

The Lady Justice Story

Fountain at the Bexar County Courthouse

San Antonio, Texas

Gilbert E Barrera, Sculptor / Author

Worldwide she is a more recognizable sculpture than the Statue of Liberty. Almost every courthouse on all 7 continents exhibits her image.

Her Name - Lady Justice was originally known as the goddess Themis. In Greek Themis means 'order'. Her other interchangeable names are Justitia or Justice. She is also associated with the goddesses Astraea, Dike, Eirene, Eunomia, Fortuna, Tyche, and Ma'at.

Her Importance

Today our laws and law systems are derived in essence from her stories and ideals. She began in Greek mythology about 800 B.C. as one of the Titan gods. Each god held the power of law and Themis was goddess of 'the order of the natural world'. That means she ordered and organized things like the seasons; i.e., winter follows summer follows spring (...no Fall in Greek mythology). She also planned and ordered the path of a person's life such as its beginning and end. Importantly she ordered and arranged what was to happen during each season for both nature and man. It followed that Caesars, Kings, aristocracy and ordinary people sought her advice and council on all the laws of nature as well as the laws of man's concerns. There was such advice and counsel on mans trepidations like farming, war, love, work and marriage.

Her Uniqueness

Interestingly in a traditional male dominated ancient world she was a predominant and coveted authority of prophecy, advice and law. She is credited as being the first counselor and the first oracle at Delphi, even before Apollo. In her time she was the final decision maker on the laws of man and nature. Her popularity influenced and was mixed into other myths and gods. Around 22 A.D. she first appeared on Roman coins as the Roman goddess Justitia, 'Justice'. She had become a blend of Greek and Roman stories. She also borrowed select traits and accessories of other goddesses such as Dike and Fortuna amongst others. Additionally every period and people has added their changes to Lady Justice even as gods and goddess had declined with the rise of Christianity.

HER APPEARANCE - For an artist to study there are few visual representations of Themis from ancient times before Christianity. However, Themis' sister or half sister depending on what school you research is Aphrodite. There are numerous representations of the ancient Aphrodite in both sculpture and painting. Appropriately Themis should look similar to her (half?) sister Aphrodite as creatively expressed by the sculptors and artists of the time of her popularity.

HER ART FORM - The classical figurative portrayal of goddesses by both the Greek and Romans of ancient time through the Renaissance has been bare or barely draped which was a sign of virtue, or good or justice. The Themis/Lady Justice of sculptor Gilbert E. Barrera is a created as a Greco-Roman version of the original manifestation of the earliest Aphrodite (i.e., the Knidos Aphrodite). Barreras' version of the original virtuous bronze shape is in composition with the styles of the Greek sculptors of antiquity, (i.e., Polykleitean 'contropasto' and Praxitelean 'S-Curve'). Across Europe this is a time-honored composition since Hellenistic times and in San Antonio she will be one of the first of her kind for public appreciation. She is approximately 4 feet in height and weighs about 200 lbs. For accessories she was fashioned in concert with the Roman symbols of

Justicia. She has – a simple blindfold, - balance scales of a design of that day and - a common soldiers sword of the period; plus two added imaginative art symbols, the circle (or sphere) represented by the earths’ globe and lastly the curvilinear line as a wind spirited ‘ribbon’ representing the sky or heavens.

HER SCULPTURAL STYLE

Contropasto is the counterpoise of the human figure. In 360B.C. the Greek sculptor Polykleitus mastered it. Here Barrera’s Themis has one foot (leg) with more weight or tension and one relaxed – showing shift of balance of weight; and Themis’ back and arms twist to one side of her hips and leg positions – showing naturalness of stress-free posture. In composition it creates a more vibrant yet relaxed appearance. Presented on the earths’ globe the implication here is there will be a change or adjustment of posture into motion. On a turning world she offers the appearance of preparedness to adapt her stance and weight. Additionally, fitting to the period of Themis is the sinuous S-curve developed by the leading sculptor of that period Praxiteles. Literally it is the form of the “S” shape from the top of the figure to the bottom. That style of posture is gracefully revealed in the Themis of sculptor Barrera. Beginning at the top of the bun of her hair around her face curving back behind her shoulder then fast down her relaxed leg and again curving around the earths’ circle.

THE HAIRSTYLE of Themis is classic Praxiteles as exhibited by his most famous Aphrodite of Knidos. It is done in a braided bun with two bands holding the hairstyle close to the head. The figure is natural without covering. For the artists composition it is intended to also be symbolic of not hiding the processes of justice. Research at this time has indicated no other Lady Justice around the world presents Themis in this striking compositional design.

HER SYMBOLS

The Themis of sculptor Barrera is graced with 5 key features. The blindfold, sword and scales are the classic devices. Here they are gilded in gold to accent them as the established symbols of Lady Justice. There are two artist added creations: a ribbon and the earth. Below is a short description of the main accessories.

THE SCALES ... represent that Lady Justice carefully weighs the claims of each side. They are referred as the ‘scales of justice’. Each scale presents a measure of evidence. Therein each scale or dish also has inscribed symbols. On the top side of one dish, a dove represents good claims; on the bottom side of that dish is a Gemini symbol representing the witnesses, claims of “he said, she said”; on the top side of the other scale a snake represents bad claims; on its bottom side is the symbol of a linen scroll page which represents written laws or facts; and next to the scroll symbol is a knife, to represent weapons or instruments used in the claim. The design of the scales of justice and designs on the dish scales are researched from pre-Christianity and can be found both on the ancient red vase paintings and in sculpted stone reliefs of the time Themis was in vogue.

THE SWORD ... represents the enforcement measures of Lady Justice. It means Themis stands ready to obligate faithfulness to her decision of reason and justice by both parties. Here Barrera's Justitia holds a sword that is oversized to her body proportion as the sword's size symbolizes a very important facet of justice, respect. In Barrera's composition the sword is barely held by Themis' right hand but is very closely positioned to her body. Thus she does not reign by fisted threat or fear of use of a weapon but instead she rules and openly exhibits she is prepared to get respect. The design of the Barrera sword is period appropriate (700 to 300 B.C) to the time of Themis and is known as a hoplite sword, commonly used by the Greek citizen soldier.

THE BLINDFOLD ... today probably her most famous symbol - it first appeared in the fifteenth century. The blindfold represents decisions of objectivity and/or impartial decision or decision not influenced by wealth, politics, popularity or infamy etc. Here the composition of sculptor Barrera offers the blindfold with a slight space under the eyes where it could be implied that Justice may have peeked and not been impartial. This device is merely an insight for humor to match post rulings conversations of alleged unfavorable outcomes or unhappy experiences.

HER PARENTS SYMBOLS

The final two symbols are heaven and earth – or the sky as a ribbon and the globe of planet earth. These are artistic additions of sculptor Barrera and are multifaceted. They are intended to artistically tie the form to its environment; to tie the sculpture and fountain to San Antonio's own family composition; and to reveal more of the marvelous family story in the mythology of the Greeks. Thus Themis is sculpted with her symbolic mother and father as a family unit. In some philosophies the sky is the mind and the earth is the body; and the systems of reason, order and laws are in between. Greek symbolism can be multifaceted and speculative.

THE EARTH ... in art represents forms like a circle, sphere, ball or globe which are fundamental elements of art and here it is used to harmoniously base the figure to the fountain; and in Greek mythology the earth represents Gaia, (In Greek the word 'ga' means land or earth) (a.k.a., mother earth, or earth goddess] from which all entities were born.). Gaia is the mother of Themis. In Roman versions Gaia is known as Terra.

THE SKY ... the ribbon in art is a line or curvilinear form, also a basic element of art composition and here represents the heavens or the Sky. In some versions of Greek mythology Gaia (earth) gave birth to the sky known as Uranus or 'Ouranos'. Ouranos is the mythological father of Themis and is god of the heavens, god of the sky, the sky god. The 'Ouranos' with an 'O' spelling is more often seen in the Greek usage, it is also known as Uranus. Gaia took Ouranos as her husband. They had the 8 Titans of which Themis was one of 4 daughters. The ribbon is designed to be moving or changing in the wind as the law and decisions she gives are according to the changing facts and issues.

HER CHILDREN SYMBOLS

Of family interest also are the three figures that are on the base pedestal of the cast iron fountain. They are the Seasons; the goddesses of spring, summer and winter, and are all the daughters of Themis. Their names are Eunomie, Eirene, and Dike and they were known as the Horae. They are all part of her natural order or natural laws, plans and systems to the world, i.e. she ordered the seasons and thereby also gave man his order of work, i.e., in the winter he plants, in the spring he waters his blooms, and in the summer he harvests. There was also a second set of goddesses called Horae who ruled over the hours of the day and what man did at those hours. In some versions her third generation of children were the Morai: Klotho - the spinner of life, Lachseses - the measurer of life and Atropos - the taker of life.

THE CAST IRON FOUNTAIN

FOUNTAIN HISTORY

The original cast iron fountain was purchased new in 1896 by Bexar County for the courthouse. The fountain itself was a J.L. Mott fountain out of New York and the Robinson Company of Alabama had bought the patterns from Mott in the 1930's. It was a two tiered 12-foot fountain with a cast iron Aphrodite figure on top and three female figures on the base pedestal. Total height was about 16 feet. It had spent time as a visual feature for the courthouse and was later moved to a few other locales including the San Antonio Water Board building.

THE BROKEN FOUNTAIN

Over the years it had been moved once or twice more and came to rest in a city warehouse. It had come into deterioration; damage, broken parts, missing parts and dozens of coats of paint, rust and lime scale build up. The Foundation shipped the separate pieces remaining and broken to Barreras' studio. The top small bowl was missing, as was the cast iron Aphrodite statute. The bottom large bowl was broken. And there was no basin bottom.

THE FOUNTAIN REPAIR

First Barrera spent a few months striping paint and at the same time researching the pattern and repair of the fountain. Finally the research revealed a cast iron foundry in Alabama had the exact pattern of the two original bowls. Barrera made an exploratory trip there and on a second trip transported the fountain parts there having already cleaned off the old paint, lime and rust scale. While there Barrera discovered they also made the original basin in cast iron in one or two tier levels and proposed it be purchased to complete the Greco-European style of cast iron. The entire effort was just over two years from offer to finish.

THE SCULPTURE

FIRST SCULPTURE MODEL

During the same time of the research Barrera had begun a 10-inch scale model of

Themis. The sculpture was extensively researched from literature, books and Internet resources. Sculptor Barrera was given creative freedom as to the design of the Lady Justice final composition and fundamental elements. After much research on Themis, on Aphrodite, and on other associated goddess stories of mythology and also researches on original sculptural styles of the period of her popularity - the concept was developed. Barrera carved direct on Victory Brown wax and completed a model or 10-inch maquette.

SCULPTURE CREATION

Tracy and Nelson Wolff and Ron and Karen Hermann approved the finished 10-inch maquette. Barrera commenced to convert the model to a four-foot sculpture by hand. The height of four-feet as her measure was because it was proportionate to the height and volume of the fountain. The sculpture will sit atop the top bowl of the fountain on a raised cast iron fitting that holds the sculpture itself above the water level. Nylon spacers keep the bronze metal away from the cast iron fitting. The bronze is bolted to the fitting and the fitting in turn is bolted to the fountains top tier bowl. The installation was slated for November of 2008.

THE BRONZE PROCESS

MAKE THE MODEL

The concept is developed. Drawings or image research are finalized. A model is made in clay or wax (or any material can be used for the model). A small model, maquette, is made first if the sculpture will be big. Themis was made in wax. She began as less than one foot in height. Upon the model being approved then a final size wax model is created and approved. Usually the final model size is made solid wax or with filler material.

FIND THE FOUNDRY

A foundry is selected to take the final size wax figure and make a mold of it. Big wax sculptures are usually cut into smaller parts that can be handled for pouring and weight purposes. A rubber mold with plaster mother mold is taken of each section. When that mold is finished the original wax model has served its purpose and is set to storage or goes back to the artist if it has not been damaged or lost in the mold handling process.

The mold is now used to pour foundry wax into. It will make a new wax hollow model. The walls of the hollow model are now about 1/4 inch in thickness or less depending on what is needed. Plumbing or spruing is now added. This aids pouring and filling the wax part hollows. The new wax hollow model with spruing added is then used to make another mold. It is called an investment mold. It is made of a special high heat resistance material. It looks like an industrial grade plaster of paris but it is a ceramic for heat of about 2200 degrees. The hollow wax with plumbing is dipped into several formulas of the investment ceramic. It covers both sides of the hollow walls. The investment mold now holds the wax model section within. At this point the investment mold is solid because the wax is still inside it. Then it is set to dry.

THE LOST WAX AND POUR

After the ceramic dries it is heated and the wax model section within is melted and pours out and or is 'lost'. This is where the name 'lost wax' method comes from. Now the investment mold is hollow. It now contains the void and form of the wax section that was,

inside. Next it is heated or kept hot and is now ready to receive the bronze pour. The approximate 2000 degree liquid bronze is poured into the hollow of the investment mold through the spruing gate and plumbing lines that help the liquid to get to all parts of the wax section. It is then set aside to cool.

FINISHING THE BRONZE

Upon cooling the investment mold is broken or chipped off in pieces leaving the finished form of the original wax sculpture section or figure. Sandblasting helps clear the ceramic away. At this point it still has the bronze version of all the spruing and plumbing lines attached. The spruing is cut off. The different sections are then bronze welded back together to re-create the completed wax sculpture. The weld marks have to be chased off the bronze metal re-textured to match the surrounding areas of texture of the sculptures surface. When the chase is complete and ground or sandblasted smooth a patina or color is added to the bronze sculpture. Finally it is fitted with a base and an inscription plate is added.

THE COMMISSION

THE BEGINNING ... In 2005 the Hidalgo Foundation under the direction of Mrs. Tracy Wolff, founder and Chair of the Board & Ms. Leslie Cole Executive Director of the Foundation, interviewed sculptor Gilbert E. Barrera. Ms. Wolff and her husband County Judge Nelson Wolff had already held other meetings with Ron and Karen Herman the exclusive donors to the historic civic endeavor to restore and add design to the 100 plus year-old cast iron fountain. Their project was in synchronization with the city/county Main Plaza re-design. Afterwards in 2006 they selected Barrera for the commission of dual resolve. The first part was to restore the 12-foot county owned cast iron fountain and the 2nd part was to create a bronze sculpture for that fountain. The sculpture they wanted was to be a Lady Justice. The fountain with sculpture atop was to be placed back where it began at the Bexar County courthouse. For his part Barrera encompassed several personal meetings and phone calls with the charges of the city, county and architectural/engineering firms. The meetings took place at both the courthouse and at Barrera's studio. The Lady Justice Fountain was on her way to completion.

ARTIST SELECTION CRITERIA - Ms. Wolff and her Foundation were seeking a native San Antonio artist and if possible in someway related to the law or the courthouse. Ms. Wolff had heard from her husband and newspaper articles that sculptor Barrera, who was born and raised in San Antonio, hosted a new annual Sculptors Invitational in San Antonio. Barrera's Sculptors Dominion International, Inc. exhibits more than 100 big landscape sculptures each April. Today it is the largest annual big sculpture exhibit in Texas. Thus the native San Antonio artist requirement was satisfied. Additionally, sculptor Barrera's, brothers, cousins, nephews, nieces and in-laws practice law at the Bexar County courthouse, and his dad who was President of the San Antonio Bar Association has practiced there for more than 50 years. Roy Barrera Sr. was also San Antonio's first Texas Secretary of State in 1968. Consequently Ms. Tracy Wolff had filled her second selection criteria. Barrera finished the commission in December of 2007.

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