

## Synopsis of how Garr Ugalde's Pieces-Agora's Light I, II, III sculptures (2016) were acquired and placed at the Welcome Support Center

- **July 24, 2015:** ARC published an Invitational Sculpture, Exhibit and Public Art Proposal for artists to submit sculptures to be placed in front of a newly remodeled Student Services Building (now known as the Welcome Support Center). The invitation explained about the exhibit, the public art site location, budget and presentation parameters.
- **September 18 & 19, 2015:** Artists presented their sculptures. Detailed criteria was developed for ranking finalists.
- **September 25, 2015 :** Three finalists were **selected by a committee of 12 consisting of representation from all constituencies on campus. (2 Managers; 3 Faculty; 4 Classified; 3 Students-names are available upon request).**
- **December 4, 2015:** Full sculpture proposals were due from the finalists.
- **December 18, 2015:** Final approval was made by the College President.
- **December 18, 2015-April 1, 2016:** Artwork was fabricated by the chosen artist.
- **April 29, 2016:** Project was scheduled for completion.







**AGORA'S LIGHT  
I, II & III**

**Sculptures by  
Garr Ugalde  
2016**

The Agora of Athens was a gathering place originally located at the foot of the Acropolis in ancient Greece. It was a cultural hub where the artistic, spiritual, athletic and activists of the time assembled in an open-air marketplace, a place where civic announcements were proclaimed. This was where the great philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle expounded upon their enlightened ideas to loyal students and followers.

With this in mind, the trio of sculptures represents allegorically the spirit of that place and time. They harken back to relics and ancient ruins, yet also relate to the present. The figures are female and were meant to exude the classic form of beauty and elan. The first figure was conceived as a dancer in graceful repose, representing the artistic and spiritual. The second brings to mind the Winged Nike, the goddess of victory. The third signifies activist engagement with her extended hand to elicit discourse with those who have reached out.

As was true with the Agora, the Student Services Building is a gathering place; a place where issues are addressed and needs are met.



## Garr Ugalde's Pieces-Agora's Light I, II, III sculptures (2016)

Garr Ugalde's *Agora's Light I, II*, and *III* sculptures (2016) are well-placed as public artworks on a campus serving the educational needs of our diverse community. Especially in light of our mission to “provide an academically rich environment that inspires critical thinking, learning, and responsible participation in the community,” Ugalde's figures make a direct reference to community, and to the historic roots of thinking and learning that guide us as educators.<sup>[1]</sup>

At about eight feet tall, the three figures are each over life-sized and refer to the tradition of heroic sculpture. The ancient Greeks began making sculptures like these more than 2600 years ago. They evolved a new, more humanistic form from the earlier, more rigid Egyptian sculptures, and they added a new focus on the body. The Greek interest in representations of the human body stemmed from their association of a perfected, idealized human body with godlike status. It also had a great deal to do with cultural markers that caused them to associate nudity with athleticism, high culture, and pride in Greek culture.

The earliest depiction of nudity in Greek art were almost exclusively male, and the meaning and trajectory of female figures like Ugalde's is connected, but also subtly different. The most ancient art objects known to have been made by humans are small figurines usually presumed to be fertility figures. The most well-known, like the *Venus of Hohle Fels* or the *Venus of Willendorf* (though both names are modern and reflect our best guesses of intentions), are as much as 35,000 years old. These differ vastly in scale from that heroic size, as they could easily be held in the palm of a hand, but they have a commonality with Ugalde's figures in that little attention is paid to the expressiveness or individuality of their faces. Fertility figures tended to be much more focused on the form, the health, and the vigor of the female body. The Greek, and later Roman, tradition turned a belated look to the female nude to perfect and idealize it, as they had the male nude, but also at times to subtly eroticize it.

UGalde's *Agora* sculptures are complex, in that he is calling upon some of the ideas of a vigorous heroic nude, which would more likely be male, but also connecting it in some ways to an even more ancient expressionless fertility figure. The result is a sculptural form that embodies what is female in a strong and vital way, without the baggage of sexualizing imagery. Sculptures in the ancient world would be made of intrinsically valuable materials, like bronze or marble, but Ugalde's are made using a cement-based compound. This gives them a rough look that the artist likens to ruins. It makes it impossible for the viewer to fetishize the surface or the technique, or to aestheticize the models' body types; instead viewers have to imagine the bodies as a vehicle or container for the emotions each figure embodies. Paradoxically, this is profoundly humanizing.

Finally, the title *Agora's Light* cannot be overlooked in understanding these works. The Greek acropolis, or high place, was the place of refined temples and sculptures. It was a holy precinct for worship. But the agora was literally the marketplace. It was the place where goods were exchanged, and ideas as well. It included public spaces where ordinary Greeks could meet, and was the site of the impromptu teaching of Athenian philosophers like Socrates. His method, one of constantly questioning and remaining humble about all that will remain beyond our true understanding, is one that is still used in college classrooms. More than that, Socrates is also known for rejecting refinements and exterior appearances, insisting instead that what we create of value is what we create with our minds. Ugalde's figures mirror that stubborn insistence to turn to the interior, to essences, with their rough exteriors that don't traffic in passing youth or beauty.

With outstretched arms that sometimes hint at wings or perhaps shields, Ugalde's women give a glimmer of potential far beyond their present iterations. Like the other references they make, to the *Victory of Samothrace*, *The Venus di Milo*, or images of Athena with her shield, they present the image of timeless survivors. In the Athenian agora itself, ancient sources tell us there were three female sculptures that stood guard: Eirene, the representation of peace, Eumonia, who stood for good order, and Dike, who personified justice. As such, Garr Ugalde's three women are worthy guardians of our campus public space, and a bridge between the ancient ideas of art and knowledge and our own.