

**Tom Connelly**  
Artist Statement

I am both a teacher and student of meditation and clairvoyance. One day a former student gave me a refrigerator magnet with the word "Allowing" on it. I took the magnet, said thank you to the student and immediately tried to define the word, analyze the word, compartmentalize the word, put the word in a safe container of what I know so I could study it and eventually... put it away when I grew tired of it.

This is my resistance to allowing. Allowing means openness, giving, sharing, showing off my heart, vulnerability, which then feeds fear and hiding. What does resistance feel like? Take a deep breath and hold it in.

Allowing is the exhale.

Making my art allows the person who lives inside my head to come out and experience the world. The making process opens a door into the room of conscious expression that simultaneously allows the space to exist while it allows the space to be filled, emptied, cleaned, dirtied and cleared over and over again. My dad, a second generation California farmer, taught me to tinker, to create what you needed when you needed it, using what you had on hand; to see objects and materials as opportunity for new creation. It was an act of seeing without being limited by an objects original purpose and then allowing that piece to breathe into something new. My mother taught me to go beyond the surface and think deeply about questions I encounter. Both parents were depression era kids, saving every scrap of paper, stockpiling for some magical day, when you might need it. Thus, I never lacked of stuff to create with nor clutter to organize.

I invoke humor into my work, and while some pieces may cause an eye roll, like wooden postcards depicting Clint Eastwood and Woodrow Wilson, or a Diebenkornhole game, there is a twisting of words or materials behind each piece. In the same way a good pun is used to exploit words, my work often combines twisting ideas, seeing the multi-sided nature of objects so the final piece is not locked into an single meaning or purpose.

I am in awe of artists who can allow me to be more aware of my surroundings and myself with what they create. The way Mark Rothko can make a color palette you can stare at for hours. How James Turrell can use light and dimensions to start a dialog about what's real and what's not. And Jeff Koons' use of wit and whimsy, and that guttural feeling of "No that's not art!" but it is, and it's funny. The only rules are the ones you make for yourself...to tinker the way a cat plays on a piano, disharmonious at times and yet creating new from nothing.

Heart Wood, a public art piece I created for San Francisco General Hospital's yearly fundraiser, took on many of the characteristics and thought processes behind my work. I saw how these sculptures were decorated in the past, beautifully and professionally painted or adorned with local scenes or references to the city. Seeing the blank 3-dimensional heart, my thought was how could I do something different? What has not been tried before? I like wood. I heart wood! I chose to cover the sculpture with reclaimed wood from my house and local wood shops. Most of the wood was scrap or reclaimed. This process spoke to me during the collecting of all the pieces, turning waste wood into useable materials, and then handling, bending, sawing, gluing,

screwing, and deciding on how each angle fit together. It was a big puzzle and I was designing each puzzle piece. The seeming tedious process of cutting each piece to fit, finding the next piece, measuring, cutting, repeating became it's own meditation after a while. Building Heart Wood took on a conscious rhythm until I glued on the last piece and let it go into the world. Naming the piece was the biggest pun about it.

I expect my art to speak to a lot of people. It's the person at the party that everyone is comfortable around and don't really know why. It won't be the loudest person in the room, it won't talk your ear off or try to go home with you, but given a few minutes of time you will be glad to have met that person and you will want to come back and see them again. I hope a viewer can be conscious. This is a view into how I experience the world and feel the need to share those experiences through an art practice.