

Art + Artists 1990

Artist and his flotsam add exotica to Live Oak

By DAN WHITE
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LIVE OAK — Other California communities have 25-foot-tall doughnuts, green brontosaurus sculptures or giant artichokes.

But Live Oak is the only one with a mystery lagoon ball, a thousand-pound sphere of rusty metal that looks like a depth charge or an alien space probe.

At last, the community has a weird roadside attraction to call its own.

The ball in front of the Pottery Planet ceramic and plant store isn't mere road kitsch. It's also a colorful mural. Felton-based artist Jonah Roll has just turned it into a canvas, featuring a bulging-eyed shark, stylized waves, a huge cup of coffee and a winged cat.

"It's a spherical lyrical mural, or SLM," Roll, 30, said.

Drivers on Portola Drive heading toward Capitola will find the ball on the left side of the road between 17th and 22nd avenues.

The tarpaulin that covered the ball was pulled away Friday at 6 p.m. in a grand "unveiling."

No one knows why it rolled and bobbed into Corcoran Lagoon 30 years ago.

"The story is, it floated into the lagoon during a big storm," said Bob Goode, co-owner of the Pottery Planet store, which opened two months ago. The ball sits directly in front of the shop. Goode commissioned Roll to do the artwork after seeing his exhibit at Seabright Brewery in Santa Cruz. The ball has designs suggested by both Goode and Roll.

Now, after years of obscurity in a nearby backyard, the globe is ready for some attention.

It will probably get a lot of it, thanks in part to Roll. He's taken this giant piece of sea rubbish and turned it into something wild.

The ball sits on a concrete drainpipe, like a giant golf ball resting on a tee.

The sight of the ball may conjure up images of space ship probes,

land mines or time capsules. But Roll believes the hollow metal ball is part of an oil tanker's mooring apparatus. Rope and a length of steel cable are still attached to it.

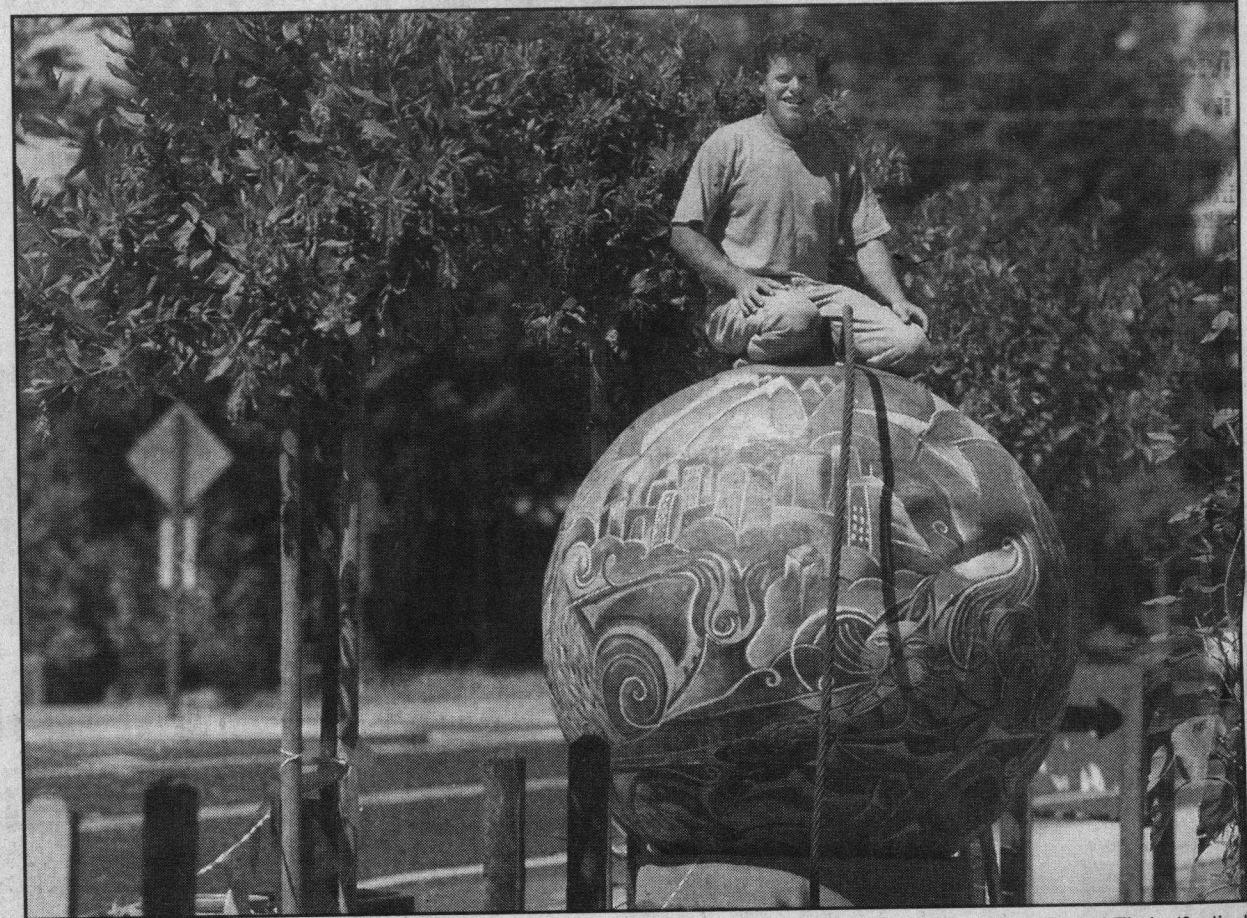
First, Roll went out and spent some time with the ball, camping out in the back with it, getting a feel for its texture and shape.

Roll made use of the surface's irregularities. A bulging plug became a shark eye. An indentation in the metal was used to create depth in the coffee cup's opening.

Painting it was tricky. Using a combination of equipment enamel — used to paint outdoor objects — and oil paint to vary the color, Roll began to cover the surface. It took four weeks. The tough part was having to roll the huge ball so he could paint different sections.

Then, hardest of all, he had to move it a good 70 yards to the store, so people could see it when driving by.

It will stay at Pottery Planet for good. "I'm not moving it ever again," said Roll.



Artist Jonah Roll sits atop his 'spherical lyrical mural' on Portola Drive.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel