

# ALASKA HOME



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## ARTIST PROFILE

### Marieke Heatwole

Story by Sarah Gonzales

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Marieke Heatwole hand-forges, plasma-cuts, chemically treats, pounds, welds, slices and colors metal, turning scavenged scraps into art.

"I see artistic potential in almost everything around me," she says.

A rear differential car part is reincarnated as a mask. She makes armillaries, skeletal celestial spheres first popularized in ancient Greece, out of things like antique wagon wheels; and she makes weathered-looking gongs out of steel drums.

If you dine out in Anchorage, drive in Midtown or attend the Alaska State Fair, you're probably familiar with Heatwole's art. The spoon-and-fork door pulls at downtown breakfast favorite Snow City Café? She made those, as well as the restaurant's sign. She's the artist behind the multi-colored wall panels and several round tables at the Spenard Roadhouse, two "Wild Salmon on Parade" sculptures at last year's fair and the tall metal spires in front of the Orthopedic Physicians of Anchorage building on Lake Otis near 36th.

Heatwole's metalwork runs the gamut from delicate wire bird sculptures to eight-foot polygons. All of her sculptures have one thing in common: they are made to last. Heatwole says she loves metalworking because of the versatility and solidity of the material. "(Metal) makes me feel strong and independent," she says. "It makes me feel challenged - the wrong technique will not work - it defines the parameters that I have to work with. And you can bend it with fire!"

Her studio is filled with unlikely treasures: mattress coils from a burned down cabin, rusted air ducts, car parts, chandeliers and even a huge old photo lab trough sink from the University of Alaska-Anchorage. "I have used nearly every treasure I've dragged home," she says. "Even if I had no clue what it would become at the time I found it."

Marieke (rhymes with "eureka") Heatwole grew up visiting her horticulturist grandparents in Philadelphia, and their influence is evident in the plant motifs seen in her work. "I was in great awe of the spectacular stone house they lived in," she says. "Outside were the bonsai - hundreds of them, some hundreds of years old. Each fall they were moved into a stone greenhouse dripping with mossy moisture and each spring they were brought back out for training. These images were deeply but unconsciously influential."

Heatwole's art transforms raw metal into elegant lines, organic shapes and vibrant colors. In one of her latest pieces, a three-foot tall steel fountain gracefully curves upward from a narrow base to a square, fluted copper top. She chemically treated the metal until the sides developed a colorful, dollar-bill green patina that will continue to change as the piece is exposed to time and weather. Over time, she says, water drips on the fountain will evolve into what looks like abstract flower blossoms.

Heatwole currently works from a garage-turned-studio on the outskirts of Anchorage. A wife and mother to two children, ages 5 and 7, she says her kids are "totally banned" from her workshop. "They know if I have my welding hood on or I'm 'making a light' with the torch that they can't come in," she says with a laugh.

Metalwork demands focus and time. "I'm really quality driven, I really want to take care to make everything right," she says. To hurry could be potentially dangerous, both to her and the artistic process. "You can't rush it," she says. "You know that 'irons in the fire' joke?" she asks. "It's three to five - it's a blacksmithing joke. That's really how many you can have in at once, that's the maximum."

For now, Heatwole's "fire" is filled until this fall with a number of commissions - some large public displays and some smaller pieces for private residences. If you live in Anchorage, you may soon be surrounded with even more of Heatwole's work, as she forges ahead with her metal.



[CLICK HERE TO VIEW A SLIDESHOW OF HEATWOLE'S WORK](#)

View more of Heatwole's work online ([mariekesmetal.com](http://mariekesmetal.com)) or at the upcoming Anchorage Botanical Garden Art Show and Fair ([alaskabg.org](http://alaskabg.org)). Photos by Jim Benning Photography & ISG Photography