

# A Woman's Touch

In the first of our two-part series, we profile women helping sculpt today's perception of the medium

*By Richard V. West*



**Lee Hutt**, *Abstracted*, hydrocal, 22 x 18 x 18"

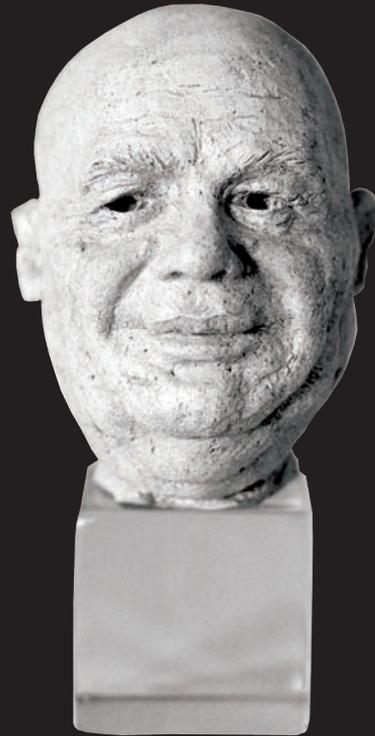
## LEE HUTT

Lee Hutt combines psychological insight with an intuitive response to her subjects. Her work ranges from straightforward portraits to figurative compositions. A native of New York, she began her study of art as an undergraduate in a Belgian atelier, where classical traditions in art were emphasized. Returning to the United States, Hutt completed graduate work at Columbia University, earning a master's degree in psychology while taking art classes at the New School in New York City. This combination of psychology and art was to have a profound influence on the direction of her future work.

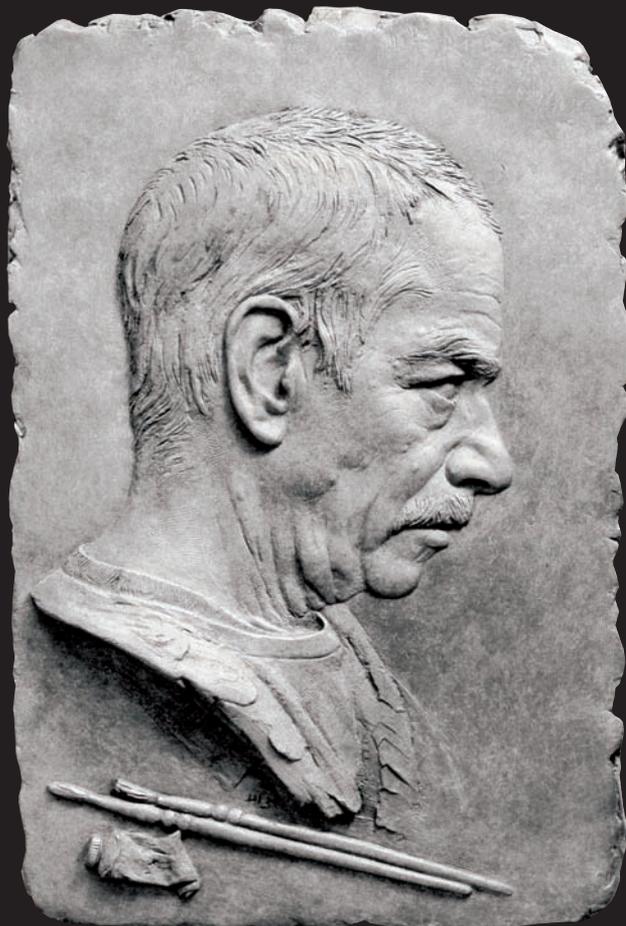
Moving to Massachusetts, Hutt intensified her interest in sculpture, studying it further at Mount Holyoke College. She soon began to establish her reputation in portraiture and figure subjects, earning professional membership in the National Sculpture Society and the Portrait Society of America.

She often creates sculpture to be cast in bronze at the foundry but, feeling that bronze is sometimes too cold and impersonal, she frequently works with alternate mediums. In her own words, she is "an inveterate explorer of plastic materials." A good example of her approach can be seen in *Abstracted*, which—despite its title—is far from abstract. This piece began as a standard half-figure portrait of a friend and neighbor, but no pose satisfied the artist. While resting, however, the model adopted this pose; Hutt immediately recognized this was the gesture that best captured her friend's personality. Indeed, the sitter is in another world, deep in thought, eyes averted as she slips into introspection. The immediacy of this pose is reinforced by the material Hutt chose for this very human and sympathetic portrait, a form of white gypsum cement called Hydrocal, especially developed to allow intricate casting and detail with a smooth surface.

Hutt feels that finishing a cast cement piece is as labor intensive as finishing bronze. "I usually rework the entire surface with sandpaper or diamond files. It is a process akin to reworking wax and chasing the metal in bronze sculpture." Hutt's cement pieces are patinated just as bronze pieces are, but with paint rather than

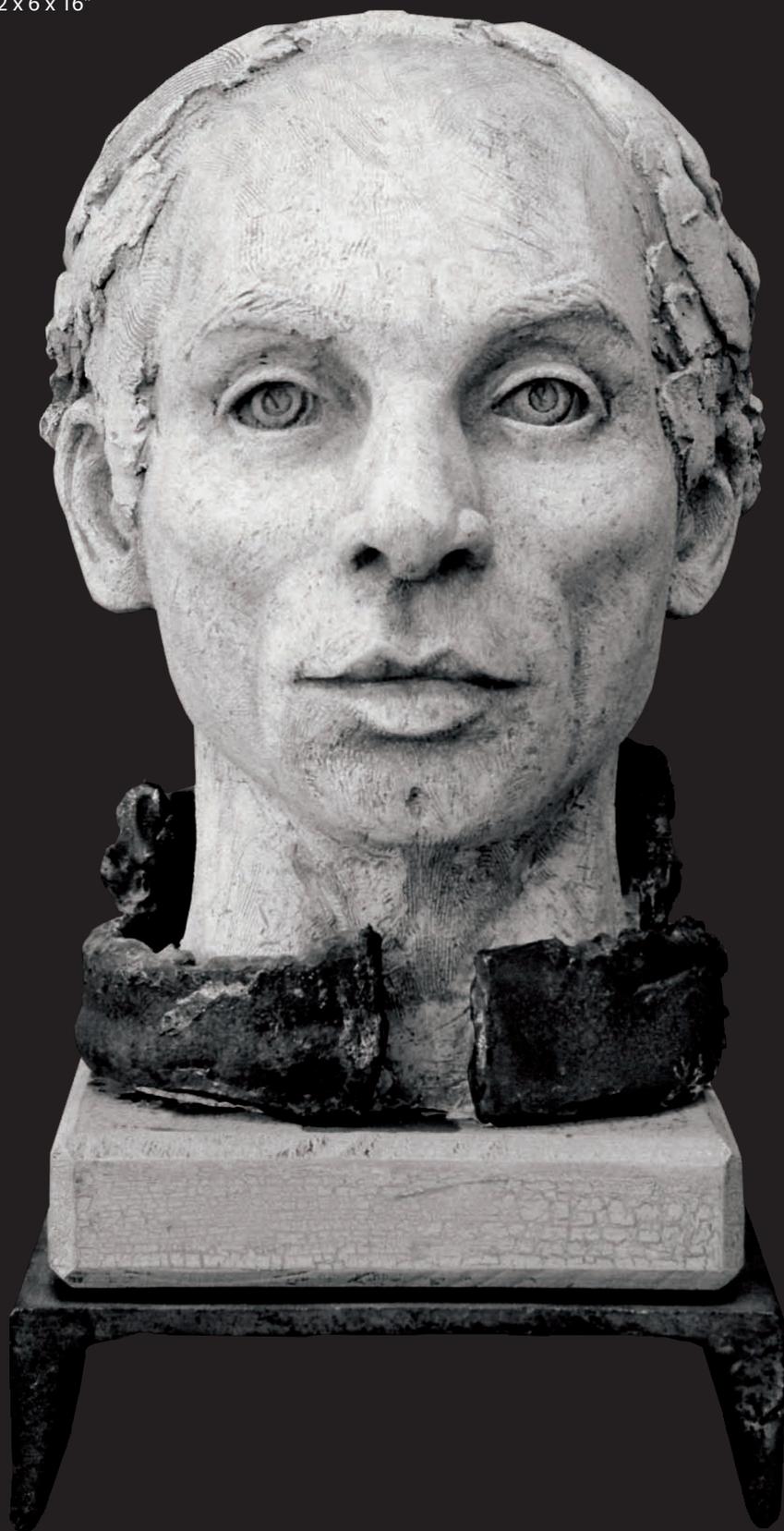


Lee Hutt, *Nikita Krushchev in 1963*, 3"



Lee Hutt, *Gregory Gillespie*, bronze, 16 x 12 x 1½"

**Lee Hutt, *the Vicar***  
terra cotta, steel and wood  
12 x 6 x 16"



chemicals. This can take the form of layers of casein paint (a medium derived from milk) or many thin glazes of oil paint, unifying the surface of the work and creating the warmth and glow of flesh.

A very different approach is shown in an homage and farewell to friend and fellow artist, the late American realist painter Gregory Gillespie. Similar to Renaissance bas-relief portraits of famous personalities, *Gregory Gillespie* shows the artist's head in full profile, slightly bowed, with brushes and a half-empty oil paint tube as symbols of his art.

Hutt's humorous and playful side is exemplified by *Nikita Khrushchev* in 1963. Attracted by Yousuf Karsh's photographs of the Soviet leader, Hutt was particularly struck by one image of Khrushchev: "It was the only time I ever saw him smiling." Inspired, she created this portrait in clay on the spot. Incredibly, it is only 3 inches high. Despite its diminutive size it captures the massive personality of the sitter without taking him too seriously.

*The Vicar*, on the other hand, is a life-size head of a character seen in a play, tormented by a crisis in faith. Here the clerical collar is made of scrap steel, a fitting metaphor that expresses the constriction of soul felt by the character in the drama. Hutt's ability to capture the essence of personality as well as outer appearance is a powerful factor that animates all her portrait commissions.

And how does Hutt feel about the role of women sculptors? "Thank goodness men and women bring different sensibilities to life and to art," she says. "In an effort to level the playing field there has been an effort to downplay those differences and not to applaud them." So, *vive la différence!*

*Richard V. West is Director Emeritus of the Frye Art Museum in Seattle. During his tenure there, the museum adopted the mission "to celebrate the tradition and contemporary practice of representational art" and began building a collection that today includes major works by Odd Nerdrum, Steven Assael, and Bo Bartlett. Before becoming an art historian, West studied with the noted Austrian sculptor Fritz Wotruba at the Meisterschule der Bildhauerei in Vienna and worked as a studio assistant for the American sculptor George Rickey. West is currently a trustee of the Gage Academy of Art in Seattle.*

