

APRIL / MAY 2001

FOCUS/SANTA FE™

A SELECT LOOK AT SANTA FE ARTS, CRAFTS, TASTES AND STYLES



"Morning Mist" ©2000 by David Pearson, edition of 9, 5'11" high
shown in the gardens at Patricia Carlisle Fine Art



PHOTO BY ROBERT RECK

"Cymar," 52" high, ©2000, edition of 7

COVER STORY

SENTINELS OF SERENITY

David Pearson blends the earthly and ethereal in timeless grace.

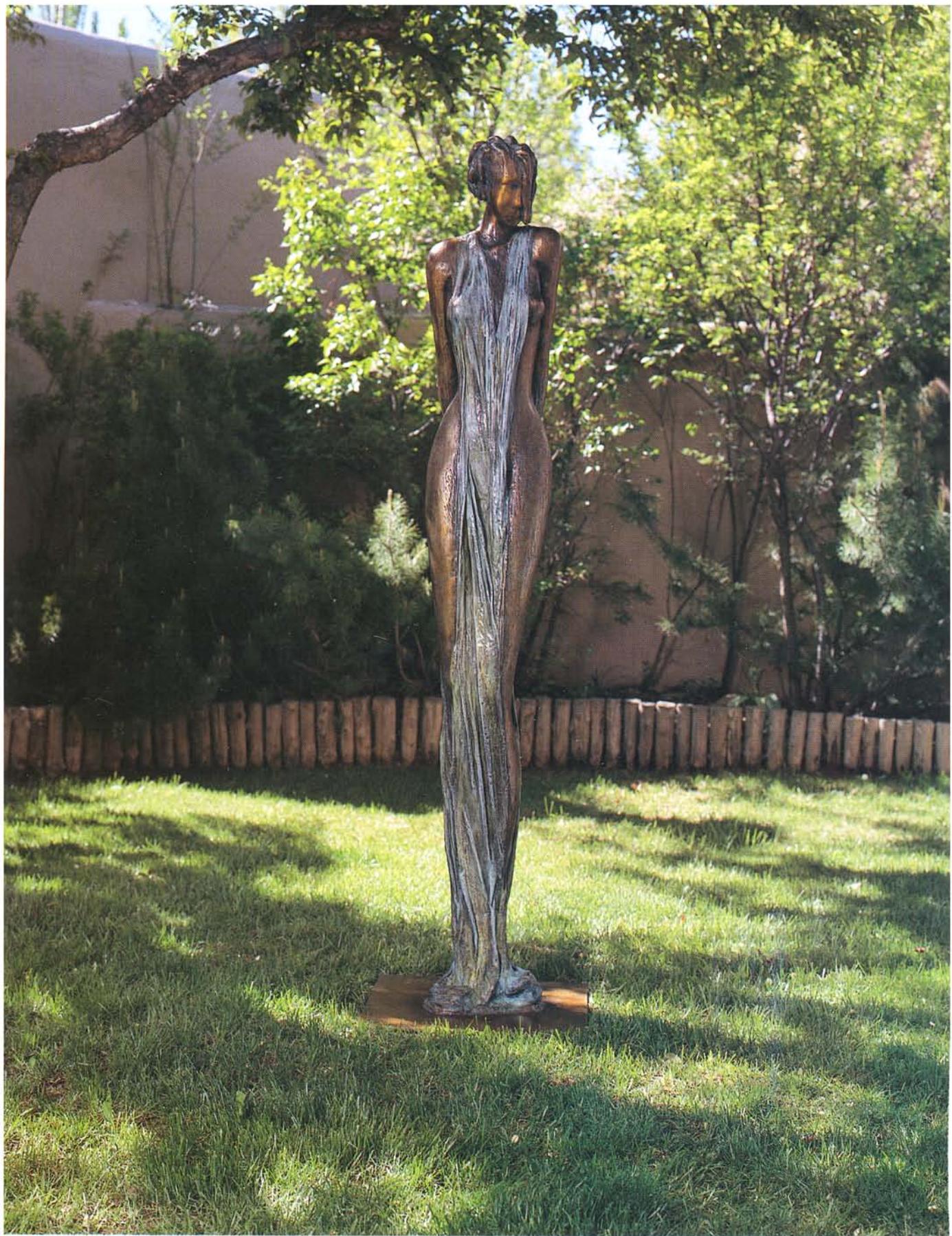
By Gussie Fauntleroy

One of David Pearson's recent bronze figures is a slender young woman holding a small bird and whistling along with the warbler's song, titled "Finch." Her shoulders are hunched with concentration, her face transfixed by the tiny creature. Another piece, also with a meditative and charming air, is of a woman gazing down at a row

of tiny songbirds perched on the hem of her skirt, which she holds in a wide arch, titled "Spring."

Like songbirds in happy communion with people, Pearson's newest work has begun to touch down in a more earthly realm, combining the world of nature with the human experience. As always with his

sculpture, there is an element of the ethereal in these figures, whose attention appears caught in the magic of the moment. Yet there is also a new sense of fluidity. And while the artist's signature style continues to bring us elegant, tapered figures that radiate a timeless presence, a suggestion of individuality is apparent in his work.



"Mishna," ©1999, 70" high, edition of 9



"Graced," bronze, 40" high, edition of 12



"Noblest," bronze, 29" high, edition of 15



"My pieces have always been real static, standing very straight and still, like ancient sculptures. They're idealized, and there's mystery to them, instead of having the whole story defined. I don't think I'll ever abandon that direction, but in my newer pieces I'm working with more of a personality," Pearson explains, glancing at the sculptures standing like graceful sentinels around his studio south of Santa Fe. He walks over to the bronze figure of the woman whistling with the songbird, and touches her arm.

"She's not caring about her surroundings; she's focusing on what she's intent on," he comments, as if describing someone he has come to know well. "I'm mixing nature with humanity, which is quite different for me. Usually I'm off in the spirit world, but now I'm evolving into a more earthly direction."

Actually, the artist is moving in several new directions at once. After more than 20 years of sculpting figures to be cast in bronze, Pearson also has begun creating one-of-a-kind pieces. Often these are formed in a paper mixture and then finished with a metallic coat such as zinc, which creates a rich texture and a strong contrast of dark recesses with polished surfaces. The figures tend to have an abstracted, unearthly quality.

For Pearson, these pieces represent a continuing fascination with the spiritual

realm. He refers to them as "people of light," evolved souls whose domain is another dimension. He also continues to explore the concept of multiple figures fused into one. Like the piece titled "Guardian Angel," in which an angelic presence emerges from the back of a female figure, these images suggest the simultaneous existence of more than one reality, and on an emotional level, the complexity of the human psyche.

Pearson is aided in transforming his vision into three-dimensional form by his many years of foundry work. He began an apprenticeship at Shidoni Foundry at age 16 and went on to become foundry director at Art Foundry, and to design and build a foundry for Allan Houser, Inc. With mastership of all stages of the process, he is able to conceptualize how the casting process and certain kinds of patinas will affect the design and texture of a finished piece.

This intimate knowledge of bronze eliminates the often frustrating, time consuming, and expensive experimentation required of less experienced sculptors. For example, Pearson knows that to produce an interesting surface and unified feel, he can cover a clay figure with a layer of wax, thus eliminating the all-too-familiar contrast between smooth skin and textured clothing. And while he has foundries do the hot, heavy teamwork of bronze casting, he then brings home the unfinished pieces, welds them

together, and does all the patina and finish work himself.

Having collaborated with many renowned sculptors in the casting of their work also has given the artist an opportunity to absorb bits of knowledge and wisdom, some of which he has incorporated into his own creative career.

"Allan Houser always said keep it simple. Kiki Smith uses a lot of different materials and textures. Bruce Nauman doesn't care about the surface at all, but is more interested in the concept, and Terry Allen doesn't care if anybody likes it or not—he just does it for himself," Pearson relates. Other acclaimed artists with whom he has worked include Fritz Sholder, Luis Jimenez, and Bill Barrett.

Yet throughout his career, Pearson has developed and maintained his own vision and style. With a strong admiration for the simplicity, presence, and mystery of the art of antiquity, he creates figures of quiet, timeless grace which leave an enduring impression.

"I think that's what an artist's function is: to touch the viewer in a subtle way," he reflects. "My pieces work a lot on the level of feeling."

David Pearson's sculpture may be seen at Patricia Carlisle Fine Art, 554 Canyon Road. Hours: 10:00-5:00 daily. (505) 820-0596 or 1-888-820-0596.