

Artscapes

Marine Memorial: Public Art With a Purpose

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As we look at art, we try to get what the artist is expressing in the work. Silently we often ask, "What does it mean?" What is the artist trying to "say?"

We want to get the concept — the idea — of what the work is about because it heightens our enjoyment of the piece and most of all because it helps us to understand the work better.

Today, much of contemporary art is described as "conceptual art," or art wherein the idea is more important than the finished product.

On Memorial Day we find that there are many conceptual sculptures—realistic or abstract—dedicated to the veterans from our past wars. A good example of conceptual art is the Vietnam War Memorial Wall sculpture by Maya Lin in Washington, D.C. It stuns visitors with the concept of the terrible toll that the Vietnam War took in American lives by simply listing the names of those that died as they descend to the earth in death. Nearby, other sculptures are conceived realistically to show the dedicated fighting spirit and ferocity of our forces in Vietnam; another honors the nurses who tended the wounded.

Is there a public art piece in Newport Beach that expresses a particular concept about our veterans? There is, and it speaks directly to some of those we honor on Memorial Day. It is dedicated to the men and women who died in Iraq from our own One/One Marine Battalion. Many of our Newport Beach citizens work to support the families of the brave men

and women who fight in this battalion, and thus it becomes "our own."

"The Marine Memorial" by sculptor Benjamin Victor is placed in Castaway Park with our flag flying high by its side. It depicts a young marine in full battle gear about to leave on assignment.

As you view this magnificent and very realistic sculpture, think what the concept might be. Why do I state that he is leaving? What is in that young face that tells me he knows what might be ahead and how do I know he is truly facing an unknown x-factor? He shows no sign of fear but everything about the form says he is aware of the fact that he is leaving the known facets of his life to face the unknown life of combat. What is there in the work that Victor created that makes the preceding statements true?

If you haven't viewed it yet, take time this Memorial Day to visit Castaways Park. It's an incredible feeling of pride and appreciation when you stand at the end of the bluff viewing the sculpture that depicts the bravery and loss that this young hero faces. Ben Victor has embodied a great deal in his concept of the One/One marine.

If you agree, you can tell him that his work is conceptually strong at bvictor@benjaminvictor.com.

The mission of the Newport Beach Arts Foundation is to promote and broaden cultural activities in the community as the fund-raising organization of the Newport Beach Arts Commission. For more information, contact Lila Crespín at babajoy28@gmail.com.



Marine Memorial in Castaways Park

