

TIM CHERRY

ANIMALS WITH ATTITUDE

By Myrna Zanetell



Mother Goose, bronze, 19" high by 32" long

"This sculpture was commissioned for placement in the Discovery Garden at the Arkansas Children's Hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas. I wanted to create a design that had a strong maternal feeling that is comforting and protective for the children and families."

If you happen to encounter a pig that has sprouted wings, a galloping hare hovering just above and behind a plodding giant tortoise, hibernating grizzly bears encased in circular dens, or a fish-filled otter snoozing on a cushion of waves, you will know for a certainty that you have arrived in the magically delightful wild world created by sculptor, Tim Cherry.

Rhythmical, flowing, and oh, so inviting to the touch, for the past 25 years, Cherry's imaginative sculptures have captured the essential charm and personalities of creatures ranging from bears, foxes, squirrels, and cats to fish, otters, and even pigs. Whimsical and endearing, all are definitely animals with an attitude.

Despite being on the cutting edge of the wild-life genre, Cherry's work has earned him entree into respected organizations such as the Society of Animal Artists, the National Sculptors' Guild, and the National Sculpture Society. For nearly two decades, his inimitable imagery also has been a regular feature in the Prix de West Exhibition at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where a stealthy mountain lion entitled *Snake in the Grass* garnered him the prestigious James Earle Fraser Sculpture Award in 2001.

Because Cherry has such an affinity and abiding love for animals, he finds inspiration everywhere. In fact some of his most popular creations have come from hours spent observing the small wonders that frequent his own backyard in Branson, Missouri. The antics of rabbits, birds, mice, and even a squirrel that persistently raided the family birdfeeder have found a humorous interpretation in Cherry's sculptures.

"Artists are a product of their environment, so I am inspired by the animals I see around me on a daily basis," he says. For that reason, family pets also have contributed to the creative process. Describing her as a "living slinky," Cherry was so captivated by the antics of his ferret, Noodle, that she became the inspiration for a sleekly knotted squirrel, while Tikka, his coal black giant schnauzer was immortalized in the form of a sprawling bronze rabbit. Explaining this unusual transformation Cherry says, "It's not so much about the specific animal as it is their gestures, which can be translated into a wide variety of subjects. My challenge is to come up with a strong design that captures the personalities that I wish to convey."

Because mass is an all important factor in his designs, in many instances Cherry simply begins with a combination of abstract shapes and then finds subject matter that works to bring it to life. For his original maquette, he chooses elastic, oil-based clay that he can form and sculpt. Once an idea has jelled, he carves an armature out of foam, coating that with wax, and then laying on the clay. As he works, details



Wise Guy, bronze, 66" high by 17" long

"The smooth and textured surfaces, as well as the positive and negative spaces, create interest and contrast in this piece. The custom-made pedestal adds to the sophistication and stately demeanor of the sculpture."

begin to appear in an ongoing orchestration of texture, shapes, and lines that allow Cherry to see how light values play out and how to balance the creation into a rhythmic form. The clay subject is coated with rubber to form the mold, which in turn serves as host to the plaster mold into which the bronze will eventually be poured.

Although Cherry's oeuvre consists largely of bronzes, he also works with stainless steel and stone. This year, however, all have taken on an added "luster of silver" radiating the fact that Cherry is celebrating his 25th anniversary as a professional artist. In his usual quite manner, he downplays his own talent, giving credit to others who, he says, have made the journey possible.

First on the list is Cherry's wife Linda, whom he met in the late 1980s while both were attending the Southeastern Wildlife Expo in Charleston, South Carolina – he as an artist, she representing a gallery in her hometown of Branson. Working in Loveland, Colorado, at the time, Cherry made what he describes as a leap of faith and moved to Branson in order to marry the woman who became his soul mate and the bedrock of his life, handling not only the business end of his career, but also occasionally assisting with less glamorous duties such as making the rubber molds for his



Tim and wife Linda in Hawaii

Cotton Ball, bronze, 7" high by 9" long

"Cotton tail rabbits work perfectly for my favorite design elements: round shapes and circles. I enjoy the rabbits every year as they return to my garden. I watch them daily as they interact with the environment and often become my dog Tikka's exercise partners."



castings. The Cherry's daughter, Amber, now living in Florida, completed his creative circle.

Sculptors who befriended him during the early years also hold a special place in Cherry's heart. Having seen samples of his work while on a hunting expedition that Cherry was guiding in British Columbia, Dan Ostermiller encouraged the fledgling artist to move to Loveland. Once there, Ostermiller and Garland Weeks became both friends and mentors, but it was Cowboy Artists of America master sculptor Fritz White, who perhaps exerted the greatest influence on Cherry's future, broadening his knowledge of the art form by teaching him skills in stone, as well as bronze.

While working in materials such as alabaster and soapstone, Cherry began experimenting with the soft lines and shapes that have become his trademark. In fact, White's influence was so strong that Cherry confides, "Every time I go into my studio I ask myself, 'What advice would Fritz give me today?'"

Sculptor Kent Ullberg also is a long-time friend. "Tim and I were neighbors during the period we were both getting started, so I have watched his work evolve over time," he says. "His early pieces looked a lot like that of other sculptors, until he began experimenting with the image of a pronghorn antelope. As Tim filled the space between its legs with vegetation, I could already see his preference for mass taking form. I think the thing I admire most about Tim is that he has never been afraid to develop his own sculptural language.

"The bronzes he does may seem simple from a sculptural point of view, however the smooth surface Tim became known for puts a great demand on the sculptor. Cast in segments, each seam has to be joined and then sanded until absolutely smooth. The texture in most traditional work covers up some of these flaws, but the clean lines, smooth surfaces, and elegant patinas of Tim's pieces are a true art."

Commenting on the fact that Cherry's

House Sitter, bronze, 65" high by 22" long

"I choose the Saw-whet owl for this design, because of its wonderful shapes and gestures. I feel it worked well with the story I was going to convey. I use circles continually in my designs, as it has become a part of my style. You will see circles repeated in the positive and negative aspects of the sculpture. The negative circle creates a much focused point of interest and represents the owl's house."





River Mates, bronze, 20" high by 12" long

"This piece has a strong, sculptural silhouette, representing an environmental message. All things living are connected by water, land, and air, and we are bound together by our relationship to one another."

latest designs are a combination of smooth and textured surfaces, Ullberg says, "Changes in style are fine, because that's just another note in our orchestra. It's still his overall design combination of abstract and representation [that] I really love."

During his early years in Loveland, Cherry also developed his artistic relationship with Bronze Services, the foundry that continues to cast his sculptures. He has always been a hands-on artist, wanting to be physically present during casting and chasing, even taking on the labor-intensive polishing process. However, when it comes to applying patina, Cherry relies on the expert advice of Pat Kipper. "Doing patina is an art form in itself, and Pat is the patina master," he says. "The way he applies the chemicals, no two images are ever exactly alike."

Cherry also considers his collectors to be a major factor in his success. "They have taught me, encouraged me, and given me the opportunity to explore, experiment, and chase my dreams," he says. "I am very grateful to each and every

one." One collector in particular stands alone: Bill Witchger, chairman of Marian Inc. in Indianapolis, Indiana. Drawn to Cherry's work from the first time he saw it at Loveland's Sculpture in the Park exhibition more than two decades ago, Witchger continues to collect Cherry's work on a regular basis. "During both the down times and the up times, knowing that he has a collector who believes in what he is doing is so important to an artist as he builds his career," he says.

Kid friendly by nature and wonderfully touchable, Cherry's sculptures are almost irresistible to children. Knowing this, the Arkansas Children's Hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas, recently placed 17 of Cherry's loveable animals, each indigenous to the state of Arkansas, in its Discovery Garden.

Aficionados are also finding new ways to enjoy Cherry's art. Calling them his "home and garden" collection, his medium-sized sculptures are being placed outside in increasing numbers. "People are currently finding special enjoyment in outdoor

living," he says. "Since bronzes are not affected by the weather, sculptures are the ideal way to take your art with you to the patio, as an enhancement to the landscaping, or even placed in front of the house as a special way to welcome guests. "

In addition to their free-flowing movement and strong sense of artistic design, humor is a constant in Cherry's sculptures. He uses the terms "endangered" and "extinct" to let his collectors know that an edition size is in low supply, or has been sold out. Additionally, clever titles such as an owl named *Wise Guy*, a fish and turtle swimming together that become a *Stream Team*, and a highly textured snowy owl on the wing, christened *Arctic Ghost*, not only complete the package, causing viewers to pause and smile, but also wrapping them in an atmosphere of anticipation, wondering what delightful creature might be the next to appear in the wild world of Tim Cherry. 

Myrna Zanetell is a writer living in El Paso, Texas.

*Swan Egg, stainless steel with gold leaf,
10" high by 12" long*

"In the design of this sculpture, I wanted to arrange and repeat the egg shape throughout the piece. This is seen in the body and head of the swan, as well as the egg itself. The round, black granite base represents the nest of the swan. I am very excited about how stainless steel and my style work together, giving it a more contemporary feel."

