



thespec.com

<http://www.thespec.com/Entertainment/article/604242>

[\[Close\]](#)

Gravity's great weight in Wallace's work

JEFF MAHONEY

The Hamilton Spectator

(Jul 22, 2009)

If you've ever been on the campus of our university you've probably seen the man who has been standing there since 1973 trying to release his eagles.

You know how it is. Sometimes you just have to let your eagles go.

Of course, the man and his eagles, situated in the Carey Fox Art Quadrangle at McMaster, are sculptural. (If they were real, in this city, the man would need a permit and a use variance, as the sky around the quadrangle is not zoned for eagle release).

They are made of welded steel, so the action of the release is never completed.

Th eagles flutter there forever at the ends of the man's perpetually upraised arms.

Did you ever try to paint a ceiling? After a while it hurts like hell, holding your arms up to the heights. But what else can we do? We're human beings. We reach.

George Wallace is the man who made the man who releases -- almost and forever -- the eagles.

To me, that sculpture should be on the city's coat of arms. It has more to do with our identity, or should, than weedy sidewalks littered with coffee cups.

And Man Releasing Eagles, as the sculpture is called, is not necessarily Wallace's best. You should see his Daedalus. You should see his Lazarus and his Lazarus Risen From the Dead.

Wallace died last Friday at the age of 89. And while he was born in Ireland in 1920 and did not come to Hamilton until 1957, and while he lived in Victoria, B.C., since the mid-'80s, and while he died there, still, Wallace was ours. He was Hamilton's. And we were his. His eagles are always at our fingertips. He loved to sculpt in steel.

Wallace, who studied at Trinity College in Dublin before immigrating to Canada, taught art at McMaster for 25 years, becoming chair of the Fine Art Department.

He retired in 1985, but not before leaving a wonderful, beau-laid body of work, and not before leaving his mark on several generations of Hamilton artists.



SPECIAL TO THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

The characters of his sculpture -- Daedalus with his tattered wings, for instance, looking up at the sky -- are not terribly prepossessing. They are paunchy, chimp-faced, saggy-balled gropers-in-the-dark, tragic and comic at the same time.

They are men of steel, literally, but they're more like Charlie Chaplin's tramp than Superman, as Hamilton artist Bob Yates has pointed out.

I never met Wallace except through his sculpture and his prints, but still that means I got to know him pretty well. And I've met his "children," artists who learned from him. Like Yates, who recently wrote a splendid article on Wallace, before Wallace died, for Hamilton Arts & Letters Internet magazine.

"Rather than instruments of elevation, Wallace has made these wings heavy objects which weigh the figure down," Yates writes, referring to Wallace's famous Daedalus sculpture. He talks about the importance of the force of gravity in Wallace's work.

Things, people, struggle to become airborne. But they're earthbound.

We live in Hamilton. It's not easy. Sometimes it's like living on the moon. The eagles have landed, but they haven't. It's 1969 and 1973 and 2009 and the beginning of time, the apocalyptic end of it, and everything in between, frozen in a moment.

We are Karen Kain in the body of some old Hamilton punk rocker. George Wallace helped teach us that it's as painfully beautiful to be the one as the other.

He is one of the best things that ever happened to this city. He would not have wanted a shrine. His works, many examples of which still reside here, have seen to the preservation of his memory. As have his students who recall him so fondly.

jmahoney@thespec.com

905-526-3306

thespec.com

<http://www.thespec.com/Entertainment/article/604242>



© Copyright 2007 Metroland Media Group Ltd. All rights reserved. The reproduction, modification, distribution, transmission or republication of any material from www.thespec.com is strictly prohibited without the prior written permission of Metroland Media Group Ltd.

