fish," "The Rider" or "The Rescue." A friend pointed out that it looked like the fish was rescuing the man, an idea that Williams said he hadn't seen originally.

But he often relies on friends to point out things in his work that

tion froze and collapsed. Worse, the tail portion, which required a "very complicated mold," collapsed three times.

The sculpting process that Williams used requires several separate stages. He first formed the piece in wet clay, which requires fairly rapid work, so that the clay doesn't dry out and crack. After completing the clay sculpture, he made a latex mold, then a plaster mold over the top. Finally, it was laminated with fiberglass.

When the work was ready for casting, he mixed epoxy with powdered metals to form the bonded bronze, which is what makes up the finished piece.

Williams said he hadn't seen originally.

he's too close to see. Other people, especially those who don't have a lot of experience in the arts, can pick out meanings and, in some cases, problems in the work that he can't always see himself.

In addition to sculpture, Williams also paints, and he is a singer and composer. His income, however, comes not from the arts, but from his job as a human services technician at the Fergus Falls Regional Treatment Center, where he has worked for 11 years.

The style of the current piece — a work emerging from the ground — is not a new idea, he admitted. There are several sculp-

tures on the East Coast that use a similar technique.

But shared techniques and similar ideas are an inherent force among the arts, Williams said. "You can't help but be influenced by different artists. When you start a piece, there's something in it that you're drawn to — information, an idea. I don't know where it comes from, but it's there.

"Much of your work ends up not being you, but a collective of what's been done before. Then you add to the collective, and the ideas go on."

He is currently displaying the new sculpture and several other of his works in the Twin Cities.