

>> Throughout this series, we explored the lives of women as artists and trailblazers from an outsider perspective. So for this last episode, we're bringing you an inside look. I had the pleasure of interviewing two women who can count themselves among the number of artists and sculptors that you can view in the Capitol. For the first interview, I spoke with artist Deborah Copenhaver Fellows, the most recent woman to make a statue in the National Statuary Hall Collection with her sculpture Barry Goldwater that arrived in 2015 from the state of Arizona. You're listening to Shaping History, Women in Capitol Art, produced by the Capitol [inaudible] Center. Our mission is to inform, involve and inspire every visitor to the United States Capitol. I'm your host, Janet Clemens. Here with me is Deborah Copenhaver Fellows. Deborah, welcome.

>> Thank you.

>> So I want to talk about how you became a sculptor or maybe why you became a sculptor. I've been researching some of the other women that made statues for the Statuary Hall Collection. And I haven't found any others that I could talk to about it. So can you take me back to the beginning, how you became an artist?

>> I sure can. I went to college at Washington State University at Pullman Washington. And I had gone to school on a political science scholarship. And it's ironic that I got involved with an art class. Just, I had always liked art. But in that day, a career in art was not considered a productive field financially. So my second year in school, I got involved in an art class at Washington State. And I went to a girl's catholic college, [inaudible] College of the Holy Name. And I met a nun, just a polymeric [inaudible] within the Northwest. And the first day I saw her, she had a welding cap on top of a [inaudible]. Very interesting woman. As it turned out, I travelled the world with her. And she kind of took me under her wing. And I started doing sculpture. And from that time on, I was 18 years old, I pursued sculpture just as -- not like a plan. It just happened that it was something that I was blessed to find out and pursue that as a life career.

>> Some of the woman artist in the Statuary Hall Collection in the 19th Century found that they had to go to Europe for opportunities to study from classic works and to have live models and to sculpt there. So when you travelled with Sister Mary Turnbull, what are some of the places you went to?

>> I studied a year in Italy with the sculpture class in Florence. And that was kind of the light turned on as far as the potential. Let me put it this way. I knew after I saw Michelangelo's work in the Individual that that was a possibility that could be achieved by a woman, a diminutive -- you know, you didn't have to be a giant to accomplish a monument, to create a monument. Just I saw a huge -- he's probably a woman's size 5 shoe, very diminutive individual. Just thoughts like that, just holy cow. Nothing I had ever anticipated thinking, let alone pursuing. And there it was. A small person could do anything. And it just -- you know, the whole deal is the art of the individual. If it's something that you're excited about and you want to do, you can do it. And so that was my major exposure was there in Italy. France, I went back, submitted my portfolio after college to the [inaudible]. They said I could only do it in independent study. There was no point in doing that. I studied in

Greece with Sister Polymary. So my European experience was probably the most motivating time that I spent prior to this fulltime going into art.

>> So when you were done studying in Europe, what happens next? You came back to the States?

>> Yeah. Well, that was all in my younger years. I came back to the United States at the same time I had to study interior design. And this was very fortuitive because I started my own business in design. And I guess you could say I kind of polished somewhat of a business acumen, which most artists don't get. They don't understand business. They'd have to depend on somebody else to do it. But I was blessed to have that experience of running a business. And that lasted for about, I think, four years after I came back. And my heart was in the sculpture. I really wanted to pursue the sculpture. And so I let a -- I wouldn't say it was majorly lucrative. But I was making a living with my interior design and just started with the sculpture.

>> Yeah. That's interesting because you mentioned earlier that you got the sense that a career in art wasn't going to be, you know, financially the best path forward when you first thought about that.

>> Well, when I started -- Janet, when I started until this day, I always signed the D. Copenhaver. Women in art have always been, and to this day, it's more difficult than being a male in the art industry. I think that's changing now. I think it is changing. But I've been in some major galleries, art galleries. And I've been told within the last, probably, eight years, "You know, Deborah, if you were a man, I could sell your art so much easier."

>> Wow. So you mentioned you signed --

>> Yeah. Isn't that daunting?

>> I can't believe that's happening in the 21st Century. But I want to come back --

>> Yes, it was.

>> I want to come back to the way you sign your work. Can you talk about that a little bit?

>> Sure. My maiden name is Copenhaver. And I started in college signing it D. Copenhaver. And actually, later on, I've been married 30 years -- I sign it D. Copenhaver Fellows now. I never wanted to get rid of my maiden name. I wanted continuity in my signature through my life. And so that's the reason I've kept it D. Copenhaver Fellows. That's on the Goldwater.

>> And do you use just your first initial in other contexts?

>> No. No. I sign everything as Deborah Copenhaver Fellows.

>> Right. Right. So it's a conscious choice when you're signing the works to use the first initial?

>> Yeah. It has been for, let's see, 45 years doing art.

>> So I want to talk about when you pursued this path, or when you started thinking about it, did you feel you had the support of your family and of your community to make the choice to be an artist?

>> Yes, I did with my family. Very supportive, my mom and my stepfather. I remember the line that my stepfather said. He said, "Deborah," because I had been -- I was very successful in the interior design business at a young age. And he knew my desire to pursue art. And he said, "It's time for you to make a choice of what you want to be excellent at." And that's the day that I made the decision just to make the commitment and pursue the art wholly. No matter what, go for it. I have been, from the beginning of my art career -- I just like to do sculpture. And I have -- my husband says I have a shotgun approach to art. You do everything. Some people refine or confine -- is the word -- their subject matter to Indian or Cowboy or Horses or Dogs. I like doing everything. I like the experience of learning to do, whether it's the anatomy of the dog or the anatomy of cattle, the anatomy of the horse or a portrait of an individual. I like the work of resolving an issue. So I like to do multiple subject matters. And that has -- I think -- I don't think. I know that has kept my eye fresh in my art.

>> Yeah. I was going to ask do you feel this is where you draw your inspiration from? Is this the environment where you live?

>> I think yes for the animals or the puppies or the contemporary western lifestyle. I believe that is true. But more of my projects, like right now, for example, I'm doing James Palmer Parker for the big island of Hawaii, a monument of him. He started the well-known Parker Ranch. The timeframe on my sculpture is around 1830s -- 1830s to 1840. I just finished Jim Bowie for the Alamo. All of these different timeframes come into play with the projects that I do.

>> Yeah. There is a lot of historical subjects.

>> Well, see, that's the fun of it because everything you get into, you learn about what King [inaudible] and Parker and Parker marrying the king's granddaughter. And they got a wedding gift of 60 acres. And now it's one of the largest ranches in America, the property that they gave back to the Hawaiian people. It's a beautiful story. Jim Bowie, the history on him is really amazing. So every project I'm in is like reading another book and applying it to a visual.

>> I would love to talk about the process of researching and creating your statue Barry Goldwater. But first, I just want to ask you how did you end up getting to make that statue?

>> Well, every project comes a different way. That was a competition here in the state of Arizona. They put a call to artists. But it wasn't just limited to Arizonan artists. It was a call to artists all over. So that's the way that one came. The Bowie, that was by invitation. So each project comes in a different way. First of all, the commission comes as a request for me to do a piece. And the important thing about picking me as compared to whatever artist they select, they are taken by the artist's eye on how the artist perceives that individual, whether it's Bowie or Palmer or Goldwater. And if it's a competition, they like your version and your ability to capture what they think he looked like from what's still available today. I'm going to work with the Goldwater if it's pertinent to this discussion. I started with

Goldwater. I bought all of the pictures. I flew back to DC and went to the library, got as many pictures of him at his prime age in [inaudible]. I have a stack of all of that information, read all the books on his family, knew his family history, learned things about him through his children, observed and photographed his family to get characteristics from him, saw his work, visited his home, visited his secretary, visited his friends. And then you just kind of put this compilation together of my perception of what he was and what I could put in a piece of artwork that would portray him accurately. And so first of all, I picked the age that I wanted him to be and then the gesture, dressed appropriately for his [inaudible]. You'd notice the Goldwater does have a pair of boots on. He was in Arizona. He died at Parks Screen out at the Grand Canyon. As a young man, Anne Roden praised in his early years. Actually, not that early. Later on, he was still riding and praised. So he was an equestrian. He started the Bolo Tie Society in the United States. His collection is in the museum in Phoenix right now. So those were some of the things that came into it. The tattoo -- he was a member of the -- honorary member of the Smoke [inaudible]. Every time, he would go to one of the ceremonies. They would put another little tattoo dot on his hand. And they did that -- they've done that for years. So all of that adds up to the essence of embodiment of where you've wanted to go with the depiction of Goldwater. So I took all of this information. And I did a -- it's called a Marquette -- a study, which is the preliminary of the large one. And that's how I won the competition. And they asked for a portrait of him -- a pretty close to life size portrait of him and a Marquette of the gesture of the full body. So that's what I submitted to win the competition to do him. I was selected. So I take the -- I think it was 25% scale model. And after I won the competition, then I converted that to 1.1 monumental scale -- from 25% life to 1 in 10% life which is in Statuary Hall.

>> So you mentioned how you assembled all your kind of materials. And then you chose to show them at a certain age and with a certain gesture and then, you know, dress him a certain way. How do you make all those choices? What's that like?

>> I think the older you get and the more you work with art -- first of all, you really have something to work with on a model if they have a level of maturity. You get more character with age. So with Goldwater, I wanted him at the peak at his prime. And I figured that that was when he was in the [inaudible], when he was really, really at that age, around the mid-50s, 60s. He just had a lot of characters. Very handsome man anyway. But he showed the most character. And just, he was a compassionate individual. He would fly in medicine to the Navajo Indians and take risks to extend himself for people. He was a communicator. He was a ham operator. But he was a communicator. And the gesture that I have with the hand out is kind of him reaching out. That was Barry Goldwater. He was a very liberal individual as far as -- he was advanced for his time. Liberal from the standpoint of homosexuality was not a negative for Goldwater. And that's in a time when, you know, it was all closet. He was a very open individual. It was so fun to get to know him. And I really felt like I did get to know him through the secretary. I made every effort I could to talk to anybody that knew him. And I got a feeling for this is just -- Janet, this is really an intimate thing to tell you from an artist's standpoint. And this happened to me on my first monument. That was the Bing Crosby. I worked so long and so hard and studied so hard I began to dream about him.

>> Oh.

>> And I did the same thing on Barry Goldwater. He was in my dreams so I could observe him.

>> Sure.

>> That sound bizarre?

>> No. No. I mean --

>> That's how far in you can take that into. But with projects like that --

>> Immersion.

>> -- where you know --

>> Immersion is the word that comes to mind, right? You're immersed in --

>> Total immersion.

>> -- his kind of being because you're trying to --

>> So your subconscious is involved.

>> Trying to communicate.

>> So I got where I could then -- not all the time. But it was so pleasant when I would dream about him.

>> Sure.

>> So anyway, that was -- that's one of those little inside notes.

>> Sure. Well, this all, I think, seems to tie back to your original intent to major in political science, an early interest in workings of government and public service.

>> You know, I still am interested in all of that. I could see where I could have gone on with that. But I'm so glad I went into the art. I mean, different times, you know, life has challenges. And I've often said art is a lonely life. You have to be friends with yourself because you're alone in the studio a lot. You have to know yourself. It's just hours of being alone. And it's just I did a 180 dealing with the public or going off into my alone space. Quite the dichotomy, really.

>> Yeah. But then the work on statues of these historical figures and political figures, it's kind of tying the two halves together like a left brain, right brain kind of collaboration, I think.

>> Yeah. You know, that's interesting Janet. I've never put that together. But that's probably valid.

>> So you mentioned that this process takes a long time. So Arizona holds a competition. You won the competition. Made the bust and the Marquette. And then they liked it. And then you made it full size. Right? And then what happens after that?

>> After it's cast, then we shipped it back to DC. And it's installed. And then the unveiling. And then you go back to the studio, and you start all over again on another project.

>> Let's talk about the unveiling of the statue. Did you come to view it in Statuary Hall?

>> Yeah. Yes. We were there. It was the most poignant moment of the whole thing for me. And I'm glad to be able to say this. Barry Goldwater's granddaughter was there. And she was -- I hadn't seen her prior to the unveiling. They sat us all in Statuary Hall. And it was really a nice program. And after it was over, I walked over with my husband, and I said I'd like to get one last picture before we leave. And standing in front of it was Barry Goldwater's granddaughter. And she was looking up at it. And she was crying. And I don't know if she knew it was me standing there. She said, "That's my papa." And that's the first time she had seen it. And that was the most touching thing that could have been said to me as far as I got. I nailed it. To have somebody that loved me say, "That's papa."

>> You're one of the 16 women to make a statue for the Statuary Hall Collection. And I'd like to know how that feels.

>> When I actually give it any thought, which I seldom do, I guess I could say that I'm proud that I'm in that list. I think that's probably one of the more special projects that I've been involved in. It's jewel in the crown for a career. That's what I would say.

>> So what advice would you give to a young woman who wanted to pursue the path that you have?

>> Well, if someone wants to be an artist, no matter what happens, no matter what advice anybody gives them, they're going to be an artist, no matter what.

>> Artis Lane not only designed the Congressional Gold Medal awarded to Rosa Parks in 1999, but her bust of Sojourner Truth unveiled 10 years later in 2009 was the first sculptural depiction of an African American woman in the Capitol. In this next interview, I spoke with Artis Lane. Ms. Lane, welcome to the podcast.

>> Thank you.

>> There's a lot that I want to discuss with you today. But I thought perhaps we should start at the beginning. So can you tell us why you became an artist?

>> In my belief, I understand that God gave me His gift. Everyone is given a gift. And I'm here to fulfill this gift.

>> Excellent. And then I guess my next question is how did you become an artist? Where did that process begin?

>> At my birth, my mother named me Artis. Very unusual. She had some insight. She was almost an angel raising us girls and one brother in Canada, in an [inaudible] village called North Buxton in Ontario.

>> And you siblings have more typical names?

>> Ordinary names. Normal. Norma, Carol, Dolores. My mother, bless her heart, was so worried that I would -- she said I'd never make a living as an artist. I had to be a teacher or to be a commercial artist. And as I say, I knew that I knew that the whole reason for my being here on earth was to follow the fine art field, be a fine artist. The sensitivity, not to please, but to find -- be obedient to the inspiration coming to as you create.

>> So already, with your name, you were a standing out artist.

>> Yes. From school time, [inaudible] amazed by it. And I was early drawing little things for the other children in school and telling them how to draw. I was put in advanced classes in Ann Arbor, Michigan. My parents moved there during the Depression years to that my father could work. He was what he called a doctor of motors. He was a mechanic, because in [inaudible] village, he had worked on tractors and farm equipment, what have you. And my background with the sad family was from my mother's sad. So I always heard of Mary-Anne said Carrie as the heroine and followed her. And her early life has inspired me to make a statement through my paintings and sculptures that related to civil justice.

>> You mentioned a moment ago that when you were young, you were teaching the other students how to make their drawings a little bit better. Did you go on to more artistic training soon after?

>> Well, wonderful little Irish lady, Alice McCoy, gave me CCI, [inaudible] Institute, fought to get me this four-year scholarship that always went to medicine or to law. And for it to go to an artist was very unusual. But she persuaded the principal to give it to me. So I had a four-year scholarship. And then my mother's group would contribute funds for me to survive in the big city of Toronto where I became Queen of the [inaudible] Ball, first time for an ethnic to win that. Always many firsts in my life. At [inaudible] for student, they accepted my portfolio but found out that I was a young woman of color. So I won the entrance to it but didn't get much friendly receptivity from other students who were usually very wealthy and elite group of people. But I endured that.

>> So then after school, you began your career in art?

>> I was always getting little commissions from public school and from the students who wanted their portrait done or whatever. And I did Neuro [inaudible] for the community church right across from where I lived and where today, my sculpture of Mary [inaudible] is standing.

>> So I want to talk about when you being a portrait, whether, you know, a painting or an engraving or a bust, where do you start with the person that you choose?

>> I start with research, much research, as much as I can get a hold of. And also, my strong desire to do justice to their struggle as a person who as overcome many immoral issues into a life of self-sacrifice and of great leadership and teaching and to obliterate racism.

>> So what was your process like making the bust of Sojourner Truth?

>> I would have all these photographs of her around me and even recording of her history. I kept [inaudible] on her qualities. I am a student of [inaudible] metaphysics. And the whole

motive for her daring to walk off that plantation and give herself that name as a journey woman to preach about God and against slavery -- that was -- all my upbringing had dealt with that through my ancestors. So I was very much in tune with her whole reason for risking her life to make this message. She even had an audience with President Lincoln. And her speeches, even though she had not been educated and she was raised with the Dutch language, that she managed to, with her powerful presence -- she was over six feet tall. And in my work, I find [inaudible]. I elongate to give it more presence and power through elongate. So it was just natural. She was six foot two I believe. So she was just the ideal sculptor's muse or subject before me. Her story, of course, was what was a strength and my keeping at it. I did many sketches of her along with the biography because she used -- very clever lady -- use photographic images of herself at gatherings and would sell them. Very enterprising, even up until her late years where she purchased land.

>> What did the process feel like to sculpt the bust of Sojourner Truth?

>> Well, the fine artist is always inspired by not only their gift given them but for viewers to be lifted by the person whom you admire. So that just always made it possible for me to - with that motivation, it just automatically grew and took form in that way. You feel inspired. And you overcome. I have -- I'm lefthanded, which is a good sign for creative people. Physically, it can be quite harming. I have a bent finger in my left hand from years of sculpting, pressure put on it. But you overcome that. You're just so caught up in seeing it appear before you. I could be just as amazed at anyone not doing it, not creating the work because of God's message on earth that everyone who has done much to uplift and speak of divine love, principal, mind, soul, spirit, light, truth as she did. That motivation just keeps you going. I lose all sense of time working into the early morning not having any consciousness of time.

>> So you mentioned, you know, some of your work portraiture and some of your work about social justice or social injustice. And you've also mentioned the metaphysical. Can you talk more about that?

>> I was given a book called Science and Health with the Key to the Scriptures by Mary Baker Eddy, who herself was a [inaudible]. She -- in fact, her injuries, she had just come back from the protest against injustice. And when I was given that book Science and Health, at first, I didn't understand it completely. In fact, the word 'metaphysics,' I didn't get the depth of meta above the physical into the spiritual, its meaning. I had been working that way, creating or from that point of view. But I was so grateful that it came to me or was given to me as a motivation for my approach to getting a likeness or making a statement. I have now [inaudible] the concept of translation of immortal mind. God created men in God's image. God is a spirit. And therefore, the mind that is purely a reflection, pure, I use as body language, using a pure African as a symbol of generic man, that whole belief of it all beginning in the bowels of Africa. This is a symbol to use through body language and darkness, mining in the field [inaudible] of death and the power of God pulling this generic man up sculpture body language [inaudible]. And then now the final top, balanced on one leg, coming out from the pure reflection understanding of God and of His true identity. And that's expressed through pure African model [inaudible], who's known by many people. He posts for all of the sculptures of the generic man rising higher and higher. And that

knowledge being I took it up to twice the size because the first ones were only 37 inches. And an installation in [inaudible] Museum of that journey we all go through, using myself and my own journey out of darkness and into the light. I did myself in darkness, just hit. And then the [inaudible] with the skeleton for anatomy, the easel symbols and then the final [inaudible] finger on. So I used to express a spiritual meaning in the very light white background and that black ray charcoal [inaudible] vertical [inaudible] of my self-portrait.

>> When you think about the bust of Sojourner Truth sitting in the United States Capitol and visitors come to see it, is there something -- a certain message you would like or hope that they would take away from looking at that bust?

>> I'm so strong on this idea of erasing that disrespect for the beauty of ebony skin and also lack of equal respect for females. And so I would hope that my portrayal of her sets a new standard for admiration, just visually and ethically.

>> Wonderful. Well, we love having the bust on display in the Capitol. And visitors do react to it. It's featured on a couple of our specialty tours. And folks can see it without even going on a tour. So I want to say personally thank you for making the bust of Sojourner Truth.

>> I am so glad. And I need to -- I'm still alive to hear that and from others. I get photographs of people standing beside it that I don't know. So I thank you for your -- what you're doing to keep it alive and understood.

>> What do you think the legacy will be left by your art?

>> I pray that it will lift each viewer or collector or museum that shows my work to understand Genesis verse 26 that God created man in God's image without any thought to skin color or features. It's a spiritual reality, not an anatomical one.

>> From the first echoes of footsteps in the Capitol, women have been a part of the story. We've explored more than 150 years of women in Capitol art. And the journey is only just beginning. At the 2009 unveiling of the bust of Sojourner Truth, Artis Lane made the following remarks. This clip is courtesy of the House Recording Studio.

>> On behalf of all the visual artists of the world, I know our President has put aside a budget for our culture to be recognized. Out of the [inaudible] museums [inaudible] of the culture when all students of all races in the museums. I'm so proud to be a humble, working woman who was inspired by this lady. And also, my great-great-aunt, Mary Ann Chardd Carrie, who I think knew her -- they were about the same era -- was [inaudible] speaker. I'm unveiling her bronze in Canada, May the 2nd. I just wanted to thank you, to recognize if you have children at home who want to be visual artists, don't discourage them. God gave them a gift. God will see it through and supply.

[ Applause ]

[ Music ]

>> Thank you for listening to Shaping History, Women in Capitol Art. For more information or to book a tour, please go to [visitthecapitol.gov](http://visitthecapitol.gov). The interviews included in this podcast represent the personal reflections and opinions of the interviewees and should not be

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