



Profile in Excellence – Classical Bronze

Over the last year, an all-volunteer project titled “Lost Wax/Found History” run by professors Melissa Morison and Norwood Viviano, enticed students of classics and art and design to make, by recipes ancient and modern, bronze statues in the classical style.

Melissa Morison of the Department of Classics explains that, “genuinely interdisciplinary work like this always becomes more than just the sum of its parts. Creative synergy and new ways of knowing result when people with vastly different skills and training work together toward a common research goal.”

Norwood Viviano of the Department of Art and Design noted the combination of factors which led to their success, “Provost Gayle Davis’s support for the project encouraged a liberal arts dialogue between faculty and students in art and design and classics. A collaborative project like “Lost Wax/Found History” allows students to become leaders taking on teaching roles and sharing information between the individual areas.”

Morison adds, “It’s meant a lot to me, personally, to watch an ancient process come alive and to see our students inspired by that process. I know that this direct involvement with the challenges faced by ancient artists has helped our classics students to better understand the daily lives and world view of the ancient Greeks. When we do experimental work

like this, we’re doing more than just studying artistic style – we’re examining the ways in which technological processes reflect cultural values and perceptions of the world.”

Over many weeks, the students researched sources of inspiration, designed their projects, sculpted them in plasticine, took preliminary molds, cast positive images in wax, and formed ceramic molds able to withstand 1,000 degrees of preheating as well as the heat of the liquid bronze. On casting day, they donned their leather coats, chaps, foot protection, heavy gloves, eye protection, and helmets with face shields and learned how each team should lift, skim, transport, and pour. A week later, after sandblasting and fine cleaning, the forms were revealed, refined, and made ready for the addition of patina of various shades. What had once been just an initial sketch or photocopy from a book used for inspiration emerged in a new form, weighty and speaking of the ages.

“We’re very lucky to have had the opportunity to work on this project,” Morison acknowledges. “One of the things that most attracted me to Grand Valley was the wide range of opportunities that faculty have to initiate projects like this. It is very rare for undergraduates anywhere in the country to have the opportunity to do experimental work like this, and we’re lucky to have access to such great facilities.”

