

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1960

Sculpture for a prayer garden

Robert E. Rickels

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Rickels, Robert E., "Sculpture for a prayer garden" (1960). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 3498.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3498>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

SCULPTURE FOR A PRAYER GARDEN

by

ROBERT E. HICKELS

B. S. CONCORDIA TEACHERS COLLEGE, 1951

Presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1960

Approved by:

Chairman, Board of Examiners

A. Lee, Thwe

Dean, Graduate School

Sho. Weeber

MAY 27 1960

Date

UMI Number: EP35816

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35816

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT	1
Theme of the Sculpture	1
Approval by the Department	2
II. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE THEME	3
Luther's Religious Conflicts	4
The Decision to Study Theology	4
III. THE GOALS OF THE PROJECT	6
Selection of the Site	6
Suitable Style and Medium	7
Symbolism of the Forms	7
Limitations of the Project	9
IV. THE PLAN OF ACTION	10
Studies for the Model	10
Changes in Design	11
Approval of Final Model	11
V. THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS	12
The Clay Body	12
Preparations for Building	13
Building Method	13
Drying and Firing	14
VI. THE EVALUATION	15
Fulfillment of Goals	15
Success of Methods and Materials	15
Future Possibilities	16

CHAPTER	PAGE
ILLUSTRATIONS	18
BIBLIOGRAPHY	27

CHAPTER I

THE INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

As the way was made clear to begin a year of graduate study in art at Montana State University in the spring of 1959, consideration had to be given as to what would constitute a suitable terminal project for credit toward the Master's Degree. The field offered many possibilities but an attempt was made to settle upon one which would not only be of personal benefit, but which might also benefit the employer making possible the year of study.

The employer was, in this instance, the St. Paul Lutheran Church in Melrose Park, Illinois. This congregation had dedicated a new church in October of 1958, a building of contemporary design and artistic adornments. It was a personal wish to add a work of ceramic art to the church property, preferably a work of ceramic sculpture for the prayer garden, the U-shaped area between the existing school building and the new sanctuary. Although pleasantly landscaped, this garden had little else to give it the character which its name implied. It seemed to call for a work which would produce an attitude of reverence and evoke a prayerful mood; it would need to be of specific interest to the parishoners; and, it would need to be of design quality and proportions which would be in keeping with the architectural surroundings.

The idea was first presented to the pastor, The Rev. M. R. Kluender, whose reaction was favorable. It was his suggestion to represent a little known episode from the life of Martin Luther, but one which had influenced strongly the reformer's personal future and the destiny of his followers. Portions of Pastor Kluender's letter follow:

I learned that the turning point in Martin Luther's life came when he was asked by Dr. Staupitz to take up the study of theology for his degree. Dr. Luther was sitting out in the garden under a pear tree when Staupitz came to him. Since this occurred early in Luther's life it would make an intriguing sculpture and would certainly be something different in Lutheran Church art.

Upon the approval expressed by Professor Autio, ceramics instructor, and by Professor Hook, advisor and head of the Art Department at Montana State University, the plan was submitted to the Special Appointments Committee of the St. Paul Congregation in Melrose Park. Final approval was granted by the committee on January 1, 1960, and the project was begun in the winter quarter with the intention of bringing its construction to a completion by the end of the spring quarter of 1960.

Exploration and experimentation in the technical realms of ceramic sculpture were not of primary importance in carrying out this project. Of greater importance was the attempt to produce a work of art which would serve a spiritual purpose in the religious life of the members in the St. Paul Congregation, and at the same time enhance the physical property.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE THEME

The incident which the project sought to portray has been referred to as a turning point in the life of Martin Luther. It is wise then, for a clear understanding, to note in which direction Luther's life had led him previous to this time, and what the turning point brought about.

As a student at the University of Erfurt, Luther began the prescribed course of study for jurisprudence. But in July of 1505 he suddenly decided to enter a Monastery. The immediate decision came as a result of a very frightening experience in which he was caught in a violent thunderstorm. Knocked down by a bolt of lightning, he promised to St. Anne that he would become a monk if help were given him.

This sudden action may seem strange at first, but Luther had had very disturbing thoughts previous to this time with regard to the severe demands of his religion. Preserved Smith, in analyzing the reason for Luther's decision, writes:

The real cause lay in a torturing sense of sin and a longing for reconciliation with God, experienced by many deeply spiritual Christians at one time or another in their lives. The cloister had been the refuge for such persons for a thousand years; to it the Saxon student naturally turned to find rest for his soul. After all, the seemingly abrupt vow is only the natural culmination of previous experience.¹

¹Preserved Smith, The Life and Letters of Martin Luther (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), p. 8.

But life in the monastery afforded very little of the peace of mind which he sought. The longing for personal salvation seemed to increase with his attempts to achieve it. Luther was guided by the writings of men, the prescribed forms laid down by the church fathers; and, try as he would, he could not satisfy completely their demands. The problem was all too clear; he was facing an impossible situation.

He became acquainted with Johann von Staupitz, the vicar of the Augustinian order of the monastery. To him Luther confided his disillusionment, his fears, his state of horrible depression; and from him Luther received much advice, some of which ultimately changed his whole life. Dr. Staupitz attempted to comfort him with arguments of various sorts, but to no avail. The solution he then prescribed became the "turning point" referred to earlier. It is interestingly described as follows:

Staupitz then cast about for some effective cure for this tormented spirit. He recognized in him a man of moral earnestness, religious sensitivity, and unusual gifts. Why his difficulties should be so enormous and so persistent was baffling. Plainly argument and consolation did no good. Some other way must be found. One day under the pear tree in the garden of the Augustinian cloister--Luther always treasured that pear tree--the vicar informed Brother Martin that he should study for his doctor's degree, that he should undertake preaching and assume the chair of Bible at the university.²

²Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950) p. 45.

It was Staupitz's way of diverting Luther's attention away from the man-made requirements of the order toward a study of the Bible itself. This would lead him to wrestle with the source book of his religion.

The sculpture, which will be described in the following chapters, attempts to represent symbolically these two figures, Luther and Staupitz, as they may have appeared on that day in 1511 in the cloister garden at Wittenberg.

CHAPTER III

THE GOALS OF THE PROJECT

The work undertaken by this study has sought to do more than to memorialize the man Luther. This has already been accomplished by many professional writers and artists. Rather, the project has sought to produce a sculpture which would increase the interest and beauty of a church property by forming a transition from architecture to landscape and yet be useful in its own right; it has endeavored to make this piece reminiscent of certain doctrines as held by the main figure of the sculpture and his followers today; and finally, it has sought to do this in a way which would enable the congregation to enjoy a spiritual experience as a result of viewing it.

The site--namely, a prayer garden, is a plot of ground approximately sixty feet square which has not been developed far beyond basic landscaping (Fig. 1). It includes a central mound on which stands a rough wooden cross, walks leading from the two inner corners to the mound, and low shrubbery around three edges, leaving one side open to the lawn and street. Although the area is visible from windows on three sides, it is seen most easily from within the sanctuary which has three large windows approximately ten feet wide and fifty feet high. An inner corner of the garden, visible to all persons seated within the sanctuary for worship,

seemed a logical choice for location of the sculpture. This would also be nearest to the door leading from the building to the prayer garden and to one of the two walks leading to its center.

For the outdoor worshipper it could serve here as a point of contemplation and prayer, directing his gaze toward the inner altar. With the sculpture in this position an interesting rear view of it would also be afforded the worshipper from within, carrying his eye outdoors to a subject for meditation. This position, therefore, would make the sculpture serve more fully the year round.

A style making easy the recognition of human figures was considered best for the final rendering. This was considered a primary obligation to the majority of congregation members who might not experience a spiritual response to an abstract form of sculpture. Within this limitation, however, distortions and simplifications were used in an attempt to give certain spiritual and aesthetic qualities to the design. Because of its durability in a climate of some extremes, and its great plasticity in modeling, clay was selected as a favored medium of construction. In its fired state it also seemed to accomplish successfully the transition from a building of buff brick and ceramic tiling to the earth itself.

But aside from these overall considerations the sculpture was designed to become a personal thing to the

individual, allowing him to identify himself with it in terms of personal experience. Luther's basic struggle was thought of as the struggle of each person within the congregation. The search for truth has been universal, but finding the truth as it pertains to the individual becomes a personal matter. The desire in Luther's heart to lay hold upon tangible certainty regarding the salvation of his soul was represented as the desire within the heart of each Christian; through a realization of mutual needs he could share in its existence.

The representation was thought of rather strictly as a symbol and, as such, was not limited to an absolutely literal interpretation. Tall figures were used to symbolize spiritual striving and the search for heavenly goals. The sculpture was intended to show a detachment of individuals from the rest of the world, individuals engaged in a very personal struggle and counseling of which the rest of the world knew nothing. Luther was shown in a seated position, book in hand, pondering the decision regarding his future plans for study; his gaze was directed over the book rather than into it, indicating the mental conflict of the moment. Staupitz, although standing higher, was simply shown as a counselor, his outstretched arm around Luther's shoulder actually directing attention to the more important seated figure.

A simplicity of design was maintained, almost reflecting the simplicity of the Biblical doctrine which comforted

Luther, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Very little attempt was made to give an appearance of real cloth to the costumes; detailed facial features were kept to a minimum to prevent detracting from the total concept. Angularity of the figures represented the boldness of the assertion of doctrine. Inspiration for clothing styles of the figures was derived from wood-cuts reproducing events of that era, but elements of design became a guiding factor of equal importance in the final rendering. Elongated figures were used in which distortions deliberately lengthened proportions of legs, arms, neck, and hands, to the torso, thereby obtaining a monumental quality in keeping with the site.

These characteristics, together with a planned three foot pedestal for installation aspired to make a statement of strength and conviction, a statement of value to the viewer, as well as an enhancement of the church property. It was not designed to make of Luther a saint or an image to be venerated. Such practices would not be in keeping with the doctrinal teachings of the church which makes a clear stand on the doctrine of idolatry. It can only stand there as a symbol of a man through whom the truth of the gospel was preserved.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLAN OF ACTION

The first stage in rendering a piece of representational art is usually that of the sketch, changing mental image into a visual form. Since the work under consideration here was to be a three-dimensional form, the earliest studies were rendered in the third dimension. The first two of these were done rather quickly and freely in clay, one of solid forms with rather dramatic attitudes, another of stick-like figures seated together upon a bench. The first seemed out of character with the religious subject matter, bordering on a slightly romanticized style, while the second, although indicating a somewhat desirable intimacy between the figures, did not lend particular importance to them.

A third study (Fig. 2) in which the figure of Staupitz stood beside a seated Luther was done in the style of stocky, solidly built forms to represent Luther in a more conventional manner. But the incident selected for portrayal in this particular piece occurred prior to that period of reform.

A fourth study was then done using elongated forms in essentially the same positions (Fig. 3) and from it a twenty two inch model of hollow built clay was constructed (Fig. 4). Simplification of lines and stylization of costume, together with distortion of body proportions came

closer to achieving the monumental quality which the subject and site of the sculpture demanded.

Upon completion of this model other members of the art faculty were consulted. Criticisms were given together with several excellent suggestions for improvement. Immediately following, another model was constructed incorporating these suggestions to the extent that they were considered desirable without changing the basic concept (Fig. 5).

The major changes which resulted were as follows; a stronger line was given to the standing figure by straightening the body position and drape of clothing; a continuous vertical eye movement was aided by changing the very horizontal lines of the collars; the treatment of the neck area of the seated figure was brought into closer agreement with that of the standing figure; variation of the knee position of the seated figure and increased angularity was matched to the angularity of arms and shoulders; a closer affinity between the two figures was effected by bringing the torsos to lean more toward a central point.

This second model was then presented to the art faculty and, although several minor features were questioned and additional changes were suggested for consideration, a general approval was expressed, enabling the beginning of construction of the final product.

CHAPTER V

THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS

A suitable clay body for any given piece of ceramics is basic to its success. The project under consideration here required a body which would have strength in its greenware state to support the weight of a piece in excess of seven feet in height; it needed to be plastic enough for good workability and yet have a minimum of warpage; and, it required a body of strength and durability without requiring firing at stoneware temperature. A large amount of previous experience with available clays and earth materials in the ceramics studio on the part of Mr. Autio and former graduate students made it unnecessary to carry out elaborate tests on clay bodies. A suggested sculpture clay body was tested in the following form:

50 lbs. Kentucky ball clay
50 lbs. Denver fire clay
30 lbs. twenty-mesh local mortar sand
20 lbs. local airport clay

Two larger pieces of abstract sculpture were constructed together with a small tile set to determine the rate of shrinkage. The larger test sculpture measured fifty-eight inches in height and shrank to a height of fifty-two and one half inches. This indicated that the rate of shrinkage was roughly ten per cent.

The workability of this particular mix proved to be desirable and almost no warpage resulted in firing at cone

five, (2156° F.), a cone temperature which would give the desired strength without endangering over vitrification of the local clay within the mix. A batch of six hundred pounds of dry materials was mixed for the sculpture.

A platform of cement-asbestos board three feet by four feet was placed on a base of two by four inch wood; this was covered with a sprinkling of sand, over which a piece of quarter inch plywood was laid to form a construction base. This was done to enable lifting the bottom sections--the largest and heaviest--directly into the kiln for firing.

Calipers were then devised, based upon a one to four relationship, for enlarging the model proportions four times. Thus, the twenty-two inch model could become a finished sculpture eighty eight inches in height, which, when dried and fired, would still be in excess of six feet in height. The base measurements were then drawn upon the plywood base and construction was begun.

Coils of clay were flattened to a thickness of one half to three quarters of an inch and to a width of one and one half inches, forming a base upon which to build. Handfuls of clay were added and carefully pressed to a thickness of one half to three quarters of an inch; all joined sections were completely sealed by hand, and later scraped and pressed with a trowel to effect a more nearly perfect compactness and thickness of walls. In order to add strength and support to the outer walls, inner cross walls were constructed in the

same manner, with one exception: these were built to a thickness of approximately one quarter inch, allowing for quicker "setting up" or hardening to give the desired support (Fig. 6).

Previous to construction the model had been scored into imaginary division points to break the figures into smaller units for convenient handling, firing, and shipping. As the actual sculpture was being completed, each section became a piece in its own right; that is, a ledge of clay was constructed of flattened coils at the top of the section and the next was begun as described for the first section (Fig. 7). A dusting of silica between sections kept them from adhering to each other on the horizontal planes, and pieces of paper accomplished the same purpose on the vertical planes. In this manner the entire forms were built, and a final modeling for the surface texture was added while in the leather-hard stage.

The sculpture was allowed to dry for three weeks to evaporate all possible moisture before firing. A splatter coating of several colors of engobes was applied to the sculpture, followed by a thin coat of lead glaze to fuse the colors and to seal the surface. The various sections were then fired until the kiln temperature reached cone five.

CHAPTER VI

THE EVALUATION

After creative time and energy have given the sculpture existence one is forced to ask whether or not it serves the purpose for which it was intended. It is very difficult to make a proper evaluation of it in terms of its functional success to the site and to the public. Permanent installation and the passing of time will make this possible.

The forms seem to possess a desirable sculptural quality. Angularity has been maintained to give a feeling of strength while edges have been softened to make honest use of the material; details of facial features and hands have been limited to be consistent with the simplification of clothing. It is felt that this contrast between understatement of details and overstatement of proportions gives the sculpture a monumental feeling which is in keeping with its site and subject matter. The rightness of the final forms can only be judged in terms of the present; experience and exposure in the future life of the artist must inevitably effect a change in his thinking. But it is advisable, at this point, to view the work process and to pass some judgment upon its effectiveness.

Certain things of a practical nature became clear in carrying out the project. The clay body proved to be excellent, combining extreme workability with great strength.

Its drying quality prevented cracking and the shrinkage rate in firing actually proved to be less than the expected ten per cent. A desirable textured quality came to the surface in its finished form.

Seeing the piece from a distance and from all angles proved to be a necessity in avoiding errors of direction and form, and this was difficult to do within the confines of the small studio space and the anchored platform. Had the platform described in Chapter IV been combined with a turntable action, making possible the turning of the entire piece for scrutiny during building, it would have been ideal.

The terminal project resulted in a strong personal conviction with regard to the superiority of the technique employed in building. By using comparatively thin walls and even thinner interior retaining walls, a great economy of time and materials was effected. The thinner walls dried quickly, allowing continued building with greater strength, actually, than thicker walls would have. In its greenware state the danger of collapse from excessive weight was lessened; in its fired state the small sections of less weight facilitated handling in transportation.

It seems that this type of ceramic sculpture would open new possibilities to the artist who has limited facilities for work. Utilizing this technique makes possible the construction of a very large sculpture with limitations set largely by the design requirements or the personal drive of

the artist. It is a manner of building a whole out of parts; it allows the whole to be thought of as such, to be studied as a totality of form. This whole can then be handled in parts planned to fit into a small kiln and reassembled after firing. It overcomes the difficulties of expensive materials, equipment, and help needed in making similar pieces of cast metals.

It is true that in certain types of sculpture the almost indestructable quality of metal would be required. It is also true that certain limitations of design are overcome in casting where joining of parts is not required. But the advantages of this ceramic technique seem to be great enough to stir the imagination of more and more artists working in the field of sculpture today. This is an age of concrete and steel buildings and architects have felt the need to "humanize" these somewhat austere materials; they have repeatedly called upon the sculptor to serve in this capacity. With increasing demands made upon the artist he must find new methods to fulfill them, and to this end he might well utilize the technique employed by this terminal project.



FIGURE 1
ENTIRE GARDEN AREA



FIGURE 2

EARLY STUDY, SHORT FIGURES



FIGURE 3

EARLY STUDY, ELONGATED FIGURES



FIGURE 4
EARLY MODEL



FIGURE 5
FINAL MODEL

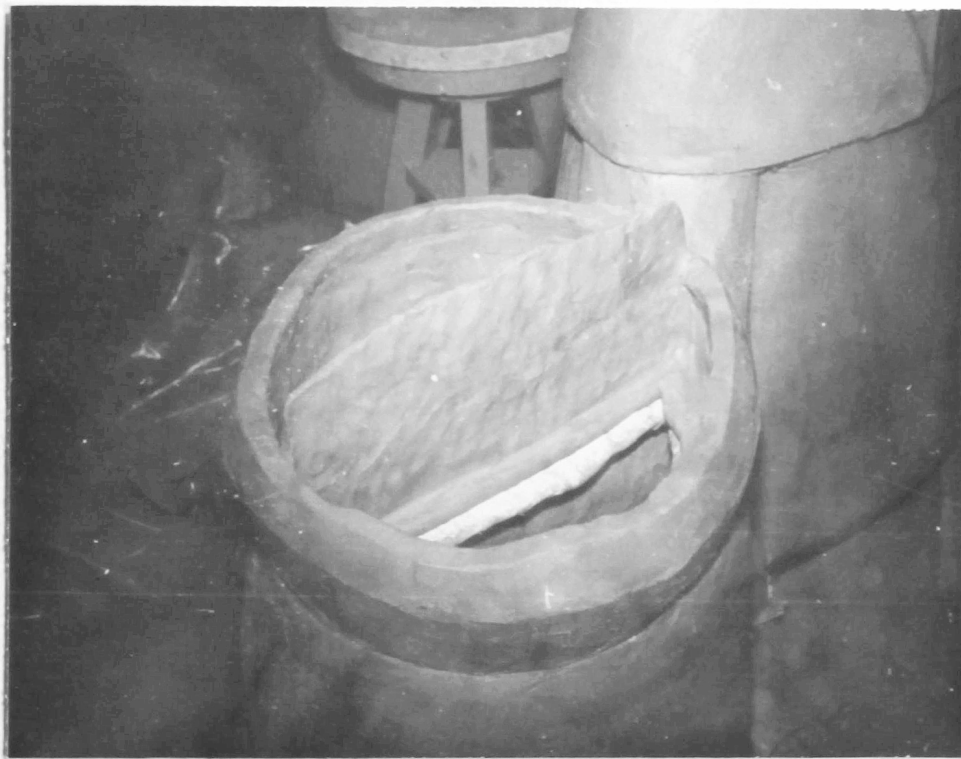


FIGURE 6

INNER WALL CONSTRUCTION



FIGURE 7
JOINT SECTION OF COILS

CLASS OF ENGLISH AREA



FIGURE 8

CLOSE-UP OF SHOULDER AREA



FIGURE 9

FINISHED SCULPTURE, BEFORE FIRING

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bainton, Roland H. Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther.
New York: Abingdon Press, 1950. 422 pp.
- _____. The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century. Boston:
The Beacon Press, 1952. 276 pp.
- Coulton, G. G. The Fate of Medieval Art in the Renaissance
and Reformation (Part II of Art and the Reformation.
Third Edition). New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958.
140 pp.
- Hazlitt, William (ed.). The Table Talk of Martin Luther.
London: George Bell and Sons, 1895. 390 pp.
- Henze, Anton, and Theodor Filthaut. Contemporary Church Art.
Trans. Cecily Hastings. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956.
128 pp.
- Jacobs, Henry Eyster. Martin Luther, The Hero of the Reformation.
New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898. 454 pp.
- Nelson, Glenn C. Ceramic Reference Manual. Minneapolis:
Burgess Publishing Company, 1957. 125 pp.
- Plass, Ewald M. This Is Luther, A Character Study. St.
Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948. 395 pp.
- Rhodes, Daniel. Clay and Glazes for the Potter. New York:
Greenberg: Publisher, 1957. 219 pp.
- Smith, Preserved. The Life and Letters of Martin Luther.
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911. 490 pp.