

B. Blanchette

Bruce's Studio News

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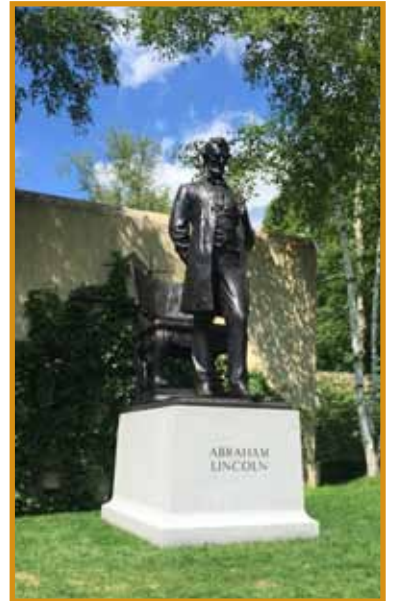
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Sunday Jazz at Saint-Gaudens

Augustus Saint-Gaudens, our greatest nineteenth century American sculptor was born in Ireland but immigrated to the U.S. at a very young age. He grew up in New York and apprenticed as a cameo carver, a trade that influenced much of his later works. In maturity, his Civil War monuments are what place him at the top of America's great sculptors of the 19th century. His home in later years was in Cornish, NH not far from where I live, and was in its heyday, a gathering place for artists and performing artists in what was known as the Cornish Colony. His home is now a National Historic Site administered by the National Park Service. Although he died 110 years ago, the home, studio, and gardens remain a beautiful setting for a wonderful museum, resident artists, summer music concerts, and meditation.

Only a 40 minute drive from Walpole, my wife Karen and I try to avail ourselves of the inspirational surroundings once or twice each summer season. The varied musical programs are performed under the expansive shade of the grape arbor outside the "Little Studio" where Saint-Gaudens worked. Visitors can sit under the arbor with the musicians, or bring chairs, blankets, picnic lunches, wine and drink while populating the large grassy lawn in front of the studio while listening to music. The view of Mt. Ascutney in Vermont adds to the spectacular scenery.

This past Sunday Karen, myself and two friends visited the site once again, and enjoyed a 2 hour jazz performance presented by the National Parks Centennial Jazz Band. Saint Gaudens hosted musicians from the New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park to perform. This gem of a historical site is well worth the visit if you live in the New England region. Art and Music in an idyllic outdoor setting. What could be better!



Mike Daley photo



Meanwhile... back in my studio...

Work continues and with it unexpected conceptual evolution has begun to affect my process. The basic structure of the nine panel relief pictured below is nearing completion, but my original intent has begun to change as the abstract architectural framework has transformed itself in my mind to an idiom of real world contrasts and societal disparities. Whereas my reliefs over the past number of years take inspiration from satellite imagery in which I have reinterpreted natural land-forms through manipulation of media and process, this work is structured by the media and process first, idiomatically finding a secondary interpretation by association with related events.

The first thought that came to mind as the project began was "coded" in my thought as *sprawl*. (The negative connotation given to architectural growth without planning constraints). However, as the sprawling city abstraction grew, I began to inform myself with actual circumstances relative to the cities and slums of the world. I listened to speakers like Marwa Al-Sabouni discuss (a TED Talk) "How Syria's architecture laid the foundation for brutal war"; how the new architecture "divided it's once tolerant, multicultural society into single-identity enclaves divided by class and religion". And Hugh Evans talking about "What it means to be a citizen of the world", and describe the hopelessness of extreme poverty in the world so passionately that I started to investigate Google-earth images of some of the largest and most appalling slums of our time. The contrast drawn between the "haves" and "have-nots" in the aerial views of Mumbai, Caracas, Kibera, or Dharavi were, and are, eye opening.

What I am now thinking about is a product of overlapping exposure to a world out of balance and my new-found (underlying) desire to have others visit this metaphorical world view. There are layers of beliefs that surround all of us when it comes to how we live and relate as humans today. All architecture is an expression of a living standard, and can be means to perceive others differently. The concept of "gentrification" in cities like Boston, Seattle, New York and Atlanta may seem to be a positive, but not if you are the ones being gradually squeezed out of your homes by redevelopment and economic changes.

Nothing in America resembles the worst slums and poverty in third world countries, but disparities between rich and poor do exist in our divided culture. What solutions vis a vis architecture can point to a solution? What way can art contribute? What way politics? I believe that the truth is objectified by an artistic vision of reality, while political rhetoric can often lead us into dark corners of deceit.



So as the season of political rhetoric intensifies... be cautious and afraid! In an unprecedented presidential race to select the lesser of two evils, we are left to decide who will give us the best chance to solve America's problems of poverty, violence, social class, religious, ethnic and racial prejudice as well as human rights, economic equality, and justice? Because art is about politics too...

because I believe we are living under the spectre of political disaster for America I urge you to click on the link following this Newsletter...

Feel free to type unsubscribe in the subject of your reply... or offer your response.