

# DON GUMMER BACK HOME AGAIN

## **Don Gummer's remarks at the press conference/launch of Don Gummer: Back Home Again, Aug. 31, 2017**

I grew up on the west side in Bridgeport with my mom, dad and 5 brothers. We built everything from forts out of trees and snow to ball fields from patches of dirt. We created race tracks and dug pole vaulting and high jumping pits in our back yard. We constructed tree houses, and put together bikes and go carts and model airplanes. We explored for miles around our house, which was the center of our ever-expanding universe. During the housing boom in the late 50's and early 60's houses were being built in our circular neighborhood and I noticed their architecture, placement, and building process while marveling at the interior framing and its inherent logic.

When I knew I wanted to be an artist, I felt a curiosity and need to explore the city in search of interesting places and structures that didn't exist in what was then the countryside. I was drawn to Monument Circle, the most unique architectural feature in Indianapolis that provides a true, symbolic and dignified center of a very balanced city. Seeing it opened a window to my own future as an artist, as it encompassed the traits I would strive for in my own work. Every week during my senior year at Ben Davis High School I took a bus to The John Herron Art School to take drawing classes and before boarding the bus back to Bridgeport I would walk around and imagine living and working here. The lay out of the city, with the circle in the center surrounded by squares, provided a feeling of security. It made perfect sense that in art as in life, there is a center and from it, things emanate.

Before exploring the big city to the east I began selling work that was displayed on a fence along US 40 at the Hershel Fullen Gallery just east of Bridgeport. They were oil portraits of men – sorry no women, this was before I became a feminist – like Albert Einstein and Ernest Hemingway who I admired for their creativity and vision.

Today I realize how formative those years were. Living on the west side, where we could build whatever our imaginations came up with, served as the foundation when I began thinking about art. Then, when I explored the city, all its circles and squares, emanating from the center, provided me with a sense of confidence and an understanding of my own place within the city and the world. A sense of beginning and grounding is invaluable, I believe, for an artist's career.

I'm honored to have been asked to exhibit my work in our beautiful city. From exhibitions on the fence in Bridgeport in 1963 to placing my work along the Cultural Trail in 2016 is so far but yet so close.