

HEROES



Patrick Morelli

Morelli ART Sculpture,
Architectural Design, &
Contemporary Art
Exhibitions

Success Magazine: Patrick, how do you define success?

Patrick Morelli: My personal definition of success is "Doing absolutely no work and getting paid millions of dollars nevertheless." Unfortunately, I have learned that my personal definition of success isn't very realistic so I have resorted to a more realistic definition – "Earning a living for one's family and one's self by doing what one loves to do – which is also another way of saying, 'maximizing personal freedom'."

SM: You went to Duke and Syracuse Universities. What did you learn about yourself during your studies at these institutions?

PM: I learned that if a man can concentrate and apply himself to the pursuit of an academic degree while surrounded by beautiful, intelligent young coeds then he can achieve anything in life. Also, don't register for any class that begins before noon or any course that has the words "mathematical" or "computer" in its title.

SM: What is it about sculpture in particular that speaks to you?

PM: Sculpture gives me great freedom of expression for my imagination and allows me, legitimately, to play with clay without being ostracized by adults as frivolous and immature.

SM: Everyone is familiar with the old notion of a starving artist. Was this line of work a hard decision for you? When you first started out in the field was it difficult to earn a living?

PM: Not really, if one enjoys eating peanut butter sandwiches every day and sharing a pre-war New York City apartment with five or six roommates. I was single and without family nearby, living and working in Manhattan as a waiter, bank teller, and manager of a disco roller rink to earn money for the monthly rent and other basic needs, while trying to perfect my craft and create artwork that would assert itself among the best in a highly-competitive city. I didn't starve, however (one of the perks of the waiting profession), and the people with whom I worked weren't all that boring –

among them, actors Bruce Willis, Christopher Walken, Susan Sarandon, John Amos, and Mario Van Peebles.

SM: At what point did your focus become doing works of public art? How did you start down this path?

PM: I have always been most interested in creating works of public art that would become part of American history and its cultural mainstream, whether they be major public memorials or, simply, beautiful works in bronze, stone, glass, or mosaic that the public would enjoy seeing. Public works of art also, by nature, break free from the insularity of the art world and involve people from all walks of life, an association which I enjoy and encourage.

SM: One of your most well known sculptures is the "Behold" National Monument, which overlooks the tomb of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. What was your inspiration for this monument?

PM: The inspiration for the ten-foot, bronze father-and-infant "Behold" National Monument was the baptism scene in Alex Haley's book, "Roots", in which the African-American slave, Kunte Kinte, raised his newborn infant to the heavens and recited the words of an ancient, African baptism ritual, "Behold, the only thing greater than yourself." I felt this scene was a powerful and universal symbol of the hopes and dreams that all fathers nurture for the welfare of their newborn children.

SM: How long did this take you to create?

PM: The actual artwork – creating the ten-foot clay, plaster, wax, and bronze models

and castings – took about nine months of labor. Building support and raising the \$250,000 for the project's cost occurred over a ten-year period during which I worked with Mrs. Coretta Scott King, Dr. King's father "Daddy" King, Dr. King's sister, Christine King, and hundreds of veterans and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement – courageous men and women of all races, from almost every walk of life – a truly inspirational and memorable experience that grows more so with each passing year.

SM: "Behold" has been featured in many major publications and televised documentaries. How has the publicity of this sculpture affected you and your art?

PM: The many emails, letters, and personal comments I receive from people who have seen "Behold" in person, or in a publication, more than justify all the years of hard work and sacrifice I invested. They demonstrate to me, time and again, the enduring greatness and influence of Dr. King's life and work, that a monument to his memory should continue to receive worldwide publicity decades after its unveiling by Mrs. King.

SM: You created the "Eagle Rock September 11th Memorial" which overlooks the former site of the Twin Towers in Essex County's Eagle Rock Reservation Park in West Orange, NJ. What was the experience of creating this memorial like for you?

PM: Creating the bronze figures and designing the 120-foot, granite "Wall of Remembrance" for the "Eagle Rock September 11th Memorial" was the most artistically, physically, and emotionally demanding art project I've ever undertaken.

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The site preparation, artwork, architectural designs, and installation of all the memorial elements needed to be completed within a year after the September 11th terrorist attacks to meet a deadline for an unveiling that would include the New Jersey State Governor, United States Senators and Congressmen, and over seven hundred families in New Jersey who had lost loved ones. The most emotionally difficult, and the most rewarding aspect of the project, however, was meeting many of the families of victims who visited my sculpture studio to see the work-in-progress. Listening to family members talk and reminisce about their fathers and mothers and sons and daughters who were lost in these tragedies was heartbreaking. It was an enormous source of inspiration and motivation for me that the memorial would, hopefully, help everyone to move from a cycle of grief to one of emotional and spiritual rebirth and renewal.

SM: This memorial was awarded the 29th annual "Excellence in Design Award" in 2004, and is currently being considered for designation as a National Historic Site. You have received many other prestigious awards for your work. To what do you attribute your success?

PM: Hard work. And more hard work. A love and a passion for what I do. Talents and attributes that were given to me by God, my family, and fate. And the encouragement, trust, advice, and assistance, of hundreds of people who have influenced me – family, friends, teachers, and supporters. I am a sincere believer in the adage, "We are small people standing on the shoulders of giants." My parents, in particular, were among those "giants." And did I forget to mention, hard work?

SM: Did you ever imagine that your art would be seen and revered by millions of people?

PM: Publically, no. Privately, of course. Every artist, I believe, hopes and dreams that his or her artwork will ultimately change and improve the world and be recognized as a very positive contribution to humanity.

SM: Do you feel that in creating public art, you are allowing people a glimpse into your heart and soul?

PM: I suppose that every work of art is, to some degree, a reflection of the artist but in truth the artwork I create possesses a beauty, nobility, and inspirational quality that is, personally, far out of my reach.

SM: What would you tell someone trying to figure out their path in life?

PM: Here's a few pieces: "Do what you love to do." You'll have greater success as an artist than you would as an investment banker if you love art and are indifferent to finance." Another, "General Motors and Microsoft do not exist but the chairmen and employees of these companies do exist." In others words, people are the most important focus in a plan for success in any career. Build your professional and personal life by earning the friendship and trust of people with whom you live and work. Success will, inevitably, follow.

SM: Where are some of the other places that your work is on display?

PM: A bronze casting of the "Behold" infant is in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institution's American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. A heroic-size bronze bust of legendary football running back, Jim Brown, is in the Syracuse University Football Hall of Fame. A bronze bust of United States Congressman, Bill Chappell, Jr. is in the visitor's center of Canaveral National Seashore in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. A small casting of "La Bellissima America"/ "America the Beautiful" is displayed at the entrance to the chambers of United States Supreme Court Justice, Samuel Alito, Jr. who received it as a special award for his contributions to the United States and the Italian American community.

SM: What project to date are you most proud of?

PM: That would certainly be my thirteen-year old daughter, Gabriella, who is an eighth grade student at Shaker Junior High School in Latham, New York. (Actually, this was a collaborative project with my wife, Amy, so I can honestly only take partial credit for my creative contribution).

SM: Beside sculpture, what other types of art do you specialize in?

PM: I especially enjoy digital and electronic art, and am now creating a number of designs in diverse themes – sports, entertainment, fine art, government, ecology and environment, ships and sailing, the American spirit, and many other themes which lend themselves – in digital format or in colored glass mosaics – to public and corporate sites as well as museum and private collections. I plan to submit some of my digital designs to the United States Olympic Committee for the 2012 Olympics Games in London.

SM: If you had to describe yourself in one word, what would it be?

PM: "Creativeandloving- lifethanksmostly- tomomanddad" (Is that one word?)

Note: Contact information and images of Patrick Morelli's artwork, architectural designs, and contemporary art exhibitions can be viewed on his website www.MorelliART.com.

