

SUSAN READ CRONIN

Interview with Vivian Patterson

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Is there a reaction you want from your viewers?

Pleasure, enjoyment, smiles, light bulbs going off, laughing out loud, falling to the rug weeping, "Ah Ha!"s, sobs, quizzical looks ... Second looks and double takes.

Talk about your process – how do you begin a project and what changes over time?

Sometimes I start from a sound in my head, like the sound of the words "Sumo Snail". I just had to start with that and see where it would lead me. One time I couldn't get the song about the "Four and Twenty Blackbirds Baked in a Pie" out of my head, which was the start of *Four & Twenty*.

Sometimes I start from a sketch I made in my "idea book." The sketch could come from an actual vision, like something I saw in the pattern of my bath towel. Not to be limited by those, I also sketch "hallucinations", like the squirrel I swear I saw when I was walking the beach in Naples, Florida. It turned into the big guy in *To the Rescue!*.

I almost always start out wondering... like I may see a blob in my clay pile and wonder what it is. For instance, I had thrown the two carrots from *Growing Close* back into the recycle pile to melt back down after I cast them. I pulled out one of the melted misshapen carrots and wondered if it might be an elephant trunk. Next thing I knew, *Lucky* the elephant showed up.

Tell us about the foundry and your work there.

I love going to the foundry. I do 90% of my castings at Berkshire Fine Arts Foundry in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. I usually go once a week and it is my social time in what is normally my solitary occupation. At any one time, I may have 3 or 4 pieces in the works



Growing Close. Limited edition of 24. Bronze.
7"h x 15"w x 7"d

in different stages, so there is always something for me to do when I go. Nazario makes the mold, pours a wax, Annie rough chases the wax, Carroll dips the piece, burns it out, bead blasts. Nazario is the patina maestro. We have a lot of fun and play around with the pieces, make up nicknames for them and come up with new ideas. Bronze casting is a team sport. My work would be nothing if I didn't have the expertise and artistry of the foundry artisans available to me.

You use your medium only to get beyond it. With a finger on the pulse of what makes us laugh, you provoke us to ponder some of the larger questions in life. Do you don the mantle of moralist? Are we barking up the right tree? Why do dogs bark? Do you set your sights on human parody and the vagaries of human foibles, but then step back and let the fur, fin and feather do the work?

I think I'll hone in on the meat of your question [Why do dogs bark?]. . . because therein lies the answer to all your other queries. Dogs bark to get attention. "Hey, Look over here! Hey!" This attention-getting happens in two stages; first, I'm getting my own attention and secondly, I'm trying to get yours.

For instance, while we're on the subject of barking, let's look at *The Bone I* and *The Bone II*. My concept was to have the two pieces act as panels that went together like a bronze comic strip. I believe that this is a new and unusual concept for the medium. I do look for new ways to use the medium.

In *The Bone I* and *II*, there is a huge social commentary going on in these two pieces. They're about giving and receiving, lusting and wanting, giving something and wanting to get it back. They're about relationships... with ourselves, our pets, our friends and families. They're about love, conditional and unconditional. They're about greed and generosity. They have specific meaning to me, and that may be very different from what you see when you look at them. The big point is... they are dogs barking for your attention.



The Bone I. Limited edition of 12. Bronze. 17"h x 10"w x 13"d

The Bone II. Limited edition of 12. Bronze. 10½"h x 10"w x 16"d

What would be a Cronin credo? “divin(ing) comedy”?

If you visit my studio, you will see that I have painted the walls pink with big white polka dots. In some of the polka dots I have glued sayings or words that resonate with me. Here are a few: Passion, Don't make assumptions, Don't take anything personally, Do not equivocate, Nothing else is an option, Don't explain - Don't complain.

“If you know exactly what you are going to do, what is the point of doing it?”

PABLO PICASSO

“Lives are not planned in advance but rather assembled from passions. Put yourself in places where you be will surrounded by smart and wonderful people, for it is there where lucky accidents are most likely to happen. And, when they happen, don't be afraid to follow them where they lead.”

ERIC LANDER



Soul Mate. Limited edition of 24.
Bronze. 6"h x 3"w x 4½"d

Speak to me about animals as avatars.

Is an avatar the scent you put on to attract the opposite sex? Or is it a holy man from the Far East? Oh, I remember now... an embodiment of a person. People are always asking me if I have pets, visit the zoo, love animals, etc. Quite frankly, I wouldn't call myself an “animal person.” I currently have no pets. The animals I surround myself with are bronze and require no feeding. But animals as avatars do seem to appear in my work, somehow, and I am surprised when they show up. They cause me to trot off to find my book of symbols. Ah,... an elephant with its trunk up in the air symbolizes good luck. Well, I've had plenty of that.

My sculpture *Giddy up!* is probably the most interesting to me, if we're talking about avatars. Taken from the fable of the Tortoise and the Hare, I wondered what it would be like if they teamed up with one another for a change. Voilà! The Hare is now riding the Tortoise and the two different species are now working together, albeit at their differently anticipated rates of speed, to work towards the same end. The fable takes on a whole new slant... now we're into the human realm of diversity and cooperation... two quite modern topics.

The sculptures are cartoons in the round, almost absurdly substantial in bronze and imposing in presence. You blend the impossibly cute with dark undercurrent seasonings. With everything seemingly positive on the surface, do you deliver some of the villains and rogues?

A most astute observation. Still waters do run deep. If there were no light, we'd have no shadow. There is a dark side to all that I do. It is what makes it 3-D, what hides around the corner or under the flap or in the shadow. Sometimes I don't even know those villains and rogues are there until they expose themselves.

What in your eyes is an artist's responsibility?

To be true to the self.