



## R. W. Butler, ALI . . . A Creative Visualist

“You use a glass mirror to see your face, you use the arts to see your soul.” George Bernard Shaw

By Ed McCormick

"Visualist" is a term for someone who provides creative visual understanding. A visualist thinks and communicates visually. It's visual story telling and idea sharing. A visualist takes difficult concepts and reduces them to simpler terms so that a complicated idea or emotion can be more easily understood. Visualism includes the disciplines of graphics, illustration, sculpture photography and design – artist R. W. Butler is certainly all of those things.

“One of my greatest passions in life is simply people watching,” says creative visualist Roy W. Butler. Driven by an ever present “creative force,” Butler has not only developed a way of seeing the world, but also a way of interpreting it for others.

A genuine student of life, his 37-year professional career has been passionately devoted to his art. Whether the medium is lifecast sculptures of the human form,

fine art sculpture, painting or graphics, he is possessed with a rare, talent for creating sensitive and emotion evoking images that reflect life and touch the soul.

Butler was born in Gallatin, Tennessee, (then a population of 4,000) a small town situated in Sumner County (of which it is the county seat) northeast of Nashville along US Highway 31E near Old Hickory Lake. Gallatin was also the birthplace of another international artist, Bill “Hossman” Allen reported to be one of the most influential shapers of American music.

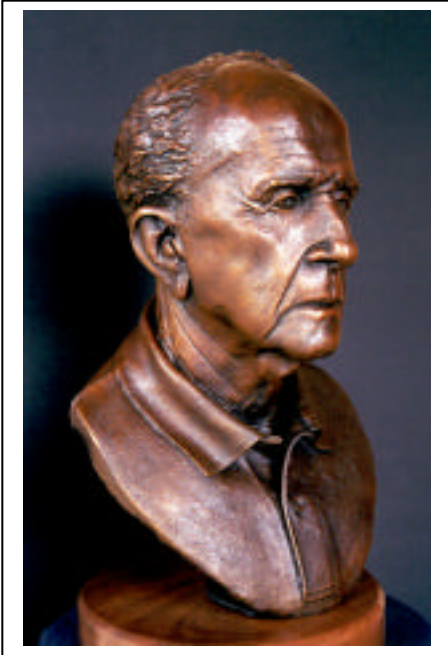
Butler began developing his artistic and technical talents while still in high school drawing and modeling futuristic cars. One of his 1/12-scale model designs sculpted first in clay then modeled in wood received General Motors’ prestigious Fisher Body Craftsman’s Guild award.

His professional career also began in high school at the early age of seventeen.

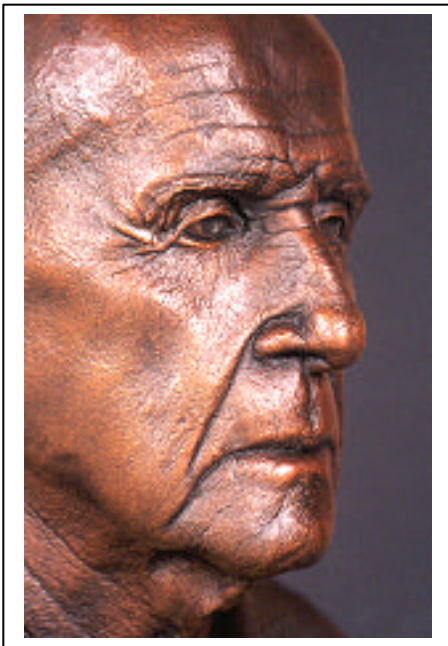
For the grand sum of ten dollars he was commissioned to create an illustration for



*Top of the page: Angie, polychrome plaster  
Above: Leather Face, leather*



*Chairman of the Board. A portrait created in bronze.*



*Close up of Chairman of the Board. Note the life-like eye detailing.*

a local business. That illustration ultimately found its way onto the pages of *Life Magazine* giving Butler his first taste of national exposure for his art.

In 1979 he left Gallatin to seek out new artistic avenues and to expand his creative and technical knowledge. He

**Art Casting Journal – July 2001**

headed for California and settled in Santa Ana for the next twenty years.

In 1985 he attended SAS (Scottsdale Artists School) a newly formed artist's college founded just two years prior by a group of artists and community leaders. There, Butler developed his great passion for lifecasting taking classes in the art of lifecasting and sculpture.

Over the years his reputation grew. Private collectors as well as galleries and museums have acquired his artwork. His long list of credits includes members of the entertainment industry, sports celebrities, international magazines, public exhibits, professional instruction and commissions for private and corporate collections throughout the United States.

During the past thirty-seven years of Butler's career, he has learned many techniques that he is able to incorporate into his lifecast pieces. The *Chairman of the Board* is one of Butler's more recent creations that incorporate many of those techniques.

The real chairman of the board is 76 years old and the owner of a 50-year old nationally recognized company. Butler was commissioned to create a lifecast bust about two years ago so a bronze edition could be given to each of his eight children.

Butler describes the process, stating that; "We began the project by showing him photographs of my previous lifecastings and explaining the entire procedure in detail. Due to his age and the method I would use for this portrait casting, I assured him the procedure was safe but he had the power to stop the process at any point by employing a couple of simple hand signals that I explained to him."

Actual casting began by using Crisco to coat the model's hair and eyebrows. A thin layer of Nivea Oil was used as a release barrier for his skin, since it was very fragile due to age and weathering. Butler finds that Crisco and Nivea Oil are better and more reliable release agents over many current alternatives.

Choosing the mold medium was a concern. Because of the client's particular state of health, a skin safe silicone rubber was utilized for the molding process instead of a prosthetic alginate. Also, since multiple casts were



*Ralph and Mom. This is a hand casting of mother and son in mixed media.*

a requirement, silicone rubber would allow for the pouring of plaster copies if needed during the detailing process.

After the silicone was applied over the entire head, a quick setting plaster gauze two-piece support shell was made over the silicon rubber mold (a piece for

## Association of Lifecasters International



**Dedicated to the advancement of the art of life casting.**

**For Further Information:**

ALI

18 Bank Street  
Summit NJ 07901

Or call:

1 908-273-5401

Please visit our website at:  
[www.lifecasting.org](http://www.lifecasting.org)

the front of the head and a piece for the rear of head). Once firm, the support shell halves were removed and the rubber mold carefully slit up the rear with surgical scissors and slid forward off his head in one piece.

Butler then used blended gypsum to make a solid casting into the reassembled combination mother mold and support shell. Before pouring he painted in a surface coat of gypsum to assure the casting material reached all surfaces of the cavity and to eliminate the possibility of air bubbles.

The result was that within two hours of the sitting the real chairman saw a gypsum copy of himself the same way that everyone else saw him; life size and in true three dimensional form.

Butler remarked that, "Even though I have been lifecasting for many years, I am constantly amazed at the reactions of people when they view their own face for the first time in correct perspective, full size, three dimensional form."

Over the next few days, the gypsum bust was dried in stages and the detailing began. Butler prefers to perform certain detailing while the cast retains a lot of the original moisture. He has a reputation as a perfectionist, ever striving for higher quality detail.

Because Butler is a fine art sculptor he has mastered the art of detailing eyes

and hair. "Eyes are the mirror of the soul and if they are not represented accurately including surrounding tissues, the final presentation will not come to life with true expression," says Butler.

Once the cast was thoroughly dry and the eye areas completed, he recreated all the necessary skin and hair detail using various tools and spackling paste.

The next step was to produce natural looking clothing to compliment the face, head structure and most importantly the personality of the subject. According to Butler, the chairman, even though a leader of a multi-million dollar corporation was actually a very casual dresser. So Butler portrayed him at his true personality creating a pull-over-collar type, knit fabric, casual sport shirt to compliment the bust portrait.

Butler achieved this by hardening the shirt in place on the completed plaster bust. He used resin that he carefully applied so as not to destroy the detail of the fabric weave. Butler cautions that bronze foundry casting limitations must also be considered when positioning clothing undercut details.

A silicone rubber mold and resin support shell was made of the entire composite bust. Then a gypsum copy was pulled and examined for any mold defects. Reference photographs and the completed mold were then forwarded to



*Las Brisas. Resin cast with the finish completed in translucent blue/green over metallic bronze.*

the foundry for lost wax bronze casting of the bust, finish patina and mounting to an appropriate display base.

Butler says, "I never forget that a live human being is my subject and they have trusted me with their safety and the ability to communicate with them, and provide them with a finished product they will be delighted to add to their heirloom collection."

Butler is now back in Tennessee where he began. He teaches more workshops now training lifecasters-to-be. Yet, he continues to pursue his passion creating emotionally charged life cast art with more vigor than ever before.

As you view his work, it is his hope that you too will gaze deeply into the reflections of his real life models – those glass mirror images – and at the same time to take a moment observe and visualize their inner souls breaking free.

Butler says, "We are all visualists. I hope to create visions of art that reflect the soul of the viewer. And in reality it is the viewer who is the visualist just as much as am – I am merely send the message. It is the viewer that must visualize its personal meaning to them."

**ACJ**