



TRIPTYCH OF THE *The Guardians*

Triptych of the Guardians is now in Japan as part of the Canadian collection for the upcoming FIDEM TOKYO 2020 this October.

Author Richard McNeill



GUARDIANS OF THE SECRET
Bronze

2016/18
360 x 480 x 240 cm

TRIPTYCH OF THE GUARDIANS presents two image/figurative works flanking an abstract one. The central cosmic egg swirls with opposing strands, like an infinity sign, around an endless void. The pregnant female Nurture Guardian looks to the fertile ground beneath while the male Searcher Guardian scans the boundless cosmos.



NIGHT AT THE PORTAL
With American & African sculptors, 2016

I created three new medals last fall as miniature reflections of my second monumental work in China at the Yanghu Wetlands International Sculpture Park in Changsha – a second tier city and capital of Hunan Province, of seven and a half million people, on the Xiang river. It is an ancient city, rebuilt after the almost total destruction by the Japanese last century, in the middle of China, servicing both north and south.

For a recounting of my first visit and experience in creating Eco-Portal (my large gate), see issue 39 of 'Behind the MASC' newsletter (Dec 2015). As stated, in that article, I was invited to return the following year to produce a second major work. Because of that, I was fortunate to see and document that first work which I had last seen in its original clay – it was now cast into bronze and erected, in the spring of 2016, on a very prominent site. I am told it is one of the favourite pieces in the park.



ECO-PORTAL
Bronze

2015/16
520 x 240 x 104 cm

I produced only one proposal for the 2016 symposium – I had sent a missive some time earlier that this proposal piece would be the finest work of my career to date and it was immediately accepted. This time I intended to produce a major installation grouping of three pieces spanning five metres and nearly four metres high. Three recent exhibition works and my massive gate were all to impact on this, as was the principle of dualities prevalent in much of my work.



GUARDIANS OF THE SECRET (GOTS) 2016
Original clay (proposal model) 36 x 48 x 24 cm

Guardians of the Secret has its origins in the history of my past work and I considered it a major culmination of much of what had come before.

Throughout my time during the symposiums of 2015 & 2016, I was chosen to be spokesperson for both groups of sculptors at all official functions.

I sat with Yi Lianhong (*of the Standing Committee of Hunan Province & Secretary of Changsha*) at the head of the first official gathering with sculptors on one side and CPC members on the other.

For the farewell banquet in 2016 I sat at the head table, along with dignitaries, sponsors, and ambassadors of other countries, and spoke for all the sculptors whom I called to the stage.

There, I officially thanked Lei Yixin for his leadership in all three symposiums surrounded by sculptors from Russia, Nigeria, the US, Portugal, Georgia, Germany, and China. Each time, I worked with a

group of about twenty incredible sculptors from all corners of the globe. We all agreed that Changsha had again hosted the best sculpture symposium in the world.



**OFFICIAL WELCOMING –
CHANGSHA CHAMBERS**



FAREWELL BANQUET



FAREWELL BANQUET

Guardians of the Secret, as a companion piece to *Eco-Portal*, again deals with the creation and protection of the environment and employs similar STREAM motif symbolism. Two columns that evolve into male and female figures, for the integrating dual nature of life, stand erect at each end of the central form symbolizing the mystery of life.



SIGNING GOTS ON THE MALE GUARDIAN

The male form scans the eternal distance while the the female one, swelling with new life, gazes upon our nurturing earth.

The central form, the cosmic egg that is also cradled at the top of *Eco-Portal*, has been brought down to the ground in this companion work and is now inter-laced with two streams moving over its surface and interacting at the top – the YinYang principle. This abstract form stands as a symbol of life and the secret of existence – that which is constantly asked but can never be truly answered. The streams move upward from below, as they also do in the two figures. They are positive and negative; one cannot exist without the other. They move in and out, over and under – they suggest the many combinations and possibilities in all that is. They represent the pulsations of life and the rhythm of energy.

The silhouettes and negative spaces are strong from the distance and invite viewers to move through the installation and engage with it at close quarters.



FEMALE GUARDIAN OF GOTS
(original clay in progress)



GOTS
(another view from the official Festival book)

NUTURE GUARDIAN
(photo pattern for medal)

COSMIC EGG
(photo pattern for medal)

SEARCHER GUARDIAN
(photo pattern for medal)



I developed the faces and hands in a naturalistic manner, but retained extreme abstraction in the rest of the restrictive figures that are eternally fixed in their protective positioning. This use of head and hand harks back to the very beginning of my GAZER series in the 1970s. The rest of the figuration is a compilation of geometric structure interlaced with organic streams that pulsate in and out of simple suggestive anatomical surfacing. The basic heads, upon which the faces evolve, are tribal-like forms, not unlike many of their abstract forebearers, while the eyes are only holes drilled into pronounced lids.

Guardians of the Secret belongs to my series RE-GENERATION – a series that encompasses aspects of all that went before and that refers to revitalization, renewal, and rebirth. *Eco-Portal* is, likewise, part of this investigative series. The Guardian heads forever gaze beyond, both down upon our nurturing environment and out into the eternal cosmic one. Their inner strength is evident; they do not move vaguely within and without, as does the Portal Mistress of *Eco-Portal*. They are profoundly and nobly aware.

I began the medals with reduced photocopies of the large work. To capture all of this in small scale and in relief fashion was a challenge – one I gave myself for some unknown reason.

Having eliminated the column structures from the figures meant finding another way to incorporate the streaming pulsations of energy, life, and growth. This was also necessary to complement the central medal that was, at early stages, nothing but that.



TOG – (STREAMSHIELD – INFINITY) 2019/20
Bronze 13 x 9.5 x 2 cm

STREAMSHIELD – INFINITY: Penetrating the cosmic egg, two opposing and weaving strands interact, like an infinity sign, around an endless void before confronting at the summit.

As the figures, in the large work, appear essentially similar from either side, it was a simple task to use a side-view silhouette in the flanking medals. This proved unworkable in the central form as the interaction occurs throughout the large work and culminates at the top. As this medal developed, drastic changes occurred until it scarcely resembled the starting pattern. At some point in the process, I decided to move right through it so that the two streams had a relevance to work with – in the original the three-dimensional form, itself, served that purpose. It also allowed me to bring their culmination focus lower, while still at the top of the design. Ultimately, this central medal, due to the restraints of relief work, evolved more from my *Stream Shield* works than from its starting point. Those works dealt with origin and destination and were so titled. This one, although so much smaller, has a similar quality and could be enlarged to any size. I, therefore, sub-titled it as part of that series.



STREAM SHIELD – ORIGIN 2014
STREAM SHIELD – DESTINATION 2014
Alumina cement, bronze, oil & graphite finish
(each) 82 x 50 x 20 cm

“In late winter of 2014, I created two *Stream Shields*. Death had shrouded my family on several fronts in the recent past and they were a response to this. As I created the meandering pathways and overlaps, I maintained reflection on these recent departures from this plane of existence. The elliptical format and the aspect of shield protection with the weaving stream of life and the stations of transition all came together to question the beginning and the end. They are musings on our very being – the journey of life” (excerpted from *STREAM – 2016*)

For the figurative medals, on either side of the shield, I solved the problem of the lost column streams by encircling ones similar to that shield about the figures. These emanate from the heads and form an environment, a bubble, about the two guardians.



TOG – (NURTURE GUARDIAN) 2019/20
Bronze 13 x 11 x 2 cm

NURTURE GUARDIAN: Within a cyclical format and swollen with life within, the female guardian looks to the earth as an iris plant signifies fertility and renewal.

In *Guardians of the Secret*, it is evident where the focus of each guardian is – above and below. The medals required more descriptive evidence in their restrictive two-dimensional presentation. I elected to use an iris plant for *Nurture Guardian* to reinforce the vitality and resurgence of the earth and of the guardian, herself. The iris has long been used in symbolism for fertility and it is a plant I am well acquainted with. The house, in which I was raised in Toronto, had a small planting bed in front and that bed thrust up the common purple flowers every spring. I assume they were planted by the grandmother I never knew. They have left an important imprint on me and I now have several groupings, of many colours, spread over my extensive grounds in the country.



ESSENCE FIVE 1976
Acrylic on paper/board laminate
77 x 56 cm

The arrangement comes directly from *Essence Five* of 1976 – a work from one of the painting series I was engaged in as I transitioned from a loft painting studio in the city to wide-open sculptural possibilities in the country. This series had its roots



TOG – (SEARCHER GUARDIAN) 2019/20
Bronze 13.5 x 10.5 x 3 cm

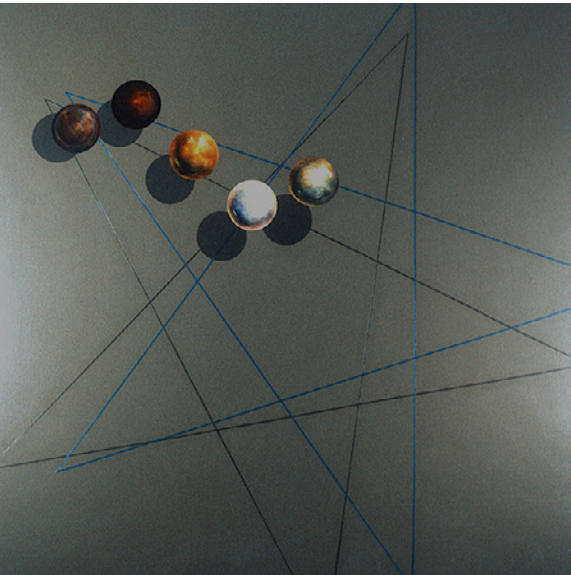
SEARCHER GUARDIAN: Trapped in a vortex of endless time, the aging erect male guardian scans the confines of the rugged landscape to the never-ending cosmos.

in eastern thought, Jungian theory, Indian Tantra Art, and European Surrealism – all areas that I have travelled with, among others, throughout my practice. The painting’s barren landscape also influenced that of the *Searcher Guardian* medal.

Although I have created many skies in my paintings, nothing seemed right to complement and counter-act the plant symbolized in the female medal. I searched the Internet for something more cosmic and settled on a stock photo that was barren and life assuring at the same time.



It was the starting point I needed and I juggled its components to fit the limited space I had allocated for it. Spheres have always been an important element in my work, both in painting and sculpture so the inclusion into this design seemed more than appropriate.



FIVE ALONG 1969
Acrylic on linen 156 x 156 cm

Over fifty years ago I began working with bronze; at this time I also painted a dance of spheres, titled *Five Along* – it was on my mind as I created the *Searcher Guardian’s realm*.



MEDAL OF THE GUARDIANS 2019/20
Wax for bronze 13.5 x 11 x 3 cm



MEDAL OF INFINITE DUALITY 2019/20
Wax for bronze 13.5 x 9.5 x 3 cm

I worked on the plastilina models over many days last fall, finally moulding and casting them in a hard wax. In late November, I delivered them to *Maker Sculpture Toronto* - Marina and Tyler had them successfully bronze cast just before winter solstice and I picked them up on that day. After many more days of finishing back at my studio, they were shipped off to Lynden Beesley in British Columbia to meet her deadline in January. She has since dispatched them, along with all the other Canadian medals, to Tokyo. Many thanks to all mentioned.

In the interim of finishing the waxes and working on the bronzes, I created two new medals cast from the moulds. Normally I do not make one-sided medals but felt it best to do so for the presentation of the triptych. The new medals, however, return to my regular practice of two-sided medals of equal value – there is no obverse/reverse situation happening with them.

One, *Medal of the Guardians*, fuses the two guardian castings back-to-back. The other, *Medal of Infinite Duality*, binds two castings of *Streamshield-Infinity* in an up/down opposing fashion that magnifies and reinforces the infinite duality inherent in that work. The difficulty in solving both of these works was in creating a flawless fusion of the stream motif connecting the two sides. Neither has yet been cast into bronze but, when conditions improve, I intend to produce and market a small edition of both as they are extremely good sculptural medals.

I am writing this as a deadly viral pandemic is sweeping the earth, ravaging our lives and way of life. Yet it is also the time of great springtide religious festivals and burgeoning renewed life - I am surrounded by it and am fortunate in that my personal isolation bubble is so large. Eostre is figuratively bounding about the fields and abundantly rushing in the nearby waterways - new growth is bursting from the ground; the birds are back, singing, masterfully constructing their nests, and soaring overhead.



Iris beneath a black walnut tree continue to ignore the hazardous juglone toxic condition in which they grow, where so many other plants cannot.

Triptych of the Guardians speaks to all of this.



Richard McNeill: Easter (April 12 2020)