

Brian R. Owens – Biography

2017

Owens belongs to a small fraternity of artists who use classical techniques to depict contemporary subject matter. Within this is an even smaller group: Artists that have won highly competitive grants, scholarships and commissions – both public and private. And within this, a still smaller group: Artists that can both sculpt and paint.

From Michigan to Florida; from applied scientist to sculptor; Owens has made an improbable journey into the world of art and the continent of his soul. He was born in Detroit, MI in 1958 to Katherine J. Owens, an educator and Carl C. Owens, a freelance illustrator and Staff Artist for the Detroit Board of Education. He grew up in a pleasant lower middle-class neighborhood on Detroit's west side. Carl C. Owens became one of America's first self-employed African American illustrators to contract directly with national corporations such as Ford Motor Company. With his father's encouragement, Owens held his first "2 man" exhibit at the age of 16 at a fine art gallery in Detroit. As a young adult, he set his artwork aside to pursue other interests. Years passed before his need to create art took hold again.

Owens relocated to Florida to work for a defense contractor in 1981. He continued his art education by assisting professional sculptors at their "studio foundries" where he learned how to cast bronze and continued to develop through private instruction, non-matriculated courses, open studio sessions and workshops. Interest grew into obsession until a mass layoff catalyzed the beginning of his artistic career at the age of about 33.

During the 90's Owens created his first limited edition sculptures based on an exploration of his heritage. He traveled to seek the advise of nationally prominent sculptors and was represented by galleries in Atlanta and Orlando. He competed heavily for grants and public art projects resulting in a number of awards, including a commission by the Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta (CODA) in 1996.



Owens is known as a sculptor who works mostly on a commission basis. But a closer look reveals his range as a visual artist, including works in oil, acrylic, pastel and pencil. In 2010 he completed a mural that included 16 portraits for a private client.

In 2011, Owens completed the St. Augustine Foot Soldiers Monument that is now a permanent feature of historic St. Augustine, FL. In the fall of 2012, Owens was cited for the fifth time in the Journal of the Portrait Society of America and won the Florida Historical Society's David C. Brotemarkle Award. He completed a life-size bronze of Dr. Arthur Harold Parker for Birmingham Board of Education in 2013. In 2017, Owens completed work for multiple clients including a collaborative sculpture with Richard Bennett for MSU College of Law and a monument to Frankie Muse Freeman for NAACP St. Louis.

"Art is not something I do, it's who I am", said Owens. "I didn't choose to be an artist, it chose me. William H. Gass predicted my own feelings when he said that people like myself are here to add to the world's objects and ideas those delineations, carvings and symphonic spells as ought to already be there. To make things whose purpose is contemplation and appreciation."

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