



GLENN BEIL/DEMOCRAT FILES

Bradley Cooley Sr., left, and Bradley Cooper Jr. work on a clay sculpture of Ray Charles before it was cast in bronze. A new exhibit honors the legacy of the senior Cooley, who died earlier this year.

## ‘BRONZE IS FOREVER’ FOR COOLEY SCULPTORS

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COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

Strolling through the 1020 ART gallery, you might come eye to eye with musician Ray Charles or the first and only female chief of the Seminole tribe, Betty Mae Jumper.

Peer closer, and you will see the highly detailed handiwork of Bradley Cooley Sr., who died earlier this year, and his son Bradley Cooley Jr. As a team, Bronze by Cooley, they created one of the largest, and most respected bodies of work in bronze, immortalizing wildlife, sports figures and songwriters. Cooley hopes he and his father's greatest contribution, however, will be to the native peoples that lived in the southeastern United States.

“Bronze is forever,” said Cooley. “It’s for generations to come and will be something permanent. I’ve done some sculptures in other media, but I prefer the bronze because I know it will be here when you and I are gone.”

### If you go

**What:** Legacy: An exhibition honoring the work of sculptor Bradley Cooley

**When:** 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday through June 30

**Where:** 1020 ART, 1020 East Lafayette Street

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** For more, please call 850-383-1020.

The family decided to honor and celebrate the elder

Cooley with a display of his great works in “Legacy,” an exhibition that will run Monday-Friday through June 30. Each work represents the long-lasting impact the patriarch had locally, nationally, and internationally as an artist. The younger Cooley, along with his wife, Linda Cooley, are continuing as the backbone of the family business, creating sculptures for both informative and artistic purposes.

“Our pieces are very educational,” Cooley said. “All my pieces are telling a story of some type whether it’s educating you about what the natives wore or how they were at that time. It’s important because I’ve got Choctaw and Cherokee as part of my heritage, but it’s also such a big part of Florida history.”

Art also runs deep in the family tradition, as Cooley’s maternal grandfather was a sculptor and painter who in turn taught the trade to the elder Cooley. The young Cooley began sculpting at age 5, and made his first bronze sculpture, a bust of Julius Cesar commissioned by his teacher, at 16.

“I started out picking up little pieces of clay my dad left behind and making stuff,” recalls Cooley, who attended North Florida Junior College for two years on an art scholarship. “I learned a lot about design there, but my father was the one who taught me about technique. After school, I went right into the business.”

His father was also his main instructor when it came to learning about the early southeastern Native Americans, which had been passed on to him from the elders of the Seminole tribe. Together they found arrowheads on their farm and learned to make atlatls, a traditional spear thrower, firsthand before placing these traditional tools and activities in bronze.

As historians and artists, this collection of stories and experiences are essential to the Cooleys’ artistic processes in order to accurately represent the Native American culture. Recollections of joining his father at powwows every weekend and learning the legends from Seminole elders stand out in Cooley’s memory. When being commissioned for any given work, research at museum archives is another source of information.

“For a life-size bronze of Chief Osceola, I went to a museum in Gainesville where they had a death mask of him, and took calipers to measure his face,” explains Cooley.

The creation of the artwork is a very involved multi-part process that takes place in the family’s facilities in Jefferson County and ends up in Colorado for the final bronzing stage. It all begins with a small clay figurine. From there, Cooley creates a scale replica out of wire and clay which eventually serves as the impression of the figure for the mold.

The “lost wax process” is when wax is burned

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# Bronze

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away to create the ceramic molds that the bronze will be poured into. In the end, different acids, or patinas, are added to the bronze to create different colors, and the exacting detail work begins.

“Sculpting in the first month is my favorite part,” says Cooley. “On a life-size sculpture you’re putting on handfuls of clay and by the end, you’re putting on thimblefuls of clay. At the beginning, you may work on it for two days and look at it for two hours, but by the end, you may look at it for two days and work on it for two hours.”

From winning the Guinness Book of World Record’s for sculpting the largest whitetail deer to more traditional depictions of great Native American and Seminole peoples like former Chief James Billie, the Cooleys hope to capture humanity as closely as possible. In terms of design, Cooley says emotion and flow are two of the most vital aspects of any given figure.

“Expression is most important part of a sculpture,” says Cooley. “If you have someone giging an alligator or a lady sewing clothes, you want different types of expression. None of my sculptures is a generic face and may use several faces as reference, but we want it to be lifelike as if it would talk to you. We want you to see what we’re thinking.”

The family has shown in 1020 ART gallery for several years, but it was elder Cooley’s passing that prompted them to put together a tribute show of their greatest works in order to give locals a chance to see his work once more.

Most of all, Cooley looks forward to upholding the business and continuing to produce the same quality sculptures — a hope that is coming to fruition as his own children have shown talent and have begun to experiment with clay, even as the exhibit looks in retrospect on all the work Bronze by Cooley has achieved in the past 20 years.

“For a son and father to work together for over 25 years is a pretty big accomplishment,” smiles Cooley. “My vision is for people to remember my father and myself for historians and amateur archaeologists that have studied the Native American culture and preserved it in a way that people can enjoy for the future. That’s the legacy we’ll both leave behind.”

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the area’s agency for arts and cul-



DEMOCRAT FILES

These three bronze statues, outside the Museum of Florida History, depict a Miccosukee Indian family in the 1930s. The statues are by the father-and-son Jefferson County artists Bradley Cooley and Bradley Cooley Jr.



AMANDA SIERADZKI

Bradley Cooper Jr. poses with a sculpture. An exhibit honoring the work of his father is on display at 1020 ART.

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June 16th & 17th • Fishing Days

Main Weigh Station - Shields Marina St. Marks, FL

Outpost Weigh Station - The Moorings Carrabelle, FL

3:00pm – 7:30pm on Friday June 16th;  
3:00pm – 5:00 Saturday June 17th.

June 14th

Kickoff Party & Captains Meeting

Buffalo Wild Wings - 392 S Magnolia Dr. (Tallahassee)

