I didn’t expect much of this condo estate sale. A friend wanted some advice about sculpture included in the estate. Expecting some Hummel figurines, I was astounded to see three beautiful stone carvings. Not just beautiful, old. Old as in ANCIENT. Two Buddhas and a devotional figure from Gandhara. 1500 to 1700 years old.

Gandhara sculpture looks like no other art. Gandhara was a kingdom in the 3rd to 5th Centuries, in what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan.

I felt a protective responsibility for these three time travelers, and had so many questions! How did they wind up in a Parkrose condo? Can you sell these? Can you own them? How do you put a price on cultural art that’s almost 2000 years old? Don’t they belong in a museum?

Looking for a way to evaluate the trio, I called the Asian Art Museums in Seattle and San Francisco. They were little help, though they did refer me to the National Institute of Appraisers.

The faces are very stylized, like a 30’s movie star. It is a fusion of Greek and Asian art that happened when Alexander the Great took Greek art and crafts into Asia. The artists of Gandhara were the first to carve images of the Buddha. Prior to this, he was depicted as footprints with inscribed symbols.

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I don’t much care for heat. I find it far easier to keep warm in the winter than to stay cool in the summer. This drives us into the car which has a dandy air-conditioner. The alternative is to be in the home office with the blinds closed against the sun and the unit blasting away. That’s what I’m doing right now in fact. The car is way better. Windows all around, trees and cows and all that outdoor business going by. We take pictures and occasionally I see things that would be fun in the newsletter. You’ll find a few of those in this issue.

Portland still looks to be the choice for the ISC’s 2019 conference. Their board is meeting this month and we will know for sure. The big questions have to do with accomodations and which month. I’ll send a notice the instant I know.

Thank you Patrick Gracewood and Robert McWilliams for the wonderful articles. Getting good content fills me with joy.

Thank you too Olinka Broadfoot. I was very sorry to miss that one but was rear-ended earlier that day and felt too rattled to drive anywhere. No injuries or anything like that but the bumper is trashed.

Please, if you’ve not written for the newsletter do so. If you have do so again. Technique, philosophy, rants, all are good as long as there is some connection to sculpture. Best to All,

George
With the pressure of time and no money to pay for an appraisal, I called an Sue McGovern-Huffman an antiques dealer in Washington DC, for advice.

Sue looked at photos and said they weren't the quality her collectors were looking for.

That raised the question: How perfect does a 1700 year old religious stone object need to be?

“Try Bonham’s in San Francisco.”

They have a specialty in Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian Art.

Darise Weller, the sale organizer, told me that the owner was a Pan Am pilot, stationed in Iran and Afganistan in the 1960’s. Historic art as souvenir. They’d been in the USA for 50 years. Not a recent vandalism…… The heavy stone sculptures had small zigzag hang- ers epoxied to the back side. Talk about hanging by a thread…..

Also in the sale were Persian tiles, an embroidered jacket badge for the Imperial Country Club, Iranian jewelry. A large silver medallion caught my eye. Facing reliefs of the Shah and Richard Nixon proclaimed 100 years of friendship between Iran and the USA. I laughed out loud. That era seemed more distant and dated than the Buddha’s. What art survives as a living force and what becomes just memorabilia?

Weller decided against sending the sculptures to auction. Including them in the estate sale was easier and faster. And it changed my role from consultant to contender. I said “Put my name on the list.”

Sale day, I was there early and had a great conversation with two women about Buddhism while we waited patiently. Closer to opening time, the stairs became crowded and the energy changed. People were indignant that others were in front of them, that they had to wait at all. People cut into the line. The impatient man behind me, a dealer, had covered his entire left arm with SOLD stickers, eager to aquire more.

Doors open, I walk to the three carvings, pick up two and have my hand on the third as Mr Dealer reaches from behind me and slaps a sticker on it. Figuring I’m bigger and have three blunt objects, I say loudly, "My hand is on it.” He responds with a loud curse and moves back.

Now I have a different problem. Flooded with adrena-lin, I’ve suddenly got a bad case of the shakes and an incoming panic attack from the intensity in the crowded room. I can’t set the carvings down, cause the shark is still circling, and I can’t physically hold them for long. To have survived almost 2,000 years only to be dropped on my foot? A wide lunge to the cashier’s table, a credit card and a cardboard box, a quick exit and I’m good again.

They need metal mounts with stone bases: that’s a winter studio job. It’s so amazing to see how they’re carved and wonder if the dirt in the crevices is recent Portland dust or the dirt of the ages. For now it’s enough to be able to hold each one individually and continue to ask questions.

Member Notes

Michelle Collier and Andy Kennedy will be showing at the Guardino Gallery during the month of September. The opening will be on Aug. 30th. The Guardino Gallery is at:

2939 NE Alberta St
Portland, OR 97211
(503) 281-9048
http://www.guardinogallery.com/

At the Corvallis Art Center

We drove to Corvallis last week. There is a sculpture at the Corval-

lis Art Center which I find inspir- ing. It’s by Peter Helzer, a bronze sculptor from Eugene. The title is Clever Disguise. From the back it looks like a dirty old man. From the front it looks like this. Brilliant.
Charioteers Rolling in the Money
Robert McWilliams

A hundred and one million dollars is a lot of money but that’s what hedge fund manager Steven A. Cohen paid in 2015 for Alberto Giacometti’s sculpture, The Charioteer. Giacometti was a multifaceted artist who achieved his greatest recognition for his freakishly elongated spider-like human figures. A prominent existentialist philosopher explained Giacometti’s figures as depicting the estrangement of modern (post WWII) individuals living in an empty cosmos devoid of meaning.

To me, one thousand and ten dollars is a lot of money and I was thus inspired to carve and assemble my own Spoon Charioteer. The one hundred and one million dollar version of Giacometti’s bronze masterpiece is number two of an edition of six, cast in 1951-52, and is only three inches less than six feet tall. In comparison, my humble version stands only three inches more than two feet high (25Hx8x12 inches) and is made of scraps of wood and metal.

pull escutcheons, and a rusted electrical cord spool. Everyone should have a shop with such serendipitous junk. My Spoon Charioteer is really one half unpainted black walnut spoon and one half painted and low relief carved charioteer.

A spoon may seem to be a perplexingly mundane motif for serious sculpture but I have been first, whittling, and now carving spoons since 1972, so even if you send the sheriff to try to make me stop, I won’t. Although otherwise not remotely comparable, my spoons are to me what Michelangelo’s ignudi (naked men-women) were to the greatest sculptor who ever lived. Spoons combine the male handle with the female cup, the sinuous, unpredictable curves of the voluptuous mature woman with the predictable stiffness of the militaristic male and the convex with the concave; and spoons are neither left or right, or up or down, and they spoon (nest) in perfect unity.

The charioteer side of my sculpture is an androgynous, golden haired adolescent who looks to me like one of the Archaic kouros that preceded the golden age of Classical Greek sculpture. He is gloriously beautiful, naïve, and lusty. He is representative the new generation, both female and male, the one that always, and without fail that rolls in to replace the cynical, the plumb tuckered out, and the put into barn wet and tired.

Spoon Charioteer is not a mere copy like Steve Cohen’s, mine is original, unique, and still for sale.