Martin Doyle, Sculptor

In conversation with Tony Fahy

The Four Seasons

PHOTOS: TONY FAHY

Tony: Martin—you are settled down in Leitrim for the last few years. Did you always want to be a sculptor? Did it suddenly happen?

Martin: When I was in the army in the late seventies, I was kept in on one of the weekends and one of the lads left a trimming blade behind. So, to amuse myself, I started carving the turf. I did a bust of my officer and corporal, which on the Monday went missing. I found out by that afternoon while we were having a kit inspection that the Corporal had taken them up to show the officer. He thanked me for the sculpture and told me that I had got the likeness right and said that they looked well on his mantelpiece!

Up until then had you done any drawing? Did you go to college?

As a kid, I always drew, but I preferred the 3D effect. I didn't have the art college experience. I'd left school at 15 and worked in the amusement arcade and did a lot of the sign writing and artwork that was required. In the mid '80s I worked in an animation studio in cell painting and then went into editing. That could be fun at times, putting sound effects together and adding the music which was recorded in the Concert hall to the scenes. We did TV animation; titles included Oliver Twist, Les Miserables, Dickens Ghost stories, Phantom of the Opera and a few others.

From there it seems a long jump to the work that I see around me here?

I started to work for a friend in the jewellry trade expecting to stay only a short while, but lasted 17 years! In that time, I started to sculpt with clay, but I knew nothing of how to preserve what I had done. It wasn't until I was in a bookshop in Dublin that I saw a book on the casting of sculptures. It took three reads of this book before it sank in and that was the start of a fantastic process for me, to be able to see the sculpture that you've worked on, cast in stone and cold cast in bronze, was great! I love the majesty of the equine form and I also love what you can portray within Celtic mythology. On a trip to Florence, I was in a world of my own, sculpture everywhere—the sense of motion and passion was everywhere

What are you influenced by?

I would have been influenced as a kid by the relief works in the churches representing the Stations of the Cross and the portrayal of the Crucifixion. It's great going to the big cities where you can see the large monuments, especially the battle horses which show elegance and strength. I can get a picture in my mind as we speak. That kind of work takes my breath away!

So Martin, take me through the process

The process for me starts with the idea, then the laying down of the armature to support the clay. Then you get your basic shape and over time see it coming together. When I finish the

Martin at Work on the clay

Irish Wolfhound

Venus

War Horse

final sculpt, I put my mark into the clay. Then when it is sufficiently dry I start laying on the silicone coats. After a few days you then get to work on the fibre glass shell which supports the silicone. Later on when you are casting the piece in the stone mix, the whole process can work out expensive but the finished product is always worth it. I would cast up to seven in each edition if possible, but it doesn't always work out like that. I have often worked on a fabulous sculpt and gone through the whole process only to get nothing out of it in the end as the cast would rip or something would go terribly wrong.

See Martin's work on: www.crutu.com