

Artist uses bamboo for sculptures

by TRICIA BRUNHART

Focus Staff

An artist-in-residence at Texas A&M University does more than just work on his special craft.

For John Walker, a sculptor and the current artist-in-residence, this includes teaching a class in sculpting, and sitting in on a class in architecture.

Walker wants to see what others are doing in architecture. He said he is interested in design being visual as well as something that can be utilized.

Walker, who previously taught sculpting and related courses at Southwest Missouri State University for 13 years, has won several awards for his sculptures. He has also presented numerous exhibits of his works, including several one-man shows.

This year at Texas A&M has mainly been an opportunity to work and get away from the daily routine and obligations of full-time teaching, Walker said.

He said being an artist-in-residence is "a time to rediscover yourself."

He does like teaching, however, especially students who are interested. He said he likes the students at Texas A&M because they are open, polite and curious.

They aren't as cynical as a lot of students, Walker said. They have that "wide-eyed questioning quality that makes teaching exciting."

Walker is disturbed that students, in general, seem to have a lack of imagination.

A college should be a place to find yourself, he said. He thinks there is a danger of people becoming only technicians and managers, who won't know how to solve problems except for the way it has always been done.

"I would hope that the prevailing attitude would be more innovative in solving problems, rather than just the normal day-to-day solutions."

Walker is currently making pieces out of bamboo, a material he started using upon his arrival at Texas A&M last fall. He got the idea from a book and from a fellow teacher at Southwest Missouri State University who works with it.

He likes working with bamboo because it is very immediate — one can see what the final form will be more quickly. This is the total opposite of casting bronze, Walker said, because every image you make has to go through two or three stages.

Bamboo is strong and light, he said, and all one needs to do is "buy glue and string and you're in business."

Working with bamboo is time consuming, however, he said. He has made about six sculptures, the largest one about 13½ feet long.

Walker has worked with a variety of materials. Wood and metal are the two primary ones, and he likes working with metal the most. He changes material about every three years.

"Sometimes you work so hard at one material, it tends to get stale — you have to switch over to something else," he said.

Walker doesn't know how long he will continue working with bamboo, but said he hasn't near exhausted its potential.

Walker first became interested in sculpting through Leonard DeLonga, one of his instructors at the University of Georgia, where he got both his bachelor's degree and his master's degree in fine arts.

He said he could relate to sculpting better than any other area of fine arts.

In his sculpting, Walker usually combines mechanical, human and

insect forms. He sketches most of his ideas ahead of time.

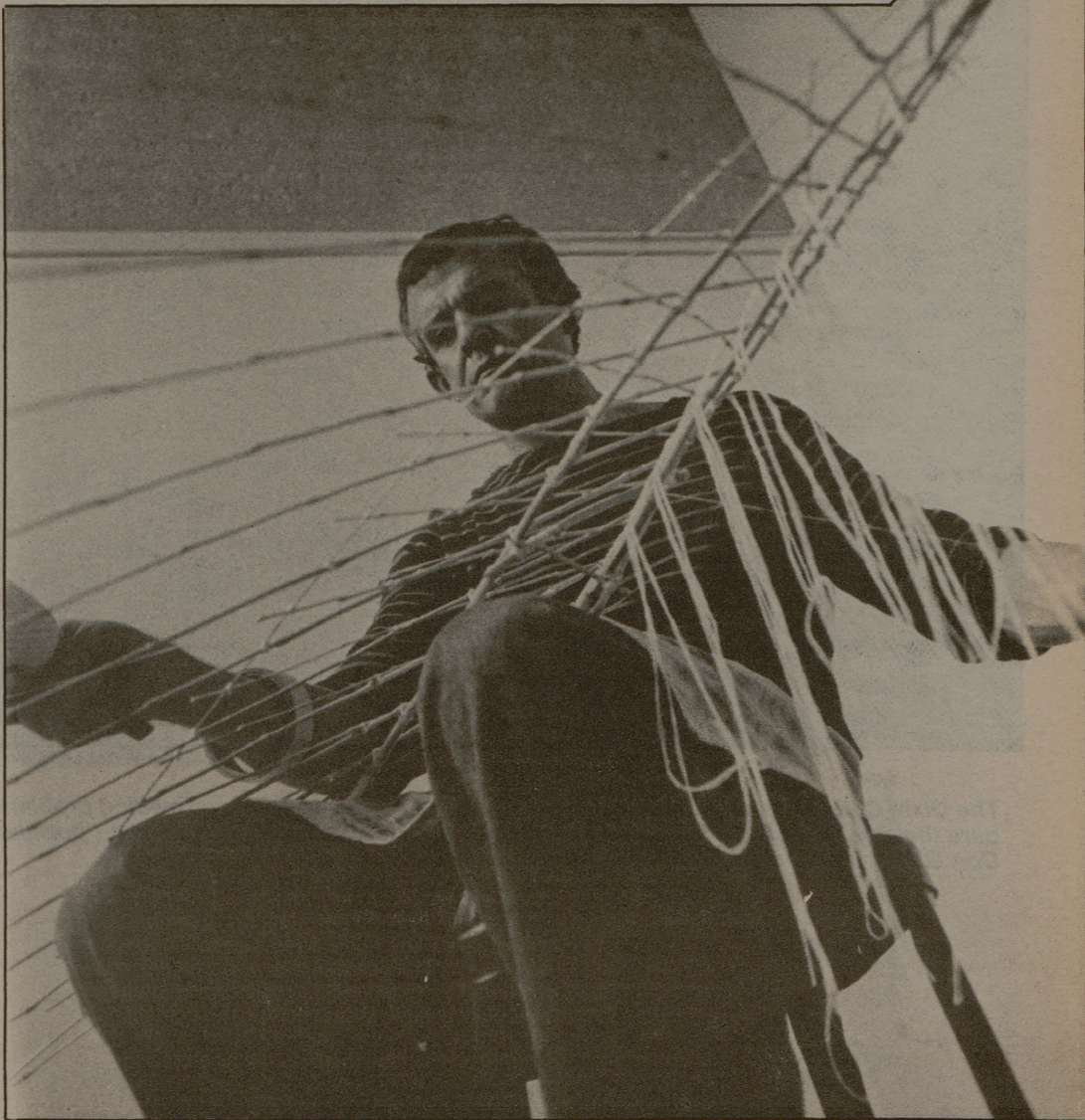
He doesn't set out to make any kind of social statement with his work, it just does it on its own, he said. It's hard to avoid a style, it just happens.

"The key is being comfortable with your work."

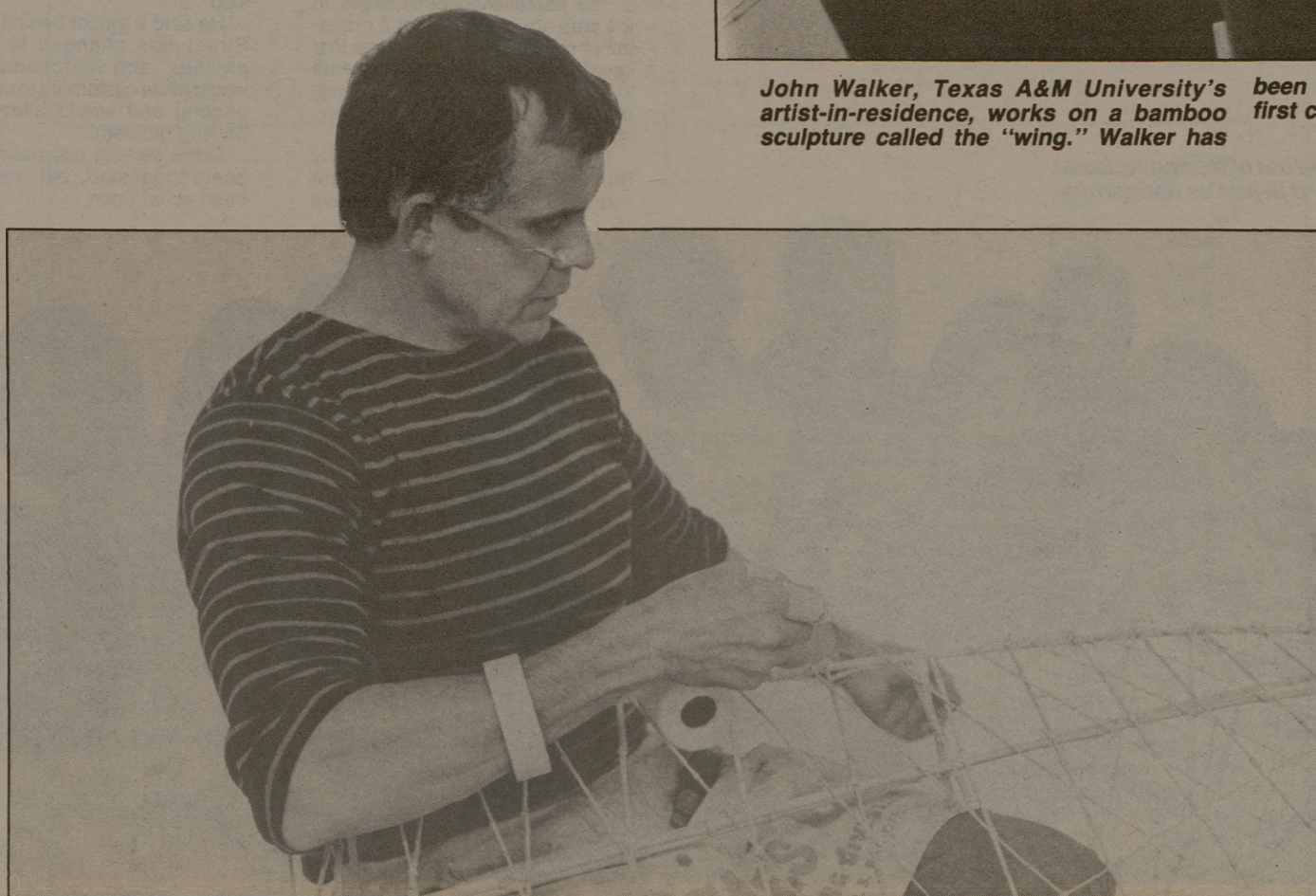
Over the years, Walker said, one makes a lot of bad pieces and only a few good ones. He said there are some cases where one may never get the really good ones throughout his whole life.

Walker likes to do work that he can pick up and move himself. Most metal sculpture is cast in separate pieces, he said, especially the large works because the molds are huge.

An exhibit of 15 of Walker's works will be held April 13-26 in the gallery of the Ernest Langford Architecture Center.



John Walker, Texas A&M University's artist-in-residence, works on a bamboo sculpture called the "wing." Walker has been working with bamboo ever since he first came to Texas A&M last fall.



Photos by

Paul D. Childress

There will be an exhibit of Walker's sculpture in the gallery of the Ernest Langford Architecture center from April 13-26.