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Art: Stone monsters combat bad news



(September 2010) Eerie, they are indeed, these gargoyles stooping from the roofs of Christian chapels even though they were never conceived to frighten people. In fact the exact opposite is true: by creating their effigy it was hoped that worldly evil and harmful spirits could be more effectively harnessed.

Walter Arnold is famous for his gargoyles, several of which stand perched along the roof of the National Cathedral in Washington D.C.. The artist was recently elected President of the US-American Stone Carvers' Guild for the fourth time running and his business model could be a role model for many a stone mason.

Arnold is a traditionalist fostering the ancient handicraft and carving large sculptures for a variety of implementations. But he also has no qualms about designing unpretentious objects for private living rooms or gardens.

But that is not all – and this is a small sensation for a stone mason: he sometimes makes copies of some of this original carvings (mostly made of Indiana Limestone) and moulds them in resin to sell via the internet!

But back to the monsters of times gone by. Perhaps they conceal new markets for the future. Modern day also has its fair share of harmful spirits as continuous natural disasters and bad news frighten people.

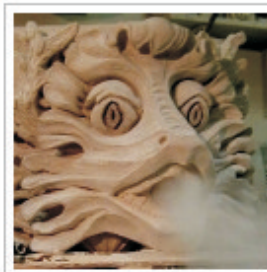
Conversely grotesque faces and figures make people laugh like a slapstick performance and thus bring a little light into their lives.

Arnold designed a water spout in form of a cute hamster and a gnatty fly holding a can of insect repellent, to name but two examples, both of which sit perched atop Washington's National Cathedral, a project to which Arnold dedicated five years of his life. For another project he designed animal heads, two of which, namely the mountain lion and the otter, serve as water spouts. Cope stones, too, come to a second life at the hand of this master of masonry.

Arnold began to wield the hammer carving stone at the tender age of 12 and went on to apprenticeship in Italy's Pietrasanta not far from Carrara. After his Washington Cathedral era he opened a studio in his home turf of Chicago.

[Walter S. Arnold](#)

Photos: Walter Arnold



Darth Vader and strawberries

Two more points of interest: at the top of the National Cathedral another spectacular water spout can be seen. This one is not from Arnold but depicts the Star Wars moving picture legend [Darth Vader](#).

And: The Cologne Cathedral in Germany bore damages dating back to the Second World War until recently – unprepared as there was no recollection or documentation of the original ornaments. An artist crafted strawberry flowers, maple leaves and ranking hedge bindweed to decorate the spot. „Naturstein“ the natural stone trade journal reports on the ornamentation and captures it in photos ([German](#)).



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