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QuickTakes!

Renowned Sculptor Jim Dessicino Returns Home to Join Stockton Faculty

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Jim Dessicino, a nationally renowned sculptor, is starting the New Year with conflicting emotions. He is mourning a “perplexing” loss of the past year, while celebrating a “most exciting” gain for his future.

His excitement is over his new job as an adjunct professor at Stockton University. He said his enthusiasm is “uncomplicated.” He simply loves what he does – loves sharing and teaching others the joys and challenges of the profession. He also loves continually learning from his students who help him evolve and improve as an artist.

“But what is especially great about my new job is the fact that I am based in my home town of Atlantic City,” said Mr. Dessicino, who has taught in Philadelphia at the University of the Arts and in the Vatican when he led tours at the Vatican Museums from 2007-2009. He credits Atlantic City itself, specifically, the Frederick William MacMonnies statue in the World War I Memorial at O’Donnell Park on Albany Avenue, for inspiring his career. The monument, which, by the way, can be admired from Stockton University’s new Atlantic City campus, “had an effect on me when I was in college, where my love of anatomy and working with my hands all led me to what seemed like an inevitable calling of a career as a sculptor,” he said.

Featured in a Noyes Museum of Art exhibition at Stockton’s Kramer Hall in Hammonton in 2018, Mr. Dessicino is a sculptor, who works with clay and uses the human figure to explore the sociopolitical. His sculptures often examine the relationship between art and national identity, and in 2016, he received a Faith-in-Form Award from the AIA Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture with his friend and collaborator E’oin Burke.

Less inspiring, downright depressing, said the artist, was what happened to one of his sculptures in Princeton, NJ. It was stolen from a public arts project known as Dohm Alley that transformed a rundown, dark, alleyway into a beautiful urban space with an educational theme.

“I have been in serious shock over the whole thing and am still trying to come to terms with it,” Mr. Dessicino said.

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What has him bent out of shape is the theft of his beautifully crafted sculpture of street urchin Tom Dacre, the hero of William Blake's poem, *The Chimney Sweeper*. The sculpture of young Tom Dacre, the orphan, who dreamt of finding two loving parents and a God at the top of a chimney shaft, was stolen on October 29, 2018, from the public art exhibition in Dohm Alley (off of Nassau Street in downtown Princeton). Peter Soderman, the creative producer of the Dohm Alley exhibition, indicated that Mr. Dessicino received no compensation whatsoever for his efforts.

"I like to make sculptures that stick up for the down-trodden or those without a voice. It is so surreal that someone would steal a sculpture of a literary figure who symbolized those whose lives were stolen and ruined," Jim Dessicino said.

The theft was perpetrated either by someone who loved the sculpture and coveted it so much that he/she/they were unable to control their desires or by an entitled prankster, carrying out a pre-Halloween trick, according to the sculptor.

"It was more than likely the latter. I would have happily negotiated a sale price with a true admirer of my work," said Mr. Dessicino, who indicated that the artwork would have retailed for at least \$6,000. "I spent most of the summer working (gratis) on the sculpture. It was cast on October 5th, installed on October 9th, and then gone on October 29th, said Mr. Dessicino, who was hoping for a more lasting presence in the Princeton community.

Jim was motivated to donate his time and most of the materials towards creating the work of art because he was "taken" with the quality of the public space art exhibit and the enthusiasm and educational vision of the team of creators. Peter Soderman came up with the vision that inspired Jim Dessicino. Since the educational theme of the Dohm Alley is the era of the Romantics, poet, painter, print-maker William Blake was a natural for inclusion in the Alley project, noted Peter. Largely unrecognized during his lifetime, William Blake is now considered a seminal figure in the history of the visual arts of the Romantic Age. And sculptor Jim Dessicino, renowned for his "social conscience," said Mr. Soderman, was the "perfect artist" to put form to William Blake's poetry.

Disappointment over the Princeton incident, however, has failed to dampen the exuberance of Mr. Dessicino over his appointment to the faculty at Stockton. And who knows, maybe the orphan boy Tom Dacre just might find his way back to his creator if not in Princeton then in Atlantic City.