

TURNER CARROLL

Thomas Ostenberg

COMMENTS

Thomas Ostenberg was born in Nebraska, grew up on a ranch in Colorado and subsequently spent his teenage years between Colorado and Florida. At an early age he learned of the grace, form and even the psychology of the animals he was surrounded by, both domestic and wild.

He travelled extensively throughout the USA, Canada, South America and Western Europe before studying languages at Principia College, Illinois followed by earning an MBA degree from Stanford University in 1975. He then entered the international financial world where he became a Vice President of Citibank in Brazil and Spain. In 1986 he went freelance as an independent international financial consultant.

At age 40, Thomas Ostenberg exchanged his successful financial career for art school. In 1994 he earned his BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute, and in 1997, his MA from the Royal College of Art in London, England, aided by a grant from the Henry Moore Foundation.

Now a full-time sculptor, he claims his biggest break was "discovering that I wanted to be an artist". Ostenberg maintains this change was precipitated by "fifteen years of seeing great art on three continents". In particular he cites the major Velazquez exhibition in Madrid and a visit to the Rodin Museum in Paris.

He works primarily in bronze. The power and durability of his finished pieces belie his approach to the medium, which is quite fluid and intuitive. "sometimes I will have a bit of clay or wax in my hand, and, by playing with this lump, some image or other just begins to appear."

For his large-scale works he will have a specific image in mind to represent an emotion he hopes to convey. He will start with a steel armature that is covered with an oil-based clay. Then, using his hands and later, clay tools, he defines the image. "I alternate between building up and carving back until I achieve a result I am satisfied with."

Thomas Ostenberg's sculptures explore the theme of motion and balance. His work reflects his personal search for emotional and spiritual equilibrium. For him, the work "touches on the moment of stepping into the unknown and doing so willingly."

Ostenberg's sculpture has been called joyful and magical, words not often applied to contemporary art. The surfaces of these bronze sculptures communicate a tangible love of process. The works contain human figures and/or frequently horses on a variety of ladders, wheels and spheres, performing acrobatics and balancing acts much like those associated with the circus. This is not to say, however, that his sculptures are frivolous or trivial. On the contrary, what may at first appear only as a feat intended to entertain is, at a deeper level, a wondrous allegory full of hope, strength, stamina, and determination.

The titles of Ostenberg's sculptures alone - notion of place, truth and consequence, in pursuit of a clearer understanding, mind over matter, a question of perspective, matter don't matter - give a sense of positive action that results in personal and, therefore, public benefit, and an understanding of life as a gift rather than a predicament. The sculptures themselves depict feats of enormous physical control and extraordinary mental focus. To view them is to experience triumph over contemporary malaises such as nihilism and despondency, to receive a message of calm amidst chaos - and ultimately, to feel joy in the pursuit of knowledge and truth.