

***Envy and Purity*: some differences between these, the first works of my *Masterpiece* sculpture series, and their historical "starting place" antecedents, Giusto Le Court's *La Invidia* and Antonio Corradini's *La Purity*.**

There is a long history of artists making works "after" those of their forebears. Although employing an advanced technological armamentarium, I am also working in that ancient tradition. I don't consider, however, that my project owes much to "appropriation" and my contemporaries' works that have been labeled as such. Fueled by love, I'm reaching way back to a time centuries before the Modernist Revolution, searching for a way to make something equally revolutionary.

New in my art, commencing with *Envy and Purity*, is the utilization of exact digital "copies" of specific existing physical sculptures as my points of origin. No longer content to have my work be generally reminiscent of or inspired by historical sources, I have used Giusto Le Court's and Antonio Corradini's very-identifiable endpoints as my beginnings. I have set for myself the task of making sculptures that are "more perfect" than the *Invidia* and *Purity*, Baroque masterworks in the permanent collection of Ca' Rezzonico in Venice. Here is a partial list of the ways I have gone about attaining that goal:

1. The substantial additions I have effected and the way I have carved / polished my works have made mine true sculptures-in-the-round, not frontal portraits intended for placement in niches or against walls.
2. I have employed a non-traditional stone for my works, not stereotypical white Italian marble. My translucent Golden Honeycomb Calcite renders the veil, shawls, drapery, and figures diaphanous. The calcite's exuberant venation establishes a parallel surface network, one that alternately camouflages and reveals the sculptures' folds and sweeps, while adding a dizzying complexity. When carefully lit, the calcite appears to glow from within, to have an inner light that radiates outward. This is not possible with standard opaque marble. Italian Baroque sculptors used the material with which they were

familiar, the most readily available carving stone in Italy, the one that responded well to traditional hand-carving techniques. Because of my high-tech methods and my access to and knowledge of worldwide stone sources, I have many more options. I made a concerted attempt to select a stone that works in concert with the sculptural forms to create something rich and new.

3. My sculptures are mirror images of their sources. The mirroring, a feature shared by many of my portrait sculptures of the last 2 decades, is intentional. It is the view that the subject "sees" in a mirror. Mirroring is difficult to accomplish through traditional means of sculptural reproduction (e.g. "pointing up"). It is made possible through my use of digital technology, and I hope, adds a significant element of strangeness, of unfamiliarity, of newness to my sculptures (especially for those viewers who are familiar with their Venetian historical antecedents).

4. I eliminated the Christian Latin cross from the bodice area of *Purity's* veil. By so doing, I intend to make the veil more universal. The veil is a widely used head covering - Christian, Islamic, Indian, mourning (think Jackie Kennedy at the funeral), etc. The universal veil is especially appropriate for Venice because of that city's role as crossroads of Islam and Christianity. I hope that I have made the veil one of rich mystery, not just a relic of religious devotion, mourning, penitence, or modesty.

5. I eliminated the lace border from *Purity's* veil to freshen its appearance and enhance its smooth, sensual liquidity.

6. My sculptural treatment of *Envy's* drapery and *Purity's* veil is intentionally softer, more flowing, less sharp than that of the Baroque works. In my pieces, the stone cloth has become more than a covering. It is co-equal with the figures – the bodies and their coverings are more unified. This difference is subtle, but important. The Corradini woman, for example, appears to be covered by an improbable, wet-look, relatively crisp pile of cloth. In my sculptures, and especially with *Purity*, it almost appears that the body has departed and left behind a misty, swirling, dematerialized fabric surrogate.

7. I have corrected several of Le Court's and Corradini's sculptural errors. The Baroque artists not only didn't finish the bottom, sides, and back of their sculptures, certain passages of their works are confused or poorly realized. In particular, the layers of Corradini's drapery sometimes don't make sense or are not completely resolved. I digitally "fixed" those problems before committing my works to stone.

8. I subtly enlarged *Purity's* breasts. For a sculpture ostensibly with chaste devotion as its subject, the Corradini woman is quite sexy. There is undeniable eroticism in the way the body is concealed and revealed. By my breast enhancement, I have tried to gently tip the pious / sensual balance a bit farther toward the latter.

9. I have selectively polished various sections – backs, the lower frontal regions, the small patch of *Purity's* exposed bodice flesh – to differentiate them from my sculptures' mainly silky matte surfaces. In contrast, the white marble Le Court and Corradini busts have a dull, uniform surface finish throughout. I have worked hard to give the matte passages of my works a fine, non-directional satin finish so that their surfaces softly "disappear".

10. Le Court's *La Invidia* and Corradini's *La Purità* have suffered damage in some areas over the centuries. Their carved surfaces also have several rough, chipped, unfinished portions. This could be because the Baroque sculptors didn't feel the need to finish those areas, because they didn't have sufficient time to complete their works, or because those sections have been subject to abrasion. My sculptures are completely finished and damage-free. I have treated backs, sides, fronts, and tops with equal fastidiousness. The bottom of my works are also scrupulously finished, and I have permanently affixed a custom stainless steel insert system and ABS base plate to ensure display / transport safety. The historical antecedent sculptures lack these accommodations.

11. I have designed and fabricated my pedestals from lacquered wood, Greek marble,

and stainless steel as fitting accompaniments to my sculptures. In Venice, the Le Court is difficult to see, installed as it is on a shelf high on a Ca' Rezzonico wall. And the Corradini, until recently, has been displayed in a corner of the palazzo on an unfortunate, too-large, too-dark wood base, to which it is crudely attached. My pedestals are refined, multi-part, carefully-designed-and-constructed ensembles that I hope present my sculptures far more elegantly. They permit my works to be seen from all sides.

I trust the above clarifies my intentions and adequately addresses the subject of the "originality" of my *Envy* and *Purity*. I want these works to pose questions, not dictate answers. While striving to induce a type of refined viewing, of connoisseurship, I also hope also that my sculptures seduce. Ultimately, the analytical approach I have employed in the creation of my *Masterpieces* doesn't feel all that different from the one I have used for many years to make sculptures based on models of my own creation. In an internet-linked world where almost everything from every period is available to everyone, my aim has been to build a new type of sculpture, redolent of its sources, but very much of our time.

Barry X Ball