



# THE METALIST

CHRISTIANE CASELLA BRINGS BRONZE SCULPTING TO THE VERO BEACH ART CLUB AND THE ORCHID ISLAND GOLF & BEACH CLUB.

WRITTEN BY MELISSA KAREN SANCES

Christiane Casella holds her newly poured bronze over the cement sidewalk and gleefully lets go. As the ceramic shell cracks away, it is the first glimpse of a new bronze sculpture, and one of the last steps in a several month, multi-faceted process that requires patience and diligence.

Always a sculptor at heart, the artist was introduced to the bronze process seven years ago while working as a high school art teacher in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. For a number of years, Casella taught sculpture, ceramics, metals, art essentials and advanced placement art history. Today she divides her time between New Hope, Pennsylvania and Vero Beach.

"While in Bucks County, I'm very fortunate to live close to Bucks County Community College, one of the few community colleges in the country to have its own foundry in a wonderful art department," says the artist. It is there, Casella explains, that at any given time,

"Stay with Me," bronze.



"Conversation,"  
bronze. "To  
be human is to  
communicate,"  
says the artist.  
" This piece  
captures the  
essence of  
heartfelt human  
expression, of one  
person conversing  
with another."

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Today Casella owns a home in Vero Beach where she frequently walks along the shore. “It’s my favorite activity, and for me it’s very spiritual,” she says.

about a dozen “non-traditional students” use the college foundry for bronze work.

It is an important symbiotic relationship because bronze casting “takes a village” to actually cast and pour bronze. Working with molten metal can be dangerous. That’s why there are numerous safety procedures and practice drills in place before every pour. But in the months before the casting, the initial conceptual work through the actual sculpting of the piece is solitary work because “no one knows better than the artist what her personal history and intent are that always imbue a piece,” Casella says.

The first creative step is easy enough and relatively private. Before she even sketches an idea, Casella heads to the ocean for a walk. This is where she does her best thinking. She has always been drawn to the water. As a young child, the family spent a month each summer on Long Beach Island. From as early as she can remember, Casella and her father swam from lifeguard stand to lifeguard stand, racing and building her stamina.

Today Casella owns a home in Vero Beach where she frequently walks along



"Pace & Bene" illustrates three steps of the "lost wax" process: clay, wax and mold.

the shore. "It's my favorite activity because for me, it is both spiritual and clarifying," she says. "Some of my best ideas develop as a result of those long beach walks. Depending on the time of day, sometimes you can walk for miles and not see a soul." Sometimes Casella uses the sand as a sketchbook, drawing and building ideas. Other times she just sits quietly at the water's edge. When she's ready, she starts shaping ideas in her sketchbook.

Once an idea has been put to paper, a small clay maquette, or 3D model, is made. "It is at this point that I know what I have to do," says the artist. Often a sketch evolves, as does the maquette, before a final decision is made as "the entire process from initial concept through to completed bronze can take several months. I want to be certain that I feel passionate enough that it's a strong piece."



This closeup shows Casella building an armature, the framework around which a sculpture is built, in her Vero Beach studio.

Using numerous fine tools, Casella next sculpts a fully detailed full-size, clay sculpture over a period of several weeks to several months. She then makes a rubber mold of this clay sculpture so that the piece may be replicated. Casella usually limits her sculptures to editions of nine. However, one-of-a-kind pieces are also done where no mold is made, only a final

bronze sculpture.

The next step involves melting wax in an old crock pot and pouring it one thin layer at a time into the rubber mold, being careful to reach all the parts of her sculpture. When the wax has cooled, it is removed from the mold and "chased," cleaned with wintergreen oil, which slightly dissolves the surface to get the

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"32963," bronze. "This piece resulted from the wonderful experience of witnessing a leatherback turtle emerge from the sea, nest and lay eggs, and then return to the sea," says the artist. "This sculpture honors her and the memory of this magical moment."

desired finish.

Casella then "gates" the piece, which allows for the flow of molten bronze into the actual sculpture. The gated wax is then repeatedly dipped in a ceramic shell. With each dip, Casella rolls it in progressively coarser stucco letting the shell dry several hours between dips. This process continues for about a two-week period.

Once completed, the ceramic shell is placed upside down in a furnace, allowing the original wax to drip out of the ceramic shell. What is left is the "negative" space that previously housed the wax sculpture and which is an exact negative of the original, finely detailed clay sculpture.

It is at this juncture where "the village" steps in. Several people "suit up in silver," donning silver safety gear, gloves and face shields. "We look a bit like astronauts when doing a pour," Casella says. Bronze ingots are placed in a crucible and

The artist is a  
receptacle for  
emotions that  
come from all  
over the place:

from the sky,  
from the earth,  
from a scrap  
of paper,  
from a passing  
shape, from a  
spider's web.

– PICASSO

melted at about 2,200 degrees F. Once melted, the bronze resembles liquid gold and is poured from the crucible into the "negative" mold which is now upright in a bed of sand. The "liquid gold" is then leveled in the mold and a brick placed on top to slow down the cooling of the bronze.

After the bronze cools for about an hour, Casella grabs her large tongs, brings the piece outside, and lets it fall onto concrete, cracking away the ceramic shell and revealing the first glimpse of the new bronze sculpture. The remaining shell is hammered away until "You find your piece buried in there." The new bronze is an exact replica, down to the fingerprints, of the original clay sculpture.

Grinding tools and a sandblaster remove any remaining pieces of the mold still stuck in crevices. Any final welding is completed and the piece is ready for the last step - finishing with a patina to create



a rich color. Casella emphasizes that this patina must work with, and not overpower, the piece.

“Other than safety precautions, this entire process hasn’t changed since the time of the ancient Greeks,” she says. “That for me is so exciting. I love the fact that the ‘lost wax’ process is so rooted in the past and still carries on such an important tradition, one that we can see and read about daily in many museums across the globe.”

**W**hile Casella didn’t begin bronze sculpting until seven years ago, she has been an artist for as long as she can remember. “My mom and dad said I always had my hands in stuff, making things,” she says. While her parents weren’t artists, an artist family friend suggested that they forego any coloring books for sketchbooks. They took her to museums in New York City where she fell in love with artists like Michelangelo, Gentileschi, van Gogh, Hepworth, Noguchi and Picasso.

She majored in graphic design at Arcadia University in Pennsylvania and later went to graduate school for a master’s of education in art education. Casella considers herself a classically trained artist and during the past few years has studied with John Horn at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

After many years of being a full-time mom, she then enjoyed working in her children’s school district so that she could continue being actively involved in their



Casella receives the President’s Award for her bronze “Unconditional” shown left and above at the Salmagundi Club in New York City.

upbringing. “When my children were little, I was a very ‘hands-on’ mom and had them exploring all their senses through music and art-making. Music and art were, and still are, a big part of our family tradition.”

The artist and her husband divide their time between Vero Beach and Pennsylvania. A member of the Vero Beach Art Club and the Orchid Island Golf & Beach Club Art Club, Casella is also a member of the American Artists Professional League. With her work becoming more nationally known and recognized, she recently won the President’s Award in

sculpture at the Salmagundi Club, one of the most prestigious centers for art in New York City. She is also a member of the New Hope Art League, Philadelphia Sculptors, Philadelphia Sketch Club, and the BC3D Sculpture Club.

She is an advocate of animal rights and is involved with organizations in both Florida and Pennsylvania and enjoys participating in events sponsored by H.A.L.O. Animal Rescue based in Sebastian. Now that her children are grown, she’s able to devote much more of her time to her art. “I feel very blessed,” she says. ☼