

# Visual Art Review: Genius in granite: Giuliano Cecchinelli

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*Stefan Hard / Staff Photo Barre sculptor Giuliano Cecchinelli with his “green” clay bust of his grandfather, Francesco Cecchinelli, carved in 1969 from a photo taken of Francesco in 1968. In front is a small stone relief tablet Giuliano carved of his three children*

“In the ‘O’ Hall there is an exhibit of sculpture and reproduction of marble models. Twelve of these, accomplished in clay, show the hand of a model-maker, who — although young and not yet canny or aware of the secrets of the trade — truly knows his stuff,” reads the translation of a clipping from a Carrara, Italy, newspaper of the late 1950s.

The writer then comments specifically on one figure, a likeness of an elderly

man from a retirement home. The sculptor, he observes, not only “perfectly reproduces” the gentleman, but also, “There is in this head, as also in the other works, freshness and strength in the unusual features.” The account reports that the great Italian sculptor Arturo Dazzi advised that the head should be rendered in marble.

Those 12 figures that received such high acclaim were all the work of a young Carrara sculpture student — Giuliano Cecchinelli.

Sixty years later, the genius that Cecchinelli showed in his youth is still going strong.

Beginning this week, the public has an unprecedented opportunity to see a broad and spectacular range of Cecchinelli's work as Studio Place Arts presents "Rock Solid XIV." The annual SPA exhibition showcases creative work of stone sculptors and carvers. This year, "Rock Solid" is a solo show honoring Cecchinelli's extraordinary artistry and career. An opening reception will be held 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. today.

The exhibition spans more than six decades of Cecchinelli's creative life and includes more than 50 pieces — from a drawing he did when he was 9 years old to a piece he is currently carving in front of SPA. Cecchinelli will be working on the granite sculpture as weather and his personal schedule permit, letting the public see his process first hand.

A stunning range of Cecchinelli's work is featured. His plaster busts include a beautiful likeness of his grandfather; it is accompanied by a tiny silver relief of his children. Several fluid and sensual nudes are in the show.

In "Pheasant for Dinner," a relief in Westerly granite, the land recedes into the distance as a hunter and dog get their bird. High reliefs dealing with religious subjects including "Scourging of Christ" have stunning depth and detail. Many pieces consider current events and issues — including a 1963 piece on the Cuban missile crisis and powerful recent work dealing with GMOs, Sept. 11, and marriage equality.

"I am a common person. You can't be any commoner than I am," said Cecchinelli.

Along with his humility, though, he acknowledges his talent and perception.

"I think it's the eye. I see planes, it's a natural ability that I have. It's a natural thing and it's always been," said Cecchinelli.

His combination of natural talent and finely honed skill has elevated Cecchinelli to the pinnacle of the stone-carving world.

"He's regarded by many granite carvers as the finest granite carver in the world — even in Italy. He's brilliant. He reads the stone and carves for the ages" said stone carver John Hikory, of Windsor.

Cecchinelli was born in Carrara, Italy, in 1943 into a family with a long history of stone carving. With talent recognized in childhood, Cecchinelli began his rigorous six years of study at the Istituto Professionale per l'Industria e l'Artigianato del Marmo when he was 11 years old.

Several pieces from Cecchinelli's youth are in the SPA exhibition. His "Serafina," a graceful figure of a woman in Carrara marble, dates from 1959. A man's face, with high angular cheekbones, emerges from the stone in "Constantino," one of Cecchinelli's pieces noted in the Carrara newspaper.

Cecchinelli moved to Vermont in 1961. His father, Alberto Cecchinelli, was working in Proctor, recruited from Carrara to produce Corinthian caps for columns at the Capitol in Washington D.C. His father gave the teenager material for sculpting soon after he arrived. Cecchinelli's first Vermont piece is in the show. "Three Phases of Life" is a trio that includes faces of a boy, a middle-aged man, and an old man, all finished with a bronze patina and set on a quartzite base.

In Proctor, Cecchinelli worked for Vermont Marble Company through and just after he finished high school. Soon, though, he moved to Barre and Buttara and Sons Granite Company, shifting seamlessly from marble to granite.

“Once you’ve got your skill no one can take that away from you,” said Cecchinelli. “It doesn’t matter what kind of rock, you learn to work it, you conquer it.”

## **Studio Place Arts**

Studio Place Arts presents “Rock Solid XVI: Giuliano Cecchinelli,” a lifetime exhibition of sculptures, models, and sketches in the main floor gallery; “In Our Hands,” an environmental art and architecture exhibit by artist and designer Shannon Lee Gilmour using post-consumer plastic in the second floor gallery; “November” and “Equinox to Solstice,” paintings and sketches by Paul Calter in the third floor gallery, through Nov. 5, at 201 N. Main St., Barre. Hours are: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; noon to 4 p.m. Saturday; call 802-479-7069, or go online to [www.studioplacearts.com](http://www.studioplacearts.com). An opening reception will be held 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. today.