



Photo: Joseph Painter.

“Smith explained: “The torso is a segment that I cast from the original mold of *Still Life*. I closed the open ends, and those planes created abstract shapes, as suggested also by Stephen Robin.”

Over the years, Smith developed his own techniques for achieving both the aesthetic and practical benefits of concrete. “All my sculptures are first modeled in plastiline,” he says, “then an intermediate plaster waste mold is used to produce a plaster cast of the sculpture. That cast is then refined, and a urethane rubber mold is made of it. That is the mold I use to produce a concrete cast.”

“I have found GFRC to be a versatile material for casting,” he says. “I use portland cement, which is very fine, and triple zero sand which is very fine also. It gets into all the small detail of the rubber mold. You can cast your work hollow because fiberglass strands work as a reinforcing matrix, much like hemp does in plaster. This keeps the weight of the piece down. One square foot of GFRC at three-quarter inch thick weighs about seven to eight pounds.”

“I recently cast a series of reliefs where I cast them at three-eighths inch thick to reduce the weight,” Smith says. “I chose to do this because the reliefs are interior pieces and won’t be exhibited outdoors, nor are they structural. A three foot by four foot relief at three-eighths inch thick weighed fifty pounds. You can use dry pigments in the mix to color it or paint or spray cement dyes on the finished cast. Those exterior dyes also help to seal the sculpture from moisture. Like casting in plaster, the larger and simpler your composition is, the easier it is to cast in concrete.”

Smith has found the “beautiful contradiction” of concrete well suited to the subject matter of his sculpture, which he calls a *conversation between past archetypes and present reality*. “When I observe people in social gatherings and private settings,” he says, “I continually see the past traditions of figurative sculpture assert themselves through the poses, attitudes, and physiques of my contemporaries. While I model the forms from direct observation of the naked model, a gradual change occurs to the exterior form so that this is no longer a strictly mimetic process, but takes on an inherent abstract formality, a past contained in the bones of the idea, which begins to direct the composition and the aesthetics.”

On this page: *Still Life Fragment* (2005), cast in GFRC, 16 inches high.