

# Joan Benefiel + Jeremy Leichman

## Figuration Studio

A sculpture design and production studio | NYS Certified WBE, est. 2008 | Brooklyn, NY

October 23, 2023

Dear City of Carlsbad Public Art Advisory Subcommittee,

On Veterans Day eighteen years ago, I had the transformative experience of attending the unveiling ceremony for my first public art commission, the Nassau County Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in New York's Eisenhower State Park. Being awarded the project was a profound honor because it meant the Committee trusted me to translate their stories into a sculpture that would honor the bond between all those who fought and provide a place of comfort, remembrance, and hope for their families and friends to visit for generations to come. Sitting in the plaza on that day, looking out over the colorful sea of flags snapping above the crowd of assorted Veterans in full regalia, I had an epiphany. It was clear to me that I wanted to spend my career seeking out other opportunities to make art that truly matters. And so I am thrilled to submit my qualifications to join this team and help create welcoming and remarkable public art on the upper plateau of the Veterans Memorial Park in Carlsbad, CA. I am confident that I have the creative, technical, and administrative public art experience and expertise required to deliver a stunning new piece of landmark sculpture that the community of Carlsbad, its visitors, and most importantly its past, present, and future Veterans along with their families will feel connected to and proud of.

My name is Joan Benefiel and I'm a sculptor with more than twenty years of experience in the field. I founded my own sculpture production studio in 2008 after completing my sculpture MFA from the New York Academy of Art and working in bronze art foundries for more than a decade. I am closely connected to the Carlsbad area in San Diego because I have been visiting every year of my life, usually more than once. First, growing up in Kansas, I traveled to see my grandparents there regularly and now we go frequently so our kids can spend time with my Father-in-Law in Solana Beach. My husband and studio partner is fellow sculptor Jeremy Leichman, who grew up in California. Also, both of our grandfathers were WWII Veterans. Jeremy's was a purple heart recipient with whom I had the incredible experience of getting to sit with and record hours of his bombardier experience recollections. Additionally, my Uncle from just north of Carlsbad was also a Veteran (Vietnam) and he and my grandfather would meet as often as possible to play golf obsessively all around southern CA. I know they would have loved the play at the Crossings in Carlsbad!

I have been lucky to work on numerous public art projects, both temporary and permanent over many years. Some have required very little community engagement, while others have

been highly collaborative. Whether it is working with other artists, contractors, architects, designers, city representatives or community stakeholders, I am comfortable both leading or simply joining teams. We also understand the importance of feedback from the community on our ideas. One example is from our project with Fairfield University. In one community review session, a historian pointed out that we had sculpted our Saint wearing an historically incorrect cowled robe. It would have confused the message significantly if we had proceeded without that feedback and were grateful for the chance to revise it.

Many aspects of this project are especially interesting to me. One is the rare chance to act on the debt of gratitude that I believe we owe to Veterans of all generations and their loved ones for the sacrifices they made and continue to make for the rest of us. And it is a chance to do so on a truly monumental scale. The fact that the site is so epic and spacious is incredibly exciting. It needs a stunning work of art that will be a natural destination, a beacon, attracting people to the plateau to get a closer look and to learn and reflect on its message. And it must also look amazing from afar and not require the trek up the trail to be moved by it. It will be important that it make a profound impact and be just as rewarding for those not able to take the trail to get up close. Set against the sky and the beautiful landscape that surrounds it, this is clearly a once in a lifetime opportunity to design something of such importance and beauty. Another aspect that we're excited about is that the artist gets to be present in person to really experience the location and connect with the community in the beginning. Having that gift of time and engagement *before* designing the art is a special opportunity and not to be taken for granted.

Our collaboration is fifteen years young and with our two heads and four hands we dive deep into concept development together. It is invigorating to be able to bounce ideas off each other. Having our differing perspectives and strengths all working together to hone in on what is the best, most powerful solution for a call sets us apart from other applicants. In addition, we bring mastery in a vast array of sculptural materials and techniques. Jeremy is also a furniture designer, so we can think beyond just plopping sculpture down to considering the site and all its elements as a whole. For example, we can incorporate seating, shade, risers, etc. as integral elements to the art.

Together, we also work comfortably across the spectrum of sculpting styles, from highly realistic traditional bronze portrait sculpture to very loose and abstract, or a combination of the two. Earlier this year we designed the winning Anne Frank memorial proposal for the grounds of the Clinton Presidential Library in Arkansas. It blends cast cement with cast bronze and has no obvious figurative elements. The cement element serves the dual purpose of elevating the massive bronze sculpture while resolving accessibility and seating needs for visitors. On the other end of the style spectrum, our winning proposal for Fairfield University centered on a pair of realistic over life-size bronze portraits of St. Ignatius. Standing face to face, they present him dramatically staring into his own soul engaging in the Jesuit "Examen" meditative practice. To

create this true-to-life portrait, we were granted access to the Saint's rooms above a historic cathedral in Rome where his death mask is kept, with permission to photograph it for reference. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum is our loose gestural work, as demonstrated in the "Power of Possibility" resin and stainless steel monument on the campus of Dakota Wesleyan University unveiled last year. In that case, figures were requested, but only to represent people in general, no specific person. Also, generalized figures were necessary to avoid the suggestion of nudity, because no clothing could be used since it was to represent women throughout many generations and clothing style would have detracted from the message.

In all our projects, we pride ourselves in offering the most value for any budget. We can do this because we handle all the sculpting, molding, and finishing work ourselves in-house. Since we are a Partnership and team of just two, our overhead is low without labor cost concerns. We also pride ourselves on never delivering late. Again, since we are a full-service production team of just two with very little outsourcing needed, we maintain tight control over all potential variables and prioritize accordingly. Only a few aspects of metal casting and fabrication are outsourced. For resin, 100% of the production happens in-house.

In terms of administration and management ability, I worked for a decade as Project Manager on numerous architectural metal restoration projects across NYC before founding my own studio. More recently, I spent a year as the Visual and Public Art Coordinator for the City of Salina, KS. During that short time, I was responsible for organizing and managing existing and newly acquired public art works and instigated the planning and implementation of the city's first annual major multi-mural community weekend-long alley painting project, recruiting big names in street art from around the Midwest for the event. I also experienced leading and managing several community events and group activities for other public artists during that time. It was interesting and helpful to gain another perspective. Simultaneously, Jeremy was the Public Art Consultant for the development and planning stage of their multimillion-dollar Smoky Hill River Waterfront Renovation project. All told, we have a good understanding of the public art process from the multi-faceted perspective of administrator, developer, and artist.

We will always go the extra mile to ensure that the experience of commissioning us is extra positive as well as on time and on budget. I sincerely hope that we may have the opportunity to bring all our experience and passion to the table to create a proposal for this wonderful new opportunity, thank you.

Sincerely,



Joan Benefiel  
646-823-6114

# Joan Benefiel + Jeremy Leichman

## Figuration Studio

A sculpture design and production studio | NYS Certified WBE, est. 2008 | Brooklyn, NY

### SELECT EXHIBITIONS & PROJECTS

2024

- Sculpture on the Lawn Public Art Installation; Orlando, FL

2023

- Clinton Presidential Center commission - winner of the international search to create the new Anne Frank and Holocaust memorial sculpture for the Presidential Park; slated for installation in 2024; Little Rock, AR
- Culture Lab Plaxall Gallery Exhibition, "Blood or Bond"; New York, NY (LIC)
- New York City Art in the Parks – installation of Hoodoos sculpture in the median; Finn Square Park (Tribeca); New York, NY

2022

- "Power of Possibility" commission - winner of national search to create Dakota Wesleyan's new campus sculpture to honor the Women of Wesleyan, past/present/future; Mitchell, SD; Unveiled September 28, 2022
- Public Art Consultant for the 6.8 mile \$75 million dollar historic Smoky Hill River Renewal Project, oversaw the Friends of the River Aesthetic Committee in collaboration with the City of Salina and HDR Engineering and Construction Services; Salina, KS
- Artscape 6 Public Art Exhibition; Fayetteville, NC
- 18th Annual City of Olathe Downtown Outdoor Sculpture Exhibit; Olathe, KS
- El Paseo Sculpture Exhibition; Palm Desert, CA
- Sculpture on the Move; Gladstone, MO

2020-2021

- El Paseo Public Art Sculpture Exhibition; City of Palm Desert, CA
- Turchin Center for the Visual Arts; Boone, NC — Won 1<sup>st</sup> Place in 35<sup>th</sup> Rosen Sculpture Competition
- Sculpture on the Move; Gladstone, MO
- Sculpture Walk Springfield; Springfield, MO

2019

- Sculpture Walk Springfield; Springfield, MO
- Art on the Streets; Colorado Springs, CO

2018

- Talking Sculpture Project and portrait sculpture of Pope Francis; a traveling interactive sculpture on a custom base that poses questions and collects visitor's responses. Launched on Earth Day in NYC and traveled to several other locations on the East Coast through 2020

2017

- Pikes Peak Community College – permanent acquisition of "Breathe" sculpture to mark entrance of new Marie Walsh Sharpe studio building; Colorado Springs, CO
- Sotheby's Take Home A Nude Auction
- Art in Public Places; Knoxville, TN;

2016

- Art on the Streets; Colorado Springs, CO
- Art Encounters Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition, Highlands Ranch; Douglas County, CO – Judges Choice Award Winner
- Sculpture Walk Springfield; Springfield, MO
- The Arnot Art Museum 75th Regional Juried Exhibition; Elmira, NY
- St. Joseph Sculpture Walk; St. Joseph, MO
- Art on the Lawn Outdoor Sculpture Installation; Rye Arts Center; Rye, NY

2015

- Cast in Light: Landscape Reflections, public art installation; Rye Town Park; Rye, NY
- Treasures from the Vault; Island Weiss Gallery; New York, NY
- National Museum of Women in the Arts – The Showcase Collection of Small Works; Washington D.C.

2014

- Public art installation & exhibition at Distrikt Hotel, sponsored by the Garment District Arts Program – installation of 11-foot tall resin “Breathe” sculpture on sidewalk in front of hotel for 1 year; New York, NY
- ArtHamptons Contemporary Art Fair at Nova’s Ark Sculpture Park; Bridgehampton, NY

2013

- Clothing Optional Art Exhibition; National Association of Women Artists; New York, NY
- Jeff Koon Studio Sculpture Production Contract; New York, NY
- Fairfield University Sculpture Production Contract – production of small bonded bronze versions of our St. Ignatius Memorial on laser engraved wooden bases for school; Fairfield, CT

2012

- Beyond Rodin: Contemporary Figurative Sculpture exhibition – installation of 10 sidewalk sculptures throughout the downtown and on art center lawn; Rye Arts Center; Rye, NY
- Somatic Shift Art Exhibition; Island Weiss Gallery; New York, NY
- ArtNaples Contemporary Art Fair; Naples, FL
- L.A. LIVE sculpture installation; Nokia Plaza/Staples Center – installation of ten resin sculptures in the plaza and at entrance to art fair; L.A., CA

2011

- Fairfield University St. Ignatius Memorial Sculpture commission; Fairfield, CT
- NFL Coach of the Year Award Sculpture Production Contract; New York, NY
- The Fashion District NYC - 30 resin sculptures for outdoor summer installation; NY, New York

2010

- Helmsley Building lobby wall art – Sculpted and supervised production and installation of 30 linear feet of 6-foot high .5” deep bronze relief sculpture with approval from Landmarks Commission,

2005

- Vietnam Veteran’s War Monument commission – 12-foot tall bronze sculpture honoring the bond between all those who served; Eisenhower State Park; Long Island, NY

## DOCUMENTARY

- [Creating a Large Resin Sculpture, a documentary by Smooth-on, Inc.](#) documenting the creation of Joan Benefiel's 11-foot tall "Breathe" sculpture at Figuration studio in Brooklyn, NY
- [In His Image, a documentary by Fairfield University](#) documenting the creation of the *Examen* Statues by artist team Joan Benefiel & Jeremy Leichman

## EDUCATION

- MFA Sculpture, New York Academy of Art, 2007 - New York NY [Joan and Jeremy]  
-Merit Scholarship 2005-2007 [Jeremy]  
-Sculpture House Outstanding Achievement Award 2006 [Joan]
- BFA Furniture Design, Rhode Island School of Design, 2002 - Providence, RI [Jeremy]  
-Deans List, Spring 2001
- Painting and Portrait studies, Lyme Academy, 2002 – Old Lyme, CT [Jeremy]
- Architectural Drafting studies, Parsons School of Design, 2002 - New York, NY [Joan]
- Art Teacher Certification Program, K-12, School of Visual Arts, 2001 - New York, NY [Joan]
- BA Gender Studies, University of Kansas, 1999 - Lawrence, KS [Joan]

## OTHER RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

- Excalibur Bronze Sculpture Foundry, Brooklyn, NY; Project Manager, Sales/Community Engagement Manager, Sculptor; continuously contracted over many years on a project and as-needed basis, both full and part time from 2000-2011 [Joan]
- Public Art Consultant for Friends of the River Waterfront Planning, Design & Development Committee; Salina, KS; 2022 [Jeremy]
- Visual and Public Art Coordinator; City of Salina, KS; March 2021-July 2022 [Joan]
- Sculpture and Drawing Teacher; 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y; New York, NY; 2006-2011 [Jeremy]
- Director (furniture design firm); Isaac Design Co, LLC; Providence, RI; 2003-2005 [Jeremy]
- Designer (yacht interior restoration); Best of all Times, LTD; Newport, RI; 2002-2003 [Jeremy]
- Bronze Foundry Technician; Eligius Bronze Sculpture Foundry; Kansas City, MO; 1997-1999 [Joan]

## SELECT PRESS

- The Tribeca Citizen, May 10, 2023; [Art in Tribeca: Hoodoos by Joan Benefiel](#)
- The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, April 16, 2023; [Benefiel Selected to Create New Clinton Center Sculpture](#)
- Cover story of Wesleyan Today, Winter 2022-23; [Dedication of Joan Benefiel's "Power of Possibility"](#)
- Fox News, 2017; [New Statue installed on Pikes Peak Community College downtown campus](#)
- The Rye Record, 2015; [The Landscape Just Got A Lot More Interesting](#)
- The New York Times, 2012; [The Human Form Unleashed](#)
- New York Garment District Alliance News, 2011; [Announces Joan Benefiel's Figurations Garment District Summer Public Art Installation](#)
- The Architect's Newspaper Blog, 2010; [Full Steam Ahead](#)
- The New York Times, 2005; [At Last, A Monument to Vietnam Veterans](#)

Past Work Sample 1



Past Work Sample 2





Past Work Sample 3



Past Work Sample 4



Past Work Sample 5



Past Work Sample 6



Past Work Sample 7



Past Work Sample 8



Past Work Sample 9



Past Work Sample 10





## **Annotated List for (10) Images of Past Work**

### *1 - 2. The Power of Possibility*

**Medium:** Resin, stainless steel

**Dimensions:** 10' H x 6' L x 4' W

**Budget:** \$65,000.00

**Year Completed:** August 30, 2022

**Location:** Dakota Wesleyan University, SD

**Description:**

Winning proposal in international competition, consists of a triple resin figure composition commissioned by Alumni of Dakota Wesleyan University, Class of 1970, to honor the Women of Wesleyan. Site-specific sculpture for entrance of new campus building. Completed on time and on budget in 1 year.

**Community engagement:**

Consisted of working closely with committee of six alumni from initial interview through unveiling day. We were awarded the project based on our initial proposal drawing, but many decisions regarding final column material, color, alignment, placement, and scale were considered and decided in collaboration with the committee via regular zoom check-ins and development drawings and plans. I was also present and spoke at the dedication event and related celebrations.

### *3 - 4. Examen; St. Ignatius of Loyola Memorial Sculpture*

**Medium:** Bronze, granite

**Dimensions:** 9' H x 5' L x 7' W

**Budget:** \$150,000.00

**Year Completed:** 2011

**Location:** Fairfield University; Fairfield, CT

**Description:**

Pair of realistic larger than life-size bronze full body portrait statues of St. Ignatius intently engaged in the Jesuit practice of "Examen", where one is to look carefully inside of oneself to recognize and face the good and the bad in oneself. Winner of international contest with the winning proposal, commissioned by Fairfield University. Completed on time and on budget in 18 months.

**Community engagement:**

Consisted of numerous in-person community review and feedback sessions with groups of students, clergy, and community as we finalized the design and our small-scale maquette, resulting in several adjustments along the way prior to sculpting at full scale. Towards the end, there were lots of meetings with the architects and engineers on campus to decide the exact opposing patina colors for the two bronze figures. The school film department documented our production process, spending lots of time with us in the studio and foundry for a making-of documentary. We collaborated with local artisans who were selected to provide the engraved stone base. We were also present and supervising the crane operator on installation day.

## *5-6. Nassau County Vietnam Veterans Monument*

**Medium:** Bronze, granite, cement

**Dimensions:** 12' H x 10' L x 10' W

**Budget:** \$180,000.00

**Year Completed:** 2005

**Location:** Eisenhower State Park; Long Island, NY

**Description:**

12-foot tall bronze sculpture of two soldier's clasping hands bound together as one by dog tags that dual-function as wind chimes, symbolizing the powerful bond between those who served in the Vietnam War. Commissioned by unanimous vote of the Nassau County Veterans Committee. Completed on time and under budget in 1 year.

**Community engagement:**

Consisted of visiting the site and several in-person meetings with the full Veterans Committee prior to submitting proposal. After being awarded the project based on my initial drawing, numerous meetings were held to ensure that I heard from all members and could consider it all as I created the first small-scale model. After presenting and receiving approval for the small model, the committee came to my studio and the foundry for regular meetings to check in at every stage of the enlargement and casting process through installation day.

## *7 - 8. Hoodoos*

**Medium:** Resin and COR-TEN steel

**Dimensions:** 93" H x 26" L x 29" W

**Budget:** \$25,000.00

**Year Completed:** 2019

**Location:** Finn Square Park; New York, NY

**Public Art Program:** NYC Parks Art in the Parks

Also featured as temporary installation in downtown Colorado Springs, CO / Palm Desert, CA / Kansas City, MO / Turchin Center for the Arts, Appalachian State University / Fayetteville, NC / Olathe, KS

**Description:**

Glowing, hand-tinted, cast resin abstract figurative sculptures on set of three COR-TEN steel bases. Inspired by the dramatic landscapes of the Colorado Plateau and rocky spires of the same name. Solid-cast custom-made "Sea glass" resin color

**Community engagement:**

N/a – work from my general studio practice

## *9. Breathe*

**Medium:** Resin, stainless steel, wood

**Dimensions:** 11' H x 3' L x 3' W

**Price:** \$27,000.00

**Year Completed:** 2014

**Location:** Pikes Peak Community College

**Public Art Program:** Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation

**Description:**

11-foot tall luminous resin sculpture. Recently acquired for permanent installation in front of the newly renovated art school. Pictured here at "Art on Streets: Colorado Springs," CO. In part sponsored by Smooth-on Inc. Commissioning agency: Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation. Prior to permanent acquisition for the campus of Pikes Peak Community College, it was installed for temporary exhibitions at the entrance to the Distrikt Hotel in midtown Manhattan, a brewery rooftop in Springfield, MO, and on the lawn in Rye Town Park in Rye, NY.

**Community engagement:**

N/a – work from my general studio practice

*10. Helmsley Building Historic Train Lobby Bronze Murals*

**Medium:** Bronze

**Dimensions:** 40' Long x 6' High x ½" Deep relief sculpture

**Budget:** \$240,000.00

**Year Completed:** 2010

**Location:** New York, NY

**Description:**

Commissioned by Monday Properties to sculpt a pair of images of the historic Park Avenue cityscape featuring the historic 20<sup>th</sup> Century Limited Steam Train to flank the elevators in the Landmark building. Joan hand-sculpted the images and supervised the bronze casting and installation of the completed panels on-site. Completed on time and on budget.

**Community engagement:**

Consisted of collaborating with a historic train painter, Chris Ludlow, and working from his original paintings approved for the imagery. Initially, I created a sampling of detail samples to show how I intended to sculpt the building detail and landscape in relief and presented them to the architecture firm and property managers and owner for approval. Throughout the project, their team visited me in studio to check my progress and approve the various elements, i.e., the train body, the train wheels, the track in perspective, the steam against the sky, the detail of the Helmsley Building intricate façade, etc. Upon completing the sculpture, I supervised the mold making at the foundry and hand-chased all the waxes, presenting them for approval along the way. Upon completion of the bronze casting, I supervised the chasing and finishing as well as the installation on site, ultimately receiving approval from the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission.

## References

□ **Kitty Allen**

Vice President for Institutional Advancement  
Dakota Wesleyan University  
Mitchell, SD  
Tel: (605) 995-2603 Email: Kitty.allen@dwu.edu

Led the committee that commissioned me to create “Power of Possibility” for the campus of Dakota Wesleyan University, worked closely with us throughout and supervised every part of the process. Can speak to our professional credentials and workmanship and experience of working with us in all aspects.

□ **Gerald Scupp**

Vice President  
Garment District Alliance  
209 West 38<sup>th</sup> Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10018  
Tel: 212-764-9600 Email: jscupp@garmentdistrictnyc.com

Commissioned and oversaw installation of a temporary exhibition of thirty of my resin sculptures on 10-foot poles for the pedestrian plazas south of Times Square in New York City. Can speak to professionalism, quality and originality of art, ability to work as a team member and also to lead a team. We coordinated with various parties such as city engineers, the Department of Transportation, and general laborers throughout development and the all-day installation process of the sculptures in a dense urban environment.

□ **Jim Fitzpatrick**

Assistant Vice President (retired)  
Fairfield University  
1073 N. Benson Road  
Fairfield, CT 06824  
Tel: (203) 395-5401 Email: JFitzpatrick@fairfield.edu

Commissioned and managed our ‘Examen’ monument for campus of Fairfield University. Can speak to our artistic and technical skills, the general experience of working with us, our ability to collaborate with stakeholders, and dependability for on time and on budget delivery. Consists of two life size bronze figures standing on a granite base. Partnered with Excalibur Bronze Sculpture Foundry for bronze casting where we are given full access and involvement in all stages of production for our bronze projects.