

MILESTONE

By Pamela Ellertson

NESA Celebrates its 75th

The New England Sculptors Association is celebrating its 75th Anniversary this year with an eye trained on dynamic growth both in membership and sourcing exhibition venues. It also aims to strengthen the bonds between its existing 185-member community through education on matters both artistic and entrepreneurial.

"I have these three building blocks," explained sculptor and activist Domenic Esposito, the 2023 NESA president: showcasing the art, education, and community.

Unearthing exhibition space has been one of organization's primary goals since its inception in 1948 by a handful of men and women sculptors, students, and teachers at the Museum School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

Today, while membership is open to professional sculptors throughout the U.S., its exhibitions are exclusively in the New England region. In addition to finding exhibition space to accommodate the large, outdoor works that curators and clients alike have been seeking in increasing numbers since the pandemic has waned according to Esposito, NESA is actively recruiting sponsors. UBS, which is a leading global sponsor of the acclaimed international art fair Art Basel, has already come on board to sponsor one of the eight exhibitions NESA has slated for 2024.

Obtaining financial support for individual artists is another NESA goal. "We fought really hard to get artists compensated for the time and financial investment in their projects," explained Esposito.

Sculptors, like all artists, have immensely personal creative processes. Some like renowned NESA member Meredith Bergmann, who worked on her bronze monuments—the *Boston Women's Memorial* on Commonwealth Avenue, the *Women's Rights Pioneers Monument* in New York City's Central Park, and the *FDR Hope Memorial* on Roosevelt Island, in New York's Southpoint Park—with experts in various fields and civic organizations fine-tuning concepts for feasibility, historical accuracy and allegory for months before her fingers ever touched clay. Whereas others, like NESA member Elisa Vanelli, whose

mystical creatures often incorporate spiritual symbols such as crystals or the seven chakras, believe their work is guided by angels. What they share, however, are awe-inspiring logistics.

Just how do you transport four clay panels—each weighing between 500-650 pounds and measuring ten-feet high by six-feet wide—on a sweltering summer day?



Above: Elisa Vanelli, *Lemuria*, 2023, Terracotta, Lemurian crystals and Herkimer diamond, 26 x 27 x 33". Photo: E. Gene Chambers.

"We are following a very large sculpture of mine on its way to the foundry," said Bergmann during an early morning phone interview from her car in July. "It should be fine, but it *is* clay, and it's *hot* today!"

The panels will be transformed into a bronze monument entitled *Something Is Being Done*. It depicts 25 women in bas relief who contributed to the history of Lexington, MA where it will be installed in the spring of 2024.

Earlier that day at Bergmann's Acton, MA studio located behind the home she and her husband purchased when they relocated from New York in 2021, a professional from a sculptural rigging company and a forklift operator loaded the panels onto a flatbed truck. Bergmann, as is her habit, followed the pieces to the foundry, Sincere Metal Works, that was over an hour's drive away.

Vanelli, has focused on sculpture for a mere two years since her families' move to Essex, Massachusetts from Les Arcs sur Argent, France. In Europe, she worked as a painter for over a

decade, yet it was her sculpture of a mermaid on the NESA web site that caught the attention of the Heritage Museums and Gardens in Sandwich, MA. Preparing to transport it for firing after the museum commissioned a similar work, Vanelli bisected the 125-pound clay mermaid titled *Lemuria* and enlisted the help of friends to lift and drive it to a ceramic studio equipped with a kiln large enough to fit the piece.

Though Bergmann, whose Lexington monument is sponsored by the nonprofit LexSeeHer, and Vanelli had financial support for those projects, many sculptors do not have that luxury, so NESA is also advocating for individual artist stipends.

"Not all the time are the calls for art given stipends to cover expenses...like building the crate to transport the work. Now artists are (sometimes) compensated for time that the artwork stays in a specific place and sometimes the cost of doing business." She added that, "NESA is doing a great job creating opportunities like their instructive seminars to teach us how to market ourselves...and how to select the places where we want to show our work."

While the organization does not gather for purely social events, NESA's educational programs, like its mentorship program, field trips to artists' studios for demonstrations, and sculpture slams have the added benefit nurturing a sense of community amongst the artists. NESA will also host its 75th anniversary gala on November 4 in Dedham, MA.

The emphasis on the work suits Bergmann just fine: "It's nice when there is an organization where it is about making the work and making the work better...not about selling yourself as a potential celebrity. It's not about your star power, it's about your sculpture, it's about what you've made."

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