IN MEMORIAM

CHARLES JULIUS UMLAUF

The Umlauf Sculpture Gardens and Museum, located in Austin, Texas, and the considerable body of work abounding in all parts of the United States in private and public collections, attest to the prolific creativity of one of America's renowned artist-teachers, Charles Julius Umlauf. The University of Texas at Austin is fortunate in having had an art professor of his greatness to bring distinction to our fair city and to the state of Texas. His entire life was dedicated to his art, and upon his death he left a legacy in sculpture from which aspiring artists and art lovers can draw inspiration.

Charles Julius Umlauf was born on July 17, 1911, in South Haven, Michigan. He was raised in Chicago, Illinois, during the great depression, an unlikely time for a young man to contemplate entering a field that held little financial promise. But for Umlauf it was not a question of financial gain; for him there was no other choice. From his early childhood his preoccupation with materials, which he carved and fashioned into images, would lay the cornerstone for a distinguished career ahead. The Art Institute of Chicago became the formative environment for Umlauf. The Institute offered a Saturday program for talented youngsters, and the school became an important part of his life. In addition, the Chicago Art Museum and its very special Ryerson Art Library in the same building offered a rare opportunity to study the masters. Immediately after graduation from high school, Umlauf commenced his formal art education. After completing three years (1929-1932) at the Institute, and before returning in 1934 for two more years, he accepted a job as an assistant at the Chicago Institute of Sculpture under the direction of Viola Norman. While working long hours at her school of art, he created two sculptures that were exhibited at the 1933 World's Fair on the shore of Lake Michigan --- a rare feat for a young and unknown artist.

Charles Umlauf, even in those early years, displayed an amazing skill in his interpretation of the human figure. He developed an appreciation for anatomy from studying the works by the great sculptors Donatello, Rodin, Bourdelle and others as well from his teacher in sculpture, Albin Polasek. His anatomy instructor, Allen Philbrook, known for his strictness, gave him the highest grade ever obtained in the anatomy class up to that point. There were frequent visits on Saturdays and Sundays to the Field Museum and Shedd Aquarium, located on the lake front, always with a sketch book at hand. He would later convey to his students that without a true knowledge of what lies beneath the skin, one cannot possibly understand the human form.

The artist's veneration for life, especially for the human form, and the skills he possessed in coordinating materials and ideas, resulted in highly individual, expressive works of art. He did not confine himself to a restricted, stylistically traditional mode of sculpture that emulated the great masters but was also absorbed in the carvings by primitive, tribal artists. Inspired by Cubism, he experimented with interpretation of form and space in geometric compositions.

Umlauf's works through the years fully demonstrate his dexterity and his mastery of carving, be it in stone or hardwood. His work in clay, however, held the greatest fulfillment for him. The most expressive body of work completed in his lifetime was achieved in this medium, which he could fashion briskly into forms with a variety of moods and purposes. Pietàs, portraits and animal came to life, embued with vitality. His ability to capture, fresh, the intrinsic character of an animal or a human figure and to give each a unique expression, demonstrates an intuitive grasp of the artistic dilemma of when and where to stop. This masterful touch is also evident in the countless drawings, completed as sketches for the works to be realized in clay, stone or bronze, although he sometimes approached these workings in wax. He often drew directly on the block of stone or wood before he proceeded to carve. Umlauf's religious portrayals, whether of Christ or saintly figures, became symbols of the human spirit and love for all mankind. During the period in his sculpture in which he utilized distortion, the contortion of form was not a manifestation for its own sake, but used to emphasize suffering experienced especially in times of overwhelming loss, poverty, and war. During his early years, Umlauf also devoted some of his time to painting and this medium posed no problems for one so gifted, whatever the subject matter.
In 1941, soon after receiving Chicago news media recognition for his *War, Mother and Refugees*, the new College of Fine Arts at the University of Texas at Austin offered Charles Umlauf the position of instructor in sculpture, which he accepted. Organized and run by professional artists under a sympathetic administration, the Department of Art afforded the young sculptor precious time for his own creative work while his career as a teacher would sustain him and his family in comparative security. His students at the University remember Professor Umlauf as a kind, sensitive, and caring teacher who, although a hard taskmaster, listened to their problems and offered them professional and helpful advice. For his dedication to his profession, the students in the department presented him with a Teaching Excellence Award.

We learn of his convictions in his own words:

... an artist must continue to observe and study, specializing in the period or kind of art most suited to his abilities and taste. This I feel, develops one's sensitivity and broadens one's vocabulary...that by personal discipline and determination one gains a certain freedom...but it must be earned.

Umlauf's colleagues respected him as one of the most gifted amongst them, and he was greatly admired by his many patrons. Upon his retirement from the University, he worked in his studio at home where he continued to produce works, both modest and monumental in size. He often traveled to Italy to oversee their casting in bronze.

Charles Julius Umlauf was a prolific, creative and dedicated artist who brought enrichment to all who were touched by his presence and the eloquence of his art. When he died on November 19, 1994, he left behind a magnificent body of art works in which his presence will continue to be felt in the years to come.

To accompany this Memorial Resolution, the members of the Committee prepared the individual statements reproduced below. A chronology may be found in *The Sculpture and Drawing of Charles Umlauf*. Essay by Gibson A. Danes. University of Texas Press, 1980.

**Letter From Kenneth Prescott**

Professor Charles Umlauf was a strong and powerful man, yet a kind and generous person, completely dedicated to his profession as artist and as teacher in the Department of Art. The students fortunate enough to have him as a teacher will always carry with them a vivid memory of the experience. So will every faculty member who served with him. He was a master art teacher in the best sense of the term, one who taught by demonstration and one who insisted on the highest standards in judging the students' work. He was not to be persuaded to use class averages or award grades for simply a good effort. Within the Department's governing board, the Budget Council, his well-reasoned and forceful suggestions and conclusions molded the progress and growth of the Department of Art through the years. Those who had disagreements with Umlauf would remember them well. New and inexperienced faculty had good reason to regard him with awe, for Charles Umlauf would brook no nonsense or artistic shortcuts that bypassed the fundamentals he knew to be essential for the successful teaching of studio art.

As ever more faculty members who served with Umlauf retire to be replaced by new teachers with new ideas, the foundry, equipment and procedures that he instigated will change. But for years to come, somewhere in the world there will be students who reflect the fundamentals taught by Charles Umlauf at the same time as they reach for their own personal expressions.

While I served as chairman of the Department of Art in the '70s and early '80s I profited greatly by Umlauf's advice and assistance. For me the strength of his handshake was matched by the sincerity of his support. On the rare occasions when we did not agree, he made certain that I knew the reason.
When Charles Umlauf retired, he left a big vacuum. I missed him then, and now that he is gone, I again experience the feeling that an essential character has left the stage. However, we are all fortunate to have here in Austin the Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum, where his spirit will always live in the works that he created. We are grateful to his friend and patron, Roberta Crenshaw, who worked tirelessly for many years to make this, Charles Umlauf's dream, come to fruition, and to his wife, Angelina, whose never wavering support played no little role in making the artist's achievements possible.

Kenneth W. Prescott  
Professor Emeritus

Letter from William Kelly Fearing

In 1945 the Fort Worth Art Association presented the work of Charles Umlauf with a one man exhibition in the gallery of the Old Fort Worth Public Library. I was teaching at Texas Wesleyan College in Fort Worth at that time and had never had contact with Umlauf's work. This exhibition made a deep impression on my esthetic appreciation of sculpture. It was a beautiful show, and my students and I made many trips to it enjoying and studying Umlauf's sculpture and drawings. Umlauf had been present at the opening and I had the pleasure of meeting him. His warm and forceful personality made a deep impression.

When I became a member of the Art Department faculty at the University of Texas at Austin in 1947, Umlauf and I soon became friends, and we remained close friends for 45 years.

I admired Umlauf's artistic knowledge and his frankness in sharing it. His understanding of human anatomy was fantastic, and on a number of occasions I benefited from his knowledge. Once after we had lunch together I asked if he would like to drop by my studio to look at a painting in progress on my easel. Looking at my work for a moment I was surprised when he asked for a pencil, not a crayon or brush, just a pencil, which I obligingly provided. I was more than surprised when he started carving into my canvas with the sharp point of the pencil making corrections in the anatomy of the figures I was developing in the painting. His verbal criticism was superb; his sculptural remarks that were left required a sizable amount of impasto painting to restore the canvas surface. Nevertheless I was most grateful for his informative corrections. I had no other colleague who would have made such bold suggestions on my work. I liked that about Umlauf and accepted his frankness and sincerity.

For a number of years he and I worked out together with weights at a local gym. This training helped to strengthen the grip in my small hands, and I learned how to return an acceptable response to his crippling handshake. Musician friends refused to shake hands with Umlauf. Since no one I knew could return that handshake in the way he gave it I don't believe he was ever fully aware of the devastation his greetings brought. However, as Umlauf offered his outstretched hand, his generous greeting smile with its warm durability more than compensated for the pain from that mighty handshake.

I hadn't seen as much of Charlie in recent years as I would have liked; and as it so often happens when someone has suddenly departed only then do we realize that empty space in our feelings which they had occupied in our lives when they were alive. Umlauf's death left this kind of emptiness in my being...until I came back to the scope of his work. No great artist can outline his art and his ideas. That empty space I had felt by his departure has now been filled with a new and greater feeling in me by his art. His sculpture lives, his ideas gain new dimensions and are there like his outstretched hand to greet me, somewhat more gentle, but with all the force I felt from Umlauf's living presence.

William Kelly Fearing  
Ashbel Smith Professor Emeritus
Letter from Paul Peter Hatgil

Charles Julius Umlauf served as chairman, along with his teaching duties, in the year 1951 when I was appointed to teach at the Art Department at the University of Texas at Austin. My duties consisted of sharing the heavy teaching load in sculpture with Charles, not realizing at the time that I would be in the presence of a noted and famed sculptor. Very soon I began to respect Charles and consider him my mentor and role model because of his dedication and knowledge of his subject. As a young man embarking on the beginning of a career in the arts, and as an instructor at an institution of higher learning and not yet having the experience in teaching and directing students, I relied heavily on my mentor's patience and guidance in the classroom. During the critique sessions when we jointly appraised the student work for grading he would point out the successes of my students' work and what I needed to do to better aid those whose work needed improving. It was a good time to listen and not be heard.

Although a hard taskmaster, Charles was an extremely sensitive person and ready to offer his assistance in time of need. In those early years, when the department was still in its infancy, we would fire the student clay work in a building that served as a barracks during World War II. The kiln or firing oven would reach temperatures nearing 3000 degrees, and the danger of burning the building down was always a strong possibility. Charles, with fire extinguisher in hand, would clamber into the attic to inspect the roof supports while I would shout from down below and above the din of the gas blowers, "Is everything O.K., Charles?" Fortunately, through countless firings we managed to keep the building intact. The barracks were soon torn down to make room for new facilities and a great increase in faculty members, but the tribulations and having to do with sparse facilities and the times of initial growth will remain in my memory.

My teaching at the Art Department improved over the years, earning me two teaching excellence awards. These awards would not have been possible without the early instruction I received from Charles.

Paul Peter Hatgil
Professor Emeritus

<signed>

Larry R. Faulkner, President
The University of Texas at Austin

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John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Kenneth W. Prescott (Chair), William Kelly Fearing, and Paul Peter Hatgil. Professor H. Paul Kelley assisted in editing the resolution.