Jarrett Mellenbruch

Design of the Haven House

The house was designed from the inside out. I started with the bees, focusing on the concepts of biomimicry. We’re looking at what the bees want in nature, and trying to replicate that. So once I had that sort of figured out as far as what I thought the bees would need, I turned to my other audience, the people, and I knew that I wanted these to go in public places, and I knew that a lot of times that if you were to tell someone that you’re installing a beehive in a public place they might be apprehensive about that. And I wanted them to first and foremost be comfortable with what they were looking at. I wanted to keep it simple. I wanted to keep it iconic. I wanted to keep it familiar. I ended up with something which can represent to people a rural farm house, a big bird house, a white church, Romanesque architecture, things that are all these sort of emblems of home, or kind of a safe and serene place. And things that when people see it, they just instantly sort of accept it.

Jarrett Mellenbruch

Functionality of the Artwork

The first time when I installed the Haven hive three years ago in a public community garden, the person who ran the garden loved the project and was very excited about it, and after I installed it they said, “So I understand you’re an artist.” And I said, “Yeah, I am an artist.” And then he said, “Well, I would love to see your sculptures sometime.” And I kind of realized that there was this kind of disconnect
between something which could perform a function or have some sort of overt use value to it other than its purely contemplative value. I think it touches the viewer in a different way because what the viewer is recognizing is that there is another mission behind the piece, and it’s the artist’s desire and intent and motivation to address whatever this functionality might be. Like in this case, the decimation of the honey bee population using creativity. I like that, especially for public work because it means that more people can have a connection with it, and as part of that connection they may get drawn deeper into art in general. I’m not concerned with whether or not the viewer considers it art, I just want them to consider it.

Jarrett Mellenbruch

Swarm Intelligence

For me, it’s about gathering enough information that makes it relevant and exposing that information to enough people that there will be enough incisive, interested, intelligent, focused people out there that know what to do with that information. It’s very similar to what we see in the honeybee population that we call “swarm intelligence.” The honeybee colony can do things that none of its individual members can. It can make complex decisions and function as a superorganism. And I think that humans are the same way. We are so much stronger and more capable when we work in numbers cooperating together on a project. So if I can grow the numbers of the hives and I can grow the numbers of the people observing those hives, then I think there’s a certain poetry in us using our swarm intelligence to address the issues facing the honeybees.