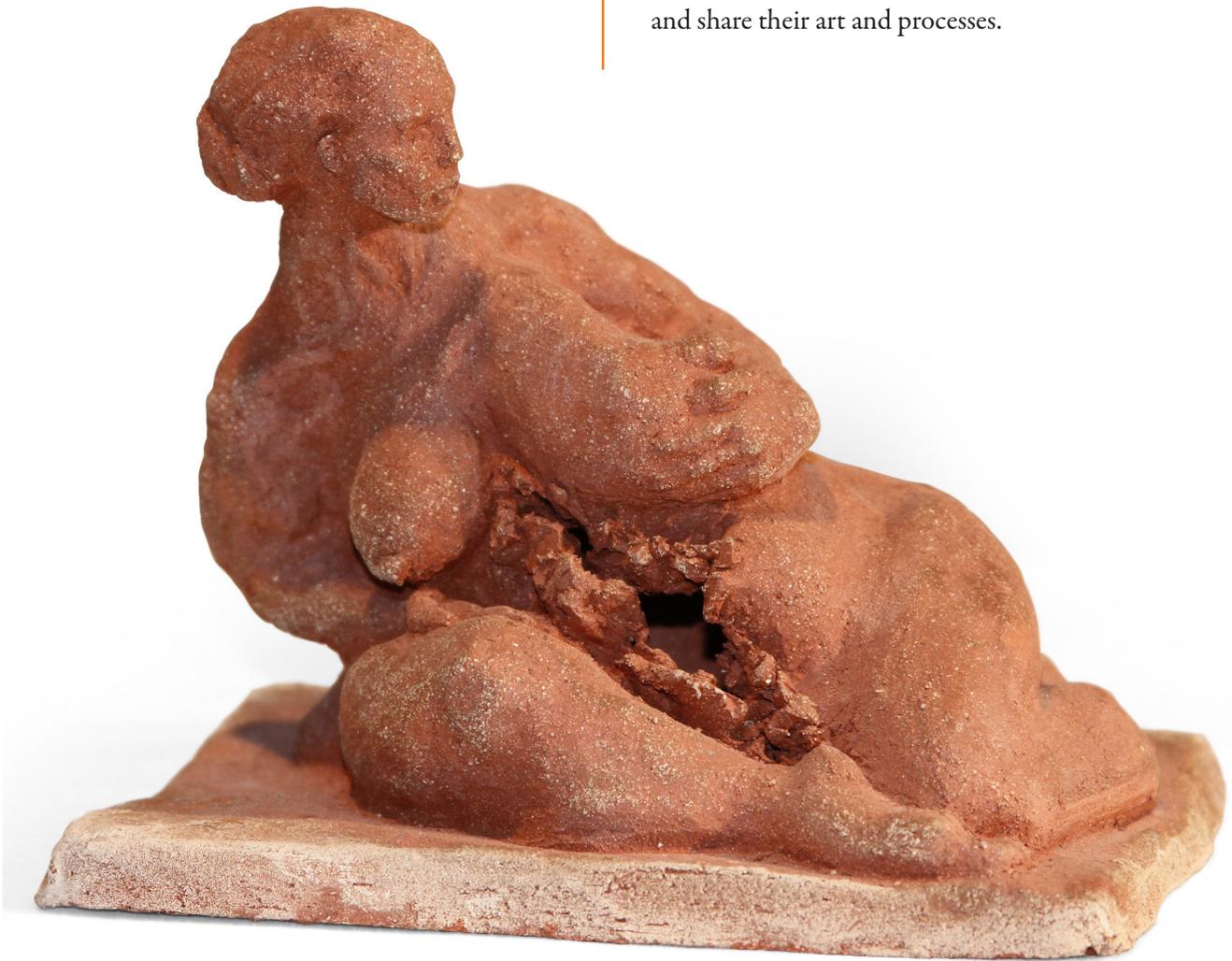


A CLOSER LOOK:

86TH
ANNUAL
AWARD
WINNERS

BY PATRICIA DELAHANTY

In 2019, the Gold, Silver, and Bronze Medal honors in National Sculpture Society's (NSS) 86th Annual Awards Exhibition were granted to sculptors whose careers were unknown by the larger NSS figurative sculpture community. All three artists were first-time exhibitors with NSS and their work earned more than just the distinction of the top medals, but the respect and admiration of sculptors and sculpture-enthusiasts nationwide. It was a pleasant surprise to discover these artists and to learn their backgrounds are as individualized as their work. *Sculpture Review* wanted to introduce these award-winning artists to our international readership and share their art and processes.



Leslie Stefanson, Untitled. Terracotta, 5¼" X 5" X 6¾" | Photo by Michelle Skrabut La Pierre.

FERREIRO BADIA

From an early age, the Bronze Medal/John Cavanaugh Memorial Prize winner, Manuel Ferreiro Badia, knew he would be an artist and developed a strong interest in painting and carving; even earning a sculpture commission at the age of twelve. The Spanish artist enrolled in the School of Arts and Crafts in Valladolid, a few hours from his home in Galicia, but a world away in the heart of the ancient Castile and León region of Spain. Badia studied the art of the provinces and became enamored with the polychrome carvings that decorate the architecture and dominate the museum collections. Greatly influenced by his time there, Badia's sculpture, *El Señorín*, was acquired by the National Sculpture Museum in Spain, and his art career was launched.

Now fifty years later, Badia is an established and celebrated artist in his home country. Adept at working large and small, his monumental installations can be found throughout Europe and Australia. His medals have been exhibited with the International Art Medal Federation (FIDEM) and included in the collection of the Museum of the Royal Mint in Madrid. Between exhibiting *Dance* in the 86th Annual Awards Exhibition and the recent installation of his stainless-steel sculpture *Compostela* in lower Manhattan, Badia achieved his life-long dream

of introducing his work to North America. As for how he interprets the human form in his work, Badia enjoys being fluid with his style. "I do not confront figuration with abstraction; they are two languages to express the same reality," says Badia. "In a figurative work I want to reveal the interpretation of real or invented nature. In the abstract figure I want to reveal geometric and mathematical perfection. I do not limit myself to creating within the framework of a particular artistic tendency, but I use the synergies that arise between them."



Above: Manuel Ferreiro Badia, Tomás Francisco Prieto Prize. Medal, Royal Spanish Mint Museum. Below: *Trovadores* (San Simón Islands). Granite Stone. *Heroic Size*. Opposite: *Dance*. Diorite Stone. 22" x 12" x 8" | Photos by Juana Ferreiro.



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BRITTANY RYAN

Across the globe in southern California's Orange County resides the Silver Medal/Maurice B. Hexter Prize winner, Brittany Ryan. A San Diego native, Ryan's artistic foundation began with, and continues to be challenged by, her alma mater, Laguna College of Art and Design. After receiving her BFA in Illustration with a minor in Sculpture in 2005, she returned and completed her MFA in Drawing and Painting in 2010. Today she is an instructor at the school and has discovered that teaching has its own rewards. "While teaching I am constantly reevaluating, refining and practicing my sculptural process," begins Ryan. "Aside from the more objective practices of sculpting the figure, the students bring new ideas and challenging questions to the table for discussion. My sculpture has improved at a highly accelerated rate that I would not have been able to achieve in my personal practice."

As with her prize-winning piece *Little Swimmer*, Ryan's portfolio of sculpture shows a sensitivity toward young women and their vulnerable place in the world. "Each figure is a version of a period of my life or a position I highly empathize with," explains Ryan. "I do want to include more male figures in my work, however, I have yet to discover the proper way to include that side of humanity into the story I want to tell."

In her short career, Ryan has exhibited extensively around the United States and has earned several honors, most notably the Elizabeth Greenshields Grant (2015) and the Roger T. Williams Prize at NSS's Richard McDermott Sculpture Competition (2019). Ryan cites contemporary artists Grzegorz Gwiazda and Beth Cavener as inspiration, but her go-to artist has long been Auguste Rodin. "Rodin was the beginning of my training and I still go back to him."

Left: Brittany Ryan, *Little Swimmer*. Aqua Resin and Oil Paint. 34" x 16" x 16" **Right:** *Midwest Mermaid*. Aqua Resin and Oil Paint. 32" x 12" x 12" **Opposite:** *Miss Independent*. Aqua Resin and Oil Paint. 35" x 13" x 2" | Sculptures and photos by Brittany Ryan.



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LESLIE STEFANSON

The top honor of the 86th Annual Awards Exhibition, the Gold Medal/Charlotte Geffken Prize, was granted to Leslie Stefanson for her piece, *La Bestia*. The Minnesota native and actress credits her hours before the camera for re-focusing her career from the dramatic arts to the creative arts. “The time I spent acting clarified for me how and under what circumstances I am most creative and what is most fulfilling from me as an artist,” Stefanson explains. “I quickly discovered that I love the solitude of sculpting and the challenge of creating work that is completely from my imagination and that the creation depends entirely on whether I do the necessary work to complete the piece.”

After graduating from Barnard College in New York City, Stefanson moved to Hollywood to pursue a career in film. Between acting jobs, she studied sculpture at the Otis College of Art and the Los Angeles Art College, where she took stone carving and *écorché* courses. Her first body of work, “*Erotica*,” was inspired after an intensive study in anatomy and examines her love of the

human musculature system and her interest in female sexuality. “I have always admired Auguste Rodin’s erotic watercolors and sculptures but wondered how sexuality in sculpture looked through a female point-of-view rather than a masculine point-of-view that defines much of the erotic art in the world. In deciding the form and emotion of the pieces, I sought to capture a moment in time; a moment of privacy and solitude.”

Having become a parent in the years since and relocating back to NYC to concentrate solely on her career in sculpture, Stefanson’s artistic development has kept pace with her own personal evolution. In the past year, she has completed a series of works exploring the topics of the worldwide refugee crisis, human migration, and forced displacement. She recently completed a fifty-foot sculpture of the Syrian conflict with 3,000 bronze figures moving across a barren landscape. Stefanson does not like to overthink her process, but rather trusts that the daily routine of sculpting can be inspirational enough. “All I can do is go to work as often and as much as I can. Out of success and/or failure, the work reveals itself.” ●

Leslie Stefanson, *Pakistan Repatriation* (Detail). Bronze. 41” X 21” X 3” | All photos by Dane Rhys.





Above: Leslie Stefanson, *La Bestia*. Bronze. 6" x 9'6" x 3.5" Below: *South Sudan* (Detail). Bronze. 47" X 27.5" X 4.5"



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Leslie Stefanson, *South Sudan*. Bronze. 47" X 27.5" X 4.5"