

## Calif. Law Office Doubles As Gallery For Folk And Outsider Art

By Max Kutner

Law360 (March 4, 2022, 4:49 PM EST) -- Visitors to the offices of worker-side firm Goldstein Borgen Dardarian & Ho might stumble upon an unusual sight in one of the conference rooms: a seven-foot tall sculpture of a woman, made of discarded metal, wire, fishnet and a car part, with movable arms.



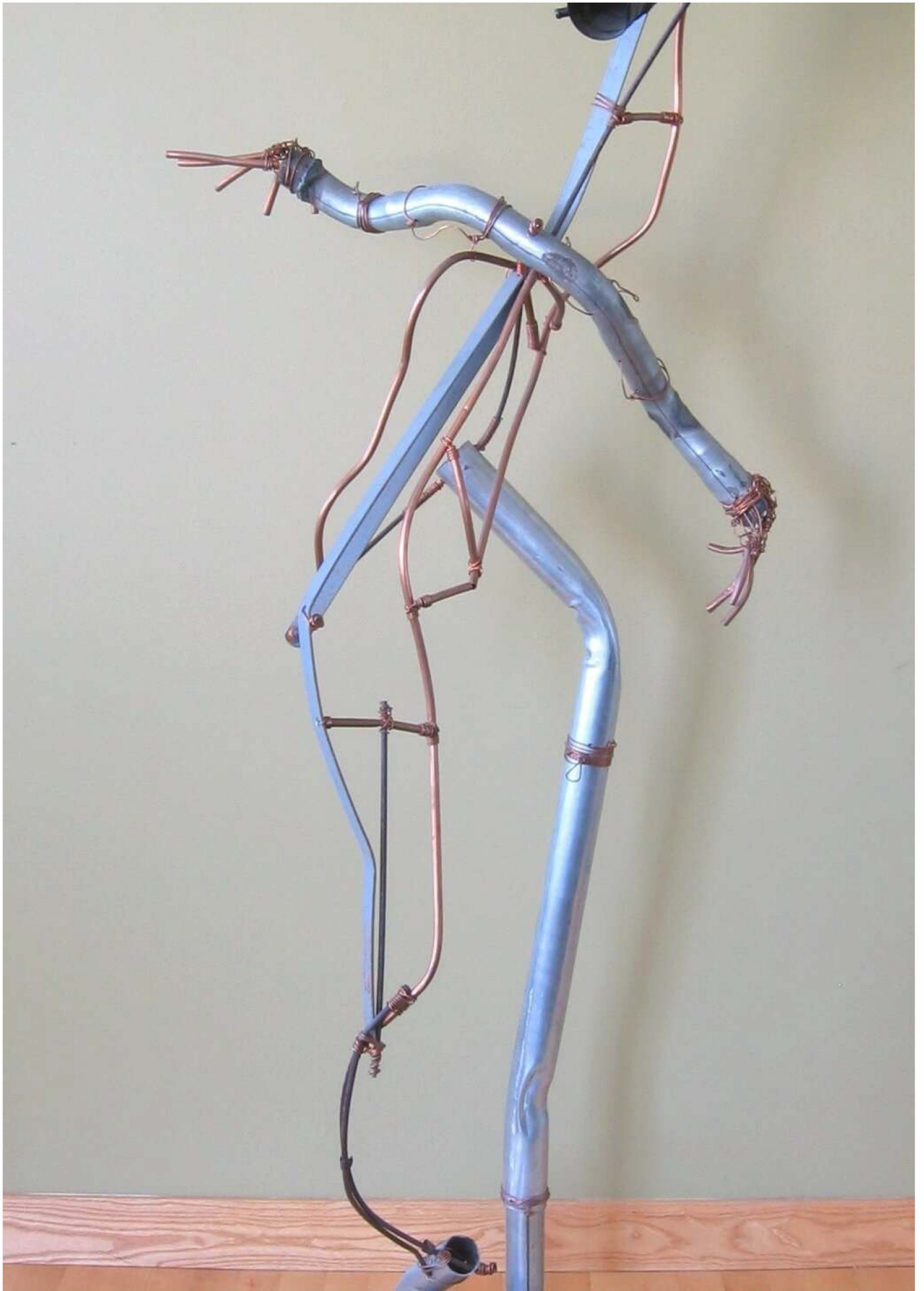
Linda Dardarian

"Sassy Lady," the sculpture by artist Charlie Lucas, is one of more than 20 works of art the firm has collected over the past two decades and displays in its San Francisco Bay Area offices. The firm also displays them in an "art gallery" on the firm's website.

Lucas completed "Sassy Lady," which the firm commissioned, in 1996. Partner Linda Dardarian, who established the collection with retired partner Teresa Demchak, recalled that the artist said the women in the office inspired the sculpture. Dardarian is unaware of any other law firm with a gallery like theirs, and Law360 was unable to identify others with online galleries, though at least a few firms have had art collections displayed in their offices.

"It adds so much joy and creativity to the law firm environment to have art like this," Dardarian said. "I find it very inspiring and uplifting."







"Sassy Lady," a sculpture by artist Charlie Lucas, is on display at the headquarters of Goldstein Borgen Dardarian & Ho in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The firm's collection consists of folk and outsider art from local creative centers for people with disabilities and from artists in the South whom Dardarian and Demchak learned of through Demchak's sister, who was the director of a folk art foundation. Some of the artists now have works in institutions such as the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The works appear in common areas and offices at the firm, which represents workers in wage and hour cases and other matters. The online gallery has existed since the firm launched its website in the late 1990s or early 2000s, said Dardarian, who has handled wage and hour, employment discrimination and disability access cases.

Law360 spoke with Dardarian about the gallery. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

### **What is this gallery?**

This is all art that hangs in our office. So it's art that the partners of the firm own. And we had gotten so many comments from visitors to our office about how wonderful and moving and interesting and uplifting the art is that we decided to put it up on our website to share it with the public more broadly.

### **How did the collection start?**

This was the idea of my former partner Teresa Demchak, who retired at the end of 2012. She's been a longtime fan of outsider art and her sister used to run a folk art foundation in Houston, Texas, called the Orange Show. And so through Terry's sister Suzanne Theis, she and I started visiting folk art environments in the South and visiting with some of the artists.

### **What draws the firm to folk art and outsider art?**

The art is done by artists who are not trained. They are creating from their spirit and their own determination. They're striving to tell their stories. They're doing it despite hardship. Many of them have disabilities or have experienced incredible trauma, and through their art they are expressing joy and hardship and emotion, beauty, all things that are part of the human experience.

And that is what we try to do on behalf of our clients: allow them to achieve their best despite whatever kind of hardship is coming their way because of discrimination in the workplace, discrimination on the basis of disability, inability to access public services, being unfairly paid at work, being taken advantage of ... We represent people who are traditionally on the outside.

### **How else does this gallery contribute or connect to your mission?**

All of these artists whose works we feature come from situations where they were really experiencing oppression. And yet they show their resilience and what they can accomplish when given a chance. And what we are trying to do with our casework is put people on a level playing field so that they can achieve their best.

### **Are you still building the collection?**

Yes. We kind of ran out of wall space. [Laughs] And a lot of these works are a lot more expensive now than they were back in the '90s, because some of these artists are now in the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. San Francisco's de Young Museum ... acquired some work from Purvis Young and Lonnie Holley. But we still do collect art, just not as much as we used to.

### **Is there a work that stands out to you?**

"Sassy Lady" is the one that stands out to me because it represents us. She's seven feet tall, and she's mighty, and she's creative, and she moves, she's a mover. She gets a lot of comments.

--Editing by Haylee Pearl.