



It's a **MONUMENTAL** *anniversary*

The Polasek marks 60 years of courage and creativity.

BY MICHAEL MCLEOD

Anyone who has toured the Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens in Winter Park knows that most of the Czech-born sculptor's best-known works are larger than life, both literally and figuratively.

So it's intriguing that many of the exhibitions on tap to celebrate the 60th anniversary of this cherished local institution — which was once the artist's home — illuminate Polasek the man as much as they do the breathtaking monuments that he painstakingly crafted and cast in bronze.

Over the course of this year, curators at the museum will tap into the extensive collection of family memorabilia and smaller, formative works that are lesser known — even to those who frequently visit the three-acre campus where the Czech-American sculptor gave form to his spiritual, political and mythical visions.

An anniversary gala is slated for October 16, during the same week as the museum's popular Winter Park Paint Out, a plein air event in which 25 invited artists participate. (Although Paint Out is usually held in April, it was moved this year to October because of uncertainty over COVID-19.)

The gala will be held in the courtyard of the Capen House, a restored historic home and event venue adjacent to the museum.

Capping off the yearlong anniversary commemoration will be an exhibition, *Albin Polasek: Selections from the Permanent Collection*, in which rarely seen sculptures and drawings will be on display. The exhibition will run from October 26 through December 5.

It took a lifetime for these visions to evolve in the imagination of Polasek, who immigrated to the U.S. as a young man, taught sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago for nearly three decades and became world-renowned for large commissions such as the *Wilson Monument* (1928), the original of which is in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

Already world famous, Polasek continued to produce iconic, if more intimate, sculptures after retiring in 1950 at age 70 to a Mediterranean-style home near Lake Osceola.

The man who claimed to be a confirmed bachelor married twice after moving to Winter Park: first in 1950 to Ruth Sherwood, a former student who had retired to the same city, and nine years after Sherwood's untimely death to Emily Muska Kubat, the widow of a friend.

And, against all odds, he doggedly created 18 more sculptures despite being confined to a wheelchair as the result of a stroke suffered just prior to his first marriage. Nonetheless, he was still able to paint, draw, sculpt clay and carve wood with his right

hand, while with the aid of an assistant he could carve stone.

Of Polasek's 400 known works, 200 of them are on display at the museum, which was first run by a foundation established by Polasek and later by a private nonprofit. Some of his creations can also be seen throughout the city, most notably *Forest Idyl* at Winter Park City Hall and Central Park's serene *Emily Fountain*, which was named for the sculptor's second wife.

"[Polasek] kept a lot of sketches that he made when he was planning to create something, and we have a collection of those, and hundreds more fragile works we don't have out normally," says Debbie Komanski, the museum's director and CEO.

Other family objects and smaller-scale creations in the museum's collection that may be on display over the course of the year include a family Bible from Polasek's childhood, written in Old Czech; sketches that date to his earliest, wood-carving years; and a drawing of the Stations of the Cross that he made while developing sculptures commissioned by a Catholic church.

"Polasek also liked to experiment with casting sculptures in other materials besides plaster," says Komanski, adding that he would sometimes use aluminum or fiberglass as "something just for himself, just for his own pleasure."

In addition to the anniversary events, the museum has several outside exhibitions on view or upcoming. *Revival*, a lifetime of works by University of Central Florida art professor Robert Reedy, runs from now through April 11; *Sweet Surrealism*, whimsical compositions by artist Cynthia Holmes, runs April 20 through July 11; and *Classical Conversations*, a combination sculpture-and-painting exhibition featuring the works of Florida artists Jack Hill and Edson Campos, runs July 20 through October 3.

The Albin Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens is located at 633 Osceola Avenue, Winter Park. Check polasek.org for ticket prices and information about anniversary events or call 407.647.6292. **OA**



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