

BELLARMINE

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Feat of Clay

BOB
LOCKHART
SCULPTS
ROBERT
BELLARMINE

A Micro-lending
Trip to Belize

PLUS:
An Adorable Baby!

BOB LOCKHART SCULPTS ROBERT BELLARMINE – OR IS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND?

FEATFLAY

FOR SIX MONTHS LAST YEAR, BOB LOCKHART DIDN'T trim his beard. He wasn't making a statement; he was working out a problem. The beard on his sculpture of Robert Bellarmine didn't look right, and he couldn't figure out why. As his own whiskers sprouted gloriously forth into a wiry cloud, he discovered his mistake: He had Bellarmine's beard pointing straight down, but beards follow the jawline, thrusting outward. He reworked it. "The good part is that I'm ruthless about ripping something up and starting over," he says.

The beard was not the first change he had made to the sculpture, and it would not be the last. For nearly two years, the 7-foot-tall figure of Bellarmine - cardinal, saint, and namesake of Bellarmine University - has dominated both Lockhart's studio, in a carriage house in Crescent Hill, and his thoughts. The piece, which will be 10 feet tall when it's cast in bronze, will have a prominent spot on campus. It is a gift from Colleen Liebert, a member of Bellarmine's Women's Council, in memory of her husband, Dennis Liebert, who was a close friend of President Joseph J. McGowan. (Their daughter, Sarah, graduated from Bellarmine in 2002.) University officials hope to place a second bronze casting in Rome.

Lockhart is known for adding whimsical, Surrealist touches to his work - his Bellarmine Knight on the quad is filled with them - and for putting a bit of himself in each piece, often the distinctive silver ring he wears on his right hand. You'll see it on

the finger of Joseph in his Holy Family sculpture in Our Lady of the Woods Chapel, for instance. But there is much less latitude with the Bellarmine piece. Commissioned work is by its nature more confining, "especially religious work," he says. "It's the hardest. ... It's very academic."

He lost about three months' work when it was discovered after consultations with Jesuits in Rome that Bellarmine's garb was not historically accurate and had to be altered. Lockhart admits that part of that time was spent in getting past his own anger: "I hated to rip down my thoughts." He is very self-aware; he admits that he carries a lot of ego. But he also knows that he doesn't know everything. And one of the most appealing things about him is that even after making art for almost 50 years he is most drawn to that which he doesn't know. "I'm interested in what I can't solve."

The work can be very slow. Adding texture to a 3-by-8-inch section of Bellarmine's tunic took 12 hours. "You'd like to be able to say, 'Well, today I finished the arm,'" Lockhart says. "But it doesn't work that way." Some of the roughing in is done by Mike McCarthy '90, who majored in fine arts and studied with Lockhart and now builds furniture and cabinetry with an artistic bent in his Trinity Designs company. They've worked together on many pieces, and Lockhart trusts him completely. "There's something to having the voice of another artist in the room, to question or suggest," he says. ▶

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photos by GEOFF OLIVER BUGBEE





TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:

THE TOWN AT ROBERT BELLARMINI'S FEET ADDS A GREAT DEAL OF TEXTURE, WHICH "GIVES THE BRONZE A CHANCE TO EXPRESS ITSELF," SAYS SCULPTOR BOB LOCKHART. "YOU'RE WORKING WITH ONE COLOR, SO THE MORE TEXTURES YOU HAVE, THE MORE THE PATINA CAN WORK." LOOKING AT THE INTRICATE DETAILS, HE CHUCKLES. "THAT'LL FREAK OUT THE GUY AT THE FOUNDRY."

BELLARMINI HOLDS HIS DE CONTROVERSIIS CHRISTIANAE FIDEI, IN WHICH HE ADDRESSED THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS.

FOLLOWING SURGERY IN LATE APRIL TO CLEAR HIS CAROTID ARTERY, LOCKHART'S FACE WAS MORE DRAWN THAN USUAL. "I WAS LOOKING IN THE MIRROR AND SEEING WRINKLES, SO I ADDED MORE" TO BELLARMINI'S FACE, HE SAYS. "THEY CALL THEM 'CHARACTER LINES,' BUT I WAS A CHARACTER LONG BEFORE I HAD THEM."

SECOND ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:

LOCKHART PURPOSELY LEFT TWO OF BELLARMINI'S BUTTONS UNDONE. "IF I HAD THAT MANY BUTTONS, I WOULDN'T GET 'EM ALL DONE." HE FOUND THEM AT THE NOW-CLOSED BAER FABRICS.

LOCKHART GREW HIS OWN BEARD FOR SIX MONTHS TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO MAKE BELLARMINI'S BEARD MORE REALISTIC.

WORKING ON THIS PIECE, LOCKHART LEARNED "THERE IS A LOGIC TO WRINKLES – CLOTH FOLDS IN A VERY SPECIFIC WAY." HE CARVED WOOD TOOLS TO MAKE THE ELABORATE LACE PATTERN.

THIRD ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT

THE DETAILS OF THE SASH ARE TRIM INTENDED FOR USE ON DOLLHOUSES.

FOLLOWING THE SUGGESTION OF HIS FRIEND, NOTED SCULPTOR ED HAMILTON, LOCKHART MADE BELLARMINI'S EARS MORE ROUNDED AND PULLED THEM OUT MORE FROM THE HEAD. THE CRITIQUE FROM THE MAN HE CALLS THE BEST ARTIST IN LOUISVILLE MADE LOCKHART "NERVOUS – AND GRATEFUL."

LOCKHART KEEPS A CONTINUOUSLY UPDATED "THINGS TO DO" LIST ON THE SCULPTURE. IN LATE APRIL IT RAN THE GAMUT FROM "BUILD TWO CHURCHES" TO "ADD FINGERNAILS."

“YOU CAN’T DO SOMETHING UNTIL IT’S FIRMLY IN YOUR MIND.”

Much of Lockhart’s time is spent just looking at the piece, deciding where to go next. The physical act of sculpting is not the interesting part to him; figuring out how to approach it is. “You can’t do something until it’s firmly in your mind.” He is apparently always thinking about it, he says; his hands are always moving. “My wife says I carve at night when I’m sleeping.”

In April, chisels and other woodworking tools are sticking out of Bellarmine like arrows in St. Sebastian. A photograph of Lockhart’s hand is pinned into Bellarmine’s chest, just above the statue’s left hand, so Lockhart can add veins. “He’s not as old as me,” Lockhart, 67, says of this Bellarmine, who is in his mid-30s to 40s, “but it will do.” He thinks the face lacks character, but he’s not ready to take it on yet. He will crack anatomy books he hasn’t looked at since he was a student at the Art Institute of Chicago, and, during a vacation in Paris in June, he will wander through familiar museums studying the faces of familiar sculptures – not even drawing anything, just looking, figuring it out.

By June, the face has undergone major changes. The eyes are no longer flat; he has carved them to suggest pupil and iris and added laugh lines at the corners. The lips are more detailed. The underlying structure of the cheeks is much more apparent. “This may be the best face I’ve ever done,” he says. He’s finally happy with Bellarmine’s tunic, after spending approximately 66 hours on it. “Now I’m excited – I’m beginning to take ownership of the piece.”

And he has found the “Lockhart part”: a village at Bellarmine’s feet, loosely based on Montepulciano, Bellarmine’s birthplace in Tuscany, that also includes several key sites in Rome – the Pontifical Gregorian University, the Church of the Gesu and the Church of San Ignazio, Bellarmine’s final resting place. By early July the town has become very detailed, replete with tiny steps leading to buildings, complex stone walls and sinuous grape vines. He has five stairwells to add.

“I want it to feel like he is traversing the village – and, in my way of thinking, the pattern of his own life,” he says. The town is Lockhart’s “dessert” following a long day of work on something like the tunic. “At night I lie down and work on my town. It’s my treat, like playing with my train set.”

But it is obvious, after months of observation, that the village is not the only Lockhart part. Sometimes, he says, people want what you can do at the instant they commission you, and nothing more. This sculpture, with all its challenges and changes, has changed him, too. “On this piece, I’ve achieved some things I didn’t know how to do before,” he says. “I can guarantee I’ve learned something.” ■



>>>> *what’s next?* >>>>

THE BRONZE OF ROBERT BELLARMINO WILL BE cast using a complex, age-old process known as the “lost wax” method. First, workers from the Bright Foundry in Louisville will come to Lockhart’s studio and section the clay sculpture into pieces. They’ll paint liquid rubber over the pieces, cover that with about two inches of plaster and let it dry, then remove it from the clay. Molten wax will be poured into the plaster-and-latex molds to form a wax copy of the artwork. The copy will be sent to California, where it will be scanned into a computer; from those images, a 10-foot-tall foam copy will be made and sent back to Lockhart to be covered again in clay. (There’s a hatch in the ceiling of his two-story studio to accommodate the taller piece.)

The new version will again be sectioned and a mold cast, then a wax copy made. This wax model will be “sprued,” with channels added where the bronze can flow and air can escape, then dipped into a liquid mastic and then into tiny white glass particles called “investment.” The investment-coated piece will be heated so the coatings harden and the wax melts and runs out. Molten bronze will be poured into the shell and allowed to cool. The shell will then be hammered away and the spruing cut off, and the bronze piece will be worked and polished until all the signs of the casting are gone.