

sculpture of
**Catherine
McAuley**

1778 - 1841

Sculptor: Meliesa Judge
Liquid Metal Studios.

Commissioned by:
All Hallows' School, Brisbane, 2011
to commemorate the 150th anniversary
of the founding of the School in 1861



1. Symbolism & concept development

in the sculpture of Catherine McAuley

The idea was to commission an artist to produce an interpretive sculpture, exploring the history and charism of Catherine McAuley. The intention was to bring her story to life for a new generation of young people in the schools.

The sculpture exists to unify the All Hallows' community across generations and across the nation. It will become an identifying symbol. It must have must have grace, strength, longevity and sincere emotion. It must relate the story, communicate directly with the viewer, and bear repetition over the years.

It must evoke the spirit, the message and meaning of Catherine McAuley's life and work.

Reflecting on Catherine McAuley's life



Catherine was very much a woman of her place,
a woman of her times.

Ireland, was undergoing change on a profound level, emancipation was gradually allowing Catholics to take their place in a changed society. Many years of repression had left the Catholic population impoverished, the children uneducated and the people's rights unprotected by law. A relatively stable and more open period in politics gradually allowed new schools and charitable organisations to establish themselves.

Catherine was one of the few who was able to walk the precarious divide between Protestant and Catholic, to balance both sides with grace and poise, to see beyond the politics of religion to the real needs of the suffering people themselves. She was able to carry her own devotion, deeply felt and humbly followed, without bigotry or resentment.

Even as a very young woman Catherine was already deeply involved in ministering to the needy, feeding and clothing the poor, offering shelter, giving that which she had to those that needed it most.

The attitude of reverence, of open-hearted generosity, was with her regardless of her circumstances. When she was poor she gave her time, when she unexpectedly inherited a small fortune, she was simply able to work on a larger scale, to reach out to more people more effectively and to include companions in her journey.

Catherine kept nothing back. She gave all that she had, unreservedly, with joy and humility.

A moment of life..

There is a delightful account of Catherine, from her contemporary, Mary Vincent Harnett. Catherine is young woman. This is at the time when Catherine had formed a deep bond with the Callagans, was living with them as adopted daughter, housekeeper and companion.

" ... her friends were unaware of her secret partiality for the Catholic religion, and she, from a feeling that will be easily understood, had a difficulty in making her intention known...

One day she alleged some excuse for going into Dublin alone; she went to a Milliner's shop, and having purchased some trifling articles of dress, desired the servants to wait in the carriage until she should return. It wasn't far from the Roman Catholic Church, then in Liffey Street, and almost breathless with haste, and trembling from the excitement of her feelings, she applied at the residence of the clergymen... she was introduced to the Revd Dr Murray then a curate attached to that parish and afterwards Archbishop of Dublin. No one could be better suited to the occasion, or to make a more favourable impression. When the agitation of her excited feelings permitted her to make known the object of her visit, and the peculiar circumstances in which she was placed, he gave her whatever instruction and advice she needed, removed any remaining difficulties she may have had, and appointed a day on which she was, if possible, to return to him again and commence her preparation for the sacraments."



This vivid description of a young and energetic woman, becomes a starting point for the sculpture, though not a descriptive placemaker. This is the era I was interested to capture in the sculpture, this point where the young woman is acting on her the strength of her well founded carefully considered convictions.

There is no specified date, but this story places Catherine in her mid - late 20's, she was 30 in 1808, so roughly around 1805.

Catherine McAuley; as a young, secular woman



The sculpture shows Catherine as a young woman, a secular woman.

A woman still making the decisions that will shape the direction of her life.

A woman reading deeply, studying searching for the answers.

A woman practicing compassion as a natural daily observance.

Catherine understanding the link between compassion and spirituality.

A woman of her times, strong and worldly wise.

Catherine as a companion.

Catherine as a protector, her desire to keep safe the girls growing to womanhood, young women unprotected and going out into the workforce.

Catherine's love of children, and Ireland's desperate need for teachers. The ban on Catholic schools having just been lifted.

Catherine talking, listening, responding. her words.

Catherine responding in her movement, the gesture of giving.

Catherine negotiating change in society by giving all she had, her material, but also her spiritual wealth, her time, her prayers and intentions.

A woman of intelligence, looking for opportunities to practice compassionate faith in the community

“The Offering”

It is difficult to express an attitude of generosity in a sculpture. eventually I decided on a simple action as the primary metaphor in the work - a woman pulling her own wrap from around her shoulders to offer it to someone in need. An apt and appropriate symbol for someone who gave away all that she owned so as to protect and care for others.

Catherine is shown as she pauses mid-stride; imagine that her attention drawn by someone in the distance. The gesture is that of giving, as she unwraps her own shawl to give to a person in need. This is a gesture that says “I answer your need”.

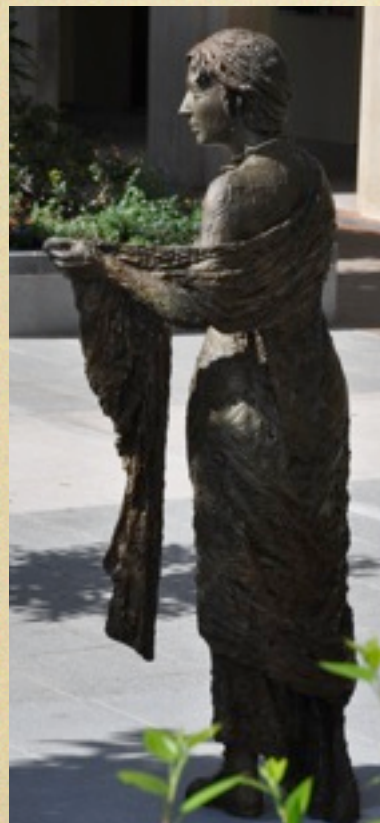


The shawl is a subtle yet powerfully universal symbol. Emblematic of the fabric of society, the cloth that wraps, that binds, the interwoven threads of our lives.

It is a metaphor for women's labour, the invisible labour that underpins the world. Women's work is central to the social outreach that Catherine placed at the core of her Society. Starting from the early days of providing a home to protect girls working in the city, through to establishing workshops and laundries as part of the structure of the convents and homes.

The offering of the shawl: When Catherine pulls the shawl from her shoulders and gives it as a gift, it becomes the symbol of nurturance, of protection, warmth & shelter. Deeply personal, it is the giving of that which was her own. This small act, this small gesture of kindness, this devotion, changes the world, just a little.

The Shawl



The Portrait



"She was very fair with a brilliant colour on her cheeks, still not too red. Her face was a short oval but the contour was perfect.

Her lips were thin and her mouth rather wide, but there was so much play and expression about it that I remarked it as the next agreeable feature in her face.

Her eyes were light blue and remarkably round with the brows and lashes colourless, but they spoke. Her nose was straight but thick.

She wore bands made from her own back hair which were so well managed as to be quite free from the disagreeable look bands of this kind usually give. The colour was pale golden not in the least sandy, very fine and silky."

- Mary Clare Augustine More





" She was dressed in black British merino which according to the fashion of the time fitted tight to her shape. She was remarkably well made, round but not the least heavy. She had a good carriage, her hands were remarkably white but very clumsy, very large with broad square tips to the fingers and short square nails."

- Mary Clare Augustine More



The figure



The Stance

To capture an expressive gesture in the sculpture the movement must be just right, light, fluid and precise. This sculpture has a subtle position, expressing Catherine's instinctive response to a situation, through the sudden change in direction as she walks.

The movement is at the moment of redirecting momentum; the moment, mid stride, when one pauses to change direction. The upper torso twists in the new direction, the head turns. The movement is circular. The line of her gaze is offset 90 degrees from the direction of her front foot.

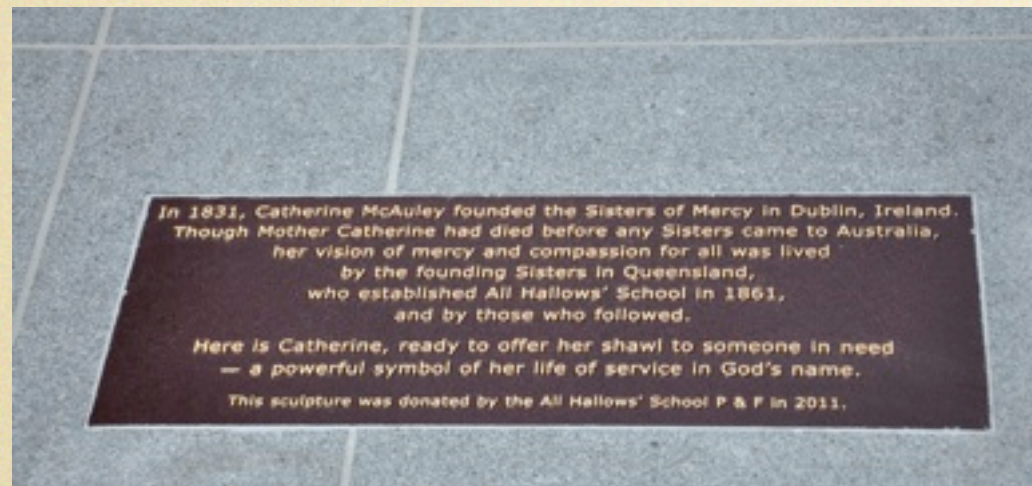
The step is the balance point between the two feet. The sculpture shown here on the left (AGNSW) depicts a lovely moment of tilt, turn and pause - the weight balanced between both feet, a woman with perfect poise, tilting into her movement while pausing, and turning.



Catherine's Quotes

Catherine McAuley was well known for her quotes and sayings, many of which were noted by her several biographers, and in her correspondence.

The school decided that some of her words around the edges of her plinth would be wonderfully appropriate. It took several months of careful thought to find the right set of four quotes, reduced from the twelve that they originally chose.





Placement

Placement of the sculpture at the heart of the school, in the central courtyard, was an essential part of the original vision for the sculpture. This is an area where the girls spend their lunch hour, an open space that links all the major buildings in the school, overlooked by balconies, classroom windows and administration.

The corner of the Courtyard where she stands is beside the junction of several pathways, with a small area of seating and raised garden beds. She looks out into the wider courtyard. She is surrounded by people all day, either walking between classes or resting during their breaks.

The concept of bringing Catherine, her story and her spiritual values into the lived reality of the school is completed by the placement of the statue in such a central yet intimate position.



2. Fashion is political

The trends in fashion are a strong indicator of social attitudes. For instance, in eras when women are strongly controlled by societal norms, fashions become more restrictive, women are tightly corsetted or more heavily veiled.

Fashion is also a direct result of the availability of materials, and methods of manufacturing. In the 1800's Industrial revolution was changing every aspect of the textile and leather industries, while at the same time imports from the far reaches of a large Empire were flooding into England.

The 1800s heralded an era of peace and emancipation in Ireland, reflecting the more open politics of the Regency Era in England.

Women's fashions at the turn of the century were more relaxed than they had been for 150 years. The tight corsets were gone, lighter fabrics were being used with less volume in petticoats. The line was soft, close to the figure, natural and feminine. This is the era of Jane Austin and the Bronte sisters.

Shoes were flat and comfortable. In 1793, Marie Antoinette wore two-inch heels to her beheading. In the wake of the French Revolution, heels became lower than at any time in the 18th century.

Clothing for the sculpture

Catherine McAuley was thirty years old in 1808.

Amongst Irish gentry "The Ladies followed the London fashion - five to seven years late. Families were large but women generally suffered fewer restrictions than in England."

"socially and artistically, Ireland took its place again in the mainstream of European culture. Dublin grew to one of the most perfect of Georgian cities ... more outstanding were the arts of domestic life, for the town houses and country estates of the landed gentry ... reached a peak of sophistication."

This is the Georgian era (1714 - 1830), Regency style in England (1800 - 1825), the empire line in clothing:

- High waisted, not tightly corseted with a smooth body line.
- Well fitted sleeves even on jackets and overcoats.
- Skirts longer at the back so that they trail slightly for day wear, (longer trails for evening).
- Short bolero jackets, a low level of ornamentation. Coats also high waisted three-quarter or full length.
- Shawls, long oblongs with woven or embroidered patterns.
- Hair fairly natural using the styling as the ornamentation more than hats or fascinators.

quotes - 'The Irish World, the history and cultural achievements of the Irish People.'
Thames and Hudson



on Catherine's clothes

"she took no pleasure in the ordinary amusements of young people but she conformed her taste for dress to that of her good friends"

- Mary Vincent Harnett

"lived in good style, kept a carriage, dressed well, went into society."

- Mary Anne Doyle

And later during the early formation of her organisation, the Archbishop discusses dress; ..."laid great stress on the unobtrusive manner in which they should appear and act. appealing to Mother M Catherine's experience of the unpleasant feelings always excited in Protestants when certain points of difference were drawn prominently forth, on which account he wished our outdoor costume might exhibit no remarkable difference from that of secular persons of respectability who did not enter the vanities of the world"

- Mary Anne Doyle

"She was dressed in black British merino which according to the fashion of the time fitted tight to her shape. She was remarkably well made, round but not the least heavy.."

- Mary Clare Augustine More



the Empire line



Catherine wears the high waisted three quarter length coat, open from the waist band, dropping to just below her knees with a modest high collar and well fitted sleeves over the long softly pleated dress, which is shorter at the front, for day wear and walking, with a slight trail at the back. Her shawl is a long oblong that would hang as long as her coat.







Hair & bonnets

“ She wore bands made from her own back hair which were so well managed as to be quite free from the disagreeable look bands of this kind usually give.”

- Mary Clare Augustine More

Hair styling of the time was very natural and soft, often with curls or ringlets around the face. Catherine would have covered her head to go out doors, but this could be as simple as a snood or a soft bonnet or gathered scarf. We show her with her hair gathered into a bonnet with silk ropes to draw it in tight around the head, with her fringe framing her oval face.



Shoes

Flat shoes became the fashion across Europe after the French revolution. Buttons replaced ribbons as button manufacture became industrialised in England (Manchester).

Catherine and her companions were often referred to as the walking nuns. Even as a very young woman Catherine was deeply involved in ministering to the needy, feeding and clothing the poor, offering shelter, giving that which she had to those that needed it most. She was well known for walking around Dublin carrying a basket of provisions that she would give away to those in need. Strong weather proof boots would have been important for walking in Ireland's cold damp climate.



3. Making the sculpture





Maquette

A maquette is a small sculpture that captures the basic elements of a design for a full size sculpture. It resolves the stance and theme of a sculpture.

Portrait head and finer details will be more refined in a life sized sculpture. Maquette is 52 cm high. Here shown as a wax copy of the original which was made in clay.

Maquettes are usually usually either half or quarter of life size. In maquettes and studies a variety of ideas for the form and pose of a sculpture can be developed and modified before investing the intense time and effort that goes into a full life size piece. This is where the key concepts and symbols are explored and ideas are refined.





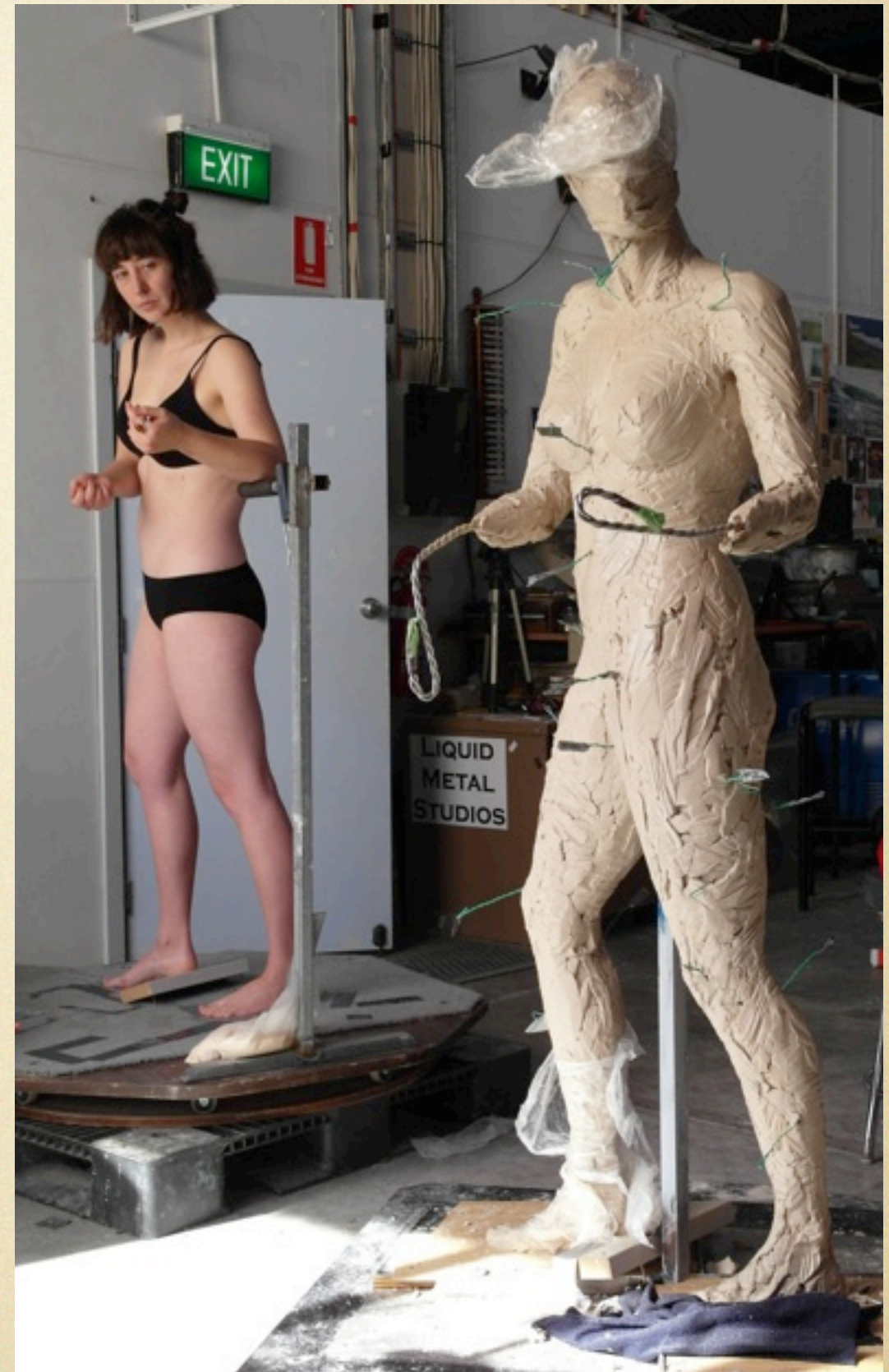
Working from the life model

I work in the tradition of the old masters when sculpting the figure, no shortcuts. The body is hand sculpted precisely, as a completely unclad form, before any details of clothes are modelled into place. I work from life models so as to capture the energy of the human form. It may seem a strange thing to do, to spend a year sculpting a figure, when all that shows after robing is the ankles, the hands and the face, but it is the only way to achieve a sense of veracity in a sculpture. Any small movement will change all sorts of details in a figure. For instance; stretch out your hand with palm upwards, then twist your upturned palm inwards, note how every muscle down your arm rolls with it. The elbow, even the shoulder will change.

The truth is that every one of us is a familiar expert on the human body. When something is not right with a figure we know without knowing, we read the subtleties of movement, of gesture, at a deeply instinctual level, and in a single glance. Gesture was our primal language, our first form of communication as a species, before the evolution of the spoken word. Gesture is so basic to communication that we still find ourselves waving our arms around for emphasis, even while talking on the phone. To get the gesture right, the movement true, is the real work of the sculptor.

Working from the life model

Sculptors models work hard. They need to hold the same pose over three to four hours, returning to position precisely after every short break. The Catherine sculpture is a strong position, stepping forward with a twist, an unbalanced pose that the model had to hold. We built a rig for her, to hold her knee, the back foot, the chest bone to take the weight as the torso leans forward, the hands. She is on one giant turntable and the clay sculpture is on another. I can line them up by eye, or through a grid, and follow the outlines and profiles against my white walls.



The completed
nude





There were no portraits painted or drawn of Catherine in her lifetime, we rely only on vivid description. There was a portrait, much copied, of Catherine's niece who is said to have had a strong likeness to her.

I chose a life model who fitted the descriptions of Catherine's physical stature and her facial characteristics. It is interesting that the young model is also passionate about social justice issues. She spent many of the modelling sessions detailing plans for her current PHD thesis which is about ethical development in the third world. The animation and intelligence of her face informed the sculptural portrait of Catherine McAuley.

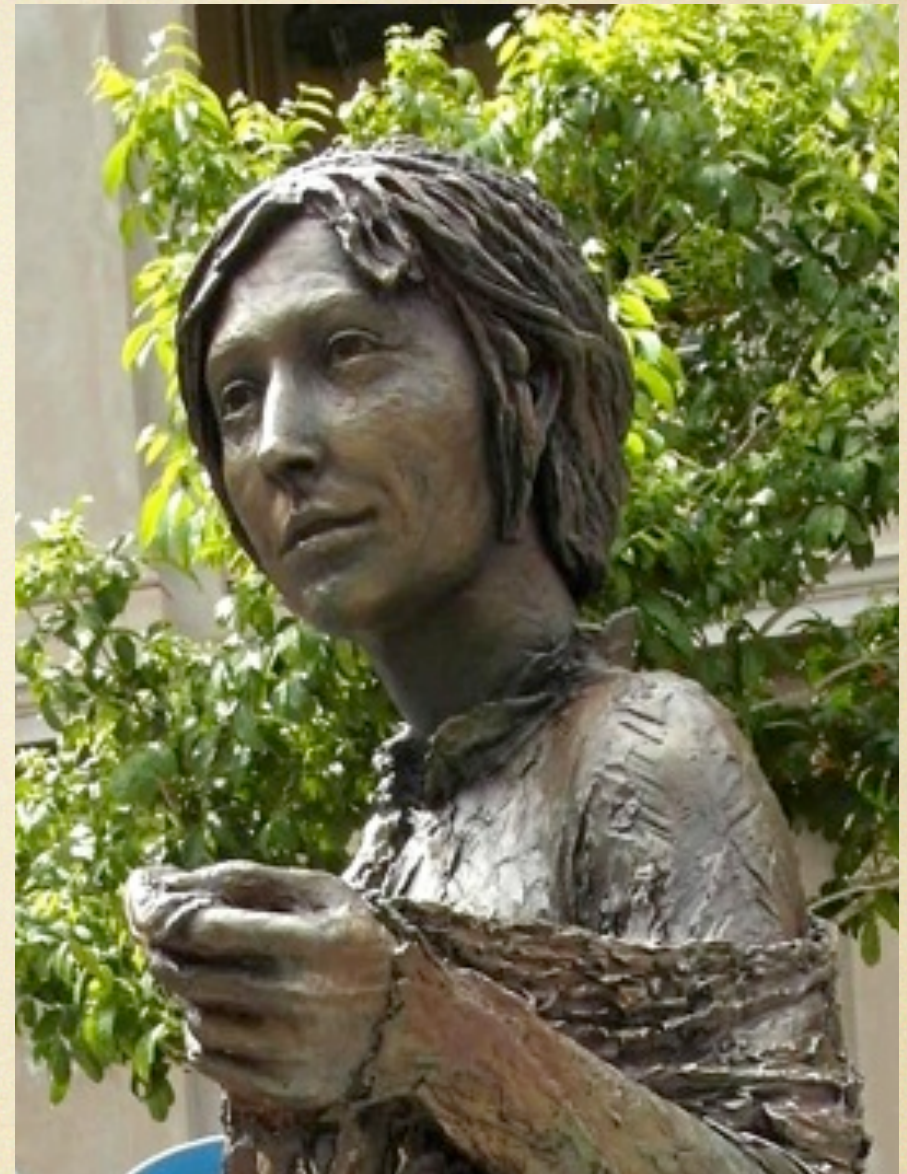
Portrait & life model





From clay to bronze

The original sculpt is in white clay. The surface of the clay is white, matt and non reflective. This is in stark contrast to the bronze which has a dark, hard and reflective surface. Part of the skill of a sculptor is to understand how the clay will read in the bronze. Details of features that show as stark shadows on the white clay will seem subtle or less strong in the bronze. Textured surfaces and fine lines will become more apparent. Light reflecting off the surface of the metal can completely change the reading of the sculpture.



clothing the figure

Hand modelled robes are the key to an energetic, powerfully descriptive sculpture. I research every item of clothing precisely, jacket, coat, length of skirt, and then I choose to let the modelling ripple around the figure, her movement pushes her skirt back and throws her coat open in structured geometry. The shawl becomes an abstract of curves and ripples.







Approval of the completed sculpture

A project like this is guided by a committee that will advise, discuss and act as a fund of information and resources for the artist. At every stage of a project I return to the committee to review my work or ideas. Photos and correspondence are enough in the early stages. I visited Brisbane with the maquette before commencing work on the large figure, at which point several subtle changes were requested. When the clay of Catherine was almost complete the Principal of All Hallows' School, Lee-Anne Perry and the Director of Mission, Angela O'Malley flew down from Qld to our SA Studios to review the work and approve it before we commenced the mould making and bronze casting process.

Silicone rubber duplicating moulds



Duplicating moulds are three dimensional jigsaw puzzles. Flexible rubber moulds capture every detail of the original sculpture right down to the fingerprint of the artist. These are encased in rigid acrylic resin. Every segment is planned from the outset to suit the wax duplicate, bronze casting and welding work which is ahead. The moulds are designed to meet the needs of the bronze foundry, the segments in specific sizes and configurations. The moulds are used to make a fragile wax duplicate of the sculpture. Every segment must come apart and bolt together again with perfect alignment.

Completed rubber moulds & acrylic resin case moulds



Bronze casting:

Australian Bronze, Sydney



Sculpture with this level of detail and complexity can only be bronze cast using the traditional lost-wax bronze casting techniques. Liquid Metal Studios has its own bronze casting foundry specifically to cast our own work however with the time constraints to meet the 150th Anniversary of the founding of All Hallows' School we decided to take the bronze casting to the expert team at Australian Bronze, Sydney.



Preparing the waxes for bronze



A hollow wax duplicate, identical to the original sculpture, is made using the silicone duplicating moulds. The ultra hard foundry wax copy is only 5mm thick and retains all of the details of the original sculpt.

Each wax sculpture is hand detailed by the artists. The sculpture is individually numbered for its place in an edition and signed by the artist.

The hollow wax duplicates are prepared for bronze casting by attaching the tubes that will allow the bronze to flow into the form and the gases to escape out. These tubes will also be solid bronze when the casting is complete.



Ceramic shell; fire proof coating over waxes



A fireproof refractory mould is constructed around the segments of hollow wax duplicate. In this foundry the refractory material is ceramic shell.

The ceramic shell moulds are prepared over several weeks of alternately dipping and drying the layers, meticulously ensuring that every layer is evenly spread and fully dried before the next layer is added. Every imperfection will cause a crack or a fissure in the final bronze cast.

On completion the ceramic shell moulds are fired in a large kiln. The wax inside the moulds melts out, and is gathered and recycled. A hollow space is left inside the shell mould, a negative impression of the wax, with all the detail of the sculpture in reverse. The shell mould is fired until it is hard and strong enough to take the bronze.

bronze casting



The bronze is melted in a crucible, in the furnace. It is ready to pour at around 1150°C. It is iridescent orange and as fluid as water. The bronze flows down through the network of tubes into the figure.

The bronze we use is an alloy called silicone bronze which does not contain lead.

Bronze grinding and detailing



Metal cutting; The tubes, which allowed the metal to flow in and the air to escape as the bronze was poured, are now also bronze. They are cut off the sculpture and the stubs are ground away using die-grinders , to match the contours of the original sculpture. The surface of the bronze is re-textured to match the original.



Bronze assembly & welding



Welding; Segments are re-aligned and welded together. The seams of the join are hand detailed to match the original. The process of matching the texture is an extremely specialised skill requiring meticulous attention to detail and an artist's eye. The stainless steel attachment points that will fix the sculpture in place are usually welded into place at this time.



Bronze grinding & welding



Patina

The completed sculpture is sandblasted to clean-up and even out the surface before it is coloured.

Patination; The metal is coloured using chemicals which react with the surface to produce the natural corrosion we associate with bronze, deep greens, olives, red browns and black. All chemicals are chosen in line with conservation practice, containing no chlorides or lead. The patination is built up in layers.



Wax finishing: A durable microcrystalline wax seals the surface and protects the sculpture from damage. Microcrystalline is recommended by museums as the best treatment for non-ferrous metals.

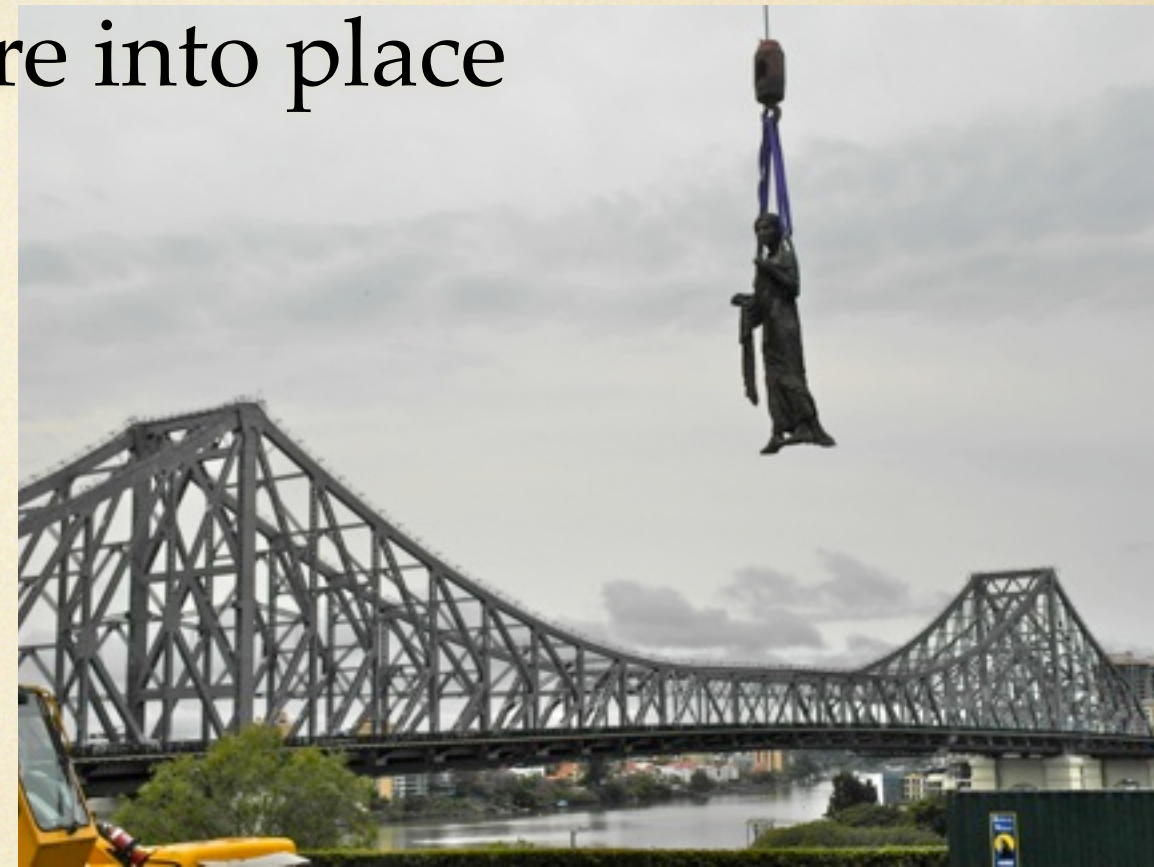


Lifting the sculpture into place

The completed sculpture was freighted to Brisbane several weeks before installation.

The Install was carefully coordinated between our SA studios and the team in Brisbane. We flew up to install the piece with all preparations already in place.

The Heritage listed walkway made it impossible to get small lifting equipment into the courtyard. The School hired a crane that could lift the sculpture right over the roof of the walkway to place it precisely. As a result of such heavy equipment we had the spectacle of seeing the sculpture suspended in the sky over Brisbane's dramatic cityscape.



Installation

Installation typically takes a single day if all aspects are organised beforehand.

Holes are diamond drilled according to the artists prepared template. The sculpture is dry fitted, adjustments made as necessary and then permanently fixed into place using high strength epoxy.

The sculpture is permanently fixed down to a plinth that has been designed specifically for it.

The sculpture was given a final buff and polish the next day and was covered and wrapped so that the students would not see it before the unveiling the following week.



Unveiling

The sculpture was unveiled on All Hallows' day 2011.

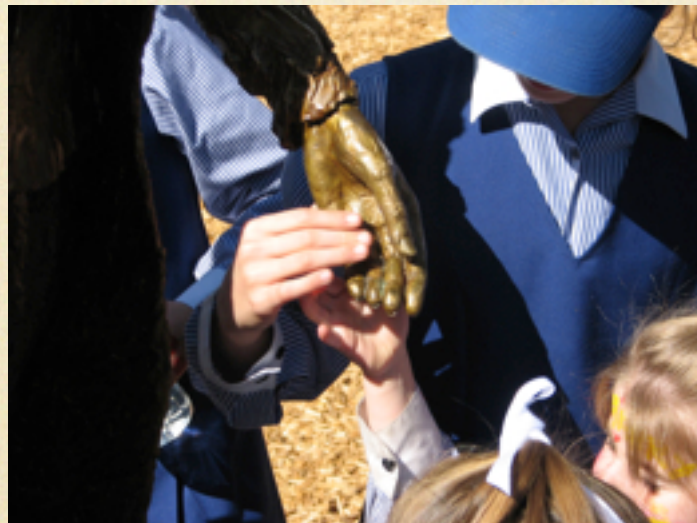
A special School Mass was followed by an unveiling ceremony. The sculpture was unwrapped by the youngest student and the Head girl. A beautiful moment when the cloths fell away from the statue, as a collective gasp went up from the gathered crowd. The sculpture was blessed by the Bishop.

Unveiling is an interesting moment, as a statue will become a permanent long term fixture in a school. Students who witness the moment of unveiling may in turn have their own children and grandchildren at the school. Capturing and remembering the moment when the sculpture arrived at the school may well become a significant moment, as the piece becomes part of the daily life of the school.



4. Sculpture an important tool for communicating values & ideas.

The theoretical background to sculpture projects



Figurative sculpture is an effective way to communicate complex ideas to children.

Sculpture captivates a different centre in the imaginative function of a child to the brightly coloured, moving image.

Children will relate with warmth to sculpture while they often will not glance twice at a painting.

Touch-ability / tactile aspects are important to children.

Physical form in space evokes stability and assurance. The evocative power of a sculpture is in the actual presence of a three dimensional form as it occupies space. It makes it real to them.



A point of reflection & contemplation



For adults sculpture is a still point in the world. It is a point of reflection in a world that moves very rapidly.

We are bombarded with imagery from television, computer and advertising – coloured temporary imagery, disposable imagery.

Sculpture creates a dynamic opposite to this; it is permanent, deeply considered imagery, imbued with concepts and metaphors. Many layers of meaning are captured within a single artwork.

This allows the contemplative mind to actively explore the nuances and symbolism.

My art starts from a basic premise; that art is both communication and revelation. This has been so since early humans painted the first cave paintings, which are our first evidence of reflective consciousness evolving in the human mind.

To communicate to a general public the symbols used must have meaning to that public. The human form and its interpretation is one of the most accessible and immediate symbols we can use, while also being as infinitely subtle as we are ourselves.

There is no single product, item, idea which is sold, promoted or advertised without the aid of the human presence. Who we are and who we might aspire to be is constantly reflected back to us. The aspirations of a consumer society are wrapped in the gloss of human beauty, a distorted aesthetic.

Sculpture gives an opportunity to reflect our humanity on a different and more profound level. In this sculpture we see a woman who was unafraid to face the disorder of her own society, who was prepared to encounter poverty, depravation and disapproval, who was also ready to embrace joy, companionship and change; who was ready to give herself whole heartedly to her mission.

It is a profound and wonderful privilege to be able to place an image that reflects on these human qualities. A child growing to adulthood in this place will encounter this image in many different ways over the years. I hope it will leave a strong internal image of a whole and authentic woman taking her place in a society in deep need of her clear and compassionate nature.

Communication & Revelation





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1778 - 1841

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Commissioned by:
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Liquid Metal Studios project management
Will Kuiper

Historian & research assistant
Jennifer Lawrence

Bronze casting
Australian Bronze

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Presentations by Sr Carmel Bourke RSM
Audio CD set

"Yours ever affectionate, M. C. McAuley"
excerpts form the letters of a very special woman
Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy.

Advisory Committee
Adelaide:
Sr Lyn Beck RSM

Brisbane:
Lee-Anne Perry
Angela O Malley