

Charlie Kaplan's path to sculpting marble began with an interest in hand tools. A natural ability in shop class in high school, a passion for collecting vintage tools, a reader of the history of technology, and a knack for being a handyman around the house meant that as a 24 year old, recently married college graduate living in an apartment in West Hollywood, he would have a set of new chisels.

After eyeing an abandoned piece of Douglas Fir in a parking lot, Kaplan hoisted it up to his apartment balcony, reached for his set of new chisels and instinctively started carving. He enjoyed the experience and thus began a decade of trying different types of wood and other materials before arriving at marble, a generation before his first gallery exhibit in 2013. Charlie Kaplan was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1944. His casual yet efficient approach to life could be rooted in the influence of his mother Ethelyn, who was always aware of potential obstacles standing in the way of her success, yet always found a non-confrontational way to achieve her goal.

Ethelyn Kaplan, a single parent of three children who was divorced in the 1950s, moved the family from Nebraska to northern California and became an entrepreneur. She had graduated from UC Berkeley so the San Francisco area was a natural place to start a new life for herself and her children. In 1954, Ethelyn opened a toy store, which would evolve into Lakeshore Learning Materials, which sells educational toys and school supplies to teachers and parents. Kaplan joined Lakeshore Learning in 1967 after he graduated from Berkeley. His younger brother Michael would join in 1971. With Ethelyn very much involved until her retirement in 1975, the two brothers developed and expanded Lakeshore Learning, eventually moving the headquarters to the Los Angeles area where Kaplan had moved when he joined the company. Kaplan's role evolved from sales, to product development to, at one point being Chief Operating Officer but then switching roles with Michael to become Vice-President for Merchandising and Buying until retiring in 2006.

Simultaneous with Kaplan's career advancement at Lakeshore Learning was the development of this artistic ability. Shortly after the first carving experience, Kaplan decided to enroll in a few courses to focus his interests. He began in 1969 at Beverly Hills Adult School in a clay sculpture course for which he paid \$5 a semester. Working in clay, and subsequently working in wax, quickly helped Kaplan realize that he was more interested in the carving aspects of working with other material rather than the additive aspects of clay.

Shortly thereafter, Kaplan enrolled in Santa Monica City College and took courses in welding for artists and blacksmithing courses. Working in metal helped him realize that he was truly drawn towards a smoother finished surface and thus he began to define his personal aesthetic.

In 1978, Kaplan enrolled in UCLA Extension and began to take sculpting courses in stone, alabaster and marble. He credits his first teacher at UCLA Extension, the late Mary Ann DeVine, as truly helping him understand that sculpting marble was the right match for his talent and

passion. Ultimately, the smooth, sensual feel of highly polished marble would become a lifetime pursuit.

When DeVine stopped teaching due to illness, Kaplan reluctantly but understandably searched for a new mentor. He met Charles Fulmer, an instructor at the University of Judaism, today's American Jewish University, and started a twenty-plus year student-teacher relationship.

The parallel tracks of developing a professional career and pursuing an artistic interest did overlap in some natural ways. During his tenure at Lakeshore Learning, Kaplan traveled widely to source product and production and also to work with the company's customers. An eye for design was certainly a factor in his success; from assembling trade show booths to understanding the appeal of a product's color, size, shape and function. His extensive travels also fostered an interest and appreciation for different cultures.

In 1995, ready to advance to the next stage of sculpting marble, Kaplan decided to join artist Lynne Streeter in a marble-sculpting course in Pietrasanta, Italy. Because he was working full time at Lakeshore Learning, he could only attend for a week, in what was a month-long course but the experience opened a whole new aspect to his art. He would return to Streeter's course another five times, always extending his stay until he finally spent an entire month in Tuscany's Pietrasanta in 2000.

The experience of carving marble in a town not more than ten miles from Carrara and being surrounded by artisans who live and breath carving, was the proverbial tipping point. Immersing himself in the community of artisans, Kaplan's knowledge of working with different types of marble would help him articulate why he would choose to sculpt in Belgium black marble or Rosa Portugal marble or Bici marble from Macedonia. He would also learn the properties of casting in bronze and would experiment with this medium.

Ironically, when at college, Kaplan thought of taking a sculpture class at Berkeley but opted not to for fear of failure. Kaplan began his undergraduate studies thinking of a career in the sciences. After studying chemistry and math he became interested in political theory and graduated with a degree in social science. It would be as an adult, taking courses part-time while working at Lakeshore Learning, that Kaplan would discover his potential as a sculptor.

Throughout his intuitive and schooled approach to sculpting, it became clear that Kaplan's strength was in non-representational, three-dimensional forms. Kaplan looks for clues from the natural shape of the material. His process is to clean up the slab, removing pieces that need to be removed because of cracks and faults and then chisel out a small contoured area. Knowing which curves are pleasing and not pleasing, intuitively knowing how a contoured area should be expanded and knowing how to create a cohesive, well-balanced form are now hallmarks of Kaplan's sculpture.

Charlie and his wife Jo Ann make Los Angeles their permanent home where they have two daughters, a son-in-law and a grandson. They recently moved into a new house designed

especially to include a sculpting studio with a crane to make moving large blocks of marble and the finished artwork possible.

Charlie still goes to Italy every summer to sculpt, and continue his study of carving stone. In 2009, the city of Pietrasanta installed one of his finished sculptures on the public pier. Reflecting on early artistic influences, which might have foreshadowed the opening of a 2013 exhibit devoted to Kaplan's sculpture at the PYO Gallery in Los Angeles, Kaplan recalls that his mother did attend art school as an adult and that her mother was a painter. Kaplan refers to one of his grandmother's paintings long being in his home and being one of his most cherished possessions.