

MAAP

MASTER ARTIST / APPRENTICE PROGRAM FY2021



ALAN LEQUIRE
CLAY TO BRONZE SCULPTURE



Best known today for his monumental sculptures in Middle Tennessee, Alan LeQuire began his artistic career at the age of eleven, when he crafted his first objects in copper and tin. His early influences include Tennessee sculptors Olen Bryant, Puryear Mims, and William Edmondson. LeQuire's first mature work involved found materials, mostly wood, which required only slight modification to suggest a representational form. These early carvings were grounded in the ideas of Archaist sculptors like Bryant and Mims (one of LeQuire's early teachers)--who, in a spirit of conscious primitivism, allowed the material itself to determine the form of the finished work. In the background of his consciousness remained the figure of Edmondson, who had no artistic training of any kind and who carved stone (by his own account) according to divine inspiration alone. The living presence which LeQuire sensed in Edmondson's sculptures is something he has wanted to evoke in his own work ever since.

After graduating from Vanderbilt University, LeQuire spent a year of apprenticeship to Milton Hebard, an American sculptor living in Italy, and afterward studied figurative sculpture with Peter Agostini in the MFA program of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. LeQuire had grown up in a rural area outside of Nashville, and the time spent with Hebard in the Roman campagna reinforced his instinctive sense of a pastoral theme in his art. Hebard introduced him to master craftsmen who practiced techniques of bronze casting dating back to classical antiquity. Particularly from the example of Giacomo Manzù, LeQuire rediscovered the versatile plasticity of clay, a material which, instead of defining and thus limiting its own form, can express any texture or form and transfer it to other media such as bronze. Since then most of LeQuire's work, from the miniature to the monumental, has first been modeled in wet clay.

These threads of LeQuire's Italian experience converged in the commission to reconstruct the Athena Parthenos statue for Nashville's full-scale replica of the Parthenon, which he won soon after completing his MFA in 1981. LeQuire's task was to recreate a lost work by the fifth-century Greek sculptor Pheidias, whose original Athena was known only from description and from miniature copies which LeQuire's own research proved to be inaccurate. LeQuire's Athena, at forty-two feet tall, is the largest indoor statue in the United States; she supports a life-sized figure of Nike in the palm of her right hand. The unveiling of this work in 1990 made LeQuire a celebrated and controversial figure throughout Tennessee and attracted favorable notice from classical scholars, archaeologists and art critics nationwide, with articles in *Art News* and the *New York Times Magazine*.

Before, during, and after the Athena project, LeQuire has undertaken many commissions, from individual portraits to larger works in public spaces, including two more works on a colossal scale: *Musica* and *Dream Forest*. *Musica* presents nine bronze figures, each sixteen feet high, exploding into a circular dance at the foot of Nashville's Music Row. *Dream Forest* is a multimedia installation, centered on a group of twelve-foot tall forms which combine features of tree trunks and the human body, incised with texts of dreams. It is the first of LeQuire's colossal works to express his purely personal vision.

The path LeQuire has followed in the forty years of his career so far diverges sharply from the one taken by most contemporary American sculptors—the latter tending toward ever more reductive abstraction. Despite his own experimentation with abstract and surrealistic sculpture, LeQuire finds the abstract tendency to be sterile, and his opus amounts to an argument against it. The living presence he seeks in his work is fertilized by his belief that in a meaningful world the human figure serves as the primary carrier of significance, and that the human figure is the single subject to which all viewers inevitably respond.