



MENTORING A MUSE:
Charles Umlauf & Farrah Fawcett



Charles Umlauf and Farrah Fawcett, October, 1982
Photograph courtesy of Hotel Ella

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Charles Umlauf and Farrah Fawcett



Charles Umlauf, *Head of Farrah*, 1973, bronze, UMLAUF City of Austin collection, 1985.102
Photograph by Maryhelen Murray
FIGURE 1



Farrah Fawcett, 1976
Photograph by Bruce McGroom
FIGURE 2

The bronze portrait bust shows a gorgeous young woman with a long, graceful neck. Her hair is pulled into a casual updo, with bronze tendrils hanging over her ears. She has even features and a serious expression, enhanced by the deep brown patina of the bronze. The sculpture is elegant, classical in style. It looks like it belongs in the halls of a 19th century English manor [Figure 1].

Sculptor Charles Umlauf (1910-1994) created dozens of images of this young woman. As he did with so many of his subjects, he knew her features by heart and frequently drew or sculpted her from memory. Yet this is the only sculpture for which she posed, the only one made from life. In real life, Umlauf's subject was one of the most beautiful women in the world. In 1973, the year he cast the bronze, she married a movie star. A few years later Farrah Fawcett-Majors rocketed to fame.¹ By the late 1970s she was a household name: no teenage boy's bedroom was complete without a poster of Farrah wearing a red swimsuit and a million-watt smile. The poster broke all records, becoming an all-time best-seller, with estimates ranging from 12 to 20 million copies sold [Figure 2].

In September 1976, following years of making commercials and playing small parts on TV and in movies, Farrah had a breakthrough role in the TV detective drama *Charlie's Angels*. With her co-stars Jaclyn Smith and Kate Jackson, *Charlie's Angels* ranked in the top ten for two years, according to the Nielsen ratings. After Farrah left the series, its ratings slowly declined, but not before she had earned a Golden Globe nomination. Farrah soon sought out more challenging roles, tallying up three more nominations for Golden Globes and two for Emmy Awards. She gained respect and positive reviews for her performances on television, stage, and in nearly a dozen Hollywood films.

While ample information can be found about Farrah's beauty and personal life, few people are aware of her life as an artist. But people who knew her well will point out that she was passionate about art. This exhibition, *Mentoring a Muse: Charles Umlauf & Farrah Fawcett*, focuses on the artistic relationship between the University of Texas art professor and his most famous student. In many ways Umlauf's bronze *Head of Farrah*

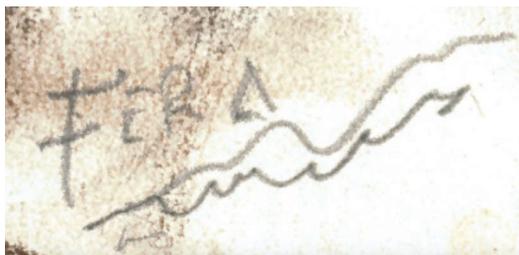
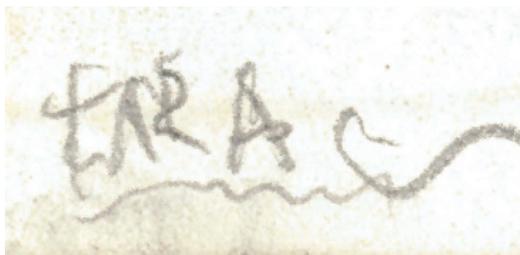


Charles Umlauf, Untitled [*Head of Farrah*] c.1966, graphite and colored pencil on paper, bound in hardcover sketchbook, UMLAUF Collection

FIGURE 3

offers a metaphor for themes within this exhibition. Most people don't even recognize the subject of his 1973 sculpture. Umlauf portrays Farrah as pensive, even introverted, but decidedly not as a stereotypical blonde bombshell. In his courses at UT, he taught traditional techniques, bombarding his students with lessons on anatomy, Greco-Roman sculpture, and the Renaissance masters. His 1973 *Head of Farrah*, classical and timeless, reflects the aesthetic philosophy he passed on to his students. Even his favored casting technique, the lost-wax method, originated in ancient Greece. Umlauf channels a tradition in which the ideal form represents an equally ideal mind and spirit.

The reserved expression on the sculpture's face tells us Umlauf saw in her something beyond her public persona. Farrah was a former student who became a friend, an artist, and a muse to Umlauf. Through dozens of sculptures, drawings, and archival material, *Mentoring a Muse* investigates how the two artists influenced one another. Umlauf created dozens of images of her, and still more that were inspired by her over the course of their long friendship. Making art was her lifelong pursuit; Umlauf remained a mentor throughout, visiting with and talking to her about her work. He sent some of her sculptures to be cast in bronze at the Italian foundry he routinely used. She collected his works—dozens of drawings and sculptures that she kept on view in her home. This is the first-ever exhibition dedicated to the unknown early decades of Farrah Fawcett's art and her mutually inspiring, lifelong relationship with the man she always referred to as her favorite teacher.²



Charles Umlauf, details of untitled [*Farrah Fawcett*], c. 1966, UMLAUF Collection

FIGURE 4

Born in Corpus Christi, Texas, Farrah began college at the University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 1965. She was initially a microbiology student and a pledge with the Delta Delta Delta sorority (the "TriDeltas"). She soon changed her major to art, taking classes in Life Drawing and Sculpture from Professor Umlauf. One of the earliest and most beautiful drawings he made of her appears in a clothbound sketchbook [Figure 3]. Umlauf writes her name twice on the drawing, spelling it incorrectly both times [Figure 4]. (In fact, Mary Ferrah Leni Fawcett changed the spelling prior to arriving at UT, so Umlauf might be forgiven for getting it wrong.) Classmates remember Farrah as one of the best artists in the class; Umlauf took note. Unquestionably, the professor was captivated by her beauty and grace, but Umlauf was always attentive to students who demonstrated talent and worked hard.

One of the earliest drawings by Farrah in this exhibition, *Portrait of a Young Man*, confirms her drafting skill [Figure 5]. The subject is her 9-year-old nephew, Jefry.³ Jefry Curtis Riggs was the first child of Farrah's sister, Diane, who lived in Houston. The college-aged Farrah shows an ease with rendering and contouring her young nephew, right down to the freckles on his nose. She even draws one of his "Fawcett" family features: a defined mouth with distinctive vertical groove between the nose and mouth. Her own painted self-portraits (dating from 1969-1971) show a somewhat somber young woman with a similarly distinctive mouth [Figures 6 - 9].



Farrah Fawcett, *Portrait of a Young Man*, detail, pencil on paper, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett
FIGURE 5



Farrah Fawcett, *Self-Portrait*, 1969, detail, oil on canvas, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett
FIGURE 6



Farrah Fawcett, *Self-Portrait*, 1970, detail, oil on canvas, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett
FIGURE 7



Farrah Fawcett, *Self-Portrait*, 1969, detail
FIGURE 8



Farrah Fawcett, *Self-Portrait*, 1970, detail
FIGURE 9

Umlauf's 1973 *Head of Farrah* sculpture shares that characteristic mouth, a feature that he had admired in others long before he met her. Umlauf liked strongly defined faces, and many of his sculptures, both male and female, reveal prominent "m"-shapes in their upper lips [Figure 13]. Aside from Farrah's obvious allure (in 1966, while still a freshman, she was voted one of the 10 Most Beautiful Women on campus), Umlauf was struck by the shape of her mouth. *Mentoring a Muse* includes two newly discovered drawings, found rolled up in Umlauf's Austin studio, both of which



Charles Umlauf, untitled [Farrah, looking right], c. 1966, detail, charcoal on paper, UMLAUF Collection **FIGURE 10**

show the recognizable Farrah mouth [Figures 10 & 11]. Judging by the pinholes at the top of the inexpensive paper, they appear to have been made in class on one of the wooden drawing boards his students used, perhaps as a demonstration drawing while Farrah posed for the class. (Students occasionally acted as models for their peers.) They are captivating, quickly sketched in an academic style, with a nicely captured illustration of her 1960s hair:



Charles Umlauf, untitled [Farrah, seated], c. 1966, detail, charcoal on paper, UMLAUF Collection **FIGURE 11**

Umlauf also finished one terra cotta sculpture of Farrah while she was a student. He depicts her high cheekbones and even, straight nose. As in the drawings, he sculpts her mouth with a slightly downward cast⁴ [Figure 13].



Farrah Fawcett, December 9, 1965, photo by Rick L. Smith, University of Texas Student Publications, courtesy Dolph Briscoe Center for American History **FIGURE 12**



Charles Umlauf, sketch for *Head of Farrah*, dated 1964, UMLAUF City of Austin Collection, 1985.112⁴
Photographer unknown **FIGURE 13**

When UT's "ten most beautiful" photograph found its way west, a Hollywood publicist contacted Farrah and asked her to move to L.A. At first she turned him down, but after repeated attempts, in her junior year she relented. She withdrew from the University, drove to L.A., and secured a modeling contract within weeks.

Living in Los Angeles only seems to have deepened her friendship with Professor Umlauf. She continued to make art and take classes locally, working in an "art shack" on her property. The geographical distance gave her a chance to pen her thoughts in letters, written in elegant script, on cream, pink, or blue stationery. Writing in 1969, she tells her former professor of several recent acting successes: commercials for Fresca and Carnation Slender and a contract with Screen Gems. Soon she would be studying and training at Columbia Studios. "Things are looking much better," Farrah writes, "and I'm still working on my art. Drawing & painting every weekend and last week I started a bust in terra cotta. Although I'm not near [*sic*] as good without your help and criticism." In closing the letter, she is utterly charming:

*Please write when you get a chance and if you come across any drawings, paintings, ect. [*sic*] that you do not want, always remember I am your most appreciative admirer. Sending you my best and much love, Farrah [letter on display in gallery]*



Charles Umlauf and Farrah Fawcett outside his studio, 1971, Austin, with Umlauf's *Pietà*. Photograph courtesy of Greg Walls **FIGURE 14**



Farrah Fawcett, Charles Umlauf, Polly Fawcett inside Umlauf's studio, Austin, n.d.,
 photographer unknown **FIGURE 15**

Before leaving Austin, Farrah had befriended not only Charles, but also his wife, Angeline. It was Angeline who handled the business side of Charles' art and much of the correspondence. (A poet who was trained as an artist, Angie had a talent for writing effusive, congenial letters in which she also identified which of her husband's works were available for purchase.) When Farrah phoned the Umlaufs from Los Angeles, Angie would get on one phone and Charles would pick up from another room so they could all talk. Farrah visited them when she was back in Texas. On some trips, she brought her mother, Polly Fawcett, to Austin to meet her former professor⁵ [Figures 14 and 15].

Eventually Farrah built up an impressive collection of more than a dozen major Umlauf sculptures and at least as many drawings and lithographs. Her Umlauf collection grew as she became more financially comfortable. For example, in 1978 she purchased a bronze casting of herself and one of *Pope John XXIII*. At the time, she was married to the actor, Lee Majors, with whom she shared a checking account. [Figure 16]

350 | LEE MAJORS & FARRAH FAWCETT-MAJORS 484 | 710

C/O TRAUBNER & FLYNN
 1800 CENTURY PARK EAST - LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90067

ACCOUNT	DESCRIPTION	CHECK DATE	GROSS AMOUNT	DEDUCTIONS
U774 002	2/23 FARRAH BRNZE	3 24 78	3,629.00	
U774 002	2/23 POPE JOHN BRNZE	3 24 78	4,129.00	

Check stub from Lee Majors & Farrah Fawcett-Majors, detail of archival document from UMLAUF collection
FIGURE 16

Their 1982 divorce must have been especially difficult for Farrah, who was Catholic. That same faith allowed her to find resonance with Umlauf's religious works. She had a taste for emotionally-fraught, deeply Catholic scenes, exemplified by the *Pietà*, the Biblical scene in which the Virgin Mary holds her deceased Son. In addition to *Pope John*, Farrah owned all four of Umlauf's *Pietà* lithographs, at least one Crucifixion drawing, and two bronze heads of Christ, one large and one small. She also had a breathtaking drawing of the head of Christ on the cross, made with



Charles Umlauf, *Head of Christ*, c. 1975, detail, sanguine on paper, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett. Photograph by Maryhelen Murray

FIGURE 18

red conté crayon [Figure 18]. While each of these Umlauf works is superbly poignant, they are not choices one might expect the world's most famous poster-girl to make.

Even more unexpected, and in fact unknown to most of the world, is Farrah's skill as a sculptor. As with her drawings, her three-dimensional work shows that she absorbed much of what Umlauf imparted to her. She learned to paint plaster to mimic stone or bronze, a clever skill that Umlauf himself had learned at the Art Institute of Chicago in the 1930s [Figure 17]. She kept a studio on her property in Bel Air where she made multiple copies of figures in plaster that she gifted to friends and relatives.



Farrah Fawcett, *Nude Torso*, 15/23, n.d., hydrastone with acrylic paint, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett. Photograph by Maryhelen Murray

FIGURE 17



Charles Umlauf and Farrah Fawcett with Umlauf's *War Mother*, Austin
Farrah Fawcett with *Head of Farrah*, Austin, September 1971
Photographer unknown **FIGURE 19**

Casting in bronze is a complicated process requiring numerous steps, and an entire team of workers. It can therefore be quite costly. From their letters and documents, Farrah seemed to share the Umlauf sense for the value of a dollar. For example, in a 1983 letter Farrah writes to Charles and Angie about a sculpture of his that she was interested in acquiring.

I think I will have to wait until sometime next year before ordering a casting of "Girl Disrobing". It all comes down to money and since I did the play for love and very little money, I will have to wait until I'm working again and can afford the luxury of your beautiful work.
- Farrah Fawcett

The play to which she refers is the off-Broadway production of *Extremities* at the Westside Theatre, a violent story in which Farrah played the victim of an attempted rape who turns the tables on her attacker. Farrah's performance earned praise from critics. Eventually she did purchase a small casting of Umlauf's *Disrobing*. And in 1985, when Farrah gave birth to her only child, Redmond James Fawcett O'Neal, she commissioned Umlauf to sculpt his portrait. Working from photographs and his own sketches, Umlauf finished three different sculptures of Redmond that Farrah kept on view in her home. All three are in this exhibition.

When Charles and Farrah got together in person or by phone, they engaged in "shop talk." One topic that arose was their mutual interest in finding a foundry capable of casting high quality bronzes at affordable rates. Farrah had some of her sculptures cast locally in Southern California; Umlauf primarily used foundries in Milan and Pietrasanta, Italy. In the 1970s, she began shipping plaster or hydrastone scale models to Umlauf, who in turn shipped them to Italy. There they were cast in bronze and returned to the U.S., with Umlauf and Angie overseeing all the logistics. Angie would then send a bill (along with a graciously written note) to Farrah or to her personal assistant.

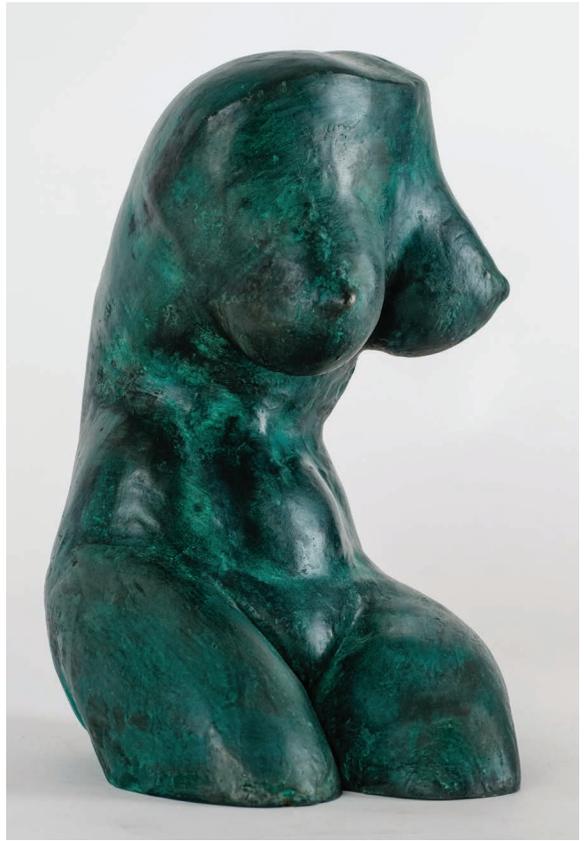
As fluent as she was in two-dimensional work, Farrah excelled in three-dimensions. The bronze portrait of her sister, *Diane*, shares the same harmonious, eternal quality that so many of Umlauf's sculptures possess. Farrah also made a series small female torsos in the classical, figurative tradition that distill the essence of the female form. One is titled *Renaissance Torso*, indicating her inspiration [Figures 20 - 23].



Farrah Fawcett, *Head of Diane*, n.d., bronze,
Blanton Museum of Art,
The University of Texas at Austin,
Bequest of Farrah Fawcett
Photograph by Maryhelen Murray **FIGURE 20**

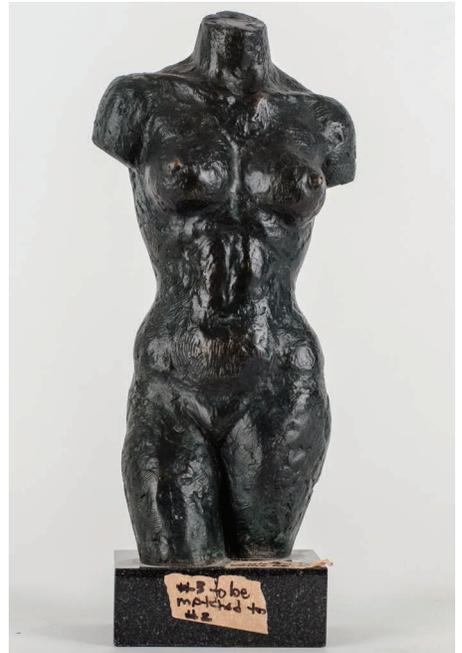


Farrah Fawcett, *Standing Female Figure*, n.d., bronze, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett
Photograph by Maryhelen Murray **FIGURE 21**



Farrah Fawcett, *Nude Torso*, n.d., bronze, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett
Photograph by Maryhelen Murray **FIGURE 22**

But Farrah Fawcett also had an appreciation for more contemporary art. Her personal art collection included a 1947 drawing by Dada artist Man Ray and a signed lithograph of Surrealist René Magritte's *Son of Man*. She herself made several versions of a quasi-surrealist subject she called *Two Faces*. In it she departs from her formal training, using a freer, more personal style. *Two Faces* depicts a female face in profile, but her eye is not drawn in profile and instead looks out at the viewer (like an "Egyptian eye"). Behind her is a male face, a figure identified as her longtime boyfriend Ryan O'Neal, whose eye also looks directly out. The effect is two heads that seem to share a single pair of eyes [Figure 27].



Farrah Fawcett, *Renaissance Torso*, n.d., bronze, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett. Photograph by Maryhelen Murray
FIGURE 23

Farrah's collection also included several works by the man who was arguably the world's most famous artist. Andy Warhol, like virtually everyone who came in contact with Farrah, was enamored of her. Farrah and Warhol met several times in New York, Houston, and possibly also in her hometown of Corpus Christi. She and O'Neal, a friend of Warhol's, stayed with his entourage in New York. In a case of the iconic Pop artist photographing the iconic American beauty, Farrah posed for a series of Warhol's Polaroids in 1980. One of the photos was then enlarged to make two nearly identical 40 x 40" silkscreen paintings on canvas, called *Farrah Fawcett*.⁶ (One of these is currently on view at the Blanton Museum of Art.) She also had two small Warhol canvases, *Fried Egg I* and *Fried Egg II*, in which vaguely three-dimensional eggs rest on purple crayon-colored "toast." The fried egg paintings elevate the breakfast food to high art status, very much in keeping with Warhol's pop art aesthetic.



Andy Warhol (attr.), *F.F. Eye*, n.d., ink on folded cloth napkin, Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett. Photograph by Maryhelen Murray

FIGURE 24

One evening when Warhol and Farrah were at dinner together, he drew on the cloth napkins and gave them to her. *F.F. Eye*, a dashed-off line drawing "portrait" of Farrah's eye, is signed by Andy Warhol at the lower right [Figure 24].⁷ This exhibition also features an enormous watercolor, *The Statue of Liberty*, signed by "Victor Hugo," the double-entendre pseudonym of the Venezuelan-born artist who was a close member of the Warhol retinue. The drawing has certain hallmarks of Warhol's early art and work created in his Factory: an iconic American subject is presented with simplified lines that flatten their subject. The color is applied somewhat haphazardly, the same way the colors in Warhol's silkscreens are sometimes misregistered, resulting in color placed outside the lines of the image.

September 9, 1974

Dear Prof. Umlauf,

I hope this letter finds you in good health — I have been a little worried since I haven't heard from you in so long. I wrote twice to you in Italy and when I didn't receive any reply I decided that maybe you didn't go. Anyway I'm hoping that the mail was just awful and maybe our letters will turn up soon. I know you must have been washing hard and I'm very anxious to hear all about it.

I'm enclosing a couple of recent photographs. Hope you like them. Please let me hear from you soon. I will call you just weeks after you've had a chance to review this. Please give my best to Regie.

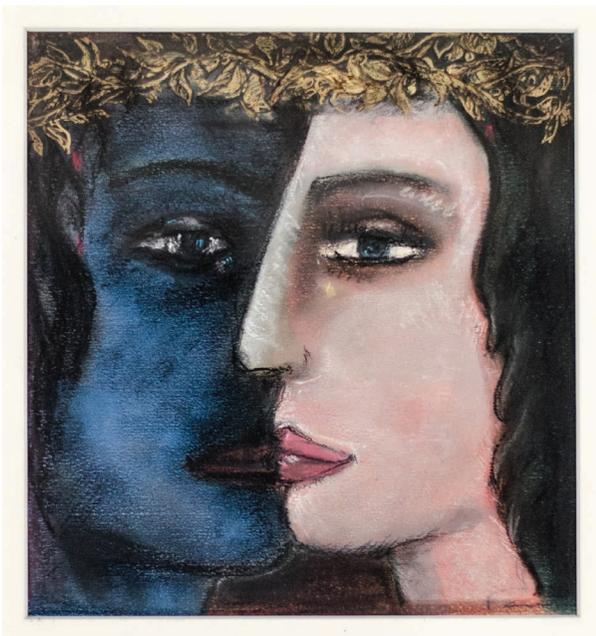
With love and concern,
Tara



Ryan O'Neal, Charles Umlauf, Farrah Fawcett, receiving the Art League Award, Houston, 1985.
 Photograph courtesy of Tom Umlauf **FIGURE 26**

Meanwhile, Farrah continued to serve as a muse for Charles Umlauf. Working from memory that he updated with publicity shots from Farrah or her publicist, Charles made many more images of her. The most recognizable of these, from 1976, features the iconic feathered hair, rendered in bronze [Figure 25]. All told, Umlauf made over a dozen finished sculptures that were either specifically of Farrah or influenced by her features.

Farrah and Charles remained friends throughout the 1980s. He probably did not mind that she outshined him when she joined him to celebrate his award as Artist of the Year by the Houston Art League in 1985. [Figure 26] Farrah made numerous visits to the Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, which opened in 1991. She paid one final visit to Charles in January 1994, the same month that the Northridge earthquake damaged her Bel Air home, toppling an Umlauf sculpture in the process. Later that same year her mentor passed away in Austin. It is an honor for us to now bring together the art of the professor and his former student and to share their story with the public.



Farrah Fawcett, *Two Faces*, n.d., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Bequest of Farrah Fawcett
FIGURE 27

Notes:

¹ She married Lee Majors in 1973 and changed her legal name to Farrah Fawcett-Majors. Given the sculpture's date, it is possible *Head of Farrah* was a wedding gift to the couple from Umlauf.

² Much later, in 2002-03, Farrah held a major exhibition with artist Keith Edmier that toured to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The Andy Warhol Museum.

³ "Portrait of a Young Man" is the title as listed in the Fawcett estate documents and now the Blanton Museum of Art's records. Thank you to Greg Walls for identifying the subject as his brother Jefry, who would have been 9 or 10 at the time.

⁴ The Museum's 1985.112 *Head of Farrah* is dated by Charles Umlauf, Angeline Umlauf, and in all the publications as 1964. That date seems improbable, as Umlauf would not have met Farrah before fall 1965.

⁵ Polly even made a later trip to the Umlaufs on her own from Houston, taking her friends to meet Charles and Angeline and to see his studio and sculptures.

⁶ After Farrah's passing, ownership of the two 1980 Warhol silkscreens became the subject of a protracted lawsuit. A jury finally awarded Ryan O'Neal one of the paintings. The other painting is owned by The University of Texas, Blanton Museum of Art. The UMLAUF did not request to borrow Andy Warhol's *Farrah* silkscreen for this exhibition. It is frequently on view at its home, the Blanton Museum of Art.

⁷ The attribution of the "*FF Eye*" napkin, *Fried Egg I* and *Fried Egg II* have not been authenticated by the Andy Warhol Authentication Board, or The Andy Warhol Museum.

Acknowledgements:

This exhibition would not have been possible without the generous loan of art work from the Bequest of Farrah Fawcett at the Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin. Special thanks to Annette Carozzi for laying the groundwork for this endeavor and the Blanton team of Veronica Roberts, Meredith Sutton, Gabriela Truly, and Simone Wicha. We are also grateful to Crutch Crutchfield, Mary Anne Rickhoff, Greg Walls, the Russell Collection, Arthur Umlauf, and the Umlauf Family Partnership for lending artwork. Information on Farrah Fawcett's art was graciously provided by Sylvia Dorsey, Keith Edmier, Greg Lott, Karen Spellings, Nels Van Patten, Pat Van Patten, and Greg Walls. Special thanks to Stephanie Busing, Ryan Corrigan, Maryhelen Murray, and David Nichols of Refined by Fire Media. Support for this exhibition was provided in part by the City of Austin Economic Development Cultural Arts division and Texas Commission on the Arts.



Charles Umlauf, *Head of Farrah*, 1976, bronze, UMLAUF City of Austin Collection, 1985.106
Photograph by Ralph Barrera, *Austin-American Statesman* **FIGURE 25**

OUR MISSION

The UMLAUF Sculpture Garden & Museum exhibits the work of Charles Umlauf, his influences, and other contemporary sculptors in a natural setting, and provides educational experiences that encourage the understanding and appreciation of sculpture.

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Charles Umlauf and Farrah Fawcett working in the studio

February 16 - August 20, 2017

Exhibition Opening*

Thursday, February 16, 2017, 6 - 8 pm

Insights: Artist Keith Edmier*

Edmier shares memories of his collaboration with Farrah

Tuesday, March 7, 2017, 6:30 pm

Insights: Friends of Farrah*

An evening with Farrah's lifelong friends

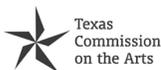
Tuesday, April 4, 2017, 6 - 8 pm

**These events are free & open to the public*

Exhibition Curator: Katie Robinson Edwards

UMLAUF sculpture
garden
& museum

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Tues-Fri 10-4; Sat & Sun 12-4
umlaufsculpture.org



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