

In Conversation with Mary Ann Sures, Co-Donator of *The Portrait Bust of Ayn Rand*

The Portrait Bust of Ayn Rand was sculpted by artist Sandra Shaw. This project was conceived by Mary Ann Sures, an art historian and co-author of *Facets of Ayn Rand*, and financed by Doug Arends, the chairman of Canadian Bank Note Company, and John Ridpath, an intellectual historian and former ARI board member. Mrs. Sures and Dr. Ridpath purchased the first casting of the edition in bronze to donate to ARI. The bust was installed last month in the lobby of the Institute's office in Irvine, California.

Impact had the opportunity to discuss this exciting project with Mrs. Sures. See the *March 2011* issue of Impact to read an interview with Ms. Shaw.



Impact: How did you come up with the idea for the Ayn Rand portrait bust? Is this something you've always wanted to see made?

Mary Ann Sures: After the Ayn Rand postage stamp was issued in April 1999, I began to think of a portrait bust of her. A stamp is small and has a short life; it is discarded after use; it lives on only in stamp albums. I wanted to see something life-size, something solid and everlasting. However, I didn't actively pursue the idea. In my mind, it was only a possibility. When I saw a picture of Sandra Shaw's bust titled *Arrival*, I thought that the possibility could become an actuality. That is, if Sandra was interested in doing it. Happily, she was.

Impact: What impressed you about *Arrival*?

MAS: Two things. First, the likeness. I knew that John Ridpath had been the model. The bust is not a literal reproduction of John, down to the last detail. For example, Sandra made his eyes larger. But there is no question about the sitter's identity. And second, equally important, is the theme or abstraction projected by the bust. It is an image of a self-confident man, someone who has reached important goals in his life. He faces the world with firm lips and smooth brow, and with eyes wide open—certain, aware. It is a positive estimate of man.

I always thought that whoever did the Ayn Rand bust had to have read and admired her works and, by implication, her person; had to understand and agree with her heroic view of man. An artist who saw man as an essentially flawed creature, whose life is characterized by doubt, struggle and defeat, could not do the bust. His metaphysics—his view of man's nature—would take over. He might achieve a physical likeness, but he could never convey Ayn Rand's character and spirit.

Not only is Sandra a skilled technician, she is committed to Objectivism and has a deep admiration for Ayn Rand. That's why I thought she could do the bust.

Impact: When we spoke to Ms. Shaw earlier this year, she mentioned that she took the maquette—a small clay model—across the country to show you. What was your response when you saw it?

MAS: I was moved to tears. It was so beautiful. It was the Ayn Rand I knew and loved. The tears came because, in those first moments, I realized how much I missed her. But the sadness was replaced with a rising sense of optimism, something I always felt when I was with her. Seeing the bust



was like having her in my life again. I said, "Ayn, if only you could be here to see this." I thought that she, too, would have a positive response.

Since then, I have purchased the small version of the bust, which was delivered to me recently. It is a work of art that inspires me daily.

"The boat completed the turn, and there in the distance was the graceful span of the George Washington Bridge and beyond that the skyline of New York City. When she saw it, Ayn exclaimed, 'This is magnificent!'"

I marvel at the likeness. In this connection, I'd like to say something about the difficulties facing Sandra when she started on the bust. She began with a great disadvantage: she did not have a living model. She had to rely on photos. When an artist has a living subject before him, he can study it from all angles, under a consistent light source which he creates, from a consistent distance. He can replicate these conditions. To observe a particular feature of the face, he has only to walk around the sitter, or ask the sitter to turn his head. The photos of Ayn Rand were taken at different periods in her life, did not have the same source or intensity of light and were taken from different distances. They showed some, but not all, angles of her face and head.

Sandra spent months studying the photos, familiarizing herself with the bone structure and features of Ayn Rand's head and face, with the goal of integrating all of it into a consistent whole. She had to present Miss Rand from all angles, which required translating the two-dimensional into the three-dimensional. All this she did successfully. The portrait presents Miss Rand's characteristic features: the firm jawline, the full lips, the aquiline nose, the large, perceptive eyes and the sweep of the hair across the forehead.

Impact: Does the bust bring to mind a particular memory of Ayn Rand?

MAS: Yes, it does—my favorite memory. And this takes me to the theme of the bust.

First, the memory: On one fall day, the four of us—Ayn, Frank, Charles [Mrs. Sures's late husband], and I—took the Circle Line cruise around the island of Manhattan. I was surprised to learn that Ayn had never done it. It was a cloudy, gray day, with gray sky, gray buildings and dark water. Now and then, the sun would break through the clouds and flash for an instant on the windows of buildings—and then vanish. Starting in midtown Manhattan, the boat goes down the Hudson River, turns around the southern tip of the island and then heads up the East River. When it reaches the northern tip of the island, it turns to go down the Hudson. I had taken the cruise a number of times and knew that when the boat entered the Hudson, there would be an unforgettable sight.

We were sitting inside. I told her that there was something I wanted her to see. We went out on deck. It was windy. The boat completed the turn, and there in the distance was the graceful span of the George Washington Bridge and beyond that the skyline of New York City. When she saw it, Ayn exclaimed, "This is magnificent!" The expression on her face was that of dedication and exaltation, of reverence at the sight of a great value. She said she was thinking of what made it all possible. As the boat moved down the Hudson, she remained standing, as if standing at attention, head uplifted, braced against the wind, facing the rising towers of the incomparable skyline of New York.

Ayn Rand's facial expression that day is the expression in the portrait bust. In the interview you did with Sandra, she describes the concrete she had in mind when creating the bust. She visualized Ayn Rand "encountering her hero from *Atlas Shrugged*, John Galt. I clearly saw in my mind's eye her walking up a gravel road in the countryside on a sunny day. The road is gently inclined on a hill and Galt walks along the road toward her. I see them from the side of the road and observe her as she realizes who he is. This vision guided me while I worked to portray her expression." Combined with the uplifted head, the expression conveys recognition of and reverence for an ideal.

Impact: Why did you decide to co-donate the bust to ARI?

MAS: It was an honor to do so. As Sandra was finishing the bust, I suddenly realized that it would soon be in the world. Immediately, I thought of the Ayn Rand Institute as the first world it should enter. I wanted to make that possible. John and I had spoken frequently and excitedly about the project, and I thought that he would want to share in the honor. He agreed, enthusiastically, to join me as co-donor.

I am grateful to the Institute for the work it does to promote Objectivism. I thank everyone there for working to create a future world of rationality and freedom. The donation is an expression of my gratitude. May everyone there be inspired by the portrait of Ayn Rand.



ARI board co-chair Michael S. Berliner leads a toast at the unveiling ceremony of the portrait bust at ARI