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'Culmination' joins growing list of public sculptures in Barre



“Culmination,” a granite sculpture designed and carved by Sean Williams, depicts the diverse cultural and architectural history of Barre, as seen Tuesday among new paving and construction work on Pearl Street and North Main Street. [Josh Kuckens / Staff Photo](#)

BARRE — Sean Williams’ first thought when the multicultural stone city he carved out of a huge hunk of Barre granite finally settled on a freshly cured patch of concrete downtown Tuesday morning was about size. His second involved time.

“It looks a lot smaller,” Williams said of a sculpture that loomed larger in his studio than it does amid the buildings that bracket the soon-to-be-finished pedestrian plaza on Pearl Street.

“It’s a great relief to see it finally in place,” Williams added, following the crane-aided placement of the sculpture. “Culmination” is nearly 8 feet tall and weighs roughly 4,000 pounds.

It would have been ready several years ago, but for reasons beyond Williams' control, the project slid from one construction season to the next until work finally started this summer.

With work on the long-awaited project underway, Williams gave his sculpture a fresh once-over and made some last-minute adjustments in the run-up to its big reveal.

"Once I knew it was really going in, I buttoned it up," he said, of the finishing work on a sculpture that took eight months to carve before sitting idle for three years.

"It looked bigger," Williams said, returning to his original impression of Barre's newest piece of public sculpture.

"When you have it in an enclosed space and you're working on it, it seems much bigger than it is," he said.

Williams said he is hopeful ornamental arches, which will be installed next month to bracket the pedestrian plaza, will frame his unique sculpture and restore the sense of scale it enjoyed in his studio.

"The arches should make a big difference," said Williams, who is pretty pleased with his first public art commission and eager for the arches to go up, the construction fences to come down and for pedestrians to explore the architecturally diverse city that he carved atop a mountainous rock-pitched base with quarry-like features.

"I think it's something different than what's already downtown," Williams said. "It's definitely a new way for people who live in Barre to look at who they are, where they came from and how they came together to make something unique."

Williams' piece was selected more than four years ago after a "call to artists" solicited proposals for a "non-figurative" sculpture that represented "... the cultural history of Barre" during the rise of the granite industry.

"I immediately thought of using architecture as a visual cultural marker that could be reiterated and grouped together to represent a unique community," Williams explained.

The end result incorporates examples of architecture from around the world — a nod to Barre's cultural diversity — and combines rough natural forms and refined geometric shapes intended to attract people to examine its intricate detail.

"I like that you can walk all the way around it and explore," said Williams, who incorporated "a little bit of fantasy" in a sculpture he hopes will generate "foot traffic" when the pedestrian way is finally finished next month.

So does Sue Higby.

Higby is the volunteer coordinator of the Stone Sculpture Legacy Program, funded by a small portion of the generous bequest former Barre businessman Charlie Semprebon left the city following his death a decade ago.

Semprebon funds were used to commission several stand-alone sculptures and sculptural bicycle racks over the last several years. They range from “Coffee Break” by Heather Milne Ritchie, which is located in front of Barre City Place, to Williams’ “Culmination.”

Higby said Williams’ sculpture is an overdue addition to an impressive collection of public art.

“It’s going to be a really amazing focal point for the downtown,” she said, adding the installation of the arches and ornamental lighting will accentuate the piece.

“The scale is ideal and the site is perfect,” she said.

Higby said Williams’ sculpture tells the rich, multi-cultural story of the people who settled in Barre to work the quarries, start small businesses and create their ideal new home.

“(Culmination) is a tribute to the international roots of Barre and will serve as a link to our past as well as a reminder about the important qualities of diversity, unity and community strength,” she said.

Higby said “Culmination” won’t be the end of Semprebon-sponsored sculptures, which have been rolled out over the last several years. Two more pieces have been commissioned and could be unveiled next year.

“Veloce” (the Italian word for speed) will depict a cyclist in motion, a nod to Semprebon, an avid cyclist who separately left \$1 million to help finance construction of a bike path linking Barre and Barre Town. Giuliano Cecchinelli II was commissioned to complete what will be his third piece financed by money left by Semprebon.

Last year, Cecchinelli completed work on the Barre Scouting Monument, which was installed on Depot Square, and he previously carved the over-sized jack-in-the-box bike rack that was installed behind the Aldrich Public Library.

Two other bike racks — one depicting a child riding a Big Wheel jumping from one granite ramp to another, and another featuring two gargoyles — were previously installed. The Big Wheel, like “Coffee Break,” was carved by Heather Ritchie and sculptor Chris Miller was the man behind the gargoyles.

A fourth bike rack — this one featuring a fish head and tail connected by a serpentine bike rack — has been promised by Gampo Wickenheiser.

With one exception, all of the Semprebon-funded pieces have been added to Barre's streetscape over the past five years. One — a quarter-sized likeness of Sir Isaac Barre, the man for whom Barre was named following a storied fistfight in 1793 — was placed in City Hall. That piece was carved by Giuliano Cecchinelli Sr.

Higby said the granite sculptures belie the notion "nothing beautiful happens in Barre City," and enhance a community already blessed with several impressive "gateway pieces."

"There will never be too much sculpture in Barre," she said, predicting a map depicting the public sculptures will constantly need to be edited.

"It's never going to be done," she said. "The idea of printing a final map is folly."

The just-updated "Art Stroll" map features all of the Semprebon-funded sculptures, and a number of others that weren't. Sculptures on the latter list range in scale from "Mr. Pickwick" on the lawn in front of the Aldrich Public Library to "Youth Triumphant" across the street in City Hall Park.

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