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In the second of this two-part series, columnist Richard West profiles women helping sculpt today's perception of the medium. This month, it's Chris Mikulasek and Myra C. Weisgold.



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Photos from The National Sculpture Society's annual Sculpture Celebration Weekend at the Brookgreen Gardens in South Carolina.

**FEATURED SCULPTORS**

- Béla Bácsi
- Gonzalez Beltran
- Michael Bergt
- Chris Mikulasek
- Elliot Offner,
- Laura Orchard
- Jim Rennert
- John Sisko,
- Myra C. Weisgold

# Made Men

Sculptors who revisit the classic male form in stone and bronze

By John O'Hern

Daedalus was a successful inventor. Among other accomplishments, he designed the Labyrinth to contain the feared Minotaur. When Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete, wanted to help her lover Theseus slay the dreaded beast, Daedalus gave her a flaxen thread that Theseus tied to the front door of the Labyrinth to find his way out after his heroic feat. Minos, understandably upset, confined Daedalus and his son Icarus in the Labyrinth. Daedalus, of course knew the way out and later fashioned wings of feathers and wax for him and his son to flee Crete and the ire of Minos. He didn't count on the hubris of his son who flew too close to the sun, melting his wings and plunging to his death in the sea below.

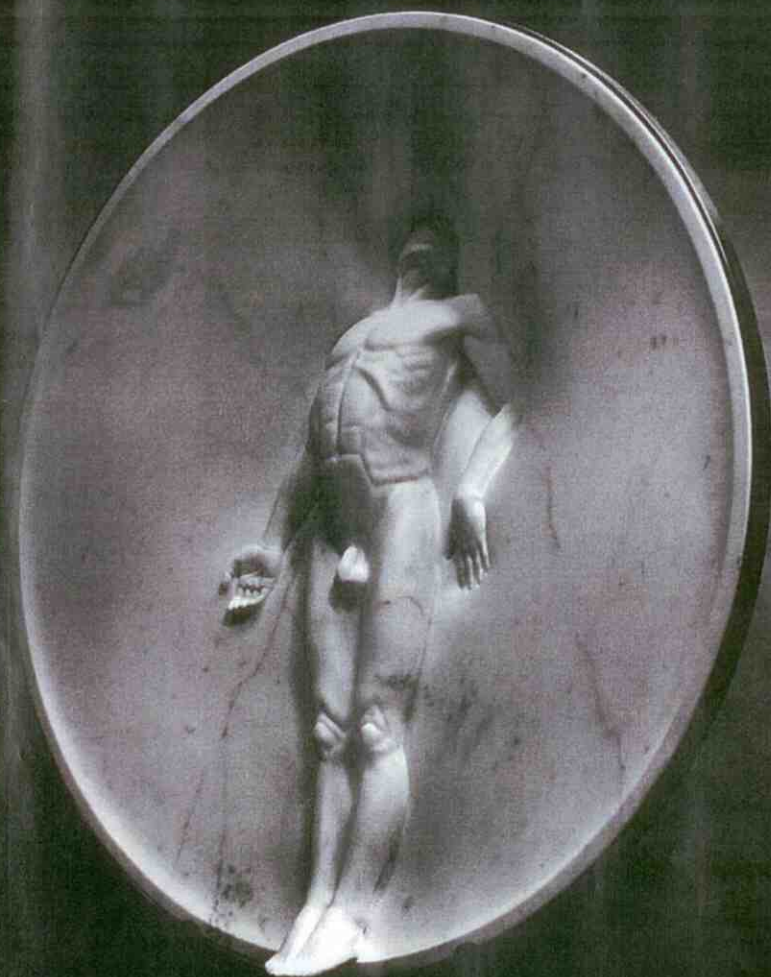
Most often, the dramatic death of Icarus is the subject of artistic interpretation. Elliot Offner, however, a supremely inventive sculptor of birds and other animals, has chosen to depict Daedalus. From any angle, the awesome power of the wings seems to overwhelm the inventor. Ill-equipped to control the wings on land, Daedalus becomes wrapped in one while the other catches the wind and pulls him back. The struggle to control the wings and the drive to flee the island would exhaust any other man. Offner captures this energy and the beauty of Daedalus's manufactured wings in a sculpture of moving intensity.

The figure in Béla Bácsi's *Driver of the Wheel* falls back into a circle of soft fabric belying the fact that the entire work is Italian marble. The solid corporeality of the figure and the flexibility of the fabric are entirely believable and invite us to suspend our disbelief, to borrow a phrase from the theater. He fled Hungary with his family in 1956, leaving behind four uncles and cousins who were stone carvers in the family monument

company. Isaac Walton, who took fishing very seriously, wrote "As no man is born an artist, so no man is born an angler." Bácsi, who is self-taught, may well have been born an artist. For that we should be thankful.

More falling men appear in Laura

Orchard's *Falling Frieze Relief*. Based on her exquisite drawings of blindfolded male figures tumbling through space, the sculptures add dimension to her concept that men are blind to one another, incapable of reaching out and helping, ignorant and alone in their deadly



Béla Bácsi, *Driver of the Wheel*, marble, 44 x 12" COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



John Sisko, *The Four Elements: Fire and Earth*, 2003, Forton or Bronze, 13 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 32 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 1"  
COURTESY JOHN PENCE GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO, CA



Elliot Offner, *Daedalus 1*, Bronze, 21 x 28 x 13" (front view)  
 COURTESY FORUM GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY

fall. By freeing her figures from the need for support, Orchard has been able to create completely free forms. There is no need for ground to stand on, a tree to lean on, or wings to fly with. Yet her figures assume postures of terror and resistance rather than freedom. A fearsome representation of our ignorance.

Michael Bergt's sculpture *Man* is a more self-assured figure. The model was taking a break from a drawing session with the artist and had walked over to look at the results. Bergt immediately recognized another good pose and turned to capture it. Often in the interlude between poses, the model will don a robe and leave the studio. In this instance the model, comfortable in his skin, simply changed position and assumed a comfortable one for him. Legs apart and arms crossed, he appears as elemental *Man* before the Fall. The strong stance of the figure is echoed in a structural steel pedestal.

John Sisko has created a series of bas-

reliefs of *The Four Elements*, Earth, Air, Fire and Water. The Four Elements are usually associated with Greek philosophy, science, and medicine. Pythagoras even added a fifth element, Idea. The concept is pre-Socratic and is found in the earlier time of the Buddha who taught that the four elements serve as the basis for objective understanding of real sensations.

In a bas-relief, the subject projects only slightly from the background. Sisko abstracts his figures into hard-edged planes, rather than smooth musculature.

Here, his figure stands looking at a candle held with its flame above his head. The four lines at his feet are the extension of the element Water from the final panel in this four-panel series. Fire brings light and heat and it can also destroy. Sisko's figure approaches the element with awe at what this precious discovery can do. Prometheus saw the potential in fire and stole it from Zeus to give to us mortals opening an era of enlightenment—in

many ways—for mankind.

The mythical Pygmalion's sculpture of Galatea came to life. Daedalus used quicksilver or mercury to give his sculptures a voice. The sculptures here give voice to concepts and dimension to representations of the beauty of the human form. ●

*Mr. O'Hern, who has retired after 30 years in the museum business, is the originator of the internationally acclaimed "Re-presenting Representation" exhibitions which promote realism in its many guises, and was chair of the Artists Panel of the New York State Council on the Arts. He writes for gallery publications around the world. He now lives in a converted adobe goat shed in the high desert of New Mexico where he is acquainting himself with new flora and fauna.*

