

Roark Gourley @ Bella Rosa

## Off the Wall

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

### IN A TOPSY-TURVY RIDE SURE TO TICKLE YOUR FUNNY

**BONE**, artist Roark Gourley takes viewers between the dimensions with his iconic wall sculptures. Six of his two-and-a-half dimensional wall sculptures are on display at Bella Rosa through the end of January.

“My subject is mostly humorous, because I think the world is serious enough already,” wrote Gourley in his artist statement. “In fact, just trying to maintain a sense of humor in this crazy world is a job in itself.”

Gourley, who is named after the main



Roark Gourley

character in Ayn Rand’s *Fountain Head*, grew up in Lynwood, California where he and his brother often accompanied their mother to museums, galleries, and the Hollywood Bowl – reluctantly at first. “We thought it was really boring and we’d be joking around or throwing spitballs,” he said. “But at some point, my mom said ‘You could do that’ and I knew she was right.”

With his brother, who also grew up to be a professional artist, Gourley spent his boyhood actively building things and taking shop classes in school. “We would create objects out of nothing,”

he said. “We built Fort Apache in our backyard.”

Gourley began his formal art training at Orange Coast College where he studied art and photography under John Upton. “He was quite a taskmaster, but he completely changed my point of view,” said Gourley. “He told me, ‘You do the creative part, and I’ll teach you the technique.’ I had great teachers there. They were really into you.”



Meat and Potatoes by Roark Gourley



Spaghetti Meets Tomato in the Collision of the Continental Plates (detail) by Roark Gourley

Gourley continued his art studies at the University of Colorado. While there, Gourley developed his fascination with quantum physics and holography, the method of creating three-dimensional images. His artwork continues to reflect these interests, most notably the humorous two-and-a-half dimensional wall art that he is known for.

“It’s really about forced perspective,” explained Gourley. “It’s used in theatre a lot, and I realized that art is always messing with the dimensions and manipulating perspective. With two-and-a-half dimensional art, the artwork is flat, but it also comes off of the wall and into your life. That’s what I like about it.”

After Colorado, Gourley found his way back to California and tried his hand at running a gallery. He’s been involved with several galleries since, including the Sherwood Gallery in Laguna Beach,

but decided to focus full-time on his own artwork starting in the late 80s. He continues to work out of the Laguna Beach-based studio he calls “Coolsville”. He’s had several successful tours and exhibitions, and he was awarded an Honorary Life Time Membership for the Festival of Arts and Pageant of the Masters. In the early 90s, Gourley was honored with a commission from the Smithsonian to create a piece for the 150 year anniversary exhibit. The resulting piece, *Spaghetti Meets Tomato in the Collision of the Continental Plates*, depicts a comical visual of how tomatoes came to be used in spaghetti.

“Laughter and the appreciation of aesthetics are unique to the human race,” said Gourley. “My dog doesn’t get my jokes, but maybe he likes my art.”

Bella Rosa is located at 1103 State St. Hours are 11-7pm, daily. For more information, call 966-1707 or visit [www.coolsville.com](http://www.coolsville.com).