

BRAD MORTON: SCULPTOR

By William T. Squires, PhD

Brad Morton's sculpture studio is a foundry and a workshop where ideas become masterpieces in metal. What begins as a concept, a drawing, and a clay or wax model is fully realized in bronze and steel. Morton is a rare combination of creator and fabricator. He works skillfully and is at ease designing, casting, or welding metals. Combined in one individual, Morton's training and abilities as a designer, engineer and craftsman are virtually unheard of among his contemporaries.

Located since 1990 at his studio in the heart of downtown Birmingham, Alabama, Brad has forged unique relationships with individuals, institutions, and foundations who seek his creative judgement and sculptural expertise. His working knowledge of metallurgy, tools and materials make him a welcome resource for the aspirations of many people. His studio is a laboratory where aspiring young artists serve apprenticeships and where shop talk and expertise are shared daily with old and new colleagues and friends. Numbers of professional artists, connoisseurs, and collectors owe no small portion of their success to collaborations with Brad Morton.

Morton believes in "truth to materials". The essential, living, breathing qualities of bronze and steel lie at the heart of his work. You understand this as you experience his sculpture. It is bronze's expressive power and steel's strength that animate the theme and substance of Brad's sculpture. His subjects in bronze are often drawn directly from nature, for instance the conical symmetry of the southern loblolly pine "Pinecone Fountain" (Birmingham Botanical Gardens), and ornamental sprig of ivy "4th Infantry (Ivy) Division Memorial (Arlington National Cemetery), or the helical structure for DNA molecules "Tree of Life". But it is not the natural references that distinguish these sculptures so much as the vitality with which each subject is treated.

In steel, Morton's sculptures are humane and empathetic. It is uncommon in fabricated steel to discover empathy, benevolence and compassion. These qualities are sought and achieved consistently in the subjects Brad chooses for his work. Illustrative is "Sister's Vigil" (St. Vincent's Hospital, Birmingham, AL), a large-scale sculpture fabricated in Corten and stainless steel. This towering group of four figures provides a physical metaphor of the sacred vows that define Christian sisterhood. The earthy dark umber of Corten anchors the sisters in the here and now while brilliant stainless-steel coronets soar to the hereafter. Morton's ingenious juxtaposing of Corten and stainless steel set up a tension in "Sister's Vigil" between earth and sky. Other carefully balanced tensions occur in Morton's monumental sculptures, contrasts such as light and dark, motion versus stasis, bronze against steel, rough beside smooth. Such calculated oppositions awaken perception, ensuring that when seen from multiple perspectives, his sculptures are surprising and revelatory.

Brad Morton not only draws, designs and fashions small maquettes for competitions and commissions; he seamlessly up scales those models to impressive proportions and resolution. His studio is both a foundry and a fabrication workshop where clay, wax and plaster become bronze, and where steel plates, bars, rods and beams become sculptural masterworks.

Appropriately placed, Brad's huge "Sister's Vigil" invites hope and healing at the entrance to the hospital. In addition to sculptural groups like "Sister's", "Contemporary Family" (Mandarin Hotel, Miami, FL) and "Seminar" (Altamont School, Birmingham, AL), he creates couples and pairs. For years he has produced variations on companion pieces working solely either in bronze or steel or with both in conjunction. "Future Perfect" is an example of a pairing in which each member is made of stainless steel and cast bronze and the two sculptures are made for each other; they are a mated pair. Other mated pairs are "Rhythms" and "Synapse I and II".

Interplays of color, light, texture, line and volume are all striking qualities of Brad Morton's large outdoor sculptures. As visually engaging as surface qualities are, it is the depth of Morton's visions that endures. Our experience of his sculpture is rewarded by the joy and totality of its expressiveness. What we take from an enjoyment of his art are qualities we treasure most within ourselves and in others. His sculpture affirms family, community, and relationship. These bedrock values are familiar, but Morton's mastery of form asks us to reconsider these enduring intimacies in fresh ways. We reflect upon the kinship and communal bonds we share with others each day and with surroundings that cry out for caring and a humane touch.

BRADFORD THOMAS MORTON

SCULPTOR

A large, stylized, handwritten signature of Bradford Thomas Morton in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with thick, dark strokes. The letters are interconnected, and the overall appearance is that of a personal, artistic signature.