



A NEW SCULPTURE OF THOMAS MORE AT BOSTON COLLEGE LAW SCHOOL INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST, PABLO EDUARDO

by Joseph F. Keefe © Center for Thomas More Studies 2016

As you approach the Law Library of Boston College, the imposing figure of a man dramatically leaning into a gust of wind greets you. He holds the victorious palm branch of martyrdom in one hand, and a selection of writings in the other. His face is resolute and strong, weathered by the elements but not beaten.

This is St. Thomas More as envisioned by Bolivian-born sculptor Pablo Eduardo. The bronze statue was commissioned for the Boston College Law School by a special donation from the Frank Privitera Family in honor of the late Jean Privitera. It bears a plaque in memory of Frank Privitera's wife, Jean, who passed away in 2009, and includes the names of his children. The sculpture was completed and installed in May 2014.

Surrounded by a new public square with seating and greenery, the statue has already become a focal point of the law school campus. We interviewed Mr. Eduardo regarding this recent project.

JK: Did you know much about Thomas More before working on this project? Did sculpting him help you to better understand his life and message?

PE: Yes, but not in the depth that I know him now. I read Utopia in college of course and knew about him through that. There was also "A Man for All Seasons".

I have a friend who is a professor who has a speciality in this epoch (Steven Foley) and he sent me a long list of books and biographies of Thomas More. I read everything I could. Now I feel very close to him. It's almost ridiculous in some ways; I watched an episode with him in it and it was as if a close friend was being scrutinized... I take it almost personal. Sometimes I catch myself and laugh.

So, yes, sculpting him definitely gave me "an" understanding of his life, and maybe his message. This I would describe as a firm conviction in your beliefs and in your faith. A resilience.





JK: How would you describe the image of More that you have put forward? Why does he pose in the position you have given him (facing the wind)? What is the significance of the objects he holds in his hands? At what age were you envisioning him? What other details were meaningful to you?

PE: I set out to portray St. Thomas More exactly as you describe it: facing the wind, which in my mind signified everything that was thrown at him. A mad force that he cannot control, strong and violent, whipping his heavy coat. But one has to stand up firm, upright and with an intelligent conviction.

In one hand he holds a palm leaf which is a symbol of martyrdom, and on the other he holds two books, made heavy by their enormous humanistic content, [More's] Utopia, and [Augustine's] Civitate Dei. I did not set out to portray him at any particular age; I just let it develop organically. I think the figure required a mature and strong man.

This figure had to be in my view beautiful, as well as strong. Enough detail had to be added to give a sense that this man was a product of many years of hard study and work. To that end I made the fur on his coat very decorative and elaborate. All the nights I spent with him and his coat made me reflect on all the work that is asked of us, and how important it is that we do it well, "como Dios manda" [as God demands], as they say.

JK: Did you look to previous artistic representations of More? If so, how did they influence you?

PE: Yes I did. I tried to look for other sculptures of Thomas More, but could not find one that was strong or moving. I went to the Frick in New York City to see a portrait of him by Holbein that impressed me very much. I visited it many times while I was sculpting. Holbein showed me his skull with remarkable precision. I still have the poster in my studio.

JK: How long did it take you to sculpt this image, and were you given any indications from the client?

PE: It took me a couple of years to complete this sculpture. Maybe 16 months in the studio. The "client" was magnificent. They let me do what I thought was good and gave me all the time I needed to do it. I am very grateful for this, as sometimes it does require you to leave the work on several occasions in order to come back to it fresh. The time gave me the ability to do the coat as I wanted it; it gave me the ability to change what I did not like, re-do other things, and so on. They also allowed me to design the base and the park that it sits on. And with the help of Robert Corning (of Stantec, consultants in landscaping) it became a reality.

JK: How would you describe your “relationship” with the figure of St. Thomas More? How does the sculpture relate to the Law School as an institution?

PE: At the same time as I was sculpting Thomas More, I was going through a very bad divorce, all kinds of lawyers and judges and specialists, and court orders regarding my children, and this was very, very scary stuff. I had never envisioned myself to be at any moment of my life in the middle of such an ugly thing. It was like a circle in Dante’s Divine Comedy. Every evening as I worked on the sculpture I would pray to him, as the Patron Saint of Lawyers, for his help. I met a remarkable group of lawyers who were kind and above all had a good sense of ethics. So being in the middle of both of these things at the same time was very interesting. I was able to experience all of these important things that this figure was to represent in front of a school of Law: conviction, ethics, faith - words said so often that the monumentality of their meaning is lost. And here I was living the monumentality of these concepts, and in return trying to express their hugeness in this sculpture.



There was also this letter, this goodbye letter [More] wrote to his daughter before his execution that was extremely moving. I will never forget it. I am always very thankful that I was given the opportunity to meet this person. It sounds a bit odd, and perhaps pretentious, but it was very much like that. I still visit him once in a while and thank him.

JK: Finally, could you tell us a little bit about your work in general, and your basic principles as a sculptor. What motivates your art, and how is that demonstrated in some of your past works? Where does the sculpture of Thomas More fit into your overall oeuvre?

PE: I would have to say that my work is the product of my experience as an artist and my personal taste. As in the case of a classical musician for instance, it belongs to a tradition. The musician, or in my case the sculptor, gains more and more freedom with proficiency. The more experience and skill you have the more you can express yourself, the more freedom one has, and your imagination becomes less constrained. Of course I am the product of a contemporary culture. And I cannot attempt to do anything else but contemporary art. My principles seek to hold true to the quality of the work. I like to work on many projects at a time so that I can keep a good deal of pressure constant on myself. It is a battle for sure in

the beginning, and it is difficult sometimes to start something that could take years to complete. I am not really sure that there is one thing that motivates my art. The need to keep making things, to see if I can take the next thing further than the last. Maybe the responsibility I am given.

In the case of Thomas More I was motivated by immersing myself in his life, and being captivated by it. The more I can connect with the subject the more motivated and alive the subject becomes, until the subject is not a subject anymore but a presence. It is a good feeling when this is achieved. These feelings are fleeting however, because the mind is critical and constantly gets in the way. And thank God for that. As I mentioned before, I feel very honored to have had the opportunity to spend all that intimate time with Thomas More, countless nights in his presence as I sculpted the fur on his coat. I cannot really say where he fits in my overall oeuvre, but it is one work that I like to visit when I can, like an old friend.

**For more images of the sculpture, please visit Pablo Eduardo's website:
<http://www.pabloeduardosculpture.com/st-thomas-more/>**

