

Some observations about campus sculptures

GREG VAN SICKLER

Special to The SUN

Editor's Note: Assistant Professor of Art Geraldine Kiefer asked her art appreciation students to review the two sculptures on campus: The Peacemakers and the big SU. Here are two of the essays.

One of the most historic, noteworthy and yet overlooked objects on campus is the Peacemakers monument, which serves as a commemorative work of art dedicated to an extremely significant event in United States history. Although many people on campus do not know what the Peacemakers represents, it is a symbol of the movement toward the end of a very dark era in world history, beautifully illustrated through its unusual, yet simple design.

On Dec. 7, 1987, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union shook hands with U.S. President Ronald Reagan, beginning a summit that signaled a much-needed end of the Cold War.

This extremely momentous event inspired American sculptor Frank Hendler to create a monument to symbolize such an historic occasion. Thus, he created two identical eight-ton monuments titled "The Peacemakers." One is placed on the Shenandoah University campus, and the other is located in Moscow, Russia.

When I discovered there are only two of these monuments in existence and Shenandoah University has the honor of having one of these amazing works of art, I was blown away.

The fact the little town of Winchester and the small institution called Shenandoah was chosen as the site for such a national symbol of peace is almost difficult to believe.

Having known very little of the monument beforehand, I now feel very proud and honored this school was chosen as this monument's home.

The monument depicts two hands entering a hand shake. This is the feature of the monument I really admire. It is amazing how Hendler used such simple objects as hands to demonstrate the movement of peace between two super power countries.

Something as ordinary as a handshake is transformed into an iconic symbol of peace and hope. There is an enormous amount of symbolism with just these two simple hands.

The most important aspect I see is the hands are not yet engaged in a handshake. They are both moving toward each other, but the hands do not touch. To me, this cleverly illustrates the idea that, although this meeting was a very generous step toward peace, it was not

a direct halt to the Cold War.

At the time the men met, there was still tension between the countries. The space between the hands exemplifies the space that still existed between the United States and Russia. They had not come to complete terms, but huge strides were made to bring the two countries together by this meeting.

I love that Hendler chose the hands for this project. If I could build this monument, I would do it the same. The handshake is a very simple gesture between two people, and Hendler transformed it into a gesture between countries. The hands seem perfect for this monument.

There is, however, one aspect of it I do wish would change. Although the sculpture seems almost perfect to me, I would move it to a different location on campus. Currently, it sits near the Ohrstrom-Bryant Theatre parking lot, near the bridges over Abrams Creek.

This significant sculpture should be placed in the heart of campus. Right now, it's easy to drive pass the sculpture and not even notice it. Until I researched this piece of art, I never really noticed it.

I believe the sculpture should be moved into the quad, near the Smith Library. It would be noticed by many more students, community members and prospective students.

Since the Peacemakers sits alongside a road, it doesn't get the attention it deserves. Vehicles driving back and forth past the monument create a distracting environment. It should be in a quiet location where pedestrians can quietly admire the work and understand its historical importance.

BRIANA BARRON

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Shenandoah University is a small school with much to offer, and it's not limited to academics and athletics. Aesthetically, Shenandoah is beautiful. We have a lovely building layout with an open area in the center of campus, as well as beautiful outlying buildings.

Two very important structures on campus include the SU sculpture and the Peacemakers sculpture. The pieces are very different, yet are placed on the very same campus.

The SU sculpture in front of the Wilkins Building was added to simply make our landscape more pleasing as well as create a place to take keepsake photos.

It is approximately 4-feet high and 6-inches thick. Created out of cast stone, the SU sculpture is on an incline in the center of campus to create a focal point. When assessing the appearance of the sculpture, one must take landscaping into account.

The SU sculpture would just be stone letters if not for the framing and placement. Because the sculpture is framed with a brick wall and various landscaping affects, it is beautiful to look at and serves its purpose well.

The Peacemakers monument has an odd location on campus — near Abrams Creek between the foot bridge and the traffic bridge.

Made of bronze, marble and stone, the sculpture is structurally diverse. Designed by a local artist and cast in Italy, this sculpture was originally intended to rest in Washington, D.C. as a symbol of peace between the United States and the former Soviet Union. It depicts the

handshake between President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, signaling a thaw in the cold war.

The sculptor, a political activist, developed the idea for the sculpture and created it without commission. The Peacemakers is simply a marble base with "The Peacemakers" engraved in it (in Russian and English) and carved stone frames the bronze shaking hands. The symbolism is what truly makes it beautiful.

For someone to want peace enough to create this amazing work without commission should mean something. The monument was dedicated at SU in 1992 and rededicated in 2002. An identical sculpture is in Moscow.

It is interesting Shenandoah two such sculptures on its campus. The Peacemakers monument carries much symbolism, and the SU sign is simply there for aesthetics.

The diversity in sculptures may reflect Shenandoah's diverse style, as well as allows Shenandoah to remain open to new ideas.

The layout of the two sculptures also sets a mood for Shenandoah. The Peacemakers monument is one of the first things one sees upon entering main campus from Millwood Avenue. Shenandoah creates 'peace' among students and faculty from the very start. The giant SU placed atop an incline creates a focal point for anyone who walks through the quad.

The two sculptures are very different in symbolism and appearance, but Shenandoah works well with both.

With the SU a symbol of school spirit and pride, and the Peacemakers a symbol of peace among nations, Shenandoah has it all covered.

The university has very broad academic offerings as well as athletics, so why not have a broad range of sculpture on campus.

Of course, the placement could be different. One might place the Peacemakers in the quad and the SU at the entrance, but that would take away the photo opportunities of the big SU. So maybe one could keep the SU in the quad, but more toward the library, as that is another focal point on the main campus.

The Peacemakers is in a nice spot now, but many more students would view the monument if it were in a more prominent location. If the Peacemakers and the SU were in the quad at opposite ends, students and faculty could appreciate both more and learn about the history of each sculpture.

Both sculptures deserve to be appreciated. The hard work and planning that went into creating them should be commended and appreciated by all.



RecycleMania 2009! Trivia Contest Answers



Week One:

How many pounds of trash does the average person in the United States generate every day?

Answer:
4.6 pounds

Week Five:

According to Earth911.org, how many years does it take before a plastic bottle begins to decompose in a landfill?

Answer:
700 years



Week Two:

What percentage was Virginia's statewide recycling rate for calendar year 2007?

Answer:
38.5%

Week Three:

Based on the current disposal rate, how many more years can Virginia's existing solid waste landfills be used before they reach capacity?

Answer:
About 17.7 years

Week Six:

According to Earth911.org, how many barrels of oil does it take to manufacture a year's supply of bottled water?

Answer:
Over 1.5 million

Week Seven:

According to the National Recycling Coalition, how many Americans are employed by recycling and reuse enterprises nationwide?

Answer:
1.1 million

Week Four:

According to the American Forest & Paper Association, how many cubic yards of landfill space are saved for every ton of paper that is recycled?

Answer:
3.3 cubic yards



Week Eight:

Spring Break, no trivia question

Week Nine:

According to the EPA, approximately how many tons of municipal solid waste were produced in the United States in 2007?

Answer:
254 million tons

Week Ten:

According to Earth911.org, what percentage of recovered glass containers are made into new glass bottles?

Answer:
An estimated 80%

The office of sustainability extends its appreciation to the following organizations for their support of the 2009 RecycleMania competition:

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