

# A Sentinel

601 College St., • Olen Bryant, Artist  
by Marlon Scott

Along with the many buildings at Austin Peay State University, the sun shines on a bronze monolith during the day. At night, four flood lights illuminate the over 10-foot sculpture which sits prominently outside the Morgan University Center raised on a stone dias, looming like some ancient warning from a lost civilization. In reality, “A Sentinel” sits at Austin Peay State University.

“A Sentinel,” is a sculpture created by one of Tennessee’s most revered artists, Olen Bryant. Although, Bryant graduated from APSU’s most infamous rival, Murray State University, he taught art for 27 years (from 1958-1991) at APSU.

He was a Professor of Art and the Chair of the Sculpture and Ceramics Department at the University and has attained professor emeritus status. Bryant is credited with 22 exhibitions and has also received several awards. In 2007, he won the Distinguished Artist Award during the Governor’s Awards for the Arts.

Bryant has several pieces on display at APSU, however, “A Sentinel” is arguably the most recognized. Finished and erected in 1985, the piece is the centerpiece of a recessed bowl located just outside the Morgan University Center Plaza.

It is composed of bronze but resembles algae covered stone. The base is a four-sided pillar. The piece then flows from a pillar to a man sitting with his arms raised in welcoming fashion.

The piece is a prime example of Bryant’s style.

He uses natural materials, wood and metal, and keeps the designs simple. The title, “A Sentinel”, implies the piece is a guardian. This supposition is reinforced by the words engraved on each side of the base. The engravings are the following:

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“Loyalty is important in all important things.”

“Build your character on the solid rock of integrity.”

“Act with candor in every matter.”

“Be courageous in every act of life.”

The open, smiling face of the piece does not intimidate or intimate a fierce guardian as in the style of gothic gargoyles. Instead, with the open arms, the piece is inviting. It welcomes viewers to share the wisdom engraved on its base.

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