



## The Symbolism of Our Lobby Artwork

Throughout The Hotel at the University of Maryland, guests find nods to the state of Maryland. Meeting rooms are named for famous Marylanders, including Harriet Tubman and Francis Scott Key; the very recognizable Maryland state flag is emblazoned on the glass canopy above the entrance; and the room service menu includes such state favorites as crab cakes and Eastern Shore fried chicken. It should be no surprise, then, that the two major pieces of artwork installed in The Hotel's lobby also have ties to the state, though they're a little more subtle and truly reveal the passions of their creator, Baltimore-based sculptor Rodney Carroll.

When The Hotel's owner, Southern Management Corporation (SMC), approached Carroll about this commission, the artist wanted to tie his artwork to the University of Maryland and its home state, but he didn't want to do it in the usual or obvious ways. "I think this place deserves a little sophistication," Carroll says. So he chose to focus on the Chesapeake Bay, which practically slices the state in half and which is an integral part of the history, culture, culinary attributes and ecology of Maryland.

"I wanted to give some recognition to that," he says. "This gave me a chance to approach it from a different point of view." Carroll believes you can look at both the bay and the university as pure and fertile environments where species can thrive, and working on this project gave him a chance to share his passion for the state's natural environment and his commitment to ecology.

The major piece for The Hotel is installed behind its registration desk. Called "Blackwater," it represents one of Carroll's favorite spots along the Chesapeake, Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The site is a tidal salt marsh, a topography that blurs the line between land and water. All life congregates there, he says, including the diamondback terrapin, Maryland's state reptile and the university's mascot. "Blackwater," which is made of stainless steel and copper nickel, measures 40 feet wide by 17 feet high and greets all guests as they enter The Hotel.

The secondary piece is made of stainless steel and installed on the landing where a pair of escalators connect the first- and second-floor lobbies. This one is called "Mermaid's Purse" and was inspired by something we've all seen as we've walked along the beach, though we may not have known what it was. A "mermaid's purse" is a term for the egg sack of a shark or skate, so this piece again pays tribute to animal life in Maryland. In addition to looking like an egg sack, the piece, which provides a sense of depth and filtering of space and has some "movement" to it, was also designed to look like a skate swimming through the water.

Carroll is no stranger to sculpting pieces for hotels or for other key sites in Maryland. His "Birth of the American Flag" is the signature piece at the Marriott Marquis Washington DC, and he has a piece at Meyerhoff Symphony Hall in Baltimore. He has also worked with SMC previously, when the company's owner, David Hillman, commissioned Carroll for projects at some of the business's real estate properties throughout Maryland, DC and Virginia.

Carroll began seeking inspiration for his work at The Hotel nearly two and a half years before the building opened its doors. "I had the opportunity with these two sculptures to identify the lobby," he says. "It's the heart of the hotel. When you walk in, this is what sets the tone of the whole place."