

The Artists of the Hall

*Joy, thou source of light immortal,
Daughter of Elysium,
Touched with fire, to the portal
of thy radiant shrine we come.
Thy pure magic frees all others
Held in custom's rigid rings;
Men throughout the world are brothers
In the haven of thy wings.*

— from Friedrich von Schiller's *An die Freude*,
adapted by Ludwig von Beethoven
for the choral movement of the Ninth Symphony

Angels emerged from Texas limestone. Painted images of twin eagles in flight appeared, gliding near the periphery of a domed sky wreathed in stylized feathers. Other epiphanies occurred during the late 1990s as three artists created unifying iconography for the Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Performance Hall.

In their collaborations and in their camaraderie, Texan painters Scott and Stuart Gentling and Hungarian sculptor Márton Váró reflected the transcendent unity they sought to achieve in their commissioned works. The Gentlings and Váró are of the same generation, but come from different worlds. The integration of their contributions to the program of visual arts for the hall was necessary; their friendship and their mutual respect was fortuitous.

Universal and regional, Old World and New World, classical figures in relief and postmodern drapery fragments, filigreed symmetry and the curling of a grapevine, Apollonian logic-order-harmony and Dionysiac intuition-feeling-pleasure, male and female, generalized myths and the Hale-Bopp Comet, sunrise and sunset, heaven and earth come together in the dance of life. The imagery created by the three artists and their assistants is at once obvious and symbolic, wordlessly accessible to anyone who revels in both the natural world and the flight of imagination. Váró's strong, graceful angels welcome the audiences, and the Gentlings' murals shelter and encircle them in an environment honoring the shared experience of memorable performances.

Scott and Stuart Gentling

The resemblance of the dome's double winged motif to a wreath of victory is an intentional conceit and is my tribute to the sensibilities of both the audiences and the performers who will enter this place. In its significance as a triumph of the spirit, or rather, as a part of that triumph, the winged idea was chosen for other associations as well. Symbolically wings also represent imagination and thought and ascendancy in general.

— Scott Gentling
from sketchbook notes for the Great Dome,
Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Performance Hall

The Gentling brothers, Minnesota natives raised in Fort Worth, are lifelong colleagues and collaborators. The twin artists live with creations that infuse their works: collections of 18th-century clothing constructed with intricately embroidered textiles; treasured originals by their mentor in the depiction of birds, John James Audubon; ancient Greek and pre-Columbian objects; a harpsichord; and Scott Gentling's series of composers' portraits.

Best known for their monumental publication *Of Birds and Texas*, a critically acclaimed folio with an essay by John Graves, the Gentlings began painting as teenagers. Each has studied at Tulane University and at the Pennsylvania Academy of ^{The} Fine Arts; each is an independent and eclectic scholar.

The hall represents a complex canvas for the Gentlings. Accepting Ed Bass' invitation to serve as principal artists for the structure meant making a departure from ongoing work in other areas: preparing an exhibition on the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán for the Kimbell Art Museum and the Museo del ^{Templo Mayor} in Mexico City; painting for individual patrons and exhibiting at the Gerald Peters Gallery of Santa Fe; extensive research into several cultures; collecting; and writing. On the other hand, creating for the hall represented a culmination of the brothers' many interests, a multi-planed outlet of expression. They said yes.

Coming full circle in terms of bringing to the hall their synthesis of beloved tributary influences, the brothers have dedicated their mural for the interior of the Great Dome to their late mother. "Stuart and I want to personally honor our mother, Barbara Gentling Smith, with this work," Scott Gentling said. "She literally introduced us to the arts; she took us to hear our first symphony at the Will Rogers Auditorium, and she bought us our first art history book. She has fostered our talent throughout our lives, and, to her, we owe a great deal of gratitude." Two other interior murals will be dedicated to ^{Several important local artists} local artists and early arts patrons. Stuart's hand (identical to Scott's) is Apollo's in the richly sanguine proscenium mural; it touches the hand of Daphne, as she begins to transform into a laurel tree, and her hand is that of a loved one. The brothers placed themselves in the dome scene ^{AS TWO GOLDEN} in the form of the eagles. ^{TRIED AND PLACED THEM, NAUSY FERJUSAN, TO WHOM THE MURAL IS DEDICATED}

ARTISTS:
 Emily Gethere Smith
 Bill + Thane Reeder
 Deane Otter
 Bill Boman
 Blake + Colleen
 John Smith

PATRONS:
 Shirley Holmes
 Mary + William + Thomas
 Sam + B + Thane
 Ann + John
 Ted + Virginia
 Rita Stevenson
 Helen Luther Holmes

^{WE HAVE EVEN SYMMETRICAL}

Reactions to the Gentling's work-in-progress have given affirmation and momentum to the artists and the art program. The French designer Jean-Louis Renaud, on a recent tour of the hall, commented that he found something healing in the images. The symmetrical grillwork design of the Great Dome's main lamp — *Fibonacci* — is derived from an ancient Greek pattern depicting the golden section, from which the musical octave was designed. "Every feather is laid off in harmony with it," Stuart Gentling noted. Count _____ Marzotto, whose quarry in Italy is the source for the marble tiles of the lobby floor, recognized the pattern on a visit to Fort Worth. Delighted, he donated the labor and artistry of special swirling cuts of tiling for the two corner entrances, to echo the design.

Originally, and ironically, the Gentlings did not favor architect David Schwarz' vision of angels for the hall's facade. Many alternatives were presented, but Schwarz insisted on angels, in forms the principal artists could not approve. "If we had any influence," Stuart Gentling reflected, "it was in seeking another solution to the 'angel problem.' Finally, I think because we went around and around with it, a sculptor with a more sensuous, Donatellan vision was selected. Márton is exactly right."

Márton Váró

... echoes and cross-references make Váró a typically post-modern artist. ... What he lacks, fortunately, is the cynicism which informs so much post-Modernist art. All his work shows his eye for finely calculated formal relationships. But always, even in the works which are apparently entirely non-figurative, there is a feeling for flesh — in particular for the ripeness of the female body. The fact that Váró prefers to depict this draped rather than nude is perhaps a symbol of his reverence for the mysteries this image contains.

— Edward Lucie-Smith

Crossing the street that lies just north of the hall and his angels, Márton Váró has often entered the café called Angeluna laden with limestone dust. "I designed my life around these angels for the last three years," he reflected. He perceives angels as "the embodiment of human creative impulses and humanity's guardians."

The Hungarian artist, born in Székelyudvarhely, Transylvania, is attuned to the need for guardians of the human spirit. He recalls the stultifying aspects of a communist state that kept his educated parents in menial jobs; his father, an intellectual, labored in a mine miles from home, and his mother, who held a doctoral degree, embroidered collars to earn money. "If you do what you like, you are happy. The cruelest thing," he reflected, "is to stop the talented people. You have to believe in what you do; you have to have your standards; money cannot be enough motivation. You must come to a fatal attraction to your profession."

His parents provided, even in the tiny apartment where they raised him, a thousand books, music, and love for learning and for all the arts. There were so many original paintings and woodcuts, "They did not need to paint the walls," he remembers. Váró balanced the life of the mind with

physical labor and acquired woodcarving skills from farmer-craftsmen during working summers in rural Transylvania. Although he played the cello in a young people's orchestra and appeared in many operas as a student extra, in his teenage years determined "to be a sculptor or to be nothing." During studies at the Ion Andreescu School of Fine Arts in Cluj, Romania, he won the praise of an exacting teacher with a precursor of the draped female figures with which he now is identified. A Fulbright Scholarship allowed him to come to the U.S. in 1988-89. It also opened the door through which he brought his wife and two younger children, and gave access to medical care and climate beneficial to his son, whose vision is threatened by a rare disorder.

Varo's sculptures reside in many public collections, including the Peace Memorial in Palm Desert, California; the City of Volos, Greece; the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the National Gallery of Budapest, Hungary; and Plaza of the Americas in Dallas. Spain, Germany, Romania, and Hungary have hosted solo exhibitions, and he has taken part in group shows in Spain, Italy, Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United States.

His hope for the performance hall rests in its potential for bringing people together. "In a nation of many faiths, there are many sacred places. A temple of culture could be the unifying center for a community. A universal gathering place for all can make a difference."

In contrast to the experience of Váró's parents, his wife Ilona, a geneticist, works as a research associate in the prenatal counseling field. His older daughter, Kata, is in the midst of graduate work in English literature at the university in Debrecen, Romania. His son, Márton, wants to enter the film industry, and the younger daughter, Ilona, aspires to be a psychologist.

Váró found the Gentlings to be "incredible intellectuals" whose names "should be in big, big letters" in any published work on the hall. The rapport between the three is, he said, "is worth mentioning. From the time of his arrival in Fort Worth, Váró discovered "the instant beginning of a friendship. It could have been otherwise."