

L.A. Watts Times

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May 16, 1996

Vol. XXIV, No. 465

SERVING LOS ANGELES AND SURROUNDING AREAS

'Mother of Humanity' Bronze Sculpture Unveiled in Watts

By JARRETTE FELLOWS, JR.

The "Mother of Humanity," 16 statuesque feet of regal sculpted bronze beauty, was finally unveiled in Watts last Saturday before 300 guests on the newly-renovated grounds of the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC).

Beneath powder-blue skies amid 90-degree heat, marching bands, choirs, special guest speakers and local residents alike, would not suffer despair, singing and speaking soaring platitudes instead, about the two-ton Mother of Humanity, one of the world's largest chiseled bronze art works, fashioned by sculptor Nijel Binns to symbolize the origin and universality of man.

Binns, who labored on the sculpted work for more than 18 months, was pleased by the impact his creation had on the racially-diverse audience.

"The monument had the effect that I had hoped for," he said. "It aroused something within (people) to look in another direction in terms of what's possible for humanity. I'm very glad that we were all able to come together; all of our different races; (and) different ethnic groups to celebrate the unity of humanity."



Photo credit: JARRETTE FELLOWS, JR.

WLCAC president Teryl Watkins (left), shares spotlight with sculptor Nijel Binns as the "Mother of Humanity" looms in background.

Teryl Watkins, WLCAC president and director of development, believes the unveiling of the huge art work signals a new day for the agency as a viable tourist magnet.

"What this means for (us) is a new beginning going into the 21st century," Watkins commented. "We hope to use this as a focal point for tourism; that when people come here, they don't just go to the Watts Towers and then take off, (but) that here is an opportunity for them to see something else of value."

Watkins cited job development as one of the goals for her organization. An open-air market is planned for an old, unused metal frame warehouse on WLCAC proper, to which an umbilical cord leading from the sculpture to the building will symbolize new entrepreneurial opportunities for Watts.

"It will be operated by youth from this community," Watkins said. "We will establish them in business doing everything from art work and crafts, to fresh food. We will operate a restaurant and a number of other things to put the children into business."

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Photo credit: JARRETTE FELLOWS, JR.

The "Mother of Humanity," stands tall as one of the largest bronze sculptures in the world.

SCULPTURE

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Binns, who speaks Cantonese and Russian, conceived the idea for the Mother of Humanity in the wake of the 1992 civil unrest "to do something to help bring the communities together." To Watts, a community that has been ostracized and maligned for decades, Binns said the art work offers an even more pertinent message.

"It says to everyone what my mother once said to me; there's nothing which you cannot do," Binns replied. "And we have to help unify people and promote love and peace. That's what this is all about. There is no such thing as race. People are really one, regardless of what color their skin is. We all come from the same place. That's what the Mother of Humanity celebrates—the unity of humanity."

The essence of the Mother of Humanity is symbolism, embodying the identity of multiple ethnic persuasions. To the viewer, she stands tall and erect with braided hair, Oriental eyes, with a feather in the grasp of her outstretched right hand and left palm facing upward. She is adorned in a body-length wrap-around tied by a tassel-ropes with a shawl about the shoulders. Standing astride on a globe of the earth, one partly revealed breast symbolizes the milk of

humanity that has nourished all the world's nations, said Binns.

A dot on the Mother of Humanity's forehead represents the spiritual "third eye" of man; the feather, peace, truth and righteousness. The open palm, according to Binns, "beckons with a gesture of welcome."

The Mother of Humanity's left foot strides forward indicating a willingness, said Binns "to take action, to go forward, to stamp out evil."

"The Mother of Humanity is just one of the first of many globally inspired projects-planned to enhance the community," said Teryl Watkins.

Mozelle Goosby, a 50-year Watts resident who raised two sons and a daughter in Watts, and who adamantly said that she has no plans to ever leave the community, expressed that the bronze monument represents peace, self-esteem and achievement.

"I'm proud of it. It's wonderful. I see a big change (coming to) Watts," Goosby prophesied. "If they can get some jobs for the young folks here, that'll answer a lot of the problems."

Democratic California State Assembly candidate Carl Washington, expected by political pundits to easily win the 52nd Assembly District seat in the general election in November, took the podium and loudly proclaimed that "this is my district." He said the unveiling of the Mother of Humanity sculpture allows young people to see something great happening in the community.

"This is just wonderful," Washington said.

The WLCAC commissioned Binns to create the bronze statue in 1995. According to Binns, the price tag for the two-ton monument was \$2.5 million. The artist expressed a desire to promote world unity through the creation of six additional identical Mother of Humanity sculptures in Brazil, Tasmania, India, China, Spain and on the continent of Africa.

The WLCAC was developed by the late Ted Watkins more than 30 years ago as a community-based self-help program with a design to stimulate economic change and improve the quality of living in Watts through the creation of employment training and neighborhood rebuilding programs.



Photo credit: JARRETTE FELLOWS, JR.

Wendolin Binns, Nijel's mother, expressed great pride in her son's artistic triumph.

Newspaper: L.A. Watts Times
Date: May 16, 1996
Writer: Jarrette Fellows, Jr.