

The Perfect Model

By David E. Parvin, A.L.I.

Recently, someone placed on the Forum section of the web site of the Association of Lifecasters International a link to a photograph and asked for “comments.” The piece shown was a life casting of a female torso from the top of the neck to mid thighs. The casting appeared to have been made in standard gypsum material such as plaster, hydrocal, hydro-stone, etc. and had a painted-on metallic patina. The pose was straight with the weight evenly distributed on both legs. The left and right halves were symmetrical except that the right arm hung down the right side and the left arm crossed over the body with the left hand covering the genital area. The model had an athletic body which appeared to have been conditioned by a high endurance activity such as distance running.

In the October, 2007 issue of *SJ*, I wrote an article on critique titled “I Really Mean It, Please Give Me Your Honest Opinion.” I explained that even though meaningful critique is so important for artistic growth, it can be elusive. True to form, a month after the request was posted, only one reply had been forthcoming. And also predictably, the reply was encouraging but offered nothing in the way of how to improve the work. Finally, I waded in and made three suggestions. The first was that the artist try using materials that produce a more professional look such as raku fired clay or perhaps resins or Forton MG combined with metal powders. The second was that posing the model with her weight on either leg would tilt the pelvis and along with lowering or raising either shoulder and turning the head to the side would establish a curve to the torso resulting in a more pleasing composition. The third was to use a model with a somewhat more softly conditioned look. I then referenced a series of four previous articles titled “How Do I Cast Thee For Profit, Let Me Count the Ways” which describe in much more detail how kick one’s life castings up to a higher rung on the ladder of excellence. (These and other articles can now be found in the library section of the Association of Lifecasters International’s web site, www.lifecasting.org).

In the article about critique mentioned above, I pointed out that most people really don’t want critique but usually are looking for affirmation. However, I assumed in this case that the person really wanted meaningful advice. I would have much preferred to have talked in person. Unfortunately, we were separated by an ocean and practical communication is typing back and forth by email. I suspected that the artist had attempted to make something beautiful as possible; but it may very well have been that the stark stiffness of the piece was just what the artist wanted and my advice was not on the mark or even appreciated. At least I tried.

The first two suggestions were, I think, straight foreword and probably not taken as if I had been at all condescending. But the third was somewhat more delicate. I didn’t want to come across as any number of television commercials which have irked me. One was a guy in a bazillion dollar sailboat who advised the viewer to contact American Fargo Lynch to chart a path that would assure the viewer a life of utter luxury in retirement. I always suspected that American Fargo Lynch would have suggested that all I would have to do is invest fifty or sixty thousand a month for thirty or forty years and I could have my own sailboat. Some life insurance ads have affected me the same way, “Contact New Washington Life to find out just how much life insurance you need to assure that your loved ones are secure if the unthinkable happens.” I’m pretty sure that New Washington Life’s idea of how much I need is considerably more than I think I need. I do not feel an obligation to leave enough money to wife, Emilie, so that she can buy a multimillion dollar condo in Hawaii and lounge around all day drinking margaritas with Bruce, the tennis pro/pool boy/masseur. For me to say, “Just use a perfect model,” might be taken the same way. After all, for many, **a model at all** may be hard enough to come by.

But I can not over stress how important the perfect model is in life casting. With traditional sculpting, we can cheat. In other words, a model may be for just general reference. We can make the finished product what we imagine even if the result differs significantly from the model. But life casting shares the same limitation that photography has, “What is actually there is what you get.”

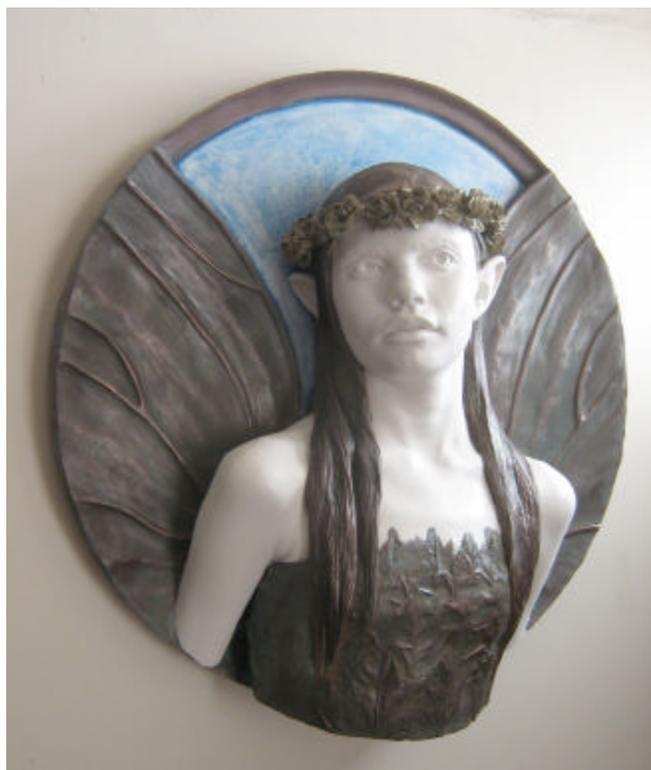
There are two examples of photography that, I believe, have especially benefited from perfect models and without which would not have been so successful both aesthetically and financially. Take the annual Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue. Years ago when it first appeared, I was duly impressed. There weren’t just pretty women almost barefoot all over, there were some of the world’s top models almost barefoot all over. The second example is the work of photographer Howard Schatz. Anyone not familiar with Schatz, just Goggle him. I have a number of his books, the latest *H2O* is absolutely beautiful. I suggest purchasing it before it goes out of print and becomes more expensive as most of his earlier ones have. Part of the reason that I consider Schatz is the best current photographer of the human form that I am aware of, is that he doesn’t compromise on his models, both male and female. Of course, he doesn’t have to. He makes so much money that he can afford the very best. Schatz may even own a bazillion dollar sailboat and regularly send Mrs. Schatz off to the

beach condo for a vacation complete with Bruce and he isn't even dead yet!

It isn't just beauty that a model must have because it isn't just beauty that we may be trying to capture. Photograph #1 is of a faerie portrait that I did. While my twelve year old model was certainly beautiful, it was her natural faerieness that drew me to her. The only change I made to her face was to add the pointed ears. Of the many hundreds of life castings that I have done, photograph #2 may be my most interesting portrait. A friend who owned a Native American talent agency told me that he had found the perfect face, "Looks like the Indian Head Nickel." I keep copy on my studio wall and visitors often comment on it. Other artists have requested copies for themselves and have used it for reference when sculpting Native American faces.

(There is a tragic end to this story, the 100% Sioux whose face I cast was later convicted of murder and is now serving a life sentence.) We could be looking for an unusual characteristic, a certain ethnic look, a particular athletic conditioning, etc. Perfect can mean any number of things.

While I don't have the resources of Sports Illustrated or Howard Schatz, I have had the fortune to have worked with some absolutely wonderful models, even perfect ones. I described how I have found these models in an article that was published in *SJ* in September, 2004. That was so long ago that Jon the Exalted Benevolent Dictator, Keeper of the Secret Handshake, and Wearer of the Big Funny Hat at *SJ* (EBDKSHWBFH), decided to run it again as a public service in this issue. If I can find great models, so can anybody else.



Photograph #1



Photograph #2