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# DAVID PEARSON SCULPTOR



BOTANICAL GARDEN EXHIBIT  
MAY 24, 2019 - APRIL 30, 2020 at MUSEUM HILL



PATRICIA CARLISLE FINE ART, INC.  
150 W. MARCY STREET SUITE 103 | SANTA FE, NM 87501  
505-820-0596 | CARLISLEFA.COM



*GODDESS OF THE NILE* BY DAVID PEARSON  
EDITION OF 9, 35" HIGH







# *Balanced Lives*

A local power couple enjoys their tranquil retreat  
from the fast-paced art world

BY GUSSIE FAUNTLEROY

ADDISON DOW





Sculptor David Pearson, his wife, gallerist Patricia Carlisle, and their Great Dane, Mr. Shadow, watch the dying flames at the couple's solstice burn at *Stonehenge*, Pearson's stone Earth art installation. The yule fire symbolizes continuity and the sharing of traditions, and the event brings the community together in celebration of friendship, art, and the turning of the seasons.



## It's 3:30 a.m., quiet and dark,

a time when most people aren't yet stirring. Patty Carlisle makes her way downstairs in the home south of Santa Fe that she shares with her husband, sculptor David Pearson, grabs her flashlight, and happily heads out the kitchen door. She walks a short distance down the driveway, then along a flagstone path and into one of Pearson's studio spaces. Turning on the lights, she moves slowly through the small, neatly kept buildings of the studio compound: the sculpting room, patina room, hot wax and metalworking spaces. She takes note of what Pearson has done the previous day and where each piece stands in the complex bronze process. Other than casting, the artist does every step himself.

Carlisle's predawn studio visit isn't a one-time event. She goes to bed each evening at a time when many would be eating supper and gets up each morning at 3:00 a.m. Spending quiet time alone in her husband's studio is a way of vicariously experiencing the artistic process. It also allows her to tell clients truthfully where their pieces are in the process and that they will be delivered on time. It's a way of connecting her role as gallery owner with that as integral partner to a working artist, in both business and life.

An hour or two later, Carlisle and Pearson sit together in the bubbling jets of a large Jacuzzi next to the expansive corner windows in their second-floor master bath. Through the windows they watch the sky lighten and change over the Ortiz Mountains. Each morning, sometimes for as long as three hours, they talk about business and art, make decisions, or just sit silently, gently easing into the day. Soon Carlisle will make the half-hour drive to Patricia Carlisle Fine Art on Marcy Street. Before heading to the studio, Pearson's morning routine requires a few playful minutes of tossing balls for Mr. Shadow, the couple's handsome, waist-tall Great Dane.

When Pearson and Carlisle first met in 1989, he was director of Art Foundry Inc. in Santa Fe, producing bronzes for major artists including Allan Houser and Kiki Smith. Carlisle was director of Glenn Green Galleries, which represented Houser, the renowned Chiricahua Apache sculptor. Carlisle would speak with Pearson when she'd call the foundry about bronzes. When they first met in person, Pearson recalls, "The universe stopped, and we both knew we were in big trouble. It was instant. It was in the eyes."

ROBERT RECK







With warm earth colors, stone, and wood, Carlisle and Pearson's beautiful, quiet home is their sanctuary. The sculptor's ethereal bronze female figures watch over the entrance hall.





Pearson began learning the bronze process as a teen at Shidoni Foundry in Tesuque and later served as director of Art Foundry Inc. in Santa Fe. He developed and retained his own signature style as he did bronze work for such acclaimed artists as Allan Houser, Bruce Nauman, and Kiki Smith. After being cast at a foundry in Berthod, Colorado, Pearson's bronzes return to his studios, where he does the metal chasing, patina, and finish work himself.

For her part, Carlisle remembers that "David's eyelashes fluttered, and I absolutely melted." Thirty years later, "Here we are," Pearson says. "It was right."

Down the hill in his patina room, the sculptor consults a large whiteboard on which is carefully noted each piece that has been sold, its edition number, and promised delivery date. An identical board in his office helps keep everything on track. Pearson's timeless, elegantly elongated female figures and other sculptural forms are cast at Madd Castings in Berthod, Colorado. Every five weeks the foundry sends a truck to pick up his wax molds and deliver cast pieces, for which Pearson does almost all the metal chasing, patina, and finish work. (He'll call in an assistant or two in a time crunch.) The full process, from sculpting in clay to the finished bronze, can take up to four months. It's an intricate scheduling puzzle, made possible by the driven personalities and formidable organizational skills of both Pearson and Carlisle, whose gallery exclusively represents her husband's art.

At the same time, the couple finds balance in sharing experiences from their respective sides of the business-art equation. Pearson spends his days in solitary work and is curious about the clients to whom his pieces will go. When Carlisle gets home she relishes the quiet, relaxing with a glass of wine and telling him about the people she met in the gallery that day. Like the man who walked in and pulled out a photo of a particular Pearson sculpture. He'd seen it four years earlier and kept the photo all that time. He purchased the last in the edition. "Stories like this really make me want to make these people happy," Pearson says.

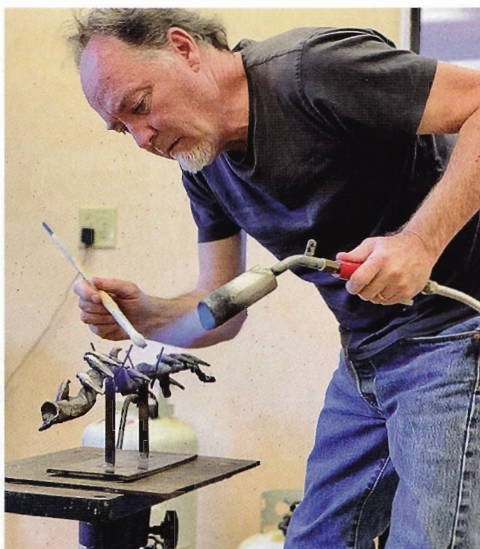
For her part Carlisle interacts with people, computers, and paperwork all day, so she finds herself inspired by the tactile elements

in Pearson's world. Because her father is blind, she's especially sensitive to nonvisual ways of perceiving. "When I come home at night, I can immediately tell what David did that day from how he smells—patina, or clay, or metal grinders," she says. From her husband she also gets encouragement to slow down, watch the sunset, and let the world go.

That sunset view is spectacularly enhanced for one day every four or five years. On that evening, always on the summer or winter solstice, the couple stands with a large group of collectors, neighbors, and friends and watches the setting sun from a special spot not far from the house. It's the site of an Earth art installation they informally call *Stonehenge* that Pearson created about fifteen years ago. The 60-foot-diameter circle of small stones and a few taller, standing stones is cut through with three vectors of shallow troughs dug into the short grass and dirt. The troughs begin at a single point on the east side and end on the west at the points of the summer and winter solstices and spring equinox. In the circle's center the troughs go around a vertical stone and a large, hollow steel head, a miscast by a New York sculptor friend.

For weeks, work has been going on in preparation for this evening. Each trough has been carefully filled with woodchips, sawdust, and gunpowder, and generously sprinkled with gasoline. Just as the sun drops below the horizon, Pearson touches fire to the trough at the eastern point. As he and Carlisle and their guests watch in silence, the flames jump into the darkening sky and travel with primal intensity toward the three points on the circle's western side. They reach their goal in about seven minutes, and gradually the flames die down. The party moves inside to food and drinks, a celebration of the turning of the seasons, friends, and art.





The prehistoric ritual of fire in alignment with the sun's journey reflects the sculptor's longtime interest in ancient civilizations, architecture, and artifacts. Whenever he and Carlisle travel they head to ancient temples or places like Malta, the site of some of the oldest stone structures in the world. (As well as visiting art museums wherever they go, of course.) "Without writing or philosophy, what's left of these ancient cultures is the architecture and art—and mystery," Pearson says. "Who were these people and what were they thinking about? That's fascinating to me." Even as a boy growing up in Tucumcari and Santa Fe, he remembers being spellbound by books on Egyptian and African art, and his sculpture clearly draws on this influence. A three-foot-long bronze vessel in the middle of the couple's dining room table is titled *Pharaoh's Solar Boat*, inspired by full-sized boats found buried near the Egyptian pyramids. Pearson's female figures possess a quiet, self-contained quality, reminiscent of ancient mythology.

He first witnessed a bronze pour at age 16. "It just blew my mind," Pearson says. Scott Hicks, a high school friend and son of Shidoni Foundry cofounder Tommy Hicks, invited him to the Tesuque facility. When they arrived the furnace was roaring and emitting a greenish gas. Then it was shut off. In the silence that followed, Pearson watched, mesmerized, as workers poured orange molten bronze into molds. "I was hooked," he says. He pestered Tommy for a summer job. Following graduation, he stayed at Shidoni Foundry for five years, where he met and worked with Allan Houser, whom he considers a mentor.

At Art Foundry Inc., Pearson headed up the bronze process for artists including Kiki Smith, Terry Allen, and Bruce Nauman while developing his own signature style. "David did very cus-

tomized, specialized work for each artist, but it never affected his personal work," Carlisle says. "He stayed true to his own vision, and they trusted him." For his part, Pearson was not only honing his bronze skills but also absorbing less tangible qualities from those with whom he worked. "It was about who they were and how passionate they were about their work. They were pushing the boundaries in so many ways. I was inspired by them just being themselves," he says.

Meanwhile, in California, Carlisle grew up in Los Angeles and the Central Coast and earned a BFA and MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, where she studied performance, video art, and photography. From a family with modest means, she paid for her education with scholarships and by holding jobs at the school throughout her college years. She planned, hung, and managed publicity for student and faculty art shows, as well as served as a model for life drawing and painting classes. "I felt like I was getting art training at every level," she says.

In 1989 Carlisle moved to Santa Fe. She had never been to New Mexico, but she wanted to work in the art field without living in a big city. The moment she crossed into the state, she says, "I knew I was home." She was hired by Glenn Green and soon was immersed in the Santa Fe art world. "Allan Houser and Glenn as a team blew me away," she says. "They were totally dedicated, totally focused, and worked so hard." The two provided inspiration for Carlisle when, in 1997, after also working for a time at Waxlander Gallery, she decided to open her own art space. Patricia Carlisle Fine Art occupied a lovely multiroom former adobe house with gardens on Canyon Road for 21 years. Three years ago she relocated to Marcy Street.









A beautiful, welcoming environment is essential for Carlisle. Each week she places fresh roses in Pearson's birdbath sculpture at Patricia Carlisle Fine Art.

Opposite: Pearson likes instilling a touch of mystery into his works. With the fountain in a courtyard at the couple's home, viewers often wonder what the three young women are thinking about, he says.

When Carlisle worked for Green, he carried art by just one painter and one sculptor and was successful in this unusual approach. She follows a similar philosophy. Along with Pearson, she currently represents painters Rebecca Crowell and Adam Shaw, giving each artist a generous presentation in the light-filled contemporary space. It's almost as if the artists have a perpetual exhibition, offering collectors a fuller sense of their bodies of work, Carlisle points out. She also continues

her long-held practice of buying and placing fresh roses in the gallery every week and lighting tea candles each day. "I have to make my environment filled with grace and beauty," she says. "There's a lot of paperwork, but beyond that I have to love going to work every day."

It's later in the morning now, and Pearson walks past xeriscaped gardens to the studios. His wife heads out down the driveway, and Mr. Shadow has had his breakfast and ball-catching time. In the

center of the clay sculpting room is the latest work in progress, *Seed of Life*, a standing young woman holding a large seed in her hand. Because Pearson produces small editions—no more than nine from each original piece, down from his earlier edition size of 15—he is able to put careful, personalized attention into every step. He takes up a carving tool to start refining the shape of an arm. Later he'll spend time on bronzes that are ready for patina or finish work. "Each process is totally different. I'm changing focus all the time," he says.

At midday he'll take a break for lunch, perhaps sitting beside the goldfish pond, with only the sounds of birds or the wind. "I love this place," he says. "It's all mine in the daytime. Nobody comes out here, and I don't care about going into town." Looking at the clay figure's serene face, he adds, "I'm not trying to change the world or make people think. I enjoy making pieces that let people feel the kind of peace that I feel here." ✱

Pearson is part of a three-artist show that opened in May and continues for a year at the Santa Fe Botanical Gardens at Museum Hill. *Human Nature: Explorations in Bronze* features seven sculptural works each by Pearson, Allan Houser, and Jonathan Hertz.



# DAVID PEARSON



NORIA, BRONZE EDITION OF 15; PHOTOS BY ADDISON DOTY

[carlislefa.com/pearson](http://carlislefa.com/pearson)

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