



ART IN AMERICA

# RICARDO BRECEDA

## *Man of Steel*

*Story by Brenda Rees. Photography by Margaret Malandrucolo*

The delicate circular tentacle indentations that run the length of undulating octopus arms. The well-worn denim back pockets of a weary prospector hunched over his gold pan. The tangled strands of hair that dance off a horse's mane as the beast rears up into the wind.

Details. Good art is in the details; because details tell a story, reveal personalities and profoundly connect viewer to subject.

The careful attention to capture form, movement and time is what elevates the metal artwork of Ricardo Breceda into

a class by itself. Who else could twist, cut and weld a lowly piece of sheet metal and create dramatic, whimsical and powerful images? When this 54-year-old Southern Californian artist gazes into a metal panel, he sees big-horned sheep, flying pigs, gargoyles, giraffes, warthogs, and all species of real and mythological creatures.

Horses have a special place in Breceda's heart; as a young boy growing up in Durango, Mexico on his parent's farm, his best friend was a red horse. "I would whistle, and that horse would come in an instant," he says with a warm smile.



Breceda exudes a calm, charming nature; he's generous to visitors who, driving on this rural two-lane highway, are astonished to see a giant T. Rex perched high on a knoll that heralds the entrance to Breceda's Aguana workshop and his cinnamon-colored menagerie.

Visitors browse and snap photos, delighted by Breceda's art, with many pieces inspired by the American Western experience; his realistic stagecoach with horses, drivers and passengers (the door really opens); the lone prospector with his carefully packed horse companion, and his refashioning of James Earle Fraser's famous "End of the Trail," a haunting and evocative portrait of the exiled American Indian.

Breceda's rural workshop isn't the only place to see his work; his art is showcased in private homes and public spaces around the world, including a gallery in Old Town Temecula and the Alta Vista Botanical Gardens in Vista; his largest open-air collection is in Borrego Springs at Galleta Meadows and is free to viewers 24/7.

In 2008, Breceda befriended philanthropist Dennis Avery who had bought 3,000 acres in the area to save from development. After seeing Breceda's work, Avery had a vision of creating "Sky Art," a landscape of life-size prehistoric beasts that once roamed the Borrego Valley.

That commission catapulted Breceda's career, showcasing his art to a wider audience and kept him busy. "Dennis was a good

friend to my family for many years," Breceda says about Avery who passed away in 2012. "He meant the world to me."

For years, Breceda lived and worked onsite at Galleta Meadows, eventually creating 130 sculptures that also include modern-day and mythical creatures; the fantastic 350-foot wiggling sea serpent took four months to build and three months to assemble.

All in all, a life in the arts for Breceda wasn't planned. He had worked as a cowboy boot salesman and construction worker, but when an on-the-job accident left him pondering his next career choice, demands from his then 6-year-old daughter Lianna sealed his fate. After seeing *Jurassic Park III* in 2001, she wanted a T Rex. "But not a little one; life-size," he remembers. "And she wouldn't let that go. And so, every single father thinks they are superman and can do for their children. So I did."

Breceda crafted a 20-foot tall and 45-foot long T. Rex and that first dino spawned others; soon the hobby enveloped Breceda with paying customers, fame and a chance to test the limits of art, creativity and imagination. "I want people to see my work and smile," he says. "I am glad they keep bringing joy and surprise." ★

To learn more about Ricardo Breceda's work, visit [www.RicardoBreceda.com](http://www.RicardoBreceda.com).

