

Grounds for Sculpture: John Seward Johnson II

In Hamilton, New Jersey, not far from Trenton, on 42 acres of the former New Jersey State Fairgrounds, John Seward Johnson II opened his Grounds for Sculpture, Center for the Arts to the public in 1992.

Seward, as he prefers to be called, was born in 1930. He is the grandson to the co-founder of the Johnson & Johnson corporation. His father, Robert Wood Johnson I, died leaving Seward and his three siblings in an expensive court fight regarding the estate. Robert Wood Johnson I's third wife was left \$500 million. The hotly contested case involved 22 lawyers. Three years later, the Johnson children were awarded funds from the estate. Seward received \$13 million.

Known as a rowdy high school and college student, Seward attended the Forman School in Connecticut and also the University of Maine, studying in poultry husbandry, but he did not graduate. Following college, he enlisted in the Navy during the Korean War and served on a frigate, the USS Gloucester. Originally, he was a painter, primarily on canvas with acrylics.

In 1969, without any formal training in art, he won first place in a U.S. Steel art competition. He attended classes at the Cambridge Adult Education Center. Seward's involvement and connection with art and sculpture included The Atlantic Foundation, Johnson Atelier Technical Institute of Sculpture, The Sculpture Foundation and the International Sculpture Center of Hamilton, NJ (Grounds for Sculpture).

Johnson's themes, "Celebrating the Familiar" and "Beyond the Frame" have received both acclaimed and negative criticism. Johnson's works are displayed worldwide. In fact, his sculpture of "Forever Marilyn" depicting Marilyn Monroe from the movie, "The Seven Year Itch", is in four locations including Bendigo, Australia.

He has described his work in the following quote: *"They called me the three dimensionalization of Norman Rockwell. My work was quite understandable to the guy on the street, so I was breaking the rules."* He went on to quote: *"Artists are different from other people. We please ourselves. We don't worry so much about the strictures of society, and we like to raise eyebrows."* Finally, he stated, *"Most people who like my work are timid about their own sense of art. I love to draw it out of them, because they have strong inner feelings. They have been intimidated by the art world."*

Below are just a few of his works that may be seen in several areas throughout Grounds for Sculpture. Note: some sculptures are changed depending on date of viewing.







Daydream (2007, 2014)
Henri Matisse "Dance" (1909)



Sharing the Headlines
(1991)



"Family Secret"
2000 - metal: bronze
inspired by
Pierre-Auguste Renoir's
"On the Terrace" (1879)



"Depression Bread Line" 1991 inspired by George Segal



