

Melita Westerlund works on a large aluminum sculpture at her cavernous Bar Harbor studio, a 19th century brick warehouse that was once an electric power plant.



(Left) Photo by Laurie Schreiber (Right) Photos by Stewart Brecher (2)



Born and raised in Finland, Westerlund has an affinity for bright colors. This is *Early Spring*, 2013, aluminum and paint, 4' x 2'6" x 12'.

When she creates one of her signature aluminum sculptures she gears up in steel-toed boots, canvas jacket and pants, leather gloves, and a welder's helmet and ear protectors layered over a knitted Lapp cap whose patterns reflect her native Finnish love of color. And she wields a powered metal saw that can screech through thick aluminum sheets.

As piles of metal filings accumulate on the floor, she cuts sinuous shapes—like petals, or folds of flesh, or giant mushrooms. Recently she was working on a six-foot sculpture.

“There’s something about the tension in physical involvement,” she said. “I like struggling with the elements, struggling to hold different things together.”

Strategically flexed, hole-punched, bolted, and painted in “park green” and “ocean blue,” the work manifested Westerlund’s twin drives to struggle with the elements of sculpture and transform them organically into bold constructions that are surprising and playful—“a little bit crazy and a little bit passionate,” she said.

“There’s something about the tension in physical involvement,” she said. “I like struggling with the elements, struggling to hold different things together.”

For more than two decades, Westerlund has worked in a studio in an enormous 19th century brick warehouse that was once an electric power plant. The cavernous space is packed wall-to-ceiling with hand tools, power equipment, raw sheets of metal, palettes of fiber, buckets of dye, paints, finishes, come-alongs, welding masks, fire extinguishers, clamps, fastenings, stacks of lumber, and artwork in various stages of completion.

One of her favorite tools is a plasma cutter.

“It burns into steel and creates these very linear forms,” she said. “It’s like drawing in steel.”

Westerlund’s sensibility is rooted in the traditional arts of her native Finland and extended stays in Kenya. But her lively repertoire is muscular, a take-no-prisoners approach that molds materials to a fantastical vision.

Born and raised in Helsinki, Finland, she grew up with an



Westerlund’s work ranges in size from small table-top pieces to large works meant for outdoor display. This is *How Oceans Evolve*, aluminum, 2014, 80" x 47" x 47".

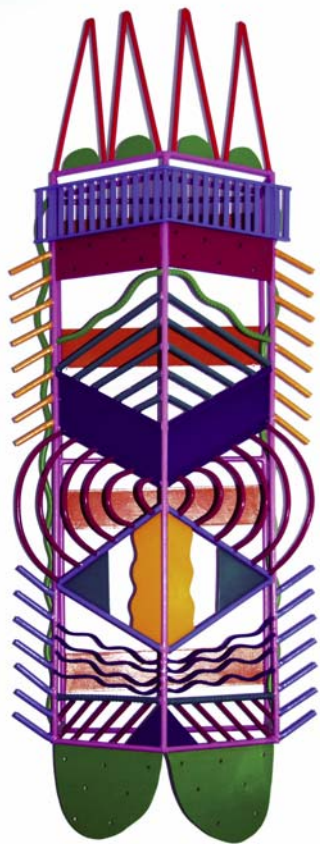
Metal Magic Melita Westerlund gives shape to fantastic visions

BY LAURIE SCHREIBER

STOP BY BAR HARBOR ARTIST Melita Westerlund’s warehouse studio and you will find her wearing industrial protective gear and wielding industrial power tools. The final results of her work are far from industrial, though.

Westerlund’s bright abstract sculptures in aluminum, steel, bronze, and stone, occasionally combined with woodwork, range in style from voluptuous to precisely linear, and in size

from tabletop pieces to room-sized public commissions and kinetic works for indoor and outdoor sites. She periodically shifts gears to create hand-cast paper or three-dimensional fiber art pulped and dyed to work like clay. Her motifs are reminiscent, in turn, of Henri Matisse’s paper cutouts, Alberto Giacometti’s attenuated sculptures, and African tribal masks—bursts of color and celebrations of free-flowing forms.



Mask, steel, paint, 1988, 69" x 25" x 13" was inspired by African tribal masks. Westerlund lived in Kenya for three years.

affinity for bright colors, an antidote to the country's long, dark winters. As a child, she began to feel that art had special meaning for her, as she discovered art with her sister, also an artist.

"I remember going to museums with her, in Helsinki, when we were maybe 14 years old, and discovering these amazing Finnish artists. At the time, we didn't know much about American art until the art magazines started to come from

Westerlund's sensibility is rooted in the traditional arts of her native Finland and extended stays in Kenya.

America to Europe. That opened up the doors to influence from outside art."

They were particularly attracted to the subjective emotionalism and experimentation of early-twentieth-century French expressionism. But one of their most powerful influences was their mother, who is now in her 90s and lives in Helsinki.

"She was a stay-at-home mom for a long time, but she could have been a really wonderful artist if she had grown up in a different period," said Westerlund. "She grew up during the war and didn't have the opportunity to do anything nontraditional. But she was very creative in sewing and knitting and making things for the home. She has an amazing sense of color and design."

Westerlund traveled to Tunisia to study painting and drawing at L'Ecole Des Beaux Arts, then returned to Helsinki to attend the Free Art School. Eventually, she and a friend, deciding it was time to study elsewhere, hitchhiked to Barcelona. It was the early 1970s and they were teens, happy to crash in an apartment belonging to the parents of a new friend and to accept canvas and paints from another new friend. When they ran out of money, they returned to Helsinki, where Westerlund enrolled in the University of Arts and Design to study design.

Figurative studies, as opposed to abstract studies, was the only option at the time.

Photos by Stewart Brecher (2)



A recent series created from recycled fibers was motivated by the increasingly fragile state of the world's coral reefs. This is *Koralli Saari (Red Coral)*, cotton fiber, mesh 2010, 30" x 30" x 15".

"We worked a lot in plaster and clay and wax, working with form and proportions," she said. "That was the traditional way of getting involved with sculpture—understanding the human body."

With a foundation in technique and materials, she began finding her own

vision. She met Stewart Brecher when he came to Finland to explore the country's architecture, moved to London to live with him, and eventually the two were married. They celebrated their 42nd wedding anniversary in 2016.

When Brecher received an appointment to teach at the University of Nairobi, the family, by then including a baby, moved from London to Kenya. Over the next three years Westerlund's art blossomed, inspired by lively colors and forms of the country's traditional batik art. Her first show there featured large wall hangings that presaged her future work and led to her first commission, a lobby mural at the National Bank of Kenya.

When the family moved to New York, Westerlund earned an MFA in Sculpture from SUNY Buffalo. In 1982, they settled in Bar Harbor, where Brecher works as an architect. Westerlund has been working nonstop since then, exhibiting in museums and galleries in New England, New York, Finland, and Kenya, and completing 16 public commissions in schools around the state under the Maine Arts

Commission's Percent for Art program. She has studios both in Bar Harbor and Finland, where she travels every summer to visit family.

Westerlund considers her creativity a work in progress. She lets loose with organic expressions of her inner self that are as much of a discovery for herself as they will be for viewers.

"You just play around," she said. "And this playfulness will become something worth pursuing or developing. You discover the right material that can become the expression for your thoughts. When you start, it's all unknown. But as you work on it, your mind is constantly involved, and the work evolves naturally—'Oh, of course! This is how it should be done!'" ★

Laurie Schreiber has written for newspapers and magazines on the coast of Maine for more than 25 years.

For More Information: Westerlund is represented in Maine by June LaComb Sculpture, and in Helsinki, Finland by Pirkko-Liisa Topelius Gallery.

CAMDEN, MAINE: YOUR SUMMER DESTINATION
FOR CRUISING, CLASSICS & CRAFTSMANSHIP



Enter Maine's Hottest Classic Yachting Event!
July 27-29

Presented by Lyman-Morse, The Camden Classics Cup is one of the world's most beautiful annual classics regattas, sailed where the mountains meet the sea in the picturesque harbor town of Camden, Maine. Come to enjoy epic on-the-water racing with memorable onshore parties.

REGISTER TODAY
www.camdenclassicscup.com

The Camden Classics Cup races and parties for a cause. All proceeds will benefit LifeFlight of Maine.





BOATBUILDING | SERVICE | BROKERAGE | FABRICATION | TECHNOLOGIES

59 Sea Street | Camden, Maine 04843 +1 207.236.4378

84 Knox Street | Thomaston, Maine 04861 +1 207.354.6904

info@lymanmorse.com | www.lymanmorse.com



www.camdenclassicscup.com

Boat lovers! If you have ALWAYS liked our Maine Boat Builders Show, you will LOVE our 30th!

Portland Yacht Services 30th Maine Boat Builders Show will be held, starting this year, at the Portland Sports Complex at 512 Warren Avenue! It will be better than ever! Don't miss it!

- Same wonderful, authentic tradition that you've come to love.
- More boats on display!
- More parking!
- More amenities!
- Only 4 minutes away from Turnpike Exit 48 to Warren Avenue!

The Portland Sports Complex is sooo easy to get to via Brighton Avenue in Portland, Riverside Street, Warren Avenue, Forest Avenue and dozens of other streets. And the parking is free!!

Because of its size, we will be able to display more boats and equipment! Just for you!

Join us on March 24th, 25th, and 26th, 2017!

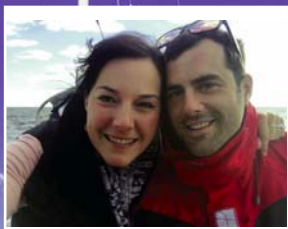




PORTLAND YACHT SERVICES

The only boatyard you will ever need!

100 West Commercial Street • Portland, ME 04101 • 207-774-1067 • www.portlandyacht.com



[TOP LEFT WITH INSET] Leah Kruger and Jonathan Tetro have been sailing their Nor'West 33 sailboat, *Brio*, for five years, settling in for the past winter in Portland.



[BOTTOM LEFT] Skye Waterson and Matt Garand have been spending the year aboard their boat *Polynya*, in Portland.

Husband and wife Matt Garand and Skye Waterson live aboard *Polynya*, a 1977 Gulfstar 50. Both are lifelong sailors, Maine Maritime Academy alums, and professional mariners who have worked in the Gulf of Mexico's oil and gas fields. Garand currently splits his year between Portland and Philadelphia, where he drives a tugboat. Waterson works at Hamilton Marine in Portland. When they married, they knew they would want to do long cruises, so purchasing a boat rather than a house was the right investment. They moved onto *Polynya* in September 2015, tying up at South Port Marine.

One of the first things Garand did was install a robust Olympia OL-60 heating system that runs, via four self-regulating thermostats, off diesel fuel plumbed from the boat's 100-gallon main tank. The system burns about one gallon per day under normal winter conditions, and nearly two gallons per day during rare days of extreme chill. On his

blog, "A Life Aboard," Garand reported toasty success.

"The unit fires up quickly and begins circulating hot water to the radiators within moments," he wrote. "Since the radiators utilize 12V fans to distribute heat, the air in the cabin warms quickly. With our four different zones we are able to heat each space to different temperatures when necessary. This is handy, for example, in the forward cabin, which we keep at 50 degrees when not in use to reduce fuel consumption. The engine room is also a separate zone, which I have set to 50 degrees to prevent plumbing from freezing."

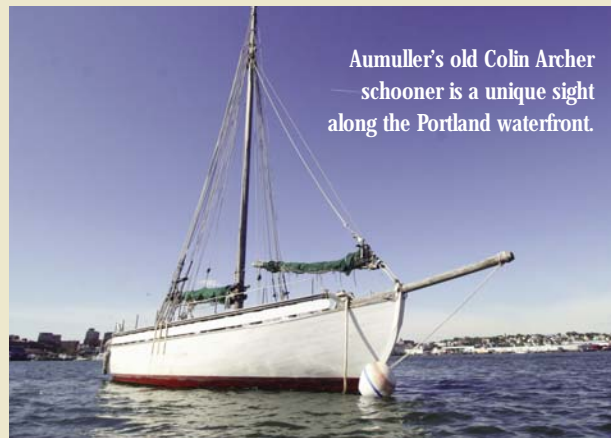
Leah Kruger and her husband Jonathan Tetro also grew up sailing. As a child, Kruger lived on a sailboat for seven years and circumnavigated with her family. The couple bought a Nor'West 33 sailboat, *Brio*, in Mexico five years ago, cruised along Central America, through the Panama Canal, around the Caribbean, then on up the

ONE DAY LAST FALL, JEFF AUMULLER was sitting topside with his 1950s Gibson guitar playing one of his tunes, a chantey about being out sailing: "Dance with me, Blue Lady. Steering by the heavens above, way out here, beyond the tides." The breeze was light, the air had that salty aroma, yachts and tour boats roamed the harbor. The sun warmed the old wooden deck.

Aumuller was in his 30s when he transitioned to year-round life on the water. He started a business making sea bags, did quite



Jeff Aumuller plays a tune aboard Grebe.



Aumuller's old Colin Archer schooner is a unique sight along the Portland waterfront.

well, and bought his *Colin Archer*. The vessel once belonged to sailor Harry Etheridge, who created the *Yachtsman's Guide to the Bahamas*. Aumuller sold the business after three years, moved to Cape Porpoise to focus on music, then moved to Portland. He also periodically cruised the East Coast, either on Grebe, or doing boat deliveries to earn cash.

These days, he's happiest in Portland, gigging and hawking his new album, *Men & Ships Rot in Port*.

"I just love playing music," he said. "Otherwise, I'd be in the Caribbean drinking rum." —LS

East Coast to Maine, where Tetro grew up. Now they're docked at DiMillo's. On weekdays, Kruger heads to Idexx Laboratories, the animal health products company in Westbrook, where she works as an instructional designer. Tetro is an independent contractor.

Last year was the couple's first winter in Maine, and was "definitely interesting," said Kruger. "To be honest, I was really afraid. But it's its own kind of adventure."

Having cruised in the tropics, the boat wasn't set up for a Maine winter. They insulated from the waterline up with high-density foam, and heat primarily with an oil-filled electric radiator. For supplemental heat on really frigid days, they also installed a Newport Dickinson diesel heater that runs off the main tank, using about one gallon every six hours. Everything worked well last winter.

Like many winter liveaboards, these two couples create a tent of clear shrink-wrap above decks. Tetro built a tall space with a 40-foot by 40-foot plastic sheet that's supported by the boom and four lengths of PVC pipe bent into arches. He built a full-size door into the tent, which can heat up to 80 or 90 degrees on sunny, single-digit winter days.

"It's awesome because the shrink-wrap triples our living space," Kruger said. "We can sit outside on a sunny day and be completely safe and warm. And we have more storage space."

Winter does have particular difficulties, chief being water access when a marina shuts off the dock spigots. DiMillo's keeps one spigot open at the head of the dock, so Kruger and Tetro run a 200-foot length of hose to their tank. They and others also use the marina's shower/laundry facilities. The marinas keep the docks clear of snow, but freezing sea spray can be a problem. Garand and Waterson wear flotation and ice cleats when they leave *Polynya* during stormy weather.

Liveaboards must follow certain rules and regulations. DiMillo's Marina, for example, requires that boats be operational.

"You have to show you're not living in a floating wreck; you're actually on a boat that you use as a boat and not just as a house," said Kruger. "But it's still a

pretty open lifestyle, without a ton of rules, which is part of the appeal."

Sitting with Card on *Camelot*, it's evident what makes this a lovely life. Although the city and its attractions are just at his back door, there's a quietness on the boat—the faint shushing of the breeze, the cry of gulls. The sun streams down, the harbor beyond beckons.

"That's why I'm here," Card said. "Living on land, I couldn't afford to have a waterfront view. Living on land,

I was always renting, throwing money out the window, never having anything to show for it. Living on land, I couldn't get up in the morning and drive my apartment to another location. I never got seasick when I was living on land, but I can get landsick now that I'm living on the sea." ★

Laurie Schreiber has written for newspapers and magazines on the coast of Maine for more than 25 years.



The color of your boat travels at 186,000 miles per second.

Think fast. Think Epifanes.

Color travels at the speed of light, so your new paint job is certain to make an instant impression. Experience what boatyard pros and backyard amateurs have discovered by rolling and tipping with Epifanes premium paints—the proven method for achieving a stunning, durable, mirror-like finish. Look for Epifanes paints and varnishes at your local chandlery, and watch our roll-and-tip video on Facebook.



AALSMEER, HOLLAND ■ THOMASTON, MAINE ■ ABERDEEN, HONG KONG
1-800-269-0961 ■ www.epifanes.com



FOLLOW US