



In *Stonexus VII* we published a report on a burgeoning international stone-related cultural phenomenon within which a nascent art form was developing—balanced stone sculpture.

Now five years later the internet, that hive of hyper-conductivity, has facilitated the growth of an international community of individuals with a shared fascination for stone balancing. A group of stone balancing enthusiasts on Facebook has grown to nearly a thousand, surely but a fraction of folks around the world involved in either an active or appreciative way. A society of sorts—the Balanced Art World International or BAWI—has formed, a magazine is in the offing and stone balancing symposia have taken place in Italy and Ontario, Canada. There will be stone balancing happening at Stonework Symposium 2013 in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Stone balancing is an often astounding feat of equilibration using found objects but also it is, or can be, a creative act. In the hands of its most talented devotees it is a true art form—additive (and balanced) stone sculpture—a challenging, improvisational art form that contains the seed of its own destruction: a delicate balance.

As the objects created are ephemeral, the art of stone balancing has evolved a graphic art aspect: the photographic record. The best of the artful balancers are also skilled photographers and use high-grade equipment to render tasteful (and saleable) images of their achievements granting them a longer life. And when it takes place in the public eye, stone balancing qualifies as performance art.

The first issue of *StonEzine*, the digital edition of *Stonexus*, featured photos of a select few pieces by three of the leading international practitioners of the art: Renato Brancaleoni, Paul Volker and David Smith from Italy, Germany and Ireland respectively. These individuals as well as Bill Dan, the Bay Area pioneer of the art; Peter Juhl, who has just written a book about it; Gabriele Meneguzzi, Carlo Petrarossi, Adrian Gray, John Felicè Ceprano, Heiko Brinkmann—and too many others to mention—are the visible vanguard of the art.





The aforementioned practitioners have all developed distinctive personal styles: a Brancaleoni would not be confused with a Volker or a Cetrano. The rather sudden advent of young Michael Grab into this society of stone artists must have been remarkable, like the young genius poet Rimbaud bursting upon the scene in literary Paris, or young Charlie Parker blazing through Manhattan jazz-club nights like a lyrical comet. An informal conclave of the cognoscenti concurs: *the kid's got something*. His style is original, multi-faceted and responsive to the material at hand be it creek rocks, beach stones or the quarry stones with which he has made such amazing balances.

Michael has achieved cyber-social popularity—he went from 700 to almost 10,000 Facebook 'likes' since last May. His art could become his livelihood, if so he hopes it won't be degraded in the process.

Yet more important to Michael than the artistic aspect of stone balancing is its spiritual aspect, its value as a meditation practice. Trying to bring disparate elements into balance is a hands-on *koan*, one that results, not in enlightenment, but in a state of equilibrium. It is a western sort of Zen practice whereby inner stillness is achieved, not through attentive immobility, but through creative activity—the kinesthetic act of equilibration. As one strives to achieve balance the breath, unbidden, slows and deepens. The mind focuses on the moment. Spirit and matter dance. Here and now meet. Creation occurs.

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*above page, above: A certain quarry in Boulder, Colorado. This photo has enjoyed great popularity on the web. It provides an opportunity to compare the character and quality of a digital image ([www.gravityglue.com/](http://www.gravityglue.com/)) and this printed one.*

*below: Boulder Creek, Boulder, Colorado where Michael often performs.*

*this page, above: At BAWI 2012 in Portonovo, Italy.*

*left: the quarry, Boulder, Colorado (this viewer's favorite piece)*