

SCULPTOR CATHY FERRELL DRAWS HER INSPIRATION FROM AIR, LAND AND SEA

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Force
of Nature

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Shaped by a love of the sea, sculptor Cathy Ferrell's ancestors date back to the early settlers of New England. "We trace our roots back to the Plymouth Colony in the early 1600s," says Ferrell. "They were seafarers who earned their living in whaling and shipping and as merchants and bankers. So, I guess I have some of those genes. From an early age I was drawn to the power of the ocean and all its magnificent wildlife and sea creatures. My life and my work revolve around themes of nature."

On a wind-swept, stormy afternoon I paid a visit to Ferrell and her husband, Tuck, at their splendid home that sits on A1A a few miles south of Sebastian Inlet. In her light-filled lower level studio, Ferrell's detailed portrayals of dolphins, fish, great blue herons and sandhill cranes are evidence to the physical world she inhabits residing between the ocean and the Indian River, surrounded by the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge.

Deliberate and exacting in her work, Ferrell captures the essence of her subject in a pleasing and joyful way. Her passion, spirituality and enthusiasm abound. One of her most widely exhibited works is "Abaco Hogfish," circa 1999. First carved in strawberry alabaster and later produced from a mold made from the carving, it was cast in multi-colored patinas of bronze.

"I anchored my sloop in the cut of Double Breasted Cay in the Bahamas where the ledges and reef had a group of hogfish that was fascinating to watch," Ferrell recalls. "They were very curious creatures that colored up when they were



Ferrell's sandhill crane sculptures seem lifelike outdoors. The male is 47 inches tall, and the female is 41 inches tall.



A large scale snowy egret in clay is in the first steps in the lost wax process.

“The ocean sounds, tropical colors, and the constantly changing quality of light, as well as open spaces, are all inspirations for my work.”

excited or feeding. When I went into the water they kept bumping me in the arm as if to say, ‘Hey, pay attention to me.’ The shapes, colors and cheery attitude stuck with me, and became a sculpture.”

Her Vero Beach studio space allows Ferrell to sculpt life-sized projects while she often works in an adjoining garden on sunny days. Upstairs, in the main living area, Ferrell gains inspiration for the wide array of creatures that appear in bronze or stone.

“It’s perfect since these birds fly by at eye level so I can really focus in on the details of their wings and the trajectory of their flight,” explains Ferrell from her oceanfront deck. “The ocean sounds, tropical colors, and the constantly changing quality of light, as well as open spaces, are all inspiration for my work.”

Ferrell acquired her love of the sea growing up in Delray Beach, where the Klemann family moved from Michigan when she was 8 years old. Attending Palm Beach Day School, she won awards for her sculpture and paintings at the lakeside campus of the Society of the Four Arts.

“It was a half a block from school so I spent a lot of my lunch time up there since I had access to the library and art — the beautiful botanical and sculpture gardens,” Ferrell recalls. “It really enhanced my love of the arts.”

Her father, Robert, was a member of the Flying Tigers, a group of American fighter pilots that flew for China in aerial battles against the Japanese in the early 1940s. Her mother, Elizabeth, was an amateur archaeologist. For three months each summer the Klemanns would pile into the station wagon and head west ready to encounter all sorts of adventures.

“We went camping and fly-fishing, hiked the mountains and along the streams,” Ferrell remembers. “We spent one summer going up the coast to Alaska, seeing what life was like in these faraway communities. Through my parents, we found the world a wondrous place, full of natural beauty and revelations.”

Ferrell studied at University of Michigan’s School of Architecture and Design but departed quickly thanks to the frigid Ann Arbor weather. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Florida Atlantic University and holds a master’s in sculpture from the University of Miami. Commissions worked on in Pietrasanta and Carrara, Italy, were snapped up by collectors in Milan, West Germany and Paris. She apprenticed with Luis Montoya Studios International and still actively continues her studies with top sculptors.

As time progressed another important influence surfaced in Ferrell’s life. For years she sailed a 36-foot Cheoy Lee sloop in Caribbean waters and also became a licensed



“Indian River Morning,” 8 x 9 x 4 inches

When Cathy Ferrell finishes a sculpture in her studio, she ships it to a foundry in Colorado, where it is cast in metal.



RENEE BRADY

Cathy Ferrell's studio, located within view of the Indian River Lagoon and the Atlantic Ocean, is full of portrayals of creatures that live just outside. "It's perfect since these birds fly by at eye level so I can really focus in on the details of their wings and the trajectory of their flight."

captain delivering boats from the Bahamas to Florida. Those memories found their way into many of her pieces.

"I was able to spend time on the water and experience new places," she says. "Looking out from the cockpit it's such a different view. Native dolphin and tarpon, wintering right whales and all sorts of marvels. I became a certified diver, which allowed me access to an underwater world, leading to ideas for many works of art."

Her sculpting style is expressionistic and impressionistic, reminiscent of the sculptures of Degas and Bugatti. Ferrell uses a variety of materials, having worked in wood, stone, bronze and precious metals. Currently working in bronze, in small editions, she matches technique and material to the inspiration and subject that also include dancers, animals and children.

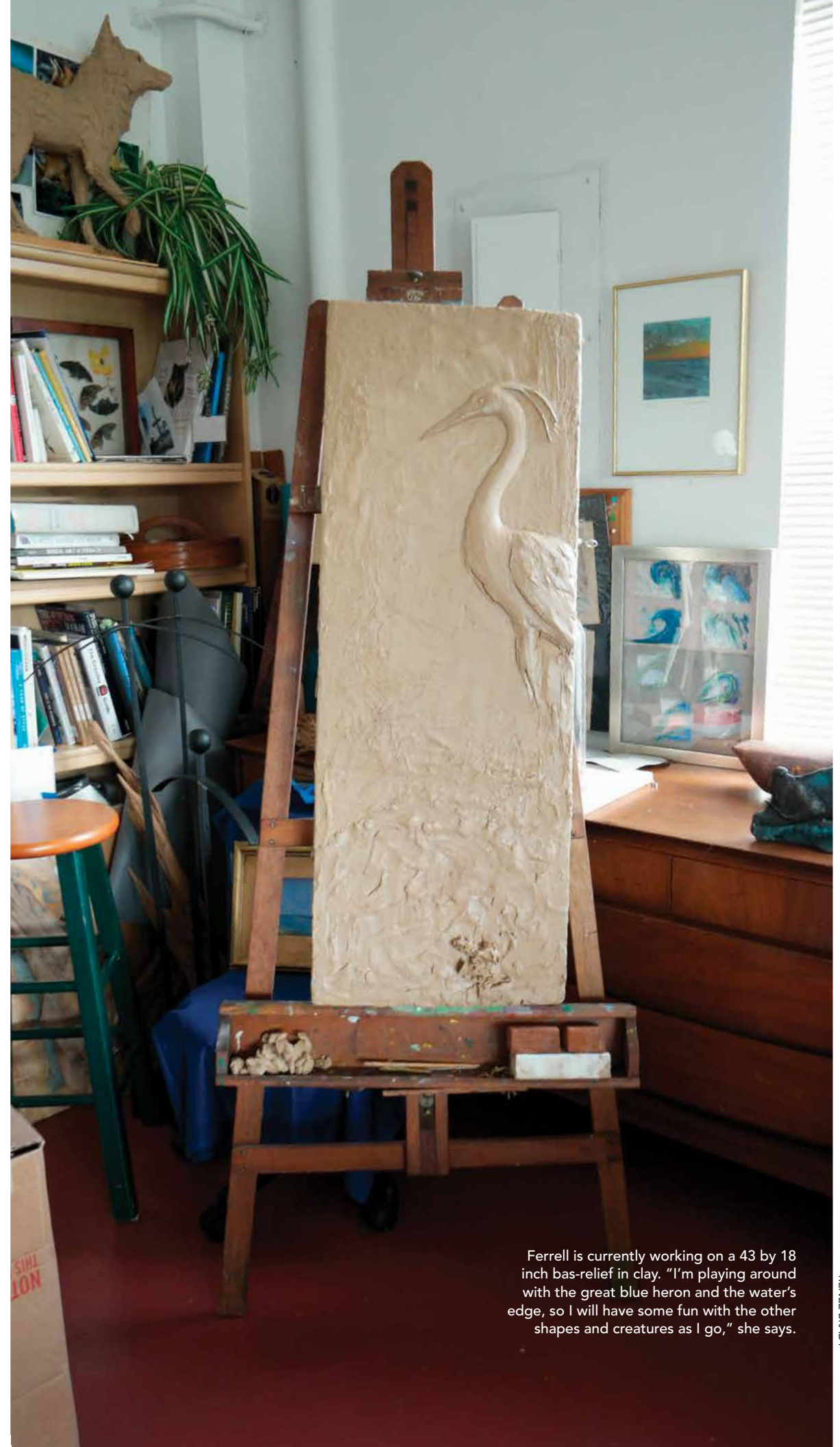
Ferrell's sculpture is exhibited in museums and in private and corporate collections, as well as in homes in Italy, France, Norway, West Germany and the Bahamas. A member of a dozen national arts organizations, Ferrell's work

is on display at Vero's J.M. Stringer Gallery, Cheryl Newby Gallery in Pawley's Island, South Carolina, and the Mystic Seaport Maritime Gallery.

Vero residents Brenda and Dan Cavicchio own a trio of Ferrell's pieces — the "Annunciation," "Abaco Hogfish" and "Mythological Cartological Fish" — created from marble from Michelangelo's quarry in Italy, circa 1083.

"Her pieces feel like a living presence," Brenda Cavicchio observes. "You feel a special energy that comes through her work that enhances your mood. They're very uplifting, something beautiful, yet playful. Once people discover her work, they are really drawn to it."

Among Ferrell's awards and honors include the Silver Medal of Honor from Audubon Artists of America, the Sculpture Society's Bedi-Makky Foundry Prize, and numerous prizes from Pen and Brush, The Salmagundi Club and American Artists Professional League, and a prized Sculptor in Residence at the prestigious Brookgreen Gardens in Pawley, South Carolina.

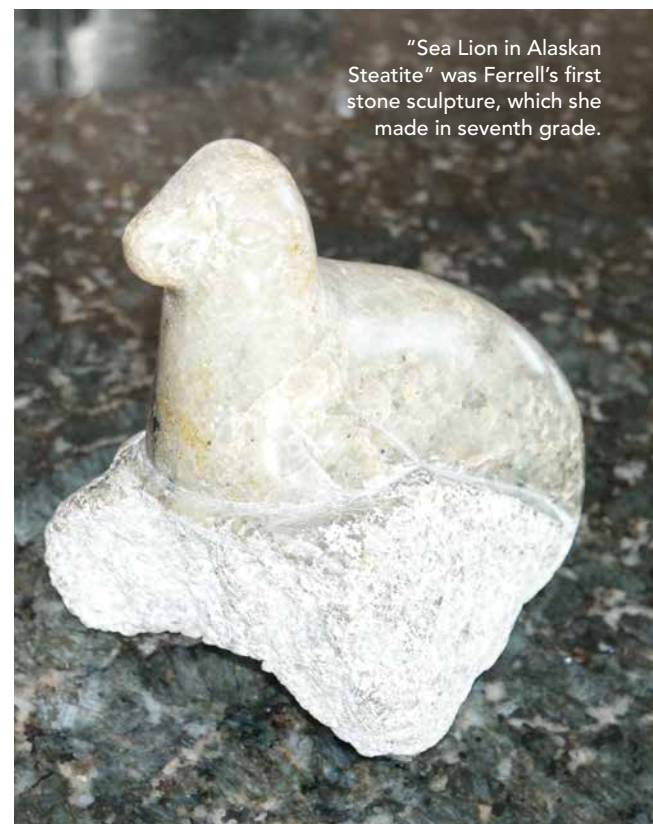


Ferrell is currently working on a 43 by 18 inch bas-relief in clay. "I'm playing around with the great blue heron and the water's edge, so I will have some fun with the other shapes and creatures as I go," she says.

RENEE BRADY



"Fishing the Flats"



"Sea Lion in Alaskan Steatite" was Ferrell's first stone sculpture, which she made in seventh grade.



"Watchful View"

RENEE BRADY

When the clay sculptures are finished in her studio Ferrell ships them off to Art Castings, a foundry in Loveland, Colorado, that handles work from sculptors and artists across the country. Sitting at the foot of the towering Rocky Mountains, the 25,000-square-foot foundry uses the lost-wax process to transform the sculptor's ideas into an exact bronze replica of the original model. It's a method of metal sculpting practiced since ancient times of the Greeks.

The atmosphere is a curious combination of factory and art studio. Part assembly line and part sorcery, the sculpting process begins with the clay or wax model and ends with a majestic work of art. Most of the 40 dedicated employees are artists in their own right, applying their talents in each step of the intensively hands-on casting process.

Tony Workman has been the owner and general manager of Art Castings for three decades. "Cathy is very talented and fun to be around. Everyone in the shop enjoys working with her," Workman says. "Our employees are the artists behind the artists, who turn the clay masterpiece into bronze. I've got the best game in town."

It all begins with a rubber mold that is made from the original. Wax is poured into it to make a replica. Then the positive is painstakingly retouched, because every

imperfection on the wax will show up in metal. The months-long process continues when a wax positive is dipped in an adhesive and coated with sand made of silica. Up to eight coats of the white sand are applied in increasing coarseness. After the piece is thoroughly dried, it is placed in a 2,000-degree oven where, after four hours, the wax will melt away from inside.

The pour is the crucial moment in the bronze casting process. Dressed in dark, full-fronted leather aprons with sleeves, chap-like leggings and face shields, two men working a chain and pulley hoist up a stone crucible and tip molten bronze, glowing an orange the color of a burnt sky, into a plaster mold.

After pouring, the metal is left to cool. The men hammer apart the shell and release the sculpture within. Bronze sculptures are then coated in a variety of ways. Finishes can simulate the patina of old bronze in green or a dozen other colors. To preserve the natural color of bronze, a clear finish is applied to the sculpture.

"The work done at Art Castings is so compelling, so fresh," Ferrell says. "They are very detail-oriented, and there is a nice interaction with their employees. They go out of their way to assist you. It's one giant family and many are sculptors who work on their own pieces at the foundry. I'm fortunate to work with all these wonderful people." ☘