

Interview with H  l  ne Kolmodin and the ICC (International Chamber of Commerce)

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H  l  ne: What led to this sculpting opportunity?

Bruce: I was first contacted by Bj  rn Li in February 2009. Bj  rn is a freelance art consultant and previous gallery owner with whom I have worked on occasion during my stay in Norway. He and Per Saxegaard have also been involved in some business ventures together and that is where the connection was made. I believe one of the key reasons why I was approached stems from discussions Bj  rn and I have had around some of my sculptures such as 'Tzedaka' and 'The Parable of the Twisted Elbows', both of which deal with some basic principles that Business for Peace expounds. 'Tzedaka' played a key role in developing the concept of the award.

Per and Bj  rn visited my atelier soon after and informed me of the project. Per described his vision and how strongly he believed this could slowly transform the way we practice business. It took some time before the implications of it actually set in,, I was quite overwhelmed. To try and create a sculpture that would embody such an award's principles and intentions struck me as an immense challenge. We brainstormed and arrived at a basic starting point. Per insisted that there be a handshake,,we agreed that the handshake should be inside a ring,,a ring that symbolized the world and the universe. That was it,, And the award would be given in 3 months!

H  l  ne: From the design to the complete tangible award, could you tell us more about the sculpting process?

Bruce: That's a very good question. I find sculpting to be the art of giving form to the formless; To clothe what is essentially abstract; a thought, an emotion, a relationship, etc and bring it forth in a material form that can then be read from the outside in again,,hopefully. The goal was to distill everything which I understood the award to stand for into that piece that would clearly communicate its attributes.

In this case there were essentially two stages to the process; one, developing the concept/design and two, the technical process of bringing it to reality. There was also the question of whether the bronze foundry in Italy, Fonderia del Chiaro, would be able to do the casting on so short notice and deliver on time. As long as I was there by a specified date, he said, no problem.

The first problem to be solved was to lift this circle off the ground. I based it on an earlier piece, 'Tzedaka', which has a ring with hands, balanced upon two pillars. After hours of drawing columns and rings of all shapes and sizes, I suddenly recognized that the space between the pillars had resembled a human figure with upright, outstretched arms all along. In that instant the whole concept and design crystallized.

Then began the actual sculpting. The first thing one must do is to build a metal armature to support

the clay . While modeling the figure it was essential to keep it natural and the energy moving in a seemingly upward-lifting motion. Sculpture is an outward expression of an inner dynamic, as is everything we perceive. The rhythm of movement and shapes gives rise to a musical interplay of light and shadow. A sort of Atlas figure, in this case he's supporting an ethical rather than a material world. He had to be strong. The handshake also had to be warm and firm. It needed to reflect the honest willingness of the individuals whose business habits we want to bring forth as examples. All this had to reflect the essence of the award.

The finished model was then cast in plaster and delivered to the bronze foundry. Since no chances could be taken, I flew down with the sculpture in my handluggage. The foundry first made a silicone rubber mold and cast it in wax. I then reworked the wax, a new silicone form was taken, and again it was cast in wax. To make a long story short, the wax is then packed in a mold, melted out in an oven, and bronze is poured into the hollow space. The new bronze casting is then removed, cleaned up, and a patina is applied giving the sculpture its color and final appearance. It's then waxed and mounted on a stone base and the necessary documents to carry it back to Norway are prepared. Again, so as not to take any chances, I was given permission to carry the sculpture onboard the plane. It was only a matter of days until the award ceremony! The man next to me on the plane asked if I was carrying a prosciutto!

There was only one statue given the first year. 11/2 years later Per asked me to make the sculpture in 2/3 size. From then on there would be one given to each honoree. Each year the awards are produced in wax and the same process follows.

Hélène: Could you explain to us in your own words what the trophy symbolizes?

Bruce: It has a very profound meaning to me. It's title, the 'Just Man', ultimately symbolizes the award winners themselves. (interestingly enough someone unintentionally called it 'Just a Man' at the first award's ceremony. I thought that was a befitting title and nearly kept it!)

The ring around the handshake has several meanings, but mostly I see it is an insulating ring, an aura if you will,, one protecting the agreement from corruptive forces and falsehoods. It creates a sacred meeting place that will also shield the agreed upon terms throughout their lifetime

You'll notice though that the circle in itself is broken. It connects through the figure upholding it and keeping it balanced. This figure becomes the circuit which allows the energy to become a continuum. Without him there is no ring, no world, no universe. The ring also connects by the handshake. Hands denote action and will. Their joining in a handshake connects the individuals with a common will. Because the nature of a circle can be perceived as 'no limitation' within a defined area, the circle symbolizes the universe as well as the nature of thought. Though the ring is held in the individual's own hands and it is his/her responsibility to sustain that, without the handshake and cooperation it is an empty ring.

The individual's focus is upward towards the bigger picture rather than on his own individual needs. He is bearing the ring as it simultaneously descends upon him, this because of his just nature. He himself is ascending, even transcending, yet he is rooted and bound to his earthly responsibilities ,,,He is a man, not an angel.

I'm very fond of Bjørn Li's interpretation which adds another dimension:

A human flexes and raises a mighty form. It is the "Wheel of Life" – the primal symbol of continuity. Naigles' "Wheel of Life" does not join in a circular end, it is bisected by "the handshake that obligates." Through an ethical act, human beings contribute and become part of the cosmic order. The sculpture hints that ethical obligation is not a pre-given, but has to be carried forth by each and every human being – again and again and again ...

Hélène: How does it feel to have these special honorees receive the award you created?

Bruce: Naturally it's a great privilege and an honor. It's very humbling to have my small contribution symbolize such great achievements and to see it be received by the honorees. To know that it is in the homes and offices of these individuals who give so much of themselves, who by their own ingenuity and great heartedness have benefited their societies and businesses is remarkable to me. They are extraordinary human beings. I have to tell you that in the beginning I was somewhat skeptical to the idea of an award for business creating peace, particularly when we see the degree of exploitation in business today. But as time goes on and I encounter this staunch idealism and determinism to bring it to fruition, as I encounter many of the grass roots movements gaining momentum through this and similar networks, my view has changed. Year after year as I meet these honorees and hear their stories, listen to their speeches, their visions, their struggles and triumphs ,,their strength and integrity comes through. They are a great inspiration! They shed light and give substance in a world sorely in need of their examples and it is right that they be brought forth and acknowledged for their deeds. As I said, it's a great privilege to be a part of it!

I also have the good fortune in getting to know Per Saxegaard, Anne Lene Hompland and the other members of the BfP Foundation; to experience their unabated efforts in forging and establishing the award and its principles. Interestingly enough I believe it is also shaping them through the process. Perhaps a form of redemption as their work gains momentum and they reshape themselves to fulfill their roles as an establishing force of a new mindset.