

“I don’t draw my ideas on paper... I prefer to let them keep developing in my mind for days, until I can see the finished work from all sides in all its details.”

– SHAUKAT CHANEY

BY DIANNE KARG BARON

How did you start working in bronze?

My interest in sculpture began in 1976 at the University of Saskatchewan, College of Dentistry. I taught in the department of Prosthodontics, which is a specialty of dentistry that deals with reconstruction. Extra-oral prosthesis included replacing portions of the head and face with artificial materials. This required a working knowledge of sculpting. I studied with the late Bill Epp, who was then the head of the Sculpture Department.

What originally attracted you to working in metal?

My interest in working with metal began with my friendship with Bill Epp, who was primarily a bronze sculptor. I found working with metal interesting, due to the similarities in creating moulds and casting metal in dentistry.

Tell us about the Pivotal Woman exhibition and the process you went through in preparing for it.

Pivotal Woman was a unique exploration of the feminine mystique. It was an examination of the pervasive endurance of the feminine archetypical images, an exploration of qualities commonly associated with femininity - Inner strength, fragility, wisdom, beauty, grace, sorrow.

I wanted to express all these qualities in my work: beauty and grace in *Pivotal Woman* and *Venus*, strength and fragility in *Athena*, wisdom in *Black Madonna*, sorrow in *Pieta* and *A Death in the Family*. *Chador* asked its own questions; is she losing her identity or does she find safety in covering her face?

Describe the construction process for your work, and the on-site installation.

Since I work in stone and bronze I enjoy combining the two materials. It creates a unique dynamic that I find interesting, but can also create its own problems, especially the shrinkage of metal while casting. This can cause discrepancies when trying to approximate stone and bronze as in *The Solitude of a Broken Mind*. Another problem with this sculpture was in trying to divide the stone head. I needed to preserve the structures of the face that was not as necessary at the back of the head. To make two different cuts I had to hollow the head and then make the two cuts. I made an impression of one half, then waxed and cast it in bronze.

Pivotal Woman had its own problem. There is a poem inscribed on the torso. If it was gated in the normal fashion I would have lost a lot of the words. The only way to avoid this was to gate the sculpture from the inside and cast the sculpture from the inside.

The installation process was fairly straightforward. All sculptures were mounted on black wooded bases except *The Black Madonna*, *Pieta*, *Death in the Family* and *Venus*, which were permanently mounted on iron bases. The show was in a large room with sufficient space for people to walk around.

What training have you had?

My training in sculpture has been informal. I took weekly classes with Bill Epp in 1976-77, and weekly stone carving classes at the Ottawa School of Art with John Sadler in 1989-90. Many

of the principles of working with bronze and stone are similar to dentistry. The transition wasn't as difficult as you might think.

What approach do you normally take in your design process?

I don't draw my ideas on paper. I find this process limits my imagination. I prefer to let them keep developing in my mind for days until I can see the finished work from all sides in all its details. This is especially important in working with stone since the material is unforgiving to an unwanted cut.

What parts of the fabricating process do you enjoy most – and least?

I am very process-oriented. I enjoy the ideas as they develop in my mind and creating the wax-up. I would not say that I dislike the grinding and finishing, it is just that by the time I reach this stage I am anxious to get on with the next sculpture.

What is your favourite work, and why?

I have a small bronze piece called *In the Eye of the Bull*. Visualizing it as it developed in my mind was very enjoyable. It was made for the Humane Society fundraiser. In a bull fight the bull is always killed, [which] would have been most inappropriate to show... at a Humane Society fundraiser. In this sculpture the matador is a klutz and has dropped his sword and... [t]he bull has him in his sights. Another sculpture is a stone and bronze Ganesh figure. [*Ganesh one of the most widely worshipped deities in the Hindu religion. He is known as the Remover of Obstacles, and the Lord of Beginnings - Ed*] For some reason that I cannot explain, creating that seemed



◁ Chador, 2008, Bronze, 40.6" x 33 x 28 cm
 ▽ Masquerade, 2007; alabaster and bronze, 30.5 x 25.4 x 19 cm
 ▽ ▽ Pivotal Woman; 2008; bronze, 53.3 x 40.6 x 25.4 cm
 A poem by Nadia Chaney "After Birth" is inscribed on the sculpture
 Photography by Joan Anderson

to be a turning point in my career as a sculptor. All my work is very different, each one has it's own set of problems to solve, and this leads to learning new skills.

Do you work in other metals?

Bronze has been my choice of metal. I have done a couple pieces in aluminum, such as *The Phoenix Risen*, and may do more in future.

What or who inspires you?

My inspiration comes from many sources; mainly from life and the world around me. I love looking at the works of other artist but I have no interest in emulating them. It is very important to me that my work is in no way 'borrowed' from anybody else.

Is there a piece of advice you wish you'd received at the beginning of your career?

This bit of advice I received, rather late in my career, from *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. According to Cameron, my job as an artist is to go to my studio everyday and create sculptures and not be concerned about the quality; to just keep working and creating. With time, quality will take care of itself. This also frees one from worrying about the judgment of others.



What has been your greatest challenge so far?

My greatest challenge at the moment is that I am getting older and the stones are getting bigger.

What direction is your work taking?

I am experimenting with abstract shapes and larger stones. Once the process is worked out I'd like to combine stone and bronze.

What types of relationships have assisted you in moving forward with your career?

I belong to the National Capital Network of Sculptors in Ottawa. They have annual juried shows that have been very helpful in showing my work to the public on a regular basis.

Are you currently working on any other commissions?

I recently finished a stone sculpture called *Matsya*. I am working on a couple of small bronzes at the moment.

Are you participating in or running any special events or exhibitions in the near future?

I am working, with many artists across the Americas, on a project which when completed will be the largest sculpture exhibit and peace memorial in the world. It will extend from Canada to Chile.

What do you like about your location? Why did you choose this area? Do you feel like you are part of a larger community?

Ottawa is a cosmopolitan city; it has all the amenities of a big city without its hassles. We also enjoy its proximity to large centres. It was a good choice when I wanted to start a private dental practice. The community has been good to us both in dentistry and art. ✎

See more of Shaukat Chaney's work at [www. waterwalks.com](http://www.waterwalks.com)

