



SCULPTING THE EMOTIONS OF LIFE

SHRAY

The story most people know about how Shray became a sculptor involves her first visit to the Louvre at age 15 with her mother. As the story goes, the moment she walked in and gazed upon “Winged Victory of Samothrace,” she turned to her mother and announced that she would be a sculptor.

What most people don’t know is what sealed the deal and nearly got her thrown out of the Louvre a few minutes later.

“I went up and touched the sculpture,” Shray says. “A guard yelled at me, but at the moment I touched it my fingers became instantly connected with my mind in a three dimensional way. Even today, I still believe that until you touch a sculpture, you don’t really know the piece.” In the time since, Shray (her name means “Morning Star” in Iroquois) has made the study of sculpture

a lifelong pursuit.

She began her formal training with a full scholarship to the Academy of Art in San Francisco and later earned a full grant to continue her studies at the San Francisco Art Institute. She intensively studied the works of Rodin in Paris and was mentored by Italy’s Piero Mussi, founder of the internationally renowned Mussi Artworks Foundry of Berkeley, for eight years.

All that study has yielded some impressive results. Among her many accolades and gallery appearances, Shray has been selected as a finalist in the Sculpture Competition for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China. Her piece, “Raising Tomorrow’s Olympic Champions,” was chosen from among more than 2,400 entries around the world, and Shray is just one of two American artists to achieve the

competition’s highest rating. As a prelude to the 2008 games, Shray’s piece will join a select group of 110 works that will travel to major cities around the world. Sacramento will be the site of the U.S. tour’s start. “This piece was inspired by the goals I read on the Web site of the 2008 games,” Shray says. “The Chinese view the games, and the arts, as something that unites us all, and it’s a true honor to be part of this unique, global event.”

“Raising Tomorrow’s Olympic Champions” is truly representative of Shray’s style, with smooth, flowing lines that, in Shray’s words, “allow the viewer to complete the picture.” Within each, she works to capture a moment, a feeling, or an experience that can be shared and understood by anyone. “With every piece, I try to create something more than a static



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pose," she says. "I try to create something that envelops human emotions and where, just for a moment, the hard metal becomes the flesh and bone of humanity."

She works in bronze, using what's called the lost wax method of casting the metal. It's an art form that dates back more than 5,000 years and, aside from a few advances in technology here and there, it's done almost the same way today as it was

in the beginning. It's also not a process for the impatient. Each piece takes about a year to complete, and evolves from a large block of clay through a 10-step process to a fully completed bronze work.

Shray's style of sculpting is called "subtractionist," which, loosely defined, means she doesn't approach a block of clay with a preconceived notion of the final form. Instead, she finds some kind of natural line



or flow within the clay, something that gives a clue to some "sense of story" within it. From there, she strives to move with that flow, to the point where she's removing the portions of the clay that hide the form that is striving to be revealed.

Her work also has the distinction of being created without the use of armatures, metal frameworks within the piece itself that provide support. Working like this requires a tremendous understanding of anatomy as well as gravity and balance. Her ability to sculpt successfully this way while working within the subtractionist method is one reason many fans of her work consider her a master. Shray herself comes across as far too modest to accept such high praise.

"Within every work I'm just trying to capture beauty, and in some way all of us have it within us to do the same thing," she says. "We all have a moment from our childhood when we first understood what beauty was, and we all have a gift for being able to share that feeling with others. For myself, I'm really just someone who loves to play with clay." For more information on Shray and her work in sculpture, visit her Web site at www.shraybronze.com. •

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