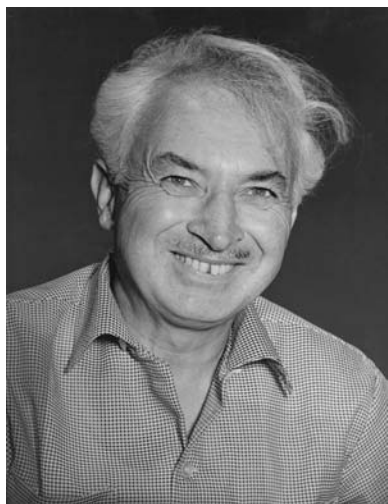


“Donal Hord”



One of America’s greatest artists left an impressive legacy in San Diego. Donal Hord, best known for his monumental stone figures, created works of sculpture that have endured at sites throughout our region.

The artist was born as Donald Horr in Prentice, Wisconsin in 1902. His parents divorced when he was only seven; the unhappy mother supposedly renamed her son to spite the father by moving the last ‘d’ from his first name and adding to his last name.

Donal and his mother moved to Seattle in 1914. Here Donal began to display an interest in art by taking lessons in watercolors and carving his first small pieces of sculpture. The young artist was sickly as a child and a bout with rheumatic fever at age twelve left him with a weakened heart. After a doctor recommended a warmer climate, mother and son boarded a steamship for San Diego.

Attending high school was difficult for Donal because of his poor health. But he was a regular visitor to the San Diego Public Library, where “he was always underfoot,” recalled a librarian. A voracious reader, Hord checked out books by the armload. Years later, he would show his gratitude to the library by donating his large personal collection of books and many works of art.

At age fifteen, Hord began taking art classes from Anna Valentien at the San Diego Evening High School. Valentien was a notable figure in San Diego’s blossoming Arts and Crafts Movement. She had also studied sculpture with Auguste Rodin in Paris. From Valentien, Hord began learning the rudiments of modeling and sculpture.

Hord continued his education in the 1920s, aided by grants and scholarships. He learned bronze casting at the Santa Barbara School of Arts and spent eleven months in Mexico studying ancient and modern forms of Native American art that would strongly influence his own personal artistic style.

Most of his early work was in bronzes, which required clay modeling and then casting. The process was frustrating at times; a bad cast could ruin weeks or months of work. Hord came to prefer direct mediums such as hardwood or stone.

He was particularly fascinated by materials used by ancient sculptors who had carved their work directly on the materials. Diorite, for example, was a favorite hard stone used in Middle Eastern civilizations such as Egypt, Babylonia, and Assyria. A famed work in diorite extant today is the Code of Hammurabi, inscribed on a seven-foot pillar in about 1790 BCE.

Hord once explained to a newspaper reporter that he chose hard mediums because “they were such beautiful materials.” Sculpting in hardwoods such rosewood or lignum vitae or rock like diorite or jade was difficult. “In fact, I would much rather have used something easier to cut,” he

admitted. But hard surfaces could be worked with precision and took a finish that was beautiful to touch as well as see.

In 1934 Hord was accepted to the Depression-era Federal Art Project and given a salary of \$75 a month. The opportunity to carve in stone followed. For *La Tehuana*, a patio fountain in the courtyard of the House of Hospitality in Balboa Park, Hord used Indiana limestone to create the figure of a Native American woman pouring water from an olla.

It took Hord and his assistant Homer Dana ten weeks to complete *La Tehuana*. Hord thought he could do his next project in twenty weeks. But *Aztec* would take fourteen months. It was his first experience with diorite, an extremely hard stone. “I learned, by blister, bruise and dark despair,” Hord said, “that diorite is a wonderful medium to instill discipline.”

Aztec, which became the iconic “Montezuma” on the campus of San Diego State College, was carved from a two and half ton block of black diorite quarried near Escondido. After months of hard work with hand tools a quarryman suggested the work would go a lot faster with an air hammer. Homer Dana remembered, “We picked a service station air compressor, and used it for years and years.”

Hord’s next major project would be *Guardian of the Waters*. Working from a 30-ton block of gray diorite quarried near Lakeside, Hord supervised a team that began by trimming off huge 100 pound slabs. “I stayed off of it,” Hord recalled, “until we got to the air hammer and then I started in to work.”

The thirteen-foot tall statue of a woman holding an olla of water on her shoulder was mounted a ten-foot base decorated with a mosaic of 200,000 pieces. After two years of work it was moved into place on the harbor side of the Civic Center—today’s County Administration Building—and dedicated on June 10, 1939.

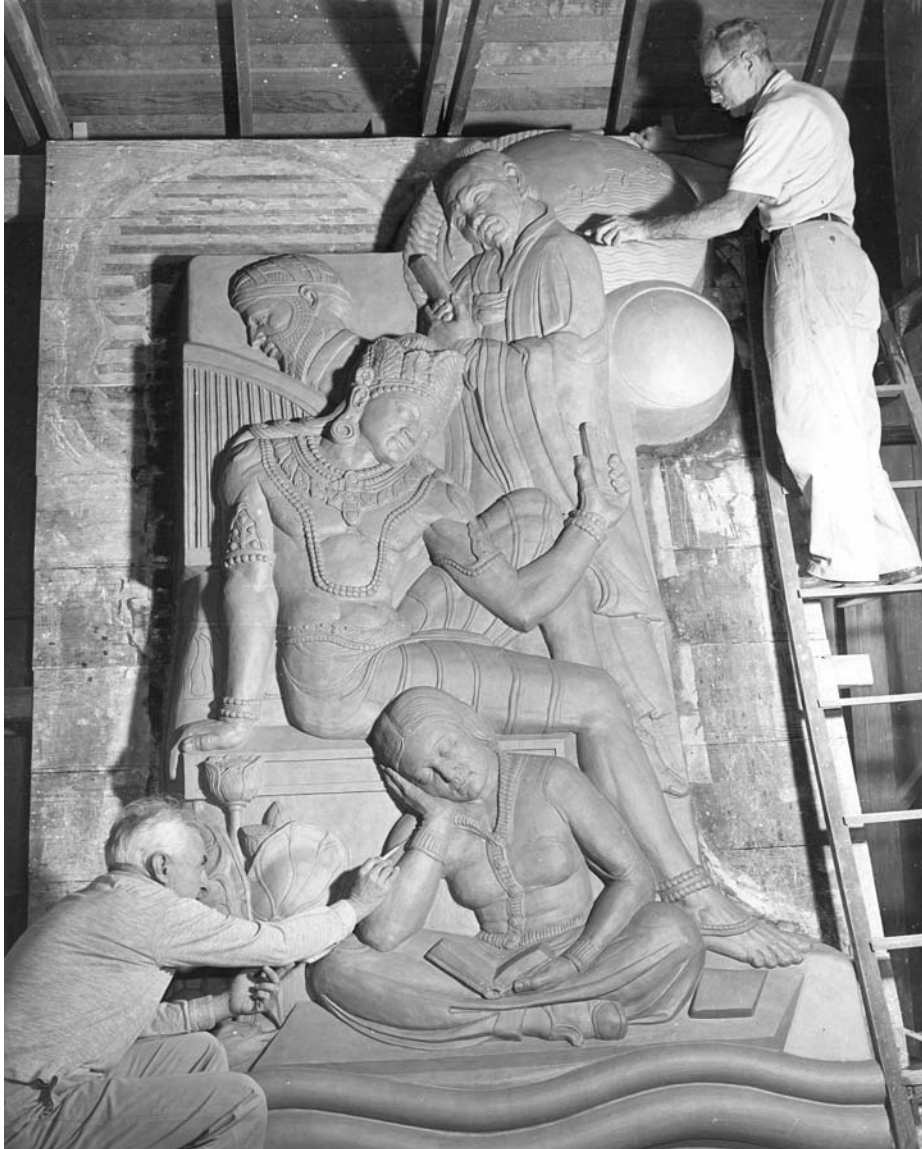
Another recognizable Hord sculpture, passed by thousands of people daily, is a set of bas reliefs flanking the entry doors to the Central Library at 820 E Street. Integrating sculpture with architecture, the two “literature” panels—ten feet high and six feet wide—represent the heritage of reading brought from the cultures of east and west.

The bas reliefs were a return for Hord to molds and castings of his early career. In his backyard studio in Pacific Beach, the panels were first sketched and made in small clay models. Larger, full-scale clay models came next, created in a wooden frame. Plaster molds were then made from the clay, which held the casting concrete for the final work. Cranes lifted the panels into place on the library’s exterior on September 3, 1953, several months before the new building opened to the public.

That same year Hord arranged for the donation to the library of *West Wind*, a graceful piece carved from Mexican rosewood. The 45-inch sculpture is on permanent exhibit in the Wangenheim Room of the Central Library.



Hord's last monumental sculpture, *Morning*, stands in Embarcadero Marina Park near Seaport Village. The 6 ft. 3 in. tall work in black diorite was begun in 1951 but took five years to complete. In fragile health, Hord returned to working simpler materials: bronzes and terra cotta. But he would continue remarkable productivity, completing one or two major works every year until his death from heart disease at age 63 in 1966.



Working on a clay model bas relief panel for the Central Library. Donal Hord is on the lower left, his assistant Homer Dana on the ladder. Hord photos courtesy *San Diego Public Library*

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