

Matthew Baral  
Personal Statement

I am a second-year MFA sculpture student focusing in wood with a history as a physician and medical educator. As a teen and young adult, my ability to work in a highly detailed manner led me to becoming a jeweler, working under renowned jewelry icon David Yurman. In college I fell in love with the sciences and pursued my interest in medicine. Eventually yearning for a more creative life after a twenty-year career, I started to pursue art again after discovering the science behind the human affinity for natural patterns. This led me to ASU's Sculpture program. My work is based on exploiting those natural patterns and bringing them to view in public places. My interest in these patterns, fractals in particular, grew late in my medical career when I was asked to present several keynotes to large medical conference audiences. I was provided creative license to explore and present concepts that apply to human health beyond medicine. My open-ended pursuit led me to the science behind our love of recognizable patterns, all of which originate in the forest and oceans, flora and fauna. Medical research demonstrates additional health benefits from exposure to these patterns, both psychologically and physiologically. As an example, the experience of "awe" has been shown to decrease markers of inflammation. This evidence has led me to pursue sculpture design that includes these patterns and therefore improve overall health.

During my time in graduate school, I have been fortunate to be hired for several large public commissions. The *Shell Study* at Mirabella was an exercise in shell analysis and design application. Shells are mesmerizing to most of us, likely due to their spiral patterns. In this case I applied fractal design by assembling 172 individual frames with complex joinery and then attaching them together in a certain arrangement to form an overall shape. Most of my work is done like this, in an iterative process. *Two Arcs* was a large and challenging undertaking, a commission for ASU's School of Law. It consisted of large redwood beams (4" x 4") made in an angled pattern. Combining units in a repeated fashion resulted in a new shape that I could not have planned. This is the most rewarding part of my work: developing new dimensions from the additive combination of simpler dimensions. *Three Arcs* was my work completed as one of the Influx competition winners. This is currently installed and viewable at Glendale City Hall. It consists of three separate pieces that are based on moving focal points, so each arc is distinct and painted to change appearance based on the viewer's position. I will continue to pursue public sculpture opportunities as part of my development as a career artist. In order to take my work to a level beyond static sculptures, I am in the process of collaborating with several departments within Arizona State University: Electrical Engineering, the Creative Health Collaborations lab, and Arts Media Engineering. The goal is to produce work that combines sustainable energy harvesting and kinetic sculpture for health care settings as well as the public domain. The more areas I explore, the more ideas I develop, so a constant search for new concepts and knowledge is important to me as an artist. I embrace the struggle of physical and mental labor of repeated movements and asceticism required for this work. The process of learning for me is to trust the process itself as a part of my personal evolution.

Thank you for your consideration!

Matthew Baral