

Newport, Rhode Island's Own Artist Howard Newman

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by Ernie Newton

A visit to Howard Newman's blue-shingled historic home is marked by a dismal, rainy Monday afternoon. A converted garage, steps from his kitchen, contains the studio where he creates the majority of his works. Drops of water sprinkle gently from the sky and the artist adjusts his navy beret over his gray mop of hair, to shield his eyes from the foul weather. Newman sighs and mentions that in his younger days he was creating over 50 sculptures in a year. Even though the thick grey fog settles outside his door, Newman's spirits are high and he exudes an aura of optimism.

Speaking with a pleasant smile across his face and glasses perched on his nose, his composure creates a sense of calm in the workroom. He scoots up onto a metal stool and rests his hands on his chest. Instinctively wise, even beyond his 65 years, Newman's astute, yet comforting presence resembles that of a grandfather figure. His wealth of knowledge and success in the realm of art is extensive. Honored as a Fulbright Scholar, he was offered the opportunity to live with his wife in a fifteenth century farmhouse in Italy, where he further pursued his art. Currently the couple dedicates their time to the awe-inspiring restoration of Portsmouth Abbey. A culmination of such experiences has set the groundwork for his solid insight on the realities of life.

As one of Newport's master artists, Newman's expertise ranges from sculptures to paintings to restoration of fine metal and

objects, to antique mechanisms. A review by Hilton Kramer of The New York Times, writes that Newman “is something of a phenomenon. His art has the look of something that was born fully matured. All sense of struggle, hesitation and indecision is effectively concealed in its sleek bronze forms ... addresses the eye with an unashamed confidence and power—a sculpture secure in a timeless sensibility of its own.”

An assortment of machinery for his silversmith projects lines the walls of his workroom and various knick-knacks are scattered on the counter. “I am absolutely fascinated by materials,” Newman says as he sits back on his seat and dangles a tiny wire item in his fingers. Art requires an enormous amount of concentration. “Patience isn’t even something we talk about here,” Newman said. Despite the tedious work and great amount of labor, Newman most enjoys the problem solving aspect. In terms of working style, his designs are first drawn or modeled and then “things just come out of the fog.” Working through the issues to find a solution thrills him. “A lot of people see art as a social thing,” Newman said. “I do it for my own sensibilities.”

Many are surprised to learn that Newman did not always aspire to be an artist. Instead, he received a background education in architecture, cultural anthropology and classical literature from Miami University and had aspirations of becoming a lawyer after graduation. Wavering between career paths, he decided to take the Johnson O’Connor aptitude test in Boston, Mass. He chuckled while revealing the results, which indicated that he is a man that should be working independently in his garage.

Newman's countless years of dedication to art have not gone unnoticed; he is both locally and nationally recognized. A critic from the Los Angeles Times said that Newman, "creates figures that combine the geometric precision of Cubism with the more rounded forms of Futurist sculpture." In addition to the media buzz he has created over the years, museums such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Il Museo dei Bozzetti in Pietrasana, Italy, as well as others throughout the world, currently display his art. In fact, the Newport Art Museum is proud to have two of Newman's sculptures situated on their lawn. One was acquired by the museum as a gift of Mrs. John Donnell in 2001 and the other is on loan from the artist. Nancy W. Grinnell, curator of the Museum said, "Howard Newman's bold, modern bronze sculptures have anchored the grounds and entrances to the Newport Art Museum for over a decade and symbolize our commitment to high quality art of our region."

In spite of Newman's respected craftsmanship as a sculptor, he and his wife now fully invest their artistic abilities on long-term projects. He insists that everything he did his whole career all comes together in these larger restorations. For instance, currently they are helping spearhead a \$4 million, year and a half restoration on Portsmouth Abbey. Newman expresses that "it has been quite an enormous project," as indicated by the 20,000 feet of gold wire involved in the process. "Yes it has been a very long project, we are anticipating the finished product this upcoming month," Newman's wife said. When questioned about the main difference between his sculpture art and fine metal restoration Newman said, "Many people have a hard time with abstract art because there is no frame of reference involved." Therefore, Newman has created a

multimedia online presentation to create a tangible visual for viewers in understanding the Abbey's incredible wire ceiling art.

Newman eloquently speaks about what he values in life as well as his understanding of the human experience. Enriching the mind with a solid education is key to shaping a person's understanding of himself and the world around him. By embracing learning, inevitably vision and judgment become clearer. "When you stop learning, in a sense, you die," Newman said. While hiring workers for his business, he and his wife first look for a liberal arts education on someone's resume. The couple can teach someone to work with their hands, yet it is the mental training from an education that allows them to be better suited to adapt to any environment. Newmans Ltd. is a business that incorporates both mental and physical work, so it is helpful when people are multifaceted and open-minded.

An individual has the power to "choose how to spend every minute of their life" on Earth. Newman stresses that when making such decisions, people should keep in mind that "money has no value in ultimate terms." Human beings don't count money on their deathbed. Years slip by and old age can creep up on people, so avoid regret and experience all you can while vivacious and young. Regarding his own experience with the aging process, Newman points out that "retiring is a meaningless concept." He thinks it seems boring and would much rather refer to it as simply "changing the proportion" of his lifestyle.

A piece of advice he offers artists and students alike who are about to graduate college during the current economic crisis, is to take advantage of Obama's Peace Corps programs. After college

Newman and his wife joined the Peace Corps. For several years, the newly weds lived in the jungles of Puerto Rico, where they learned survival skills in the wilderness. He said that after living in such conditions, there is nothing to fear in life. Joining one of these organizations is “the best thing you can do, it pays a stipend and changes your life.” Rather than heading directly into the relatively self-serving work force, Newman says people “need to expand what their idea is of a human being.”