

SCULPTORS AND THEIR FOUNDRIES

FINDING CREATIVE SOLUTIONS IN THIS ECONOMY

by: Tracey Fugami

In the midst of our severe economic recession, artists and art businesses are navigating familiar territory. In the United States, those who depend solely on their art career for income are used to long dry spells and month to month fluctuation of exhibitions and sales. Businesses who work with artists also feel the ebb and flow of revenue based on commissioned projects and art purchases. Sculptors and foundries have particularly prohibitive expenses due to their multifaceted processes, equipment, metals, and space needs. Yet in these circumstances, both artist and foundry have discovered innovative modes of working by researching alternatives, and seeking additional sources of cash flow in this unstable market.

Tim Shinabarger, a bronze sculptor who resides in Montana, received the C. Percival Dietsch Award from the National Sculpture Society in 2001. He has had an eventful year, with work in six galleries across the country and half a dozen exhibitions. Fortunately, in 2008, a private collector commissioned a large work that will give Shinabarger a foundation of income for this year. Despite this good fortune, sales have eased in his galleries, and he has diversified the sizes and prices of his works to offer more



Tribal Pride by Leon Richman, bronze, 28 inches high

opportunities to collectors.

Shinabarger remarks: "An economy like this does make it a little more difficult to manage inventory. I want to be careful, and make sure that my funds are put into the castings that are going to be the most popular. I think a sculptor has to be more careful with money in times like these. At the same time, I don't want to be too timid. It is hard to sell what you don't have to show." Artists with high production costs like Shinabarger must carefully forecast both expenses and monetary return. He is aware that if he cuts back too far he won't be able to fund his next project.

One key expense is materials. Between 2006 and November 2008, the cost of copper rose steadily. Artists, foundries, and galleries alike have felt the increase. When metal is on the rise, scul-

ptures are stolen, copper is shoplifted, and even electrical lines are damaged in hopes of a return. Not until December 2008, did prices start to decrease: copper, which cost around \$4 per pound in 2006, trades at \$1.50 per pound in 2009.

In addition to metal, foundries or artists pay for mold-making, casting, finishing, and labor. A life-size piece might cost as much as \$10,000. The prices of shipping, electricity, rent, and other overhead also affect the total cost of fabrication.

