

Arts & Leisure

Her sculpting career is shaping up

Candice Raquel began sculpting full time in January, but her art is already getting lots of attention

JOANNE SHUTTLEWORTH

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Steamy. Sexy. Eyebrow-raising even. At first blush, you might just blush when viewing the bronze-cast sculptures created by Candice Raquel Lee, who lives outside Rockwood.

"Friends look at them and say 'they're having sex.' But they're not having sex. Look closer. These are all about mythology," said the 34-year-old.

Her collection of statues, which she makes from clay and then ships off to a foundry to be cast in bronze, are mostly nudes with intricate and accurate detail.

But rather than a study in the tawdry -- or even in anatomy -- Lee's sculptures are, at their core, all about what it means to be human, and for that she looks to the gods.

Lee is fascinated by the stories of Greek mythology and early religions, especially since there are many commonalities between them. And as a visual person, she'd see the stories play out in her mind.

What she does in her work is capture the pivotal moment in the stories where the most action -- or the most anguish -- occurs. This is always where the deeper meaning of stories lie and becomes the point that gives meaning to the sculptures.

Her piece Zeus and Athena is a case in point.

According to the story, Athena, the goddess of war, is born from the head of Zeus.

"A lot of the time when I read a myth there's a question. In this one, how could she come out of his head fully (grown)? So I thought about that, I visualized that, and this is what came out," she said.

On one side of the sculpture there's the head of Zeus -- anguished, with a lightning bolt streak down his forehead. Coming out of the back of his skull is Athena -- beautiful, eyes closed, emerging toward the light it seems.

To Lee, mythology is metaphor and the characters represent human traits.



NICKI CORRIGALL, GUELPH MERCURY
Candice Raquel Lee poses with her sculpture, Eve's Awakening, which has been chosen to appear in a show for a new sculptors in Toronto later this month.



"The only way humans reach wisdom is through suffering," Lee said. "That's what this means to me."

Her piece Eve's Awakening was selected for the Emerging Sculptor Exhibition in Toronto that opens July 27 -- not bad for someone who only turned pro in January.

Like Zeus and Athena, Eve's Awakening depicts the moment of Eve's birth from Adam's rib.

"I have a problem with the Adam and Eve story," Lee said. "Eve gets blamed for everything."

But at the same time Lee has some compassion for Adam. Eve has a look of tenderness on her face and Adam is holding Eve's hand.

"They steal comfort from one another."

Judi Michelle Young, president of the Sculptors Society of Canada that's hosting the Toronto exhibition, said the show provides a place where the most talented new sculptors can show their work and then draws a crowd to view it.

"It gives the artists a venue and a platform and it highlights sculpture as an art form in general," Young said. "We are the only national sculpture organization that does this. It's part of our education mandate."

Young said there were 107 submissions this year for the society's eighth event, which three jurists whittled down to 16 works by eight artists.

Fergus metal artist Tyzo-David Toccalino was also selected to exhibit in the Emerging Sculptors show.

The exhibit runs July 25 to Aug. 18, and at the official opening on July 27 all of the artists will be on hand to talk about their work.

"The show is gaining momentum," Young added.

The Canadian Sculpture Centre is located at 64 Merton St. in Toronto.

Lee grew up in New York City and remembers her first encounter with modelling clay like she was meeting her soulmate.

"It felt like an old friend in my hands. It was familiar and it smelled of earth and not plastic, like Plasticine does. But my mother wanted me to be a doctor, so I only got new clay once a year," she said.

Lee and her husband Chris Lee moved to their rural 10-acre property three years ago, but it was only after the TV died that she started working with clay again.

"When the TV broke, my husband encouraged me to try sculpting again. I did and I loved it like it was new. We didn't buy a new TV," she said, followed by a hearty belly laugh.

She said she starts with an idea, plays with the shape and sometimes has to wrestle with gravity, which may insist an arm will point downward though Lee wants it stretched upwards.

"I sculpt manically. I can get the form fairly quickly, in about three or four weeks. And then I fuss over it for a month or two," she said.

Artists at the foundry take her clay figures, make a ceramic mould from it and then pour the bronze into the mold.

In the process the original clay sculpture is destroyed.

"The first time I saw that, it was like death to me. But then I saw how it transformed to this sublime figure," she said, stroking one of her sculptures.

"I love making beautiful things. It makes me happy."

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