

Stone Symposium: Watching Cape Breton Marble Turn to Art

-by Frank MacDonald

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The Inverness Oran

"Sculpture is mind manifested in matter...."

Thinking with and through material keeps us grounded.

It nourishes us beyond a mere physical existence. It adds meaning to our life."

- Vanessa Paschakarnis

The 14-day Atlantic Stone Carving Symposium began Sunday at the Inverness County Centre for the Arts in Inverness, and for the following two weeks the art connoisseur or the simply curious are welcome to visit the grounds and witness what is happening.

What is happening is that eight nationally celebrated stone carvers are sculpting large chunks of Cape Breton marble, and what is emerging are works of art ranging from portraits of the Buddha to computer chips

What is unique is that the symposium is interactive, meaning that visitors to the arts centre are welcome to walk into the tented studio where all eight artists are at work, and are willing to discuss what they plan to accomplish during the symposium. A visit each day or every couple of days will allow people to witness the evolution of the stone as each artist's vision emerges from their chosen piece of red Cape Breton marble quarried by MacLeod Resources at River Denys.



Ranging in weight from 300 to 2000 pounds, the marble blocks are already well underway to becoming something far more valuable than the crushed stone alternative that is the fate of much of the world's marble.

Besides witnessing the creativity taking place, people will also have an opportunity to glean greater insight into the works of each artist. On Tuesday and Thursday evenings of the two-week symposium, each of the eight artists will provide slide shows of their work at the Inverness County Centre for the Arts. Each of the presentations begins at 7:00 p.m. All are open to the public.

"Stone carving symposia are important cultural events in Europe and Asia and are established as recurring showcases for contemporary art in connection with specific local resources," explained Vanessa Paschakarnis, a participating sculptor and coordinator of this Inverness event, the first of this kind in Atlantic Canada.

It was not an easy thing to bring a stone carving symposium to Cape Breton, but a harmonious convergence of several sponsors who saw the merit made it happen.

Planning for the event started nearly three years ago when Ms. Paschakarnis visited the MacLeod Quarry and encouraged Christopher Trider, its president and founder, to host a symposium in Cape Breton. This suggestion brought together a consortium of eight government, economic development, arts organizations and business partners which included the Inverness County Centre for the Arts, the Cape Breton Centre for Craft & Design, the Municipality of the County of Inverness, Strait-Highlands Regional Development Agency, the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, the Department of Natural Resources, the Office of Economic Development, and Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation.

"Nova Scotia has the two essential elements that make its artistic contributions world class," said Minister of Natural Resources Richard Hurlburt, "high-quality marble that can compete with any from around the world, and a vibrant arts community that can turn the stone into such enriching works of art."

The third essential element for the symposium were the sculptors, and eight from across the country were selected to participate. Artists who are carving include Nova Scotians John Greer and Rudolph Henninger; Kathryn Ellis and Kent LaForme from British Columbia; Gerard Kelly, Newfoundland and Labrador; Laura Moore from Ontario; Vanessa Paschakarnis, an artist and professor of sculpture in Dallas, Texas; and Niall Donaghy from Waterloo, Ontario. (For a glimpse of these artists and their works, visit www.invernessarts.ca/stone.htm).

For Steve Basker, president of the Inverness County Council of the Arts, the presence of the stone-carving symposium reasserts the vision of the arts council when, for a decade, it planned and lobbied for an arts centre in Inverness.

"Cape Breton's rich natural resources, specifically marble, made this location a logical choice for the symposium," said Kathy Hannigan, executive director, Inverness County Centre for the Arts. "This will be the first of its kind event in Atlantic Canada and one of very few in North America."

"We've had a lot of people express an interest in working with Cape Breton marble," Ms. Hannigan said. "So the arts centre will have extra work benches and marble on site just in case anyone wants to try their hand at creating a piece."

"The Inverness County Centre for the Arts deserves high praise for organizing and hosting this symposium," said Rodney MacDonald, minister of Tourism Culture and Heritage, who officially opened the symposium on Sunday during a community barbecue. "It is a tremendous opportunity for Nova Scotians and visitors to see these accomplished artists at work."

MacLeod Resources excavates a variety of intensely coloured and richly veined marbles that are being exported as far as Italy where they compete with the world's finest marbles.

The Stone Carving Symposium is being held between August 28th-September 10th, seven days a week from 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.. While on the grounds, there is an opportunity to visit the gallery where the works of many Inverness County artists hang in the Hands Dancing Show, and a fine cup of Just Us! Coffee is available as well as a cup of Cape Breton tea.