

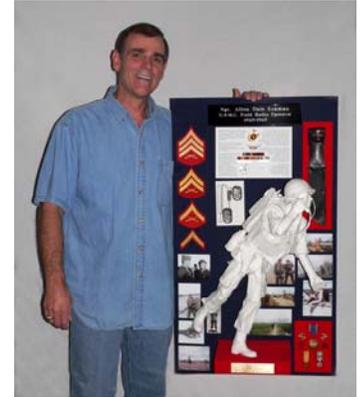


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Artist Profile

Allen Eckman – Artist, Inventor, Veteran

“Sculpture is just so comforting and it truly helps me relax,” said Alan Eckman, a 59-year-old Marine Corps veteran from Rapid City, S.D. Eckman is one of nearly 120 veterans attending the 2006 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Rapid City, selected from more than 2800 veterans submitting artistic entries this year.



A strong family military background prompted Eckman to join the Marine Corps in 1965 just after high school, during an extremely volatile period of American history. For a year he trained as a field radio operator at Camp Pendleton in San Diego, Calif., until he was sent to a helicopter base in Chu Lai, Vietnam. As a radio operator, Eckman was trained to accompany the infantry units and provide communication, relaying messages for supplies and additional forces to the nearby helicopters. Later, he volunteered to be a helicopter gunner and successfully completed 43 combat missions, receiving numerous air medals for his courageous efforts.

One day, while trying to cross a helicopter landing zone on a rescue mission, Eckman was hit in the ankle with shrapnel. He returned to Camp Pendleton a year later, where he continued to excel in both classes and field operations and was promoted to Sergeant.

Discharged from the Marines in 1969, Eckman immediately enrolled in a junior college as an art major. After two years, he decided to study commercial art in Los Angeles' Art Center College of Design. While there, Eckman met his wife, Patty, and the couple formed their own small advertising company in the L.A. area after graduating. After 12 years and raising a family, the family moved to South Dakota, Patty's home state. The couple started their own fine arts business, which they continue to operate from their home. “When we first started our business in South Dakota, I went into painting,” said Eckman. “But when I saw the art of cast paper sculpture, I was really intrigued by it. I found out that I am really good at sculpture and when our art started selling so fast, we knew we'd found a good thing.” Although the art form has been around since the 1950s, the Eckmans have developed and perfected the medium far beyond any other artist. In fact, they are the inventors of the Eckman Method of Cast Paper Sculpture, to which they alone hold the trademark. In cast paper sculpture, the artist essentially pours paper pulp into cast molds made from original clay sculptures. Once the drying process is complete, the artist painstakingly details the mold to create a unique piece every time.

Although Eckman has been an artist for years, this is his first time participating in the national Festival. He learned about the event through the newspaper and subsequently contacted the local VA facility hosting the program. Eckman's winning sculpture, “Service Memorial,” is actually a sculpture of himself as a radio operator. One of four local veterans participating in the 2006 event, Eckman is very excited to be joined by so many of his fellow veteran artists and has looked forward to welcoming them to his state. “I am really looking forward to showing people around the Rapid City area,” said Eckman. “This Festival is really a big deal and I'm anxious to experience all it has to offer.”