

Tony Berlant

born 1941

resides in Santa Monica, California

education / professional experience

Tony Berlant was educated at the University of California at Los Angeles. He received both a B.A. and M.A. in painting, and then an M.F.A. in sculpture.

Berlant's major installations include the San Francisco and Los Angeles Airports.

BABA'S DOOR The Jhamandas Watamull Entrance.

collaged metal on both sides of an exterior door.

copper, hammered tin, silver solder, metal scraps. 1988

exterior side of door and door frame; located to the left of the Dewain

Valentine sculpture near the main entrance to the Museum.

interior side of door (emergency exit); located in the Courtyard Gallery

description / design

exterior side of door and door frame; Subtle deep blue and soft green overall, with abstract fragments, soldered silver lines and swirling elements, giving the appearance of a linear figure.
interior side of door; Found metal scraps are cut and assembled together with many small tacks. The cut shapes and small tacks interact as form and edge line, creating an active visual surface. Multi colored collage which includes a Berlant apparent landscape complete with objects and background. The found tin pieces with intriguing color patterns are surrounded by nail head lines. Conical linear shapes sit on an undulating brown texture framed by a wood patterned blue arch.

subject / title

"Baba's Door" was donated by the Watamull family and titled in memory of their grandfather called Baba, which is Indian for Grandfather.

style

Tony Berlant is recognized for his style of reshaping found metal, for collaged constructions, arranging simple shapes and designing with surface pattern. He uses found tin from tv trays, cookie and cracker boxes and commercial signage. A recent exhibition includes elaborate metal frames created for painted portraits. He found at thrift stores. Rather than remain limited to found metal as a basis for his art, Berlant now creates his own tin surfaces, thereby gaining control over color and size of the collaged surface shapes.

Along with collecting metal scraps, Berlant gathers symbols and images from various myths and other cultures. Houses with pointed roofs are recurrent themes. Houses have openings — doors and windows revealing the inside or interior — symbols for the self and soul and its surroundings. Doorways are passages between the inner and outer, the self and others, transitions between life and death, and between the secular and spiritual world. Berlant comments, "While the formalist European art esthete was strong in me, it was always colliding with the naive, folk art visionary."

tour anecdotes

Tony Berlant has an impressive personal collection of Southwest American Indian Art, especially Mimbres pottery and Navajo rugs. As a young artist he financed his exhibitions by buying large estates, offering dealers the choice pieces and selling the remainder to other artists. He curated a Navajo Rug show in Los Angeles.