

Nelson Parrish

Southern California based Nelson Parrish was inspired by his native Alaska's totem pole, which is typically a decorative narrative of the legends of a culture told through man's relationship with the land. Since hunting, fishing, farming and trade traditionally were cornerstones of society, the totem pole united the stories of a community with its environment, though a form that inextricably linked art with nature. Requiring enormous labor, skill and craft, totems traditionally were made of wood but today are also made of stone, glass and many other unconventional materials.

"Originally from Alaska, I have studied color my whole life. Color is the vernacular we use when traditional words fail. It is the universal language, utilized for translating thoughts and experiences viscerally and immediate. I refine abstracted known forms such as totems, flags, fitches and river teeth to contain ideas – then implement the action of painting and sculpting to make these ideas visible and tangible. The artifacts created through this vocabulary of Light and Color are as much a telluride, as they are for Telluride. They are the alchemy of those indescribable moments that make us stay: the Light in the Canyon."

Parrish's sculptural pieces are handcrafted of wood, aerospace aluminum and layered bio-resin, infused with splashes of vibrant color and racing stripes. The narratives depicted in Parrish's work are conceptual and aesthetic tributes to seminal moments of expression or intense feeling, often triggered by nature. Parrish seizes the essence of the moment and portrays its emotional story.

His series of paintings, titled 21 Flags, is clearly based on the familiar pattern of stars and stripes, but abstracted nearly beyond recognition. By doing so, he compels the viewer to grapple with the scrapes, gaps and scratches while mentally reconstructing the familiar image hung vertically. The end result is neither a patriotic ode nor didactic lecture, but a process-driven technique that collectively speaks of the polysemic nature of the flag itself.

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