



For San Francisco sculptor Bernie Lubell, the viewer is part of the exhibit

When Bernie Lubell was growing up in New York City in the 1950s, he was a big fan of Rube Goldberg, the famous cartoonist

story and
photo by
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Review:
Bernie Lubell: Aspirations, shows through Oct. 12. Gallery talk, Sept. 19, 5:30 p.m.

Jacki Headley
University Art
Gallery
Arts & Humanities
Building, Chico State
headleygallery
csuchico.com
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known primarily for his popular depictions of goofy gadgets performing simple tasks in indirect and humorous ways. As a kid, Lubell liked to take things apart and put them back together. Later, in college, he studied engineering, then switched to social psychology, receiving a master's from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. But what he really wanted to do, it turned out, was make art—specifically, a uniquely interactive type of art, Goldberg-inspired wooden contraptions that take on meaning only when viewers activate them.

Lubell, who lives in San Francisco, was in Chico last week for the inauguration of *Bernie Lubell: Aspirations*, an exhibit of his sculptures at the Jacki Headley

University Art Gallery.

On Thursday (Aug. 29), he gave a slide lecture in the Rowland-Taylor Recital Hall that was a lot like his sculptures: whimsical, even zany at times, but also serious in elucidating Lubell's desire to foster collaboration and cooperation in the world.

For instance, consider the huge piece (it's an 11-foot-tall tower) called "Party of the First Part." It's activated when one person pedals a stationary wooden bicycle on one side of the piece while another walks on a treadmill on the opposite side. The results are sent through a chain of pulleys to make a disc on the top of the tower roll one way or the other—or, as Lubell delightedly put it, "with the right amount of cooperation, to not roll at all."

It doesn't bother him that his sculptures seem slapped together and not altogether stable. In that sense, he says, they're like his beater truck and, closer to home, his troubled heart (he's twice had surgery). "We're fragile machines," he says, which is why his sculptures are meant to seem vulnerable.

They're also unplanned and take shape and establish purpose only as they grow organically. Most of the time Lubell starts with nothing more than a title and builds from there. Every part of his pieces has a role

to play, but how they fit together is often mysterious. They're also fun and, at times, comical.

"Aspirations" is also the title of one of the major pieces in the show. It includes a couple of blow-up "lounges" in which two people lie and pull on strings connected to small blowers that provide the air that keeps the lounges inflated. In his statement, Lubell notes that "Aspirations" allows participants "to explore collaboration, competition, and communication as they negotiate how much air to keep for themselves and how much to share with their partner."

Lubell is constantly tinkering with his pieces, even when they're on exhibit. He futzed over "Aspirations" even while busily discussing it with a group of art students. Nothing is permanent, he says.

He laughs when he talks about his penurious life as an artist. In his decades-long career, he's garnered a profit in only three years, despite having been featured in galleries all across the United States and in Europe and Japan. He supports his artwork by doing carpentry.

To see a number of videos of Lubell and his work, go to vimeo.com/user5685214. And to fully enjoy the exhibit, take a friend to the gallery and just have fun. □



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