

Edited by Kim Schneider

# Spirit Guide

Gary Spinoso's enigmatic sculptures, featured this month at The Sculpture Center, all begin as exercises in spontaneity that end up emanating a deep, philosophical heft.

by Kristen Hampshire

**V**isionary art originates from an intuitive place — an internal Neverland without confines such as realism, definitions or canned themes.

That is why sculptor Gary Spinoso is often unsure of the destination when he begins to mold clay into fantastic forms that have been called “intensely spiritual.”

Spinoso refers to his creative process as a search for the origin: finding the why. He discovers his work's meaning the way a jazz performer embarks on an improvisational riff.

“A musician may start with a theme and come up with phrases in his music that veer off from where he started, but are powerful and beautiful and meaningful,” he explains.

Spinoso, a 1972 Cleveland Institute of Art graduate, earned his master's of fine arts from Pennsylvania's Edinboro University. Today, Spinoso creates his art on his Pennsylvania farm — usually alone so he can find that “place” where spontaneity rules.

That instinct rerouted his initial intention to create a sculpture of his dog, a shepherd-lab mix. Without a photo or his companion nearby, Spinoso interpreted his idea of “dog.”

“I wanted to allow myself to stylize — to let go, to improvise,” he says.

The final product, “Dog of Sorrow,” is actually a self-portrait, Spinoso says.

Some critics call what Spinoso does religious. The artist agrees, but then hesitates. “If I use the word religion, I'm using it in the sense of the root of the word: to reconnect with the source.”

Spinoso will reconnect with Cleveland Sept. 7 through Oct. 27 as his exhibition *Through Forests of Symbols* visits The Sculpture Center.

“My work started really blossoming and developing in Cleveland,” Spinoso says, adding that the University Circle neighborhood fosters “collective energy” that inspired his early career.

He hopes his exhibition will invoke similar “vibration” in others. “These symbolic arrangements can activate something in your psyche that will turn on the imagination.”

Visit [www.sculpturecenter.org](http://www.sculpturecenter.org) for more information.

