

Emotion meets the Human Form

Rodd Ambrosion's "Dignity" to become Redmond's third public arts installment

by Susan Springer, for *The Bulletin*
Special Projects Department

Michelangelo was so passionate about getting human anatomy accurate in his marble sculptures that he secretly dissected cadavers, even though it was forbidden by the Church.

Artist Rodd Ambrosion understands that passion, but was able to get his education in the bright light of medical school.

Growing up in Redmond with a doctor for a father, Ambrosion began his career in his father's footsteps. But after a couple years of medical school, Ambrosion felt the stronger call of art.

Ambrosion became a medical illustrator and had a successful career drawing for medical product companies and text book publishers. He was honored with two awards from the Association of Medical Illustrators.

Then about 10 years ago he picked up clay and was intrigued. Today, this local boy is a well-known sculptor living in the artistic hotbed of Joseph, Oregon.

The Redmond Commission for Art in Public Places (RCAPP) has chosen Ambrosion's bronze sculpture, titled "Dignity," for its next installment. The Commission is now raising funds for the sculpture, which depicts a woman holding a basket.



Ambrosion is honored to have his sculpture chosen by his home town and is proud to participate in Redmond's growth. Ambrosion and his wife grew up in Redmond. He remembers the community fondly, especially for the support his teachers gave him.

"I can't go back, but I can be a part of it," said Ambrosion.

RCAPP is recommending his three-quarter life-size bronze be installed in front of the Redmond Chamber of Commerce, where it can stand on a raised landscaped area. Right now, Dignity is waiting at the Redmond Library while funds are raised.

City of Redmond Principal Economic Planner Heather Richards said this is the first fundraising effort for the Art in Public Places program. The first three sculptures were donated.

Ambrosion and Bend's Mockingbird Gallery are providing the sculpture at the reduced price of \$15,000. Around \$5,000 has been raised so far.

Richards said because the economy is in a downturn, it's hard to get large corporate donations. However, she has been impressed with the number of small donations from individuals, some for as little as \$25.

Richards added that people are responding to the beauty of Dignity.

"They think there is a lot of intrinsic value to the public art program," said Richards. "She can evoke all sorts of images for people—she really looks like a woman of grace and dignity."

Ambrosion said Dignity was inspired by the many women in his life who have shown great persistence and dedication during hard times. One friend in particular was on his mind when he sculpted Dignity.

"It is about gathering up the pieces, and was inspired by a friend who was going through a trying period," said Ambrosion.

"The basket's empty, and its very much open to interpretation," he said.

Ambrosion wanted Dignity to be both timeless and contemporary so people could see what they wanted in her.



Ambrosion begins a sculpture by taking clay to "rough out the idea" in a small size called a maquette. If he likes what he sees, he'll sculpt it in a larger size.

With Dignity, Ambrosion said "she just created herself" since his friend who was in despair was in his subconscious.

Dignity and Ambrosion's other figurative sculptures combine his mastery of the human form with the emotion of the subject.

"I tend to be very honest with my form," said Ambrosion.

Ambrosion said his unique career path gave him the best education for sculpting a realistic human body. He truly knows how muscle moves since he has experience from medical school learning anatomy by doing projects such as a three-week detailed dissection of a knee. Ambrosion holds both a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Oregon State University and a Master of Arts in biomedical communications from the Texas Health Science Center.

"The best way to learn is out of desire for knowledge," Ambrosion added.

City leaders think Dignity will be a great addition to the revitalization effort going on in downtown Redmond.

"It's a lovely piece of graceful art. It speaks to the dignity of work and this is a hard-working community," said Susan Nobles, Executive Director of Redmond Downtown Partnership.

Ambrosion shows his limited edition bronzes in several galleries in Oregon and Washington including Mockingbird Gallery.



Photos courtesy of Rodd Ambrosion