

Garden Wise

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Living Wise

Walter S. Arnold & his passion for the Gargoyle

The word "gargoyle" shares a root with the word "gargle"; they come from "gargouille," an old French word for "throat." A true gargoyle is a waterspout. An unusual carved creature that does not serve that purpose is properly called a "Grotesque."

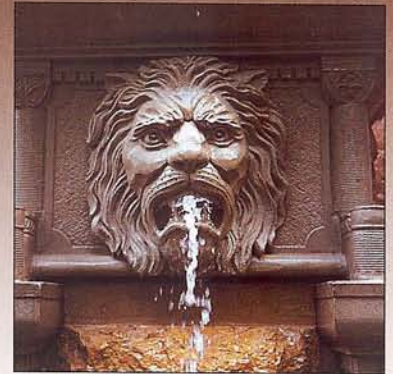
At 12 years old Walter S. Arnold was busy dragging home pieces of limestone from his demolished neighborhood buildings to practice carving on. He used tools that he could find and enlisted family and friends as models and painstakingly he learned how to carve the stone. When Walter turned 20 he moved to Italy where he apprenticed with many master marble carvers. He then moved to Washington, D.C. where he worked at the Washington, D.C. National Cathedral. Walter now calls Chicago home and has a beautiful studio full of his beloved work. When asked why he likes to sculpt gargoyles, Walter S. Arnold answered, "I love creating gargoyles for a number of reasons. They allow a wonderful combination of discipline and improvisation, sort of like jazz. Most of my other stone work is very structured and disciplined. Architectural and ornamental stone carving requires a high degree of skill and precision. The designs and dimensions are fully worked out before I start cutting the block of stone. Gargoyles and grotesques give me a chance to "let go" and improvise, to play with the stone, the forms, the effects of light and shadow. I can use everything I know about the craft of carving, portraiture, anatomy, and expression, and combine those skills with creative freedom, imagination, and fantasy."

Many cultures throughout history have created sculptures of fantastic creatures. These gargoyles and grotesques stir our imaginations, as they stirred the imaginations of the sculptors and carvers who created them. We try to understand them, to explain them. The most common belief is that they are protectors, keeping evil away from the buildings and their occupants. But is this really why they are there? We just don't know.

The best known examples of gargoyles are from the Medieval period, a time when most people were illiterate. The carvings served the role of books, telling stories and reporting on life. The only documentation of the reasoning behind them is in the carving itself. Any original legends have probably been lost or have changed so much over time that they don't tell us anything about the original intentions. In recent years people have invented some new "legends" and claimed that they are old stories, but I don't know of any authentic 700-year old writings about them so the mystery of the gargoyles remains forever locked in the stone they are carved in.

The information and graphics for this article were taken from Walter S. Arnold's web page with his permission. Please visit stonecarver.com for more information on the Sculptor/Stonecarver Walter S. Arnold and to see all his beautiful work.

Thank You Walter, Garden Wise



Walter S. Arnold

Stonecarver