

Eric Berg Leaves Legacy of Animal Sculptures in Center City and Beyond

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Most of the bronze animal sculptures created by the late Eric Berg of Center City are not hidden away in museums but instead are out in public spaces, enjoyed by people of all ages. Fascinated by animal life from early childhood, Berg had a goal to create animal sculptures accessible to the public. We are fortunate to have several of these animals residing in Center City.

Eric Berg created both *Grizzly* and *Family of Turtles*, located in Fidler Square, as well as the *Gardener's Cottage Gates* in Rittenhouse Square. The *Gates* features birds, squirrels, a snail, a lizard, a praying mantis, a frog, and a dog, all animals found in the Square.

Other important local works include: *Philbert the Pig* at Reading Terminal Market; *Mario the Magnificent*, the iconic dragon at Drexel University; the *Tortoise* and the sculpted rabbit gates at the Please Touch Museum; *Panda* at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and *Galapagos Tortoise* at the Academy of Natural Sciences. To see pictures of Berg's bronze animals and his other works in Center City and adjacent neighborhoods, go to https://www.philart.net/artist/Eric_Berg/17.html

Over 44 of Berg's public commissions reside at American zoos, parks, museums, and universities. "He leaves behind a zoo's worth of bronze animal sculptures," the *Inquirer's* Peter Dobrin wrote in Berg's obituary.

In Philadelphia and environs, his sculptures are in the Art Museum, the Please Touch Museum, the Pennsylvania Convention Center, City Hall, Pennsylvania Hospital, and the Zoo, among others, as well as many public spaces and

museums throughout the U.S., including the Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington, D.C. Smaller works have been sold by galleries to private individuals.

Berg's good friend Ed Bronstein, Center City artist and retired architect, wrote this warm tribute: "Eric was an easy guy to like. Always with a dog in Schuylkill River Park, he would start conversations with the other walkers, make jokes. He didn't forget names; everyone became his friend. He could act tough, but he was really a sweet guy."

Sculptures by Eric Berg are for sale; you can find them online. In 2010, a *Toad* sculpture, 17 inches tall, sold for \$4,500 at an estate auction. In 2015, a *Big Horn Ram*, 87 inches tall, at \$75,000, was installed at the Hill School in Pottstown. Animal sculptures for sale include *Sea Lion*, *Rabbit*, *Toad*, and another edition of *Philbert*.

Born in Pottstown in 1945 and raised in Allentown, Berg earned a B.S. from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1968. At that time, he was creating stone carvings, and decided to pursue sculpture instead of business. After graduating with a Masters in Fine Arts from the University of Pennsylvania in 1974, he got his first commission from the Philadelphia Zoo – the *African Warthog*. He resided in Center City and had studios in Philadelphia and New York State. With some works still in progress, he died on April 20.

More pictures of Berg's bronze animal sculptures and his abstract works are on his website:

<http://www.bergbronze.com/bodyofwork.htm>



Gardener's Cottage Gates in Rittenhouse Square.



Grizzly and Family of Turtles in Fidler Square.

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"The motivation behind my sculpture comes from an early childhood fascination with animal life and the natural world. The goal of my work is to place hands-on, accessible public art works which, through their character and natural appeal, foster an appreciation and respect for animal life.... and the subtle reinforcement of the beauty and value of these 'other than human' living beings."

—Eric Berg