



Robert Bricker's
Deep Relief Vase (2)



ROBERT BRICKER '75

Art Calling

When Robert Bricker came to Woodberry Forest, it would prove critical for many boys who came after him. His return as an instructor helped to create an informal support network and “art spirit” among alumni that still endures. Along with the sculptor Nathalie Lewis, Robert helped provide continuity between Mac Moore’s retirement in 1990 and Kelly Lonergan’s assumption of the fine arts chair in 1995.

For Alex Johnson '91, “Robert Bricker is a huge influence. If you hang around Bricker and you like art at all, you’re going to end up loving it.” Wilfredo Ortega '96 says flatly, “Robert Bricker was the man. He let us know that we could be professional artists.” Having come to Woodberry later, Brian Booth '00 had a trio of mentors. “Kelly and Nathalie and Robert,” he says, “were like a team.”

Robert comes from West Virginia’s Kanawha Valley, which he describes as “not quite ‘wild and wonderful,’” but an area of chemical factories, coal trains, and, at the time, little cultural opportunity.

As a kid, Robert says, he tried all kinds of art. Then came “a unique opportunity.”

“I’d been submitting creative writings beyond our assignments to my junior high English teacher. As I found out decades later, she went to my father and said, ‘The public school system is going to ruin this boy’s talents. Get him out of here!’ My father was able to send me to Woodberry.

“I experienced academic culture shock,” Robert admits. “Some of my classmates seemed a bit casual about Woodberry’s opportunities. Not me. I was the only person I’d ever known who’d been given this kind of chance. It took everything I had to catch up. But slowly, the amazing student/teacher ratio had a blossoming effect.”

Inspired by having seen photos of Michelangelo’s unfinished “Slaves” in a history class, Robert decided he would try sculpting. “Miraculously,” he says, “yet so typical of Woodberry, there just happened to be a stone carving instructor who came to campus one day a week: Nathalie Lewis. We hit it off, and our friendship lasted for decades.”

Robert was alone in the Walker Center one night, carving on his first stone sculpture, a lion. “I had what I must describe as a metaphysical experience. Looking at the work in progress, I began to see through it as if it were an opening, a portal. Beyond that I could see another portal, and then another. Something transported me through those openings. To this day I believe I experienced a ‘calling.’”

After earning his B.F.A. at the Philadelphia College of Art, Robert moved to Charlottesville, established Bronze Craft Foundry in Waynesboro, which he still operates, and began teaching part-time at Woodberry. Since then, in addition to casting and assisting in completion of some of the region’s best-known sculptures, including the Arthur Ashe monument in Richmond and the colossal Neptune on the Virginia Beach boardwalk, Robert has created bronzes of leading figures in the history of Ashland, Virginia, portraits of Mac Moore, Red Caughron, and Bob Gillespie at Woodberry, and the John Wareing statue in Virginia Beach, among others.

Waiting in the wings is a side of the artist relatively few know. Robert draws “constantly.” His drawings ingeniously intertwine figures acting out densely multilayered storylines; they look at once modern, personal, and classical. Rendered with unerring draughtsmanship, they call to mind Picasso’s allegorical self-revelations.

Robert has carved these images into urns, to be cast as bronzes. At the same time, he has been increasingly involved with the art world in China, having made twelve visits since 1992. For him, the appeal is not just that of a new market, but a chance to study traditional Chinese arts and collaborate with “kindred artisans.”

For a hyper-creative artist, Robert remains focused to a remarkable degree on the Woodberry students he mentored, often remembering them by name.

“I have this standing argument,” he says. “Which was more significant: boarding full-time at Woodberry for three years as a student, or teaching part-time for sixteen years as an adult?”

“There really is no answer. Both have moved me immensely.”

Stills from Angus
Wall’s opening
sequence for
Carnivale



ANGUS WALL '84

Making Things for the Real World

Angus Wall was the first Woodberry student Robert Bricker remembers teaching. However, he’s much better known for having won the Academy Award for film editing (with collaborator Kirk Baxter) for *The Social Network* in 2010, and for *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* in 2011. Angus also won Emmys for his title sequences for HBO’s *Carnivale* and *Game of Thrones*, and created the widely praised titles for the series *Rome*.

There is no straight-line path from Angus’s childhood in Farmville, Virginia, through his schooling, to the Oscars podium. A direct route might have been unlikely, given what Angus describes as “this very interesting mix” in his background. The family of his father, an attorney who died in a plane crash when Angus was five, was long established in Virginia. Angus’s mother was an artist and a British colonial from Calcutta. “My father’s side of the family was very conservative,” Angus says, “and my mom’s side, quite the opposite.”

Angus describes his early education in terms of “bookends”: first, a “very, very progressive” experimental lab school attached to Longwood University. “And in the middle of sixth grade,” Angus says, laughing, “I was sent to Fork Union Military Academy! Pretty indicative of my family makeup.”

When he got a scholarship to Woodberry for the third form, he says, “It was kind of like college for me. Coming out of military school, there was this wonderful sense of autonomy — maybe,” he chuckles, “a little too much, reading some of the letters that the headmaster, Emmet Wright, wrote to my mom.” For a while Angus’s status at Woodberry was touch-and-go.

“I was pretty young, having skipped first grade, and always a little smaller. I didn’t feel like I fit in until I discovered cross-country between my fifth and sixth forms, at an Outward Bound course in Maine, where I won the marathon. I started competing at Woodberry and made All-State. That more than anything else made me feel I belonged, in a weird way.”

The Maine sojourn was a “huge reason” why Angus went to Bowdoin College. Another factor: “My dad always told my older siblings, ‘Go north for college.’ Then he’d joke, ‘Just to see what makes the Yankees tick.’”



Angus was a fine arts major, focusing on photography. Working in film was not on his radar, but ingredients were there. “I always loved films. At Woodberry on weekends sometimes I would dig into the library’s laserdiscs and watch three or four movies at a sitting with the headphones on.” At Bowdoin he made photo collages, six by eight feet, “telling a story with hundreds of black-and-white still images.”

After college, he says, “I kind of wanted to get as far away as possible and throw myself into something completely different. So I came to L.A.” He was “incredibly lucky” to get a job at Propaganda Films. “The bottom line for me is that I really like to work, to make things. I was so excited to get out of school, so I could start making things for the real world.”

At Propaganda he met many of the key people he still works with. He says, “That was my film school.” He co-founded the film editing house Rock Paper Scissors, began editing commercials and music videos (including Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit”), and jumped ahead of the industry curve in using computer-generated technology. Angus is now considering films to direct, while he makes commercials for the likes of Nike and ESPN.

Angus’s opening titles for *Carnivale*, to name just one project, show a film editor with a highly sophisticated approach not just to technique, but to content. Images of Tarot cards merge into haunting film segments from the 1930s, setting up the show’s gestalt of mystical foreboding in hardscrabble settings. Angus’s image choices are historically note-perfect.

“I give Woodberry a tremendous amount of credit,” Angus says, “for giving me such a strong foundation in critical thinking. I’m actually glad I didn’t go to art school for high school. Among the things I truly cherish is having sweated through Shakespeare’s plays with John Reimers, having debated politics with Nat Jobe, having talked art with Malcolm Moore. The intellectual rigor that I picked up, if only by osmosis, has really stood me in good stead.”

And big thanks to Angus’s mom and Emmet Wright for helping him hang in there.