



HER EVERY DESIRE Sassona Norton's sculptures explore what she considers to be the most powerful emotion: longing. Opposite page: "Unquenchable Thirst," Bronze, 2004.

Bronze Ambition

Larger than life and heaping with emotion, the sculptures of Sassona Norton

BY HOLLY LEHR-HAHN

It's nearly impossible to have a reaction other than "wow" when entering the exhibit hall at the Morris Museum to view the sculptures of Sassona Norton. Sunshine streams through a wall of windows overlooking treetops and distant mountains, and the larger-than-life structures demand the visitor's attention.

Meeting the Israeli-born artist evokes the same reaction. She is animated and passionate and gestures wildly as she explains the meaning behind her work. It's not surprising that she uses her hands to illustrate her words since much of her work focuses on hands. To Norton, they are the most complex part of the human body.

"I'm very interested in the emotional gesture," explains the longtime Bedminster resident. "And the hands are where the emotional gestures are sent out."

Born in Tel Aviv, Norton started her career as an Israeli journalist. Although, even as little girl she loved to paint, she didn't pursue art professionally until she was in her twenties.

"In Israel, it was difficult to make a living as an artist so I pursued other career options. I was a high school teacher and a journalist. But even though I had other careers, my passion was always art," says Norton.

In 1974, she was sent to America to interview art collector William Norton who had been invited to exhibit in Israel.

"We fell in love and he stayed in Israel for a year. He asked me to come back to the states with him, so I did, and that was the end of my journalism career," she recalls.

When she arrived in the United States, Norton enrolled in The Arts Students League of New York. She spent eight hours a day for four years studying there – and it paid off. In 1980, her painting of a reclining nude, "A Yellow Night," was published in *Twentieth Century Masters of Erotic Art* by Bradley Smith, along with works by such artists as Picasso, Rodin, Calder and Dali. The following year she was chosen to be part of a gallery-sponsored traveling show titled "Eight Young New Yorkers on the Horizon." ▶