

## THE SCULPTURE OF JOHN WEIDMAN: FUTURE MEMORIES

Sr. Theresa Couture, M.F.A., D.Min.  
Professor of Art, Director of the Rivier College Art Gallery

the sculpture of **John Weidman**

FUTURE MEMORIES



september 22 – october 30, 2009

Rivier College Art Gallery

An internationally recognized artist who works both abstractly and figuratively, and mainly in metal and stone, John Weidman is creator of the public sculpture, *Monument to Memory*, recently installed in the traffic roundabout near the entry to Rivier College. Documentation of the conceptual and technical evolution of the piece, and its relation to a larger body of work, is a highlight of this exhibition.

#### OPEN HOURS

Monday - Thursday 11:00 A.M. - 3:45 P.M. and 6:00 - 8:30 P.M.

Friday 11:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

(also open by arrangement)

A portion of this exhibition is on view at Regina Library  
and a single sculpture has been placed near the South Main Street facade of Memorial Hall.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

In searching for my truth, I create sculpture that begins with discovering and expressing my feelings. As the work develops, my artistic process emerges as an endeavor to create forms that touch the human spirit in the broader sense. In other words, I try to stimulate others to find their own truth by inviting them to become participants in my work as they absorb it and respond to it with personal interpretations.

I believe that individuals view objects through the lens of their experiences. I consequently strive to provide viewers with opportunities to relate to their memories, creating new observations by which they can perhaps *feel* a past experience with a new perspective.

As for the technical aspects of art, I believe simply and firmly that technology and creativity must always be in balance.



## A COMMENTARY BY THE GALLERY DIRECTOR

One of the pleasures of designing an exhibition comes from a simultaneously intuited and considered positioning of pieces within a gallery space. Moving a work from one side of a room to another, inching it slightly to the right or left, lowering it, raising it, lighting it intensely or softly—all of these deliberate decisions, and more, emerge not only from looking at individual works for their own sake, but also from seeing them each in relation to other works with which they share space and consequently enter into dialogue. Each arrangement suggests a subtle emphasis of meaning that can be precisely replicated neither by other exhibition venues nor by other combinations and placements of the selections themselves. In this respect a small gallery is particularly challenging because of the necessarily close proximity of its contents, but at the same time its concentrated spaces can favorably highlight the interrelatedness of the works it presents. This has particular significance when what is shown is a body of work by a single artist. Such is the case with *Future Memories: the Sculpture of John Weidman*.

A major purpose of this exhibition is to provide an explanatory context for the Weidman sculpture, *Monument to Memory*, which stands twelve feet tall in the center of the traffic roundabout at the entry to Rivier College. “What is it?” we might be tempted to ask. “It looks like a giant clothespin!” some have said, “or a keyhole.” “What *should* I see?” is the spontaneous query of the most uncertain among its frequent passersby. The Art Gallery exhibition, by placing the roundabout sculpture in relation to other works by John Weidman, reveals an artist’s fascination with certain visual forms and rhythms, many of which he probes with a sense of limitless possibilities for repetition and variation. Some of these components become personal metaphors for those aspects of life that most characteristically inform Weidman’s artistic process. Perhaps the viewer can readily perceive suggested patterns of meaning simply by observing how the works merge within a multifaceted exploratory endeavor. Documentation of *Monument to Memory* is offered as an additional support for understanding and appreciation.

If a particular exhibition succeeds in calling attention to consistencies within an individual artist’s body of work, it can also suggest a larger historical context. Weidman’s sculpture, for example, emerges along a continuum of artistic exploration that began in the early twentieth century. A cadre of painters and sculptors of that period initiated a studied abandonment of the representational ambitions that had dominated Western art since the ancient Greeks. Their so-called abstract works were hard to put a name to, were often accompanied by factual rather than descriptive titles, and generally had no narrative intention. Yet, the artists themselves believed that their work was capable of articulating the noblest of themes, and there were critics who agreed enough to develop a language with which to justify the approach. There were essays, for example, that claimed for Henry Moore’s sculpture a poetic insight on human goodness and cruelty in a world from which God had allegedly departed; and Alberto Giacometti’s sculptures elicited a consensus that they expressed the loneliness and desire of an industrialized humankind alienated from its

authentic self. Notwithstanding the capacity of abstraction to paradoxically resemble such things as oversized clothespins, this mode of sculpture at its best demonstrates that chunks of mahogany or marble, sheets of welded steel, wedges of clay, and slabs of granite, when given certain formal qualities, can speak to us of life's most important ideas, engagements, and desires. In their peculiar visual language, regardless of how dissociated it may be from representation, they are somehow capable of communicating great thoughts and deep emotions.

Among the sculptures selected for Rivier's John Weidman exhibition is a piece entitled *Shelter*. Like other works in the gallery it is constructed of abstract visual motifs also found in *Monument to Memory*. But the title itself reinforces an almost inevitable recognition of the age-old subject of mother and child. Solid and steady as the work of Henry Moore, it makes a strong statement about security and protection, specifically the kind that comes from unconditional motherly love. However conscious the reference, the piece has a notable relation of similarities and contrasts with the work of other non-objective or abstract sculptors. A 1936 sculpture by Barbara Hepworth is a case in point. Unlike the Weidman piece with its descriptive title, the latter is called *Two Segments and a Sphere*, and is acknowledged as an adaptation inspired by Giacometti. Such a reticent verbal identifier diminishes the importance of semantic implications. Yet, though it is unclear what the sculpture with its three distinct marble stones may mean, or even represent, it has a compelling presence centered on the opposition between a sphere and a semicircular wedge on which it rests. The sphere looks unstable and energetic, as if it wants to roll down the leading edge of the wedge, picking up enough velocity to soar away from its holding environment. Might we conclude that this is an impulsive and reckless child asserting itself in the presence of a stable, calm, yet indulgent mother? And is the mother poised for gently rocking her child while reclining comfortably on the stylish chaise suggested by the second segment? Is this a meditation on a tender and playful relationship made elegant through an interaction of polished white marble forms?

Weidman's sheltering 'mother' is equally calm, if not indulgent. Here the undulating 'characters' nest with intimations of subtle constraint. Indeed the two are one. Yet, the larger providing figure is more complex. A solid and grounded combination of angular and curved lines, it is furthermore constructed of two pieces, the upper form, assumably a head, weighing heavily on the upright and stalwart body, a foil for the wriggling or reaching child that on its own knows nothing of its own stiffened back. On the whole the piece with its powerfully thick two-dimensionality and its consequent straight-ahead gaze, seems to be an interpretation of serenity tempered by necessary watchfulness. A familiar parable about motherly love, the Weidman version speaks more of abiding vigilance, courage, and resourcefulness than of momentary playfulness. One need not wonder that it presents itself ponderously in weathering steel.

It does not take much for any of us to interpret an object as a human figure. A form may have no limbs or facial features, yet the merest hint of human stature will almost assuredly prompt us to read it as a person. Thanks to this projective proclivity we can

possibly be as moved by Weidman's *Shelter* as we are by a more literal interpretation of maternal tenderness. (The Franco-American mother-and-son found in Nashua's *Le Parc Renaissance Francais* is a local example of the latter style.) To our inner eyes there need be no disparity between the expressive capacity of representational art and that of an arrangement of non-objective forms. John Weidman's work is seldom totally devoid of extraneous expression. Like Hepworth, Moore, Giacometti and other of his forebears, and in concert with a wide array of like-minded contemporaries, Weidman does depart for the more speculative regions of the intellect. Yet, like them he leaves us with the impression that he is also talking to us through his work about things that touch the heart and stir the emotions. Certainly *Shelter* is at the juncture. By extension one might reflect that much of the beauty of *Monument to Memory* similarly lies in the fact that in satisfying the human propensity for a balanced interaction of pure form, it further communicates, with guidance from a compelling indexical title, one of the most characteristic, significant, attractive, and moving attributes of our broadly shared experience. How fitting, then, that the sculpture has been installed at the southern entry to the City of Nashua and coincidentally at the turn onto the main thoroughfare through the Rivier College campus.

Sister Theresa Couture, MFA, DMin  
Professor of Art  
Director, Rivier College Art Gallery

THE SCULPTURE OF JOHN WEIDMAN: FUTURE MEMORIES

Barbara Hepworth  
TWO SEGMENTS  
AND A SPHERE



John Weidman  
SHELTER



MONUMENT TO MEMORY





## ARTIST'S COMMENT

The large form at the top of the sculpture is presented as a metaphor for the weight that our memories can bear upon us. The cubic column underneath represents the human figure, or the *person*. The space at the center of the figure is a negative form I often use as a metaphor for life. To me, life is about contrasts, and the figure with its opening—be it recognized as a key-hole and a key-solid, a circle and square, or a sphere and cube—is a stimulus for thought that shows up in many differing instances of my work. This form also helps the journey of the eye, bringing it back down from the weighted top so that the viewer is never stranded at one end of the work or the other. In this instance the open form at the center is meant to represent the spirit that takes us through our times—that is, through our varied experiences. And so I have entitled the particular sculpture *Monument to Memory*, a dedication that brings to my mind what wonderful things the memory can do to help us with the present.

With respect to how my work is viewed, I have learned to let go and embrace the gift given me by other persons who interact and identify with it, and who perhaps even find a way to express their own views about it. Sometimes there is an understanding that parallels my own, but at other times some strange and unexpected divergences occur. Actually, I am convinced that some viewers genuinely believe, however self-consciously, that what they themselves see in my work is perhaps rather *strange* in the first place, or at least decidedly personal. That's fine with me, for in the end it is always my hope that others enjoy my work in their own way and on their own terms.

The Making of MONUMENT TO MEMORY





THE SCULPTURE OF JOHN WEIDMAN: FUTURE MEMORIES





THE SCULPTURE OF JOHN WEIDMAN: FUTURE MEMORIES





THE SCULPTURE OF JOHN WEIDMAN: FUTURE MEMORIES





THE SCULPTURE OF JOHN WEIDMAN: FUTURE MEMORIES





**THE SCULPTURE OF JOHN WEIDMAN: FUTURE MEMORIES**



Photographs courtesy of Nadiya Weidman