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James Muir's Allegorical Art Could One Day Impact Humanity

The riderless horse stands proud and alert with its ears pricked up and its nostrils flared into the wind. The empty saddle is a silent testament to the brave rider who has fallen in the line of duty. Over the saddle horn hangs a Colt .45 with a badge of honor on the holster, waiting for the next deputy courageous enough to take the place of the fallen rider.

Later this year, this proud and determined horse with its feet standing four square upon the Book of Justice will be the centerpiece of the new Memorial Plaza at the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office in Phoenix. The heroic, larger-than-life sculpture is dedicated to the deputies who sacrificed their lives in service for the people of Maricopa County.

The epic, true-to-life quality of the sculpture is typical of the work of its creator, James Nathan Muir. For one thing, he knows horses. As a young man, he went out West to be a cowboy. He broke and trained horses. He learned how to shoe horses, and the first shape he "sculpted" out of metal was a horseshoe hammered out at a blacksmith's forge. It was also the hammering out of one of America's most expressive historical sculptors.

He recalls: "There was an inner voice saying to me, 'You got off track. You're supposed to be a sculptor.' I went to work for a foundry in Sedona for five months and that taught me the basics of fine art bronze casting."

His vivid, dramatic sculptures of soldiers and horses are in the Gettysburg Battlefield Museum, the U.S. Cavalry Museum at Fort Riley, the Atlanta Historical Society, and some of the nation's most prominent private collections. They are dynamic creations, three-dimensional freeze frames portraying moments of...
James Muir adds the finishing touches to "Caduceus." His ambition is to erect seven gigantic "Caduceus" monuments in the world's seven continents. 12 feet high with fountain capabilities. (Maquettes available). In progress.
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Above: A detail from “Quo Vadis.” Muir’s lifesize Christ statue in many churches across America, 6’ 3” high.
Left: “....And Justice For All.” The Blindfolded Lady Justice wields the Sword of Truth. Lifesize 6’ 9” high. 21” high Maquettes available.

wielding the heavy dragoon weapon known as “Old Wristbreaker,” because his regiment hasn’t yet received the very latest, lighter sabre of the 1860s.

Historical authenticity colors his highly dramatic statue of two cavalrmen in their last desperate battle at Little Big Horn in 1876. Side by side on galloping horses, firing in different directions, they are back to back in the combat formation, “Column of Two’s,” protecting each other’s back.

But these earlier, highly physical works, throbbing with life and sweat and with the taste of blood, are cast in a different mold from the themes he addresses today. He terms his current work “allegorical art.”

“My work speaks of duty, honor, courage, liberty and justice,” he says. “Above all, it speaks of truth and the ultimate triumph of the human spirit.”

“A lot of my collectors were disturbed when they thought I had ceased doing Civil War, Indian Wars and cavalry art. It’s a growth thing. My early work was full of symbols—more than I realized at the time. There’s no real break between then and now.”

These allegorical themes inspire “....And Justice For All” and “Caduceus” and the strong Christ figure represented in “Quo Vadis,” another of Muir’s works at St. Louis University as well as at Southern California Christian College and a number of churches across America.

They inspire “The Newsboy,” which stands at the Paul Harvey News Broadcasting Headquarters in Chicago. In

truth, split seconds when life and death are in the balance.

But a side of Muir that’s far removed from cavalry battlefields will be seen in August when a monumental symbolic work is unveiled in Loveland, Colorado, at the largest outdoor sculpture show and sale in the world. It portrays a winged female—“Caduceus”—the angel of healing, based on the emblematic staff with two serpents coiled about it that is a universal symbol of medicine. “Caduceus” stands twelve feet high and has a nine foot wing span.

James Muir’s work is greatly admired in Loveland. Two years ago, the Loveland Sculpture Group purchased for the city his allegorical sculpture “....And Justice For All,” showing a blindfolded Lady Justice wielding the Sword of Truth. The same sculpture was originally commissioned by the law firm of Aspey, Watkins and Diesel, and stands outside St. Louis University’s new Law Department Building. The university has also acquired “Caduceus” which will be moved there after its unveiling in Loveland.

Muir has further ambitions for “Caduceus.” He is seeking seven patrons to place seven gigantic “Caduceus” monuments in the seven continents of the world. The monuments will stand 24 feet high—maybe even 36 feet—with a wing span of 18 to 27 feet. Big stuff for an artist who didn’t even go through academic art training. Instead of art school, he went to West Point.

Authenticity is a keynote in his work. He tries to create the true horse, the true uniform, horse equipment and weaponry. When a cavalryman charges, holding his sabre straight out, Muir explains that he is

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this, an exuberant turn-of-the-century ragamuffin newspaper seller holds up a paper with the banner headline—TRUTH. The statue carries Muir’s typical attention to detail. He bought old clothes and a pair of boots to ensure the authenticity of his newsboy.

“They Served Well,” the horse sculpture to be unveiled in Phoenix this year, features a western horse from the early 1900s, and Muir says there’s no breed exactly like it now. It has period saddle and weaponry that is historically correct for 1922 when the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office lost its first deputy. It seemed natural that the memorial statue would be a horse, as Arizona is considered one of the last wild west territories.

“The whole idea of the horse came from James as we sat down to discuss it,” says Lt. John Kleinhinz of the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office who first saw the need for a memorial. “For me, the horse standing on the Book of Justice is a strong symbol of what we’re doing. We wanted to give people a feeling of hope. There are others willing to get on the horse, put on the badge and still protect us.”

Kleinhinz admires the care Muir has put into the statue to make it absolutely authentic. “James is a very meticulous and passionate man in terms of the ways he tries to put across the works of art that he creates,” he says.

“In America, our heroes have always been those who stood for truth and justice,” says Muir. “The law man against the bad guys. It gives a universal message.”

“The Linc,” which James Muir is working on now, takes us back to his historical work, but it is allegorical art too. It shows Colonel William Barrett Travis, the 27-year-old commander at the Alamo, drawing a line in the earth as he did on the evening of March 5, 1836, the night before he and his company were massacred at the Alamo. He challenged each man to cross that line and make a stand against the approaching overwhelming forces. A total of 185 men did that and died. In their courageous example, Muir sees a message for us today: “Where do we draw the line?”

“I hope ‘allegorical art’ will become a movement, a rallying banner,” Muir says, and he hopes passionately that there really will be a “Caduceus” statue erected on every continent.

The “Seven Ladies on Seven Continents” will be one of the modern wonders of the world, he says. But wonders of the world cost money and he estimates each one will cost between half a million dollars.

“I need to reach the millionaires who’ll say: ‘This isn’t all Wall Street and Dow Jones. I can afford to reach into my pocket and support this one. I’ll pop for the one in North America or South America or wherever.’

“There’s a clientele there that has the wherewithal to bring about some of these projects that could have an impact on humanity. You can buy a luxury automobile or you can invest in something that can affect millions of people’s lives. It takes a special type of person—very perceptive, self aware and spiritually aware—to identify with what’s going on in my art.”

If only, he says, someone like that would support the first monumental sculpture towering up to 24 or 36 feet. Then there would be an international search to find one billionaire on each continent enlightened enough to say: “Yes. This is a worthwhile project—a statement for all humanity that there is spiritual hope.”

Such patrons would stand out from the crowd the way he feels he has done as a sculptor.

“It’s safer to be back with the masses doing acceptable art,” he argues. “What I’m doing is on the cutting edge of art. In fact, I call it the bleeding edge.”

Instead of a sculpting tool, you can almost see him wielding a cavalryman’s saber, “Old Wristbreaker,” making a heroic last stand in a “Column of Two’s” formation.

For further information, turn to the Buyer’s Guide on page 138 and 160.