

Sarah Richards - Sculptor

The work of accomplished bronze sculptor Sarah Richards is found far and wide, commissioned by individuals, corporates...and even a small country

Edited by **Anne Schauffer**

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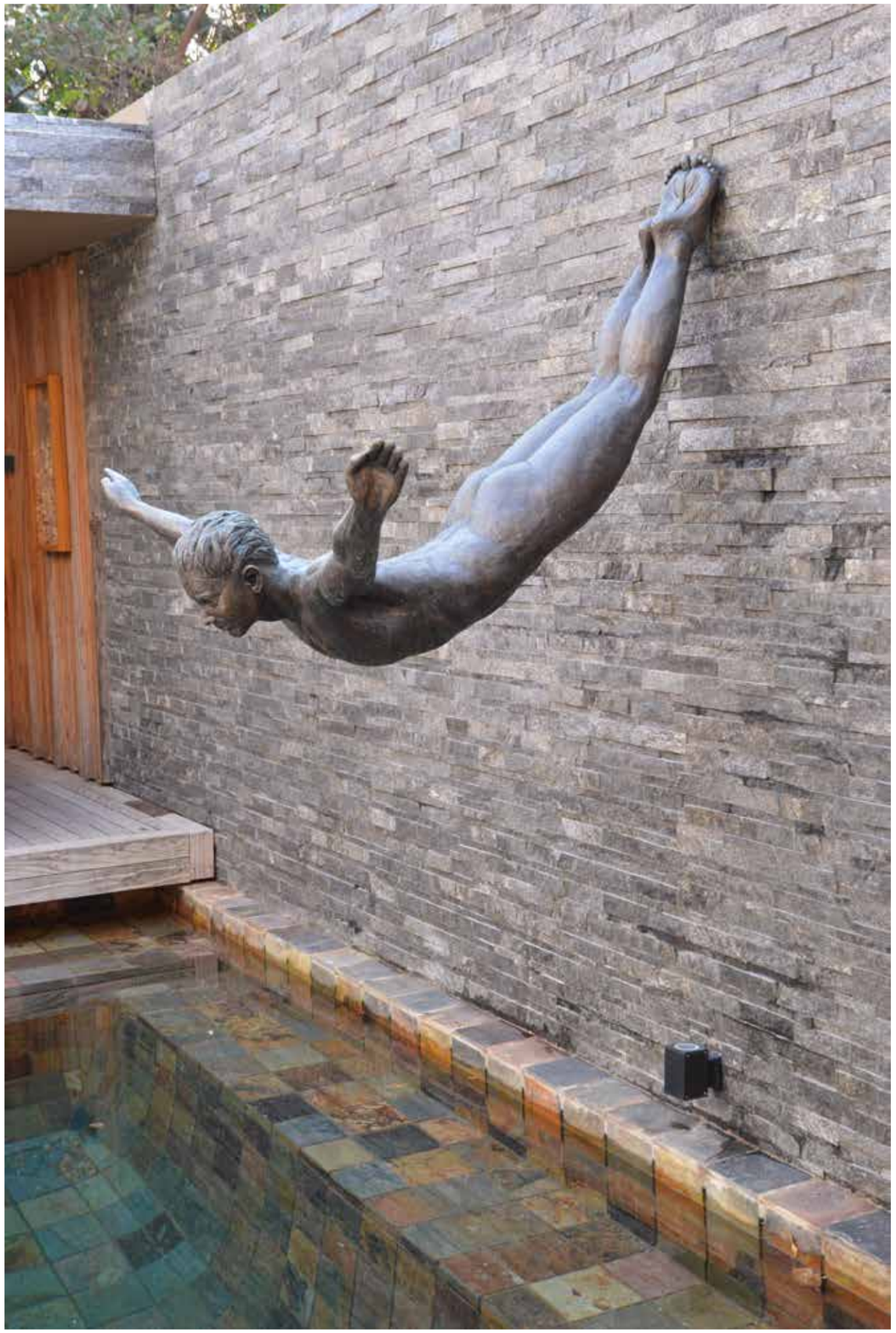




Sarah Richards lives and works in the Balgowan area of the Kwazulu Natal Midlands, and her bronzes are in little and large private and public spaces, indoors and out. She considers herself extremely blessed to have reached this place and stage of her journey: "I have a truly beautiful home which looks out at Giant's Castle Mountain, and a wonderful studio with a natural forest behind me, and stunning views. I can wander up to the house when I want a break, and I can work long hours when the need arises."

Sarah did not come from a particularly creative family. She laughs, "I was a bit of a strange one in the family, and they didn't quite know where to place me. But having said that, they were incredibly encouraging of my art, and I have photographs of very small me in Zimbabwe, in an art class." From school, Sarah studied art and sculpture at the (now) Durban University of Technology (DUT), and later, completed a Master's degree.

Sarah has always been interested in all media, whether it was painting or drawing: "I was always drawn to mixed media – it was the textures and layering of textures with paint and colour, and getting a feeling of depth; the sort of feeling that life is complex, full of layers of experiences and perspectives, nothing is black and white – for me, textures represent that." For Sarah, it wasn't – or isn't – a conscious choice, "Everything I make is layered and textured." That may be, she thinks, how she eventually chose sculptural work.









After studying, Sarah travelled for about four years, visiting museums and art galleries: "I just had a very worldly experience, and when I returned, I had a few decisions to make regarding what medium I worked in. I began doing watercolour paintings of houses, animals, portraits for people, but increasingly, I was drawn to sculptural work. I experimented extensively and finally settled on bronze as the material which gave my clients the best value. It's incredibly strong, versatile and durable indoors and out, big or small. Because it's so strong, you can do quite fragile pieces, and they won't break."

Sarah was lucky. She has a number of local foundries in the Midlands, and one in particular was incredibly supportive, helping and teaching her to make her own moulds, "Essentially taught me the entire process. I began working quite tentatively, very slowly, some figurative bronzes and a few animals – my family was very supportive, and bought the small bronzes from me. I would exhibit them, and when one sold, I could then cast another one to replace theirs. Slowly, slowly I built up my business to where it is today."

Commission work comprises a great deal of Sarah's work, and even though she would love more time to work on her own projects, she enjoys the variety: "I work on things I wouldn't ordinarily have thought about doing. I also enjoy the interaction with clients – it's a long process which you both go on together, and there's something so interesting about that."

Sarah is reluctant to name her favourite subject matter, but she does













say she is very drawn to the human form: "I suppose because I'm human, it's a kind of self-exploration, understanding how the body is put together, how it moves, how the muscles change, and even how clothes move around on the body. I find it fascinating." Even in her personal work, she tends to include a human form.

Textures play a major role in her work, particularly in her own, more contemporary work, where she takes moulds from natural things, and incorporates it into a sculpture: "It's a collaboration between myself and the natural environment. With a forest around me, I have endless resources at my fingertips." Working with the foundry is also a collaboration, and their expertise in casting the sculpture into bronze adds to the story of each work.: "There are so many stages of creating a bronze. Once the finished model goes to the foundry it goes through many stages before it transforms into bronze, with many skilled foundry artisans working on it for me. it's often not exactly the same as it was in the beginning – every sculpture is unique. It's a collaboration."

Sarah is busy. Very. She is often still in the studio at 8 o'clock at night: "From 4 to 8 is the quietest time. My work process demands many hours of consistent work, not just modelling new sculptures, but checking waxes and bronzes when they come back from the foundry, adding the patina when the bronze has been cast."

One of her recent works was commissioned by St Anne's Diocesan College, a girl's private school in Hilton: "The brief was clear. They wanted a young woman, and she would be at the entrance to the school. But what was different here, was that I worked with the Grade 11 art students, and we brainstormed what they would like the sculpture to look like and the various details it should have. That is why commissions are so fascinating, each one has different challenges."

Success takes time, particularly in the arts. For Sarah, her breakthrough was around three years ago: "After so many years of experimenting, I came up with the idea of using the wax panels which are moulded from natural things, which I can then form or model or make into skirts, shapes or put into moulds. Now I'm exploring and expanding out from these ideas and finding different ways of using these textures."

Sarah laughs at the question, What's The Dream?: "I'm living it! I remember many years ago doing a story board of how I wanted my life to look. I remember creating a studio with a tree and a view...so I'm pretty much living that dream." She adds, "Looking down the road, I'd like more time for my own contemporary work, eventually just doing that...but then again, I'd miss the interaction I have with commissioned work."

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