

Lions Gate 2 - Creation of a Cover Image

Gary Sim

READERS OF *AMPHORA* may have wondered about the cover image on Issue 135 - one of the Lions on the Lions Gate Bridge in Vancouver, B.C. The Editor, Richard Hopkins, commented in *From the Editor's Desk* that I had "cut an original piece of work" for the cover. This was not exactly the case, as no cutting was involved other than digital cutting and pasting. He was correct in that the image was indeed specifically created for the cover. The work was actually what I like to call "a very mixed media", and I thought that readers might be interested in how the image was created.

I've always loved the Lions, admiring them almost from my birth, and for many years afterwards before I knew anything about their history. They were created by Charles Marega, Vancouver's most important historic sculptor, and cast in concrete due to budget restraints - although he wished to carve them in stone. Uncertain on which side of each lion to put the tail, he asked Ross Lort, architect and artist, for advice. Lort advised putting a tail on both sides of each lion so that passers-by would see a tail no matter which side they were on. Marega was apparently not amused, and put the tails on the road side. The Lions were installed in time for the completion of the bridge in 1938.

Three years ago I began taking pictures of the Lions, intending to use the 35mm film photographs as the basis for a pen and ink drawing. An early attempt at a drawing resulted in *Lions Gate 1*, a rather dark and moody close-up of the east lion's head, as yet unpublished. My selection as the featured artist in *Amphora* spurred me on to try again. I looked through the colour photographs, and decided that although none of them had the exact view I wanted, I could merge two together to create one image.

I scanned two photographs, and began to merge and re-touch them. I chose to portray the east lion again, but it is mirrored from east to west, as I intended to use the image for cutting a block print. The trees in the background are not mirrored. After digitally editing the composite image to my satisfaction, and adjusting the image's contrast settings to "bleach out" the image and reduce tonal values, I printed it out in grayscale on my laser printer.

The edges of the statue and plinth were now unclear, and the shadows were not dark enough, so I drew those in black pigment ink to highlight them. Once that was done, I rescanned the printout/drawing back

into the computer. I reprinted it onto coated watercolour paper, and painted the black and white printout in watercolour, using blue, brown, grey, and a bit of green. I scanned this printout/drawing/painting back into the computer (for the third time) at high resolution, made minor adjustments, added the black border, saved the file as *Lions Gate 2*, burned it to CD-ROM, and put it in the mail to the Editor.

Having done that, I used a printout of the final colour image as an underlay for cutting a block print. This was quickly completed, and printed onto Rives BFK print paper as a limited edition print titled *Lions Gate 3*. I scanned one of the original prints and sent the resulting computer file to the Editor for his use. It arrived in time to be included in the issue, and the resulting print is illustrated on page 2, where the Lion is now "right reading". After some time spent worrying about how the cover image would reproduce, I finally received my copies of the issue. To my relief, the colour image was printed just as I had hoped, and has been well received.

My only minor complaint about the reproductions in the issue, and one that was completely unexpected, was that the aspect ratio of some drawings was incorrectly adjusted. For example, *Lions Gate 3* should be about 3/4" of an inch wider for its height, and the eagle on page 27 (another Marega sculpture - the Harding Memorial in Stanley Park) ended up looking more like a puffin. What price fame?

