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Sculptor Louise Solecki Weir showcases at Artists in our Midst by Andrea Rabinovitch



Louise Solecki Weir with her work (from L-R): Part of her bronze bird series ("Angel Bird"), a bronze portrait of her son David, Portrait of Glenn (one of 30 busts of people recovering from mental illness) and a piece of whimsy called Fairy Jester.

For portrait sculptor Louise Solecki Weir, the open studios of Artists in our Midst, a Roundhouse Gallery event, offer the opportunity "to meet my neighbors and fellow artists."

Like the east side's Cultural Crawl, Artists in our Midst links visual artists on Vancouver's west side with potential buyers and enthusiasts while cutting out the middle man and offering the public the chance to meet the creators.

In its nineteenth year, it kicks off with an opening night reception at the Roundhouse Community Centre Thursday April 28 at 7 p.m., with 60 artists at the group show and sale continuing throughout the weekend. At the reception, the multi-talented Solecki Wier's jazz trio will be performing -- with her on vocals, husband, musician Greg Weir on guitar and Mark Dowding of Hot Club of Mars on wind instruments.

The following Open Studios weekend runs Saturday April 30 and Sunday May 1, and will include 35 artist-created galleries and venues, with work running the gamut from fibre arts to abstract painting to three-dimensional sculpture.

"I like the community spirit of Artists in our Midst," said Solecki Weir in an interview during a break from work on a most unusual sculpture portrait.

"I'm currently working on a commission for Pope John Paul II, so I've been watching videos, researching on the Internet and in books, and looking at what other sculptors have done previously."

As one of the few Canadian sculptors specializing in portraiture, Vancouver born and bred Solecki Weir's process is very different from two-dimensional visual artists.

"It's preferable to have the person sitting so you can get to know them, their moods, the twinkle in their eye, the solemnity of their spirit," she said. "If a sitting is impossible, like the Pope commission, many photographs from all angles have to suffice. In each photo, the expression or lighting will be different. And the age may be different as well."

As for her uncanny ability to take a lump of clay and turn it into a person with a soul, Solecki Weir's mother tells her that it started early. "I was a very civilized child because I played mud pies outside and danced inside," she said.

Solecki Weir started out a dancer, but discovered that she wasn't a performer. The love of those mud pies soon pointed her in the direction of sculpture -- "because of my background in dance, I had a strong sense of three dimensionality and spatial awareness," she said.

In "Portraits of Recovery," Solecki Weir employed subjects recovering from mental illness -- many of them homeless -- to create 30 portrait busts with accompanying biographies of the subjects. The stories of a demographic that is often ignored provide a set of poignant tales of vibrant young lives, tragic illness and eventual recovery.



In a series of small bronzes of women/birds, the influence of Degas and her own years spent studying ballet allow Solecki Weir to explore myth, sexuality, nature and culture. Looking for duality, she likes to explore beauty in homeliness and heroism in the everyday, playfulness in the monstrous, and the "civilized" in a wild thing.

"I love working in clay because of the way you can manipulate the surface. It's a push and a pull: pushing your ideas on the clay and the clay pushing back", she explained. "There is a dialogue between myself and the material as it evolves."

See her work at Chi House 3387 West 4th, in the Coach House.

www.louisesoleckiweir.com www.artistsinourmidst.com

Source: <http://www.vancouverobserver.com/blogs/artsbeat/2011/04/26/sculptor-louise-solecki-weir-showcases-artists-our-midst>