

ART TALK



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Sculpture: *Up Close & Personal*

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Sculpture: Up Close and Personal

By Renée Targos

Millions of men have lived to fight, build palaces and boundaries, shape destinies and societies; but the compelling force of all times has been the force of originality and creation profoundly affecting the roots of human spirit.

—Ansel Adams (1902-1984)

In today's world market, with approximately 6.5 billion people on the planet and Internet access, it's easy to get mass-produced artworks. This trend makes the one-of-a-kind pieces, or smaller numbered limited editions, that reflect an artist's personal touch, flourish in monetary and aesthetic value. Artists tell *Art-Talk* why less is more.



Truth Seeker (bronze, 36") by Gregory Reade

At the end of the 19th century, replication of sculptures was a sign of success. The number of reproductions was inconsequential to the demand. New Mexico sculptor David Pearson says in the 21st century, a limited number brings in a better profit by offering a visible market reaction.

"I only do 15 editions. As the first, second and third edition sell, by the time the 15th edition is sold, the price has doubled," says Pearson. "It gives collectors the incentive to buy an edition when it first comes out. It's also an incentive for the buyer of the 15th edition, because it's already a proven piece by it selling out."

The beauty of smaller editions also allows for an international marketplace. California sculptor Gregory Reade says, "When I was looking into the market for an accepted number for editions, I found that internationally it was acceptable at 8 to 9. I went from doing editions in numbers of 35 to 50 down to all of my newer work in editions of 8," says Reade. "I can sell it throughout the world. I think it makes it a more powerful piece."

While some argue that more editions mean a greater audience, Reade says that in today's world of mass communication, the size of an audience isn't the goal. "Everyone can know what everyone else has, but in a different time people might not have known. I think the smaller number makes the piece more unique, and for a particular collector, more valuable."

At the Material Connexion's conference on Malfatto, which is a philosophy of creating designs that stray away from mass-produced copies, architect and industrial designer Gaetano Pesce says that Westerners crave highly personalized objects. He compared the making of identical, mass-produced objects to fascism.

While deceased artist, Allan McCollum, takes more of a Marxist approach by saying in Ulrich Wilmes *Works 1978-1988*, *Allan McCollum*, about the *Individual Works* project that a "cultural trope of the Unique versus the Expendable, the Irreplaceable versus the Common: the psychological underpinnings of the Class system as mediated through our makings of things."

McCollum challenges the belief that if an object is mass produced and available for the general population, versus a limited availability of an object to the wealthy at a higher price, that the object shouldn't have any less of value.

Regardless of philosophy or economic truths, Reade concludes the debate by saying, "There is no real price to art, it's all in the eye of the beholder."



Metamorphosis (precast in clay, 40" x 20" x 12")
by Carol Ruff Franza

Personal Touch

Regardless of a work's monetary value, the skill and passion involved in creating a piece are difficult to replicate in large numbers. Purposefully leaving her mark, Arizona sculptor Carol Ruff Franza, says, "I want my work to reflect that a human was involved. I don't want it to look machine made," says Franza. "The strokes of a gesture, the fingerprints, and tool marks that can never be reproduced or happen again in that way. The dance of creating artwork is my goal, catching the spirit. It's what makes fine art, the dream and joy of creation."

Even in the process of casting bronze sculptures, there is a unique interaction between the sculptor and the work. For Reade, he casts one to two pieces at a time, giving himself a lengthy break between editions. "There is a time period where



Following My Feet (bronze, 13" x 7" x 3") by Roxanne Swentzell
(courtesy of Hahn Ross Gallery, www.hahnross.com)



Une Danse de Reve (bronze, 52") by David Pearson. (courtesy of Patricia Carlisle Gallery)



I'm not looking at the piece," says Reade. "Every couple months, when I begin to cast the work again, I check over the wax and look at it differently. I might make some minor adjustments by working on small details or accentuating a detail, therefore each edition is different."

Pearson goes through a similar process with his work by creating his own patinas to achieve a correct texture. For the piece, *Un Danse de Reve*, he wanted the legs to be seen through a dancer's skirt with a strong cloth texture. The piece took him three months to patina. "I make so much work," says Pearson. "In taking pieces apart and putting on details. If I did 150 of the same piece, it would be ridiculous."

Unique Distinctions

New Mexico sculptor Roxanne Swentzell, who began sculpting as a child to communicate instead of talking, creates distinctive works. "Mass production turns me off," says Swentzell. "These are special things. I don't want to trivialize the emotion of the

piece, especially for the people that are relating to it."

Swentzell likes to use the human form to communicate with viewers, with a focus on the hands and feet. "It's a part of the body that is very expressive," says Swentzell.

In her work, she tells stories of love, vulnerability and strength, using a sense of humor.

Reade also plays with the big toe. "It seemed to have happened somewhere along the way, but I seem to always have the big toe separated from the rest of the toes," says Reade. "I enjoy the shape. Eight out of 10 people will walk by my sculpture and rub the big toe. It's a funny thing. It draws them into the sculpture."

In a sculpture done for a local school, Franza had children help her with some of the creation. For the end product, she hid the children's initials under the belly of wolf. "It's the only piece I've done that with," says Franza. "I'm thinking one day my children will be able to show my grandchildren by climbing under there and showing them where it is. It's a pleasure to experience that and share it with people. Its their appreciation of it that is the other half of the equation." ■