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Westchester:

Memorial sculpture to deceased LMU students to be unveiled in 2012 IN MEMORIAM OF THE DEARLY DEPARTED



(Image courtesy of William Pupa)



FINISHING TOUCHES- Sculptor William Pupa and his wife Giada work on the student memorial statue. (Image courtesy of William Pupa)



WILLIAM PUPA stands near the site where the sculpture that he created for deceased students will be placed near Sacred Heart Chapel.

(Argonaut photo by T.W Brown)

BY GARY WALKER

The campus of Loyola Marymount University is adorned with plaques honoring various religious figures, many of them located near Sacred Heart Chapel.

Next year, a work of art to honor students who passed away in the prime of their young lives while attending LMU will also have a space among the trees near the chapel.

The creator of the statue is William Pupa, an assistant professor of art and art history as well as an artist in residence at the university.

Nearly four years ago, a university committee approached him with the idea of creating a memorial to honor young scholars who died as students at the Catholic university after seeing two of his earlier works in the school's Marymount Institute.

Since the initial drawings and meetings with the committee, as well as a viewing of the early designs of the statue in LMU's Del Rey Theater last year, Pupa's work of art is now in its final stages.

On Dec. 14, the final piece was sent to a foundry in Berkeley for casting.

The subject matter—death and the need to create something that commemorated the memory of the fallen students was a challenge that the artist faced early on in the discussions with the committee.

“One thing that came through to me very strongly in the beginning was that they didn't want the piece to seem too funerary,” Pupa said in an interview with *The Argonaut* before the December holidays.

“On the other end of the spectrum, there were some people who said they wanted it to be celebratory.

“And somewhere along the line in the middle there was this idea of wanting to recognize the tragedy, which is a true loss, and we don't want to run from that or deny that,” he continued. “So that's sort of where I ended up.”

While incorporating the requests and visions of the committee, as well as those of some of the parents who lost sons and daughters while they were attending LMU, Pupa was conscious of the need to leave his own artistic imprint on the piece.

“That is going to come out no matter what. If an artist has been working in this field long enough, that voice will always be there,” he said.

The sculptor went through approximately 10 different designs in the early stages of the process.

“Listening to the committee and what they wanted the piece to express was very interesting,” he said. “Probably the most challenging part as an artist was to try to bring all those desires together in a single piece.”

Theresa De Vroom, LMU's director of the Marymount Institute of Faith Culture and Arts, thinks Pupa has incorporated into the sculpture what the commission was seeking. “The idea was to get an amalgamation of people who passed away when they were attending LMU,” she said. “Making a memorial (to deceased students) raises so many complicated issues about emotions and loss.”

Chelsey Alloti, who graduated from the university in 2010, remembered students who passed away during her years as an undergraduate. Hearing about Pupa's sculpture reminded her how her fellow students responded after those tragedies.

“I remember several student deaths while I attended LMU and no matter what the cause is, it is always tragic to lose someone, especially when they are so young,” recalled Alloti, now enrolled in graduate school at the University of Southern California.

“What always amazes me when a young person passes away is the tremendous response from their peers. Schools are unique in that way where people, I think, feel connected with one another even if they don't know the person that well.

“I think having a fixture like this on campus gives students and families both the reminder to treasure life and also a place to commemorate those who have passed away,” she added.

Pupa said there was a great deal of physical work involved in creating the student memorial. The arts professor, who studied for several years in Italy, employed many of the historic techniques that he learned abroad in creating the sculpture.

“We built three different mockettes in various sizes refining the whole concept until I established that I would build a mockette out of clay, where each figure is approximately 2 feet tall, because I knew that the final piece I wanted to have would be three times the size,” Pupa explained.

Once the committee ap-

proved the mockette, Pupa and his team began work on the final memorial, which stands 10 feet long by 9 feet high and 4 feet wide.

He used wood and metal on the final piece, working by hand with students from the university. The only modern technique they used was a welding torch. Approximately 4,000 pounds of clay was used for the mockettes and in the piece's final design.

Pupa then reproduced a waste mold in plaster before putting the final touches on the project. “I couldn't send it to the foundry in clay because it's too heavy and it's not stable enough,” he explained.

The statue was then sent to the foundry, which Pupa likes because he says they have extensive experience with figurative work. “For me that was important, because as part of the process, the sculpture needs to be cut up into several pieces,” Pupa said.

The area where the sculpture will be placed will be landscaped with decomposed granite and a cement foundation will be poured before the memorial is brought to the campus.

Pupa said he plans to take one or two more trips to Berkeley to make sure that every detail of the sculpture is right before it is transported to LMU.

De Vroom said the statue will be placed to the right of Sacred Heart Chapel on a bluff overlooking the city. “There is a space between the eight figures that represents loss,” the department director said. “I think that is a very beautiful concept.”

Alloti pointed out that often

losing a loved one goes beyond the family and at institutions like LMU, the tragedy can extend beyond the school's boundaries.

“Death is something that has effects beyond the immediate circles of that person's life and it can really shake up a community. LMU being a smaller and more tight-knit school really gives people a sense of closeness, so it often hits harder when a student passes away because the likelihood that you crossed paths with them or know someone who was close with them is so high,” she noted.

“I think the university commissioning this sculpture is a wonderful gesture to honor those that have gone. I think it is something that will be timeless and a great representation of the bond LMU students share with each other and with the school itself. My impression is that this sculpture has been created not only to remember, but to celebrate the lives of these students and honor them.”

Pupa is aware that the memorial sculpture will have a great deal of significance to the university and the parents and relatives who have lost their loved ones. But it will also have special meaning for him.

“You spend many years of your adult life, never knowing really if (your work is) going to be of value to anyone,” he said. “In that respect, this is a huge honor to be able to do something like this.”