

Holt Murray's life in bronze

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They were known as the "Bronzinis," the coterie of art students that formed Holt Murray's army of true believers in the power and glory of bronze art. For much of his 30 years teaching bronze design and sculpture at Cabrillo College, Murray -- who died Nov. 15 at the age of 76 -- was able to attract a large number of devotees to the cause of bronze.

In the wake of his death, those most touched by Murray's intensity and enthusiasm for his art are reflecting on the man's unique charisma.

"He certainly had a whole mystique built up around his work," said Sean M. Monaghan, a former Bronzini who is now following Murray's work teaching bronze at Cabrillo. "He was deeply moved by the allure of bronze. His work was not classical at all, but he felt himself to be part of that grand tradition."

"They got a chance to see that passion he had up close," said Murray's former neighbor, colleague and friend Sandy Lydon of the Bronzinis.

"When you see someone so passionate and committed to his particular subject, when you see someone so consumed by what they do, who wouldn't want to be around something like that?"

Holt Murray came to Cabrillo College in the mid-1960s



HOLT MURRAY

BORN: 1932.

DIED: Nov. 15, 2008.

HOME: Corralitos.

OCCUPATION: For 30 years, taught bronze sculpture and design at Cabrillo College.

EDUCATION: Served in the Navy during the Korean War. Earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at San Jose State University.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Gail Rich Award winner, 1997, for excellence in visual arts; Distinguished Artist Award, Santa Cruz Art League, 1995.

SURVIVORS: Wife of 48 years, Margaret Stanton Murray; daughter Rebecca Snead; son Kenneth Murray, and several grandchildren. Son Jeffrey Murray died previously.

SERVICES: A public celebration of Murray's life and work will be 1 p.m. Dec. 13 in the Erica Schilling Forum at Cabrillo College. Contributions are preferred to the Holt Murray Sculpture Scholarship fund c/o of the Cabrillo College Foundation, 6500 Soquel Drive, Aptos, CA 95003. For a more detailed overview of Holt and his art, visit

www.holtmurray.com.

after a stint in the Navy during the Korean War and earning his bachelor's and master's degrees from San Jose State University. At Cabrillo, he established the foundry where today sculpture students work.

He began his career at Cabrillo teaching jewelry before moving into sculpture. Those who knew him best paint a picture of a man of elevated, but single-minded devotions to things he loved in life -- namely, bronze, fly fishing and Italian opera.

"I would consider Holt a romanticist," said Jamie Abbott, a former student of Murray's who taught alongside him at Cabrillo for more than 20 years. "He couldn't work without listening to his opera."

"He was an absolute gentlemen," said Cabrillo colleague Jane Gregorius. "He was deeply dedicated to his art and his students. He was just crazy about his medium."

"He could be tough and he could be very demanding as a teacher," said Abbott who took his first class under Murray in 1969. "And he had these certain ideas that he held as quintessential qualities of what a sculptor is supposed to be."

Besides the waves of Bronzini's he released into the world, Murray's legacy as an artist includes a sculpture on Pacific Avenue, near Cathcart Street. As an artist, he worked in a variety of mediums, from stone to iron, but always returned to bronze. Murray worked in abstract shapes, many of which were inspired by his experience in the Navy. Specifically, he was fascinated with various machine works and marine hardware, from turnbuckles to anchor pins to Clovis hooks.



"I would call it 'boy art,'" said Lydon, who lived next to the home of Murray and his wife Margaret in Corralitos for 10 years. "It had a heft to it. It was substantial. You wanted to pick it up and unscrew a bolt with it or something."

"Holt was always very serious about his work, and serious about his life," said Abbott, who joined his former teacher with his own sculpture on Pacific Avenue just last week. "And, not that I'm a frivolous person by any means, but I just didn't have the intensity that he did."

"He was so focused and so disciplined," said Monaghan, who runs his own bronze company called Bronzeworks. "And that really rubbed off on his students. You wanted to live up to his expectations."

On Dec. 13, friends, family and admirers will gather at the Erica Schilling Forum on the campus of Cabrillo College to remember Murray and appreciate his work.

"Bronze casting was his obsession," Abbott said. "We just built a new facility at Cabrillo, and Sean Monaghan and I called him a while back and invited to be there for an honorary pour. And he laughed and said, "If I live long enough..." But he did get to participate in our very last pour at the old place, that he built."

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