



Left: Nasser Pirasteh of Clearwater demonstrates "The Wall," a wood sculpture he made.

Above: "The Universe," another wood sculpture, is displayed on a sunroom in Pirasteh's home. The work, which moves when touched, symbolizes the earth's balance.

Motion, balance important elements—

Artist describes his sculpture

Text and photos by Tami Phillippi

"If you look very closely, the trees, clouds, they are sculpture," said Nasser Pirasteh, a Clearwater artist.

The clouds and trees, Pirasteh said, show a natural sense of balance, which he tries to emulate in his art work.

"The balance is the most important part," he said.

He's a versatile artist, having worked in still-life paintings, bronze jewelry, and many different kinds of sculpture including wood, bronze and stone.

"My first motive is my art," he said.

Before moving to the United States in 1970, Pirasteh earned his keep creating art works, some of which adorn public squares and plazas in his native Iran.

"I've done a lot of portraits for the Shah's family," he said. "There was a lot of money over there."

Artistic talent seems to run in the family, Pirasteh said. His father and brother are artists and his children Shaheen, 10, and Tara, 9, have expressed interest in art.

"It seems like it is in the blood," he said. If it's not in the blood, it is in the name—in Persian, Pirasteh means someone who decorates.

With his father's encouragement, Pirasteh began selling his art at a young age. At 16, he was kicked out of a mayor's office where he had gone to discuss a statue he'd been asked to do for a national holiday in Iran.

Up until that time, Pirasteh explained, he'd dealt with the city officials only over the phone. He had an appointment with the mayor to finalize plans for the statue. When he walked into the mayor's office, the mayor (expecting an older man, rather than a boy) yelled at him and told him to leave. Pirasteh said he was startled and ran out of the office.

Since emigrating to the United States in 1970, Pirasteh has earned a bachelor and a master of arts degree in art, both from St. Cloud State University.

One of his works—a large wooden piece called "Separation"—was purchased by the city of St. Cloud for its public library.

Most of his current work incorporates wood, stone or metal materials into a piece which represents movement and, as Pirasteh explains it, "life."

"I started to develop an interest in motion," Pirasteh said. This came after years of working strictly from

still life models.

But, it has been harder for him here in the United States.

Iranians and Europeans put a greater value on owning art than Americans do, he said, commenting that luxury has a different meaning here.

For example, he said, most Americans place more value on owning a new refrigerator than on purchasing an original painting. Thus, it's harder for an artist to earn a living here, he said.

"In Europe, it is opposite," Pirasteh said.

Sometimes, especially during the last few years, his art has taken a backseat. He's kept busy with his business—2002, a landscaping, design, and construction company.

"The construction helps pay the bills," Pirasteh explained.

So, instead of creating large sculptures or bronze works, he's helped redecorate restaurants and homes, mostly in the Minneapolis area.

"I am very far from my art work," he said. He plans to move "little by little back to my art."