2000 AND BEYOND
“Its tall vertical form references the tradition of native American totems, while its biomorphic shape echoes the organic motifs favored by Surrealists. An important feature of Surrealism is biomorphism. While biomorphs can be appreciated as abstract shapes or for their allusion to sources in nature, they aren’t specific subjects in nature. Rather, they convey the organic essence of life.

With its concentrated fields of color, abstract form and vigorous gestural expressionism, this sculpture shows the influence of Abstract Expressionism, which in turn, drew upon Surrealism. Like Surrealist art, this piece shows an interest in myth, archetypal symbols and the unconscious.

This bronze embodies the qualities that are the foundation of American modernism: abstraction, the natural form, mythic resonance, and an emphasis on the essence of things. It also represents a crossbreeding of the ancient and the contemporary with its use of bronze, its abstract form and its transcendental presence.”

“Slow Art” tour, 2017,
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
Jennie Dotts, docent
For decades, country life provided the tranquility and privacy that sustained me and my work. It buffered me from distractions. But it also involved travel and maintenance that became burdensome. And, after a while, I missed the close and regular contact with people, the energizing lift of being around them. In 2015, I made the difficult decision to sell my beloved Marlboro in Aylett, where I’d operated my foundry since 1970.

Two years later, I sold my winter studio in Sarasota, whose isolated character has been rapidly overrun with condos and shopping centers. After 40 years, it was time for a change and I’ve seized exciting opportunities to expand my studio and living spaces in Richmond, where I have access to established foundries to assist with my work.

In 2016, the VMFA installed my “Untitled Totem” in its sculpture garden. This bronze originated as a maquette in 1978, when I was working in Pietrasanta, Italy. My long-time friend and supporter, Henrietta Near, commissioned a bronze from that maquette for her garden in Richmond’s Fan District in 2005. Eleven years later, she donated it to the VMFA in memory of her late husband, Pinkney, the museum’s first curator. I’m deeply grateful to Henrietta and the VMFA for making this sculpture available for wide public viewing in a lovely natural setting, so rich in history.

In 2017, the VMFA acquired another large-scale commissioned bronze, “Pentangle,” from the estate of Eric and Jeanette Lipman. The relocation of this piece to the museum is serendipitous. I first met the Lipmans at what was then called the VMFA’s Institute of Contemporary Art in 1980, where I had a solo exhibition.
A space for a sculpture in the Lipman’s new home had been designated by their architect when the house was built. After meeting with Eric and Jeanette at the house, I created three maquettes that I thought would suit the space without interfering with their river view. A mix of the abstract and the organic, the bronze is a low-slung, geometrical piece with a greenish-blue patina and surface texture intended to blend with the dramatic natural setting and crisp, contemporary design of the home.

2017 was another milestone year. That’s when Media General, a powerhouse media company headquartered in Richmond, was acquired by another company and Media General’s entire art collection auctioned. I had two pieces at Media General: a large painting, “Wild Indians on the Beach” and a bronze sculpture, “Mattaponi Memories.”

Mattaponi Memories
Aylett Art Foundry, 2000
Sarasota, FL
Bronze

Photo Credit: Terri Shanks
When Media General expanded its headquarters in the early 1990s with impressive new buildings in downtown Richmond, Jack Blanton was their art consultant, charged with selecting new works for public spaces and offices. He now asked me to create a sculpture specifically for the executive office rotunda. I designed a geometrical bronze to be viewed from the intersecting hallways and circular reception area.

I was pleased to meet the couple who acquired the bronze at the auction and to know that it had acquired an appreciative new home.

In 2017, the daughter of a dear deceased friend approached me about creating a sculpture in memory of her father. This commission is of special interest because of my long association with her father. The location of her country estate at the rolling foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains in Virginia presents one of the most pristine, inspiring sites imaginable for the placement of an artwork.
The *maquette* chosen for this piece is reflective of values associated with a classic 19th century Virginia home that is enlivened by the presence of cattle, stately architecture, and the vastness of an uninterrupted sky. This geometrical design is adorned with multiple horns, another example of my intuitive interest in combining the primitive and the contemporary, the organic and the abstract.

As a sculptor, I’m always interested in experimenting with new materials and directions. This has led to renewed interest in exploring all the possibilities of cast iron, of which there are many. While it is a brutal material, it lends itself to many types of surface finishes and effects. I’ve been waiting for years to have the leisure to pursue this interest.

For decades, I’ve done my own casting. This allowed for spontaneity as well as control as I developed my own techniques, geared for my type of sculpture. Now, I am ready to move in new
directions while shifting workloads to other experienced foundry workers. Without the burden of concern for foundry production details, I feel an immense freedom to visualize new possibilities for sculpture. For thousands of years, casting techniques have been refined and I see myself as part of that historical continuum, forging new connections between art and technology.

In early 2018, a *maquette* of “America’s Gateway,” a large-scale sculpture commissioned by America’s Gateway Park in Miami, Florida was loaned to the Branch Museum of Architecture and Design in Richmond.

“During my formative high school days, I became a fan of Arthur C. Clarke, the British science fiction writer, science writer, futurist, and inventor. It was the 1950s.

Everyone was talking about satellite communication and connecting people around the world through TVs and phones. And then—to great surprise-- the Russian satellite Sputnik transmitted a “beep.. beep..beep” from outer space. That changed the world.

TV, radio and newspaper coverage of the event obsessed over new communication possibilities. In my own semi-rural North Carolina world, rocket launching became a craze among teenagers and young adults. Although most of these small, crude rockets only managed an altitude of a few hundred feet, they represented a universally shared vision for the future.

In 2009, after forty years of bronze casting experience and a lifelong fascination with Arthur Clarke, I decided to do a portrait of him. I depicted him - after several versions in clay and wax-as he appeared
often in the 1950’s: a contemplative man in midlife, looking to the future. The National Museum of Electronics in Maryland acquired this life-size bronze in 2019, where it dwells among radar antennae, jet planes, and other marvels of the human imagination.

Abstract though my sculptures may appear, they reflect a life-long urge to return to nature, to the origins of bronze as an enduring material for creating objects of beauty. My earliest bronzes, made in 1963, reveal an awareness of the ancient, sometimes ritualistic practice of making objects of beauty using molten metals. From my first casting and wax working, I felt a lasting connection to a creative force I can’t begin to explain. Despite the hard labor involved, I felt a rewarding connection to a tradition stretching to some of the earliest expressions of human creativity.

To illustrate the unique quality of each bronze, let me tell you about a recent sale of my work. It brought back fond memories of my early days of laboring over investment casting. As the sculpture was being loaded into the new owner’s car, a small amount of residue from the white, sandy remains of the mold sifted out. The powdery grains were a fragile, though enduring, reminder of my earlier days of investment casting, a process rarely used today.
Modeled and cast at my studio in Aylett, this *maquette* traveled to Sarasota, where I enlarged it for a client. The *maquette* for the enlarged bronze was back on the road, moving to exhibitions in Richmond at the VMFA, a gallery in Washington, DC, Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, and back to the Modern Art Gallery in Sarasota. It was exhibited four or five times before it was purchased in Virginia in 2015 and entered the next chapter of its life.

The life of a bronze is often long and migratory because the inherent quality of bronze is lasting and its beauty universally recognized.