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ART

An angel in our midst

Sculpture signifies a post-Sept. 11 "strength and insecurity"

BY SARAH LEIMERT

Lesbian sculptor Sherrie Taha's latest piece, a work of unexpected magnitude and pertinence in our post-Sept. 11 world, is on display from Sept. 21 to Oct. 26 at Art Home Gallery.

"Angel Rising," a 5-foot-5 bronzed angel bearing expansive wings and an expressive countenance, is her most ambitious project to date.

"A friend actually suggested I sculpt an angel," says Taha, explaining how one becomes inspired to construct a life-size statue. "I hadn't ever done anything that large before, but something about her [suggestion] sunk quickly and deeply into my psyche... I thought, 'Why not?'"

Begun last year, the sculpture was essentially finished in two months. Although Taha was not sure why an angel seemed like the right choice for a project, the events of Sept. 11, 2001, brought it right into focus. "I stopped wondering about why I was doing an angel," she remembers, "and just focused on putting something positive into the world."

And, one look suggests, rather majestic.

"Her feet anchor her in a solid stance on a foundation of rocks," says Taha, describing the piece. "A gentle breeze is evident in the quiet motion of her skirt. She stabilizes herself with one hand on her leg for the physically uncomfortable maneuver of standing while she reaches out for help up with the other. Her wings, one open, the other closed, display both her strength and insecurity. Unknown hardship can be seen on her face as she pulls herself up, assisted by the unseen hand of God."

Taha's road to becoming a sculptor was a long and winding one. The oldest of seven children, she was born in a small town in southern Iowa and grew up in Des Moines. After a year of college in Minneapolis, she became a lab technician and worked for a major pace-maker manufacturer for several years.

Back in school on "the 10-year plan," the artist began an accounting program at University of Minnesota. While fulfilling humanities requirements, Taha "reconnected with passionate feelings" she had for the arts but had never allowed herself to embrace. After a number of moves, she finally ended up with a degree in art education.

Soon after she began student teaching, Taha moved with her partner and daughter to Oregon. Once here, she was "shocked by the realities of shrinking school budgets" and, after substitute teaching for three years, realized it was unlikely she would teach art in schools.

The following three years brought another daughter and a split with her partner. She produced very little artwork during this time, although "it was often on [my] mind."

During the past seven years, however, Taha's attention has been increasingly focused on sculpture. "My personal journey to reconnect with what I believe has



always been my 'calling' seems not to have been a direct route," she says. "But sometimes you have to wash all the dishes before you can make and eat dinner."

Taha's goal for her own pieces is to illustrate to her audience the strong emotions behind and within them. "Although a sense of the spiritual and aspects of nature are common elements in my work, 'Angel Rising' can be perceived as more overtly religious than any of my other work."

The sculptor has several pieces she hopes to complete soon, including one titled "The Power and Joy of Freedom." She's also had some help along the way—the Metal Arts Group in Troutdale is responsible for the beautiful bronze casting of her work. "I can't imagine a more professional, experienced and talented group of people," she says.

Also, the Portland Area Business Association and Firehouse No. 12 in Vancouver, Wash., have granted Taha a professional development scholarship. Thanks to this generous assistance, some of her displayed work will be soon be cast in glass. ☐

"Angel Rising" and several more sculptures by SHERRIE TAHA are for sale from Sept. 21 to Oct. 26 at Art Home Gallery, 436 S.E. Sixth Ave. Visit Taha and her work at www.sherriesculpture.com.



Meet Sherrie Taha and "Angel Rising" Sept. 21 at Art Home Gallery

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