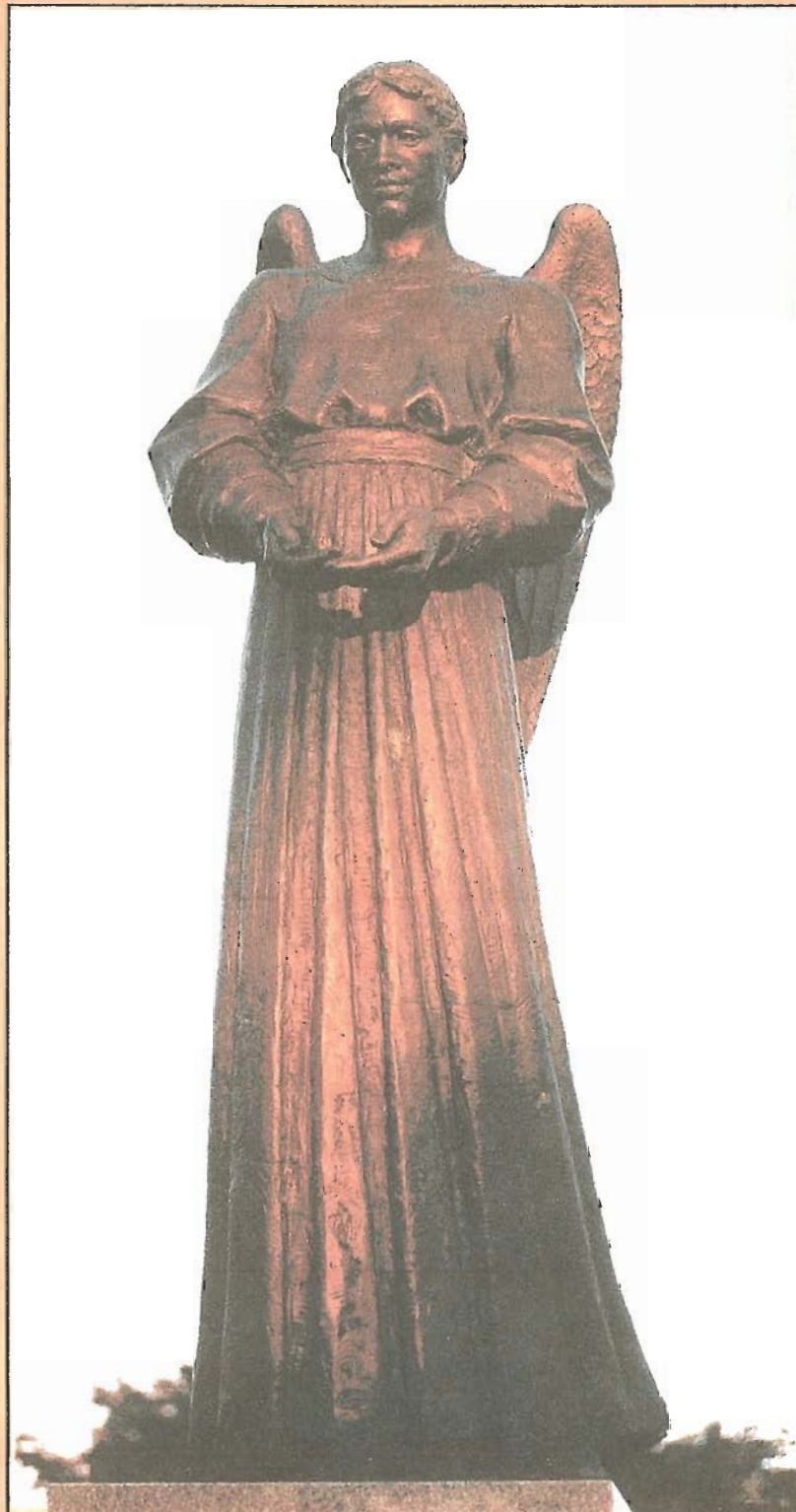


Muse & Spirit[®]

VOL. X, No. 2

A Publication of Center for Faith & the Arts[®]

Spring/Summer 2007



A Classical Sculptor in the 21st Century

By J. Daniel Brown

James Barnhill tells the story of entering his sculpture in an exhibition held in New Bern, NC. It was a competitive event which offered cash awards. He confesses that he knew immediately that he had no chance of winning any awards because he alone had entered a traditional piece of sculpture. All the other pieces were "contemporary." And the juror was curator of modern art at the North Carolina Museum of Art. Three weeks after the exhibition had closed, he received a check for three hundred dollars – he had won the *People's Choice* prize. Barnhill likes to think that says something about his choice of style as well as the choice some other sculptors make. The story tells one something not only of Barnhill but also the current status of the majority of sculptors. Fortunately, there are more sculptors of Barnhill's type than one might think.

His work can be seen at various places, including the University of North Carolina at Greensboro where his rendition of *Minerva* presides over the Garden of Wisdom. A gift to the university in 2003 from the class of 1953. *Minerva* has become part of the university logo. Her image carries her beauty to many places on various and sundry missions. Barnhill seems to like this piece very much, and has a right to do so. *Minerva* is beautiful. (cf. page 3)

Mission Viejo, California in Orange County borders Laguna Beach, Laguna Hills, and Laguna Woods. There in the Mission Hospital Regional Medical Center,

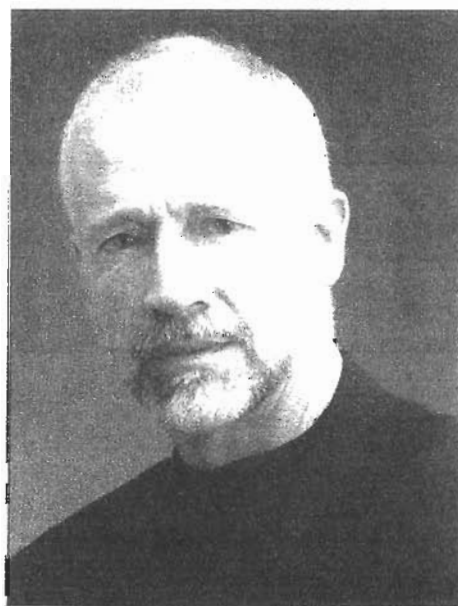
operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph, one can view Barnhill's sculpture entitled *Christ the Healer*. In this work one sees the compositional element of an equilateral triangle, symbolic of the Trinity. A flowing linear element, running through the arms, legs, and torsos, draws the three figures together within the triangle. One also sees



Minerva

the wounds in the feet and hands of the Christ. The child in this piece was modeled by Barnhill's son, the woman by his wife, and Barnhill himself modeled for the figure of the Christ. The 1997 piece is slightly over life-size. (cf. inside front cover)

The angel on the front cover of this issue of *Muse & Spirit* was rendered by Barnhill in collaboration with Randy Hudson of Hayes Large Architects and was commissioned for the citizens of Montoursville, Pennsylvania. The piece honors sixteen high school students and five chaperones from Montoursville, all of whom were lost aboard TWA flight 800 in 1996. The angel stands on a granite block eight feet high. He is just inside a ring of twenty-one maple trees spaced twenty-one feet apart. There is a brick path and benches within the circle of trees. The angel and the base stand seventeen



James Barnhill

Photographer – Charles Watkins

(Continued on page 4)

A Classical Sculptor...

(Continued from page 3)

feet high.

Barnhill was also the artist for a bronze twice-life-size figure for the city of Mountain Brook, Alabama; a portrait bust of Booker T. Washington for the National Park Service in Burnt Chimney, Virginia; and two life-size figures for the Public Library in Hickory, NC.

He has been commissioned by Northern Telecom, Research Triangle Park, NC; Holy Infant Catholic Church, Durham, NC; Southern Bell Telephone, Greensboro, NC; Broyhill Family Foundation, Lenoir, NC; Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Birmingham, Alabama, by a gift from Time, Inc. (cf. *Echo* inside front cover) 1991; and for the City of Asheville, NC (cf. *Little Sipper* inside front cover) 1995.

One of Barnhill's most significant works recognizes an important historical event. On Monday, February 1, 1960, four freshmen from North Carolina A&T State University walked to the F.W. Woolworth's Company store in Greensboro to sit down at the counter for coffee. Service was refused. Their presence and mission at the counter was doubled and re-doubled in the following days and weeks by additional students, male and female. The end result of the courageous act of these four young men was equal service in all the stores. This was, we know now, one of the poignant acts taken by the black community (and many supportive whites) to provide equal rights to all citizens. Martin Luther King, Jr. called this the pivotal point in the struggle for civil rights.

David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Jr., and Joseph McNeill were the four young men who participated in this first "sit in" in North Carolina during those turbulent years. Three of these men still live. David Richmond died in 1990.

In 2002, a monument was erected on the campus of North Carolina A&T State University depicting these four men in their youth. That monument stands in front of the Dudley Building on campus. The overall height is fifteen to sixteen feet. The figures are about ten feet tall. The

sculpture was unveiled and dedicated on February 1, 2002. The sculptor was James Barnhill. (cf. inside back cover).

Barnhill was born in Asheville, NC, in 1955. His father worked for the National Weather Bureau. At age two the family moved to Fairfax, Virginia. Then they spent two years near Frankfort, Germany, in Bad Hamburg. Returning to the United States, they lived in Falls Church, Virginia, and finally settled in Raleigh, NC, where James graduated from Jesse O. Sanderson High School.

Then it was on to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he majored in art education. He opted mostly for painting and drawing and had only two sculpture courses. To complete the requirements for graduation, Barnhill chose an advanced German class. Following graduation he spent a year in Germany – primarily Marburg and Phillips University (where Martin Luther debated, Barnhill likes to point out).

Returning to North Carolina, Barnhill took a job in

a stained glass studio in Knightdale, NC. He worked on windows for churches and residential needs.

After a year of stained glass work, he turned to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and completed a Master of Fine Arts degree. That is where he became a sculptor. One of the influences on him was a well-known professor, the late Andrew Martin. It was in this program at Greensboro that, for the first time, Barnhill worked with a model. Two other people also greatly influenced his development – the late Ben Berns and Peter Agastinni. "They taught me to work off the edge of the model." He took for his personal motto, *I want to communicate something worth communicating and communicate it well.* He learned well the elements of his art – line, shape, value (light/dark), pattern, texture, color. Barnhill's work embodies the elegance and grace of classical Greek sculpture but incorporates contemporary ideals of human beauty. Thus, his work marries

the abstract principles of design and composition to the natural form of the figure. His work ranges from small, indoor pieces to monumental outdoor pieces.

Currently, James Barnhill is a tenured professor at North Carolina A & T State University in Greensboro, NC, where he has been since 1996. He teaches four sections per semester along with studio responsibilities. He is active in Arts Alliance in downtown Greensboro. He is also serious about his religious faith. His affiliation has been with a long-standing, protestant denomination. He is knowledgeable about the Bible and able to cite passages that are significant for him. He seems to be a person who is faithful to his religion. And his company is delightful. Apparently, his students see him as a professor they enjoy, trust, love, and believe.

Professionally, he aims to enhance various settings with figurative sculpture. He works with live models. He sculpts both full round and relief. He sculpts for litur-

"I want to communicate something worth communicating and communicate it well."

gical needs. His work is characterized by elegance, grace, and the classical Greek ideals, and fits nicely in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He has won the prestigious James Wilbur Johnson Figurative Sculpture Competition (1987) at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. He won third place in the figurative sculpture competition at the New York Academy of Art in 1990. More recently he won first place in the 1992 competition at the Lyme Academy of Fine Arts in Lyme, Connecticut.

Barnhill is a man who produces his art as he believes it should be presented. The world is richer because of his ability and his vision. □

J. Daniel Brown is editor of Muse & Spirit.

Editor's Note: As this edition goes to press, it has been learned that James Barnhill has been named by the City of Greensboro, N.C. to sculpt a statue of Nathanael Greene, hero of the Revolutionary War.