



David Varnau: Inspiration in Bronze

Born and raised in rural Indiana, David Varnau grew up appreciating the lyrical in nature all around him. A wide-eyed, nature child, he developed an eye for the subtle and sometimes striking beauty of everyday moments and encounters in his environment. While pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology at Loyola University of Chicago, Varnau found himself fascinated with watching people of all ages and races in a large urban center and was intrigued by the language of the body as it expressed the range of human emotions. "My decision to spend a year abroad in Rome during my junior year stimulated a lifelong love of classical sculpture. Then, upon completion of my degree, my

work in psychology as a rehab counselor provided me with valuable insights into the vulnerable side of human nature."

While receiving post-baccalaureate training in the field of prosthetics at UCLA, Varnau gained an in depth education in human anatomy and movement. This launched a rewarding career of serving amputees for more than 35 years and provided him with an appreciation for the human spirit's capacity to transform loss into triumph. David's prosthetic training and his interactions with his patients provided him with an eye for the wonders of the human body, but also a heart to sense the essence of the

person before him. This was his milieu and it stimulated his yearning to express his insights in sculpture, leading David to pursue his art studies at Gage Academy in Seattle.

Since then, he has returned to Western Europe more than fifteen times, studying the art of the masters. When asked who has influenced his work most, he replies, "Bernini, who was one of the most influential artists during the Italian Baroque Period. Of course, Michelangelo's sculptures from the Italian Renaissance. Finally, Rodin's sculptures, whose works were created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, continue to inform me. Even today, meeting with living sculptors, such as Yves Pires in Paris has been very inspiring"

Varnau says that he sculpts the entire sculpture with a live model before him. In that way, he says he is able to "capture the unique features of each model and a sense of their soul, their truth." Bronze figurative sculpture requires many steps to carefully capture its details and faithfully transform the clay original into virtually indestructible bronze. "I like the durability of bronze—my bronzes will be around long after we are all gone!"

Varnau says that he is most productive when he is sculpting alone or alone with a live model. But he admits that he derives energy from creating in the presence of other artists. He has conducted classes for more than fifteen years and comments, "I have been

fortunate to be able to create art with some long term artist friends. Since 1998, I have been hosting open studio sessions with a live model.



The sessions are not 'classes' per se, but are an opportunity for emerging as well as for professional artists to benefit from the inspiration that can only be experienced from rendering their figurative art from life. It provides me with the chance to be among other artists and get energy from their passion for their art. The setting can be a great forum for professional exchange, is very stimulating and serves as a source of cross pollination. The camaraderie is a nice counterpoint to hours of solitude while sculpting alone in the studio."

A recently completed sculpture by Varnau is entitled ***Persuasion***.



Persuasion 18" x 30" x 12" cast bronze

It depicts an image of a male and female tugging in opposite directions. According to Varnau, "The image can conjure many questions. Are the figures caught in the eternal tug of opposing intentions? Does each playfully want to show the other his/her perspective? Is she saying goodbye and he is begging her to not leave? And can this image be viewed as a metaphor depicting the different sides of ourselves that oppose each other in our psyches? Can we let those opposites become a dance?"

In the midst of a busy, rather mundane day, Varnau says that he occasionally catches a glimpse of someone's features and it nearly takes his breath away. "We are all fascinated with the human image! Have you found yourself marveling at the gorgeousness of a complete stranger's mouth or, perhaps, their stance as they stood talking? To me, those are transcendent moments where that curve of a young girl's lips or the expressiveness of an elderly person's wrinkled face can create a sense of "ah-ha"; it's then that the world feels whole and life seems so complete. In my sculptures, I endeavor to render the features of the human figure in a manner that evokes in you a similar visceral tug, permitting you to savor those eye-popping, synapse-charged moments that are otherwise only occasional and fleeting."

In a recent interview, Varnau was asked, "when someone is viewing your work for the first time, what do



Transfixed (detail) 32" x 23" x 20" cast bronze

you hope they'll see in it?" He replied, "In my sculptures, what both intrigues and excites me is to successfully create an image that, at first glance, grabs the viewer's attention and carries your eyes along the dominant lines of the figure. In each sculpture, you are invited to discover the gesture or action line embedded in the work. With 3-D art, it is particularly satisfying to for me to succeed in capturing your interest from all sides of the piece!"



Ananda 71" x 18" x 18" cast bronze

Varnau says that his artistic mission is to generate allegories in bronze that mirror the narrative of our lives. This, he says, provides you the viewer with a glimpse of your own reflection. Whereas, some of his works reflect a tranquility that seems almost eternal, others are dynamic and kinetic. Some seem lyrical and light hearted, some are grief struck and still others are uplifting, even stirring. But all speak to the spectrum of our experience through the compelling beauty and singular expressiveness of the human body.

When one views his works, it is apparent that many of Varnau's sculptures incorporate what has been termed the "Baroque spiral", which generates a compelling sense of aliveness and dynamism.



Embrace 26" x 13" x 12" cast bronze

In addition, his figures are carefully sculpted to create a somewhat abstracted rendering of the human form. A hallmark of Varnau's style is his highlighting the natural planes of the body in order to dramatize the body's innate energy while, at the same time, creating eye-tugging interest. His insightful works confidently derive their aliveness from the understated, even contemplative mood they each evoke. Their poignancy lies in Varnau's stunning accuracy and the powerful vibrancy with which his works express the truths of our human condition.

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