Ave Maria University presents

FAITH IN HIS HANDS:
The Annunciation Sculpture by Márton Váró

Canizaro Library
March 25 - May 15, 2011

“For his masterpieces were made by chipping away the marble, not by adding anything to it; and when, after much chipping, the lineaments of a face were reached, one then realized that the work now polished and complete had always been inside the block.”

—Cicero, De divinatione 2.21.48.
Carrara

The Italian town of Carrara is a unique community. It is situated in the northwestern corner of Tuscany, 62 miles from Florence, close to Liguria and to Lombardy. It is famous for its quarries, which provide the best quality white and blue-grey marble. This marble has been known and used since Roman times—the Pantheon and Trajan’s Column in Rome are both made from this material. So is Michelangelo’s colossal statue of David. The stone for Márton Váró’s Annunciation comes from the same quarry that Michelangelo himself used, which is now known as Cave Michelangelo.

In fact the marble that comes out of this quarry today may be of consistently better quality than what was available to sculptors in the early 16th century, since it comes from deeper within the mountain, and therefore has been less affected by rain and weather. Sculptors looking for the perfect block for a particular piece of stone or a major project nevertheless have to search long and hard among the various offerings brought to their attention by the quarry-masters, in order to find the piece that suits their purpose. The more ambitious the project, the more difficult the search.

Visiting Cave Michelangelo is an emotional experience—not simply because of the association with the great sculptor. The scenery is wild, with great gashes carved out of the mountain by centuries of quarrying. Aerial photographs show these very clearly. At first they could be mistaken for snow. The quarrymen clearly belong to a special tribe, and one soon learns that this is in fact a hereditary occupation.

Socially, Carrara is a paradox. The town, during the late Middle Ages, had many masters, passing from one overlordship to another, but has always been fiercely independent. Local politics are left wing—some have described them as anarchist. The native Italian part of the population is tightly knit. Yet this is also one of the most cosmopolitan communities in the whole of Italy. Sculptors come from all over the world to work there. Some settle down, and spend their whole lives there. Others come and go.

Artistically it is also a paradox. Much of its income comes from replicating the great sculptural works of the past. If you want Michelangelo’s Pietà, full-size, and don’t think you can persuade the Vatican to part with the original, Carrara is the place to go. It’s slightly spooky to wander into one of the major workshops there, as I once did, and see an exact duplicate of this familiar masterpiece looming over an elderly artisan, busy with something else. What he was busy with, in this case, was not a copy of some revered masterpiece from the Renaissance but an ‘original’ by a well known youngish Italian artist. Today many fashionable artists, not just Italians, commission the marble workshops in Carrara to make final versions of their work. What they supply may simply be a small model, or maquette, which the workshop enlarges through successive stages. Throughout most of this process the artist who will sign the finished result as his own is absent. The hard graft of carving stone is not for him. He arrives from time to time just to inspect, and make a few suggestions. This method of making sculpture—at arm’s length so to speak—is not in fact new. The academic sculptors of the 18th and 19th centuries pioneered it. In our own day, there are stories that this process is now being taken to its logical conclusion. Some of the fashionable conceptualists who now commission work in Carrara don’t even go to the trouble of providing a model. All that the artisan gets as source material is an impatient rough scribble, or even just a verbal description.

One young sculptor living in Carrara, who finances his own work by making sculptures for artists more famous, though less technically gifted, than himself, said to me ruefully: “Look at this big thing. At the moment, because it is not quite finished, it is all mine. But next week the great man will arrive, and touch it with his hand. And then it becomes all his.”

None of this applies to Márton Váró. He is stubbornly insistent that everything, from first to last, will be the product of his own hand. Some of the preliminary work for this great Annunciation was done in Carrara, and the rest after the blocks of which it is composed were shipped to Florida. It is just as much a heroic individual effort as Michelangelo’s David. Michelangelo was not the first to fantasize that the sculpture, complete, was already sleeping within the marble, waiting for the sculptor to free it. This notion is also to be found in the work of ancient writers, such as Cicero and Virgil. The Annunciation is not just a creation, it is also an awakening—something doubly appropriate, given its subject.

—Edward Lucie-Smith
Art Historian, London
Sculptor Márton Váró was born March 15, 1943 in Székelyudvarhely, Transylvania, Hungary, which is now part of Romania. He studied art at Ion Andreescu Institute of Fine Arts in Cluj, Romania from 1960-1966. Váró’s first major group exhibition was held in Cluj, Romania in 1966. In 1984, the artist was awarded the Munkácsy Prize from Ministry of Education and Culture, Hungary; and Váró received the Fulbright Fellowship in 1988, which lasted through 1989 at the University of California Irvine (UCI), Irvine, CA. In 1990, after his year at UCI, he was the city of Brea Artist in Residence for a public art project at the Brea Civic & Cultural Center, Brea, CA. Following his residency, Márton Váró became a U.S. citizen.


Márton Váró’s works are included in numerous public collections such as the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Holland; Jyväskylä Art Museum, Jyväskylä, Finland; Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, Hungary; Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged, Hungary; Den Museum, Debrecen, Hungary; Muzeul Tării Crisurilor, Oradea, Romania; The Art Institute of California, Laguna Beach, CA; Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway; City of Debrecen, Hungary; City Hall, Szombathely, Hungary; Convention Center (former Communist Party’s Scientific Center and Performance Hall) and Forum Hotel, Budapest, Hungary; Anavros Park Volos, Volos, Greece; Village of Etna, Norway, Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Performance Hall, Fort Worth, TX; Plaza of the Americas, Dallas, TX; Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Nashville, TN; City of Brea, Cultural Arts Division, and Embassy Suites, Brea, CA; University of California Irvine, Irvine, CA; and the City of Palm Desert, Community Arts/Art in Public Places (located in Civic Center Park), Palm Desert, CA. Váró’s works are also included in private collections in Fort Worth, TX; Naples, FL; Laguna Beach and Irvine, CA; Washington DC; Prilep, Macedonia; Athens, Greece; Budapest, Hungary; Paris, France; and Bergen, Norway.

Márton Váró’s works have been exhibited at the Gerald Peter’s Gallery, Dallas, TX, the Albemarle Gallery, London, UK and Galerie du Soleil, Naples, Florida. He divides his time between studios in Ave Maria, Florida, Irvine, California and Carrara, Italy.

—Jane Jacob
Jacob Fine Art, Chicago
One of the greatest works in the history of art in the twenty-first century will be unveiled on March 25, 2011, the feast of the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel to the young Mary of Nazareth. The drapery covering the tympanum of the great Oratory of the Annunciation in Ave Maria, Florida, will be pulled aside to reveal a classic image of that original day when Jesus first entered in human flesh in embryo. Quiet in its simplicity, shining, brilliant white-pink in the morning sun, this new Annunciation was cut from the same Carrara marble that released Michelangelo’s images of the Pietà, David, and others of his great works.

At nearly 54 tons, this new sculpture by the great Transylvanian artist Martón Váró is cumulatively the largest marble tympanum in the history of Christianity, some thirty-five feet high and thirty-one feet wide. Block by block, it was carved by hand while lying on the ground on the lawn just across from the Oratory, on the campus of Ave Maria University. The marble from which the 15 blocks were eventually separated (for lifting onto the front of the Oratory) is thought to be the largest single block ever cut from the deservedly famous Carrara vein.

No one who has seen the steep, rugged terrain of the mountains and the white stone cliffs of Transylvania, if only in cinema or in photographs, will be surprised by the strong masculine lines of Váró’s Annunciation. And these manly, bold lines put in clear and lovely relief the soft tenderness of the young maiden, as she listens in wonder to the Archangel’s history-shattering words.

No scene is more frequently portrayed in the history of Christian art than the Annunciation. Almost every great painter of the Renaissance—as well as the early and late Middle Ages, and in the centuries since the Renaissance—has been inspired by the thought of God humbling Himself to insert Himself into human history as a young male, son of a virgin. There are exceedingly famous works by Giotto, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, da Vinci, Caravaggio, Murillo, Lippi, Rubens, Perugino, Hans von Aachen, D’Eycyk, Grunewald, van der Weyden, Rosetti, and others of their kind.

Nearly all of these artists express wonder at the coming of God in human flesh in the womb of Mary, while surrounded by her purity and grace. “Hail Mary, full of grace!” Mary’s womb was the gateway through which Almighty God entered human flesh, in the person of the baby soon to be in her arms at Bethlehem. The human Jesus experienced a quiet, silent voyage of beauty, purity, and grace through the womb of His mother.

If Christianity in America (and the rest of the world) is again going to blossom in a new Renaissance, it may well begin with a new image of the Annunciation—mighty, strong, bold, and yet as gentle and pure as the maid.

The whole twenty-first century is indebted to the kind, humble, and great Martón Váró for this brilliant new work, and to Ave Maria Foundation for the Arts, along with the founder of Ave Maria, Thomas S. Monaghan, and Ave Maria University’s first president, Nicholas J. Healy, for the courage, the stamina and the creative enterprise of this production, spanning two continents. Mr. Michael Windfeldt was the creative producer who managed the enormously complex project from Carrara to Ave Maria.

The day on which Christianity was conceived in embryo, in the womb of a teenage Mary of Nazareth, is fairly well triangulated from other dates given in the New Testament; and so the tradition of March 25 has been quite reasonably established in relation to young Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth, six months pregnant with John the Baptist, the great census of Caesar Augustus, the tradition of celebrating Christmas sometime near the end of December, and other historical events. Thence came, over time, the nine-month separation between March 25 and December 25.

Ever since, March 25 has taught us again one of the greatest prayers in human history, both the prayer of the young teen before Gabriel and the prayer Jesus Himself uttered in His Agony in the Garden three days before His death—and some say the most central and meaningful of all prayers, a final Yes to the bittersweet invitation of the Lord. “Be it done to me according to the word”—“Not My will, O Lord, but Thine!”

Divine humility and human humility are joined in the greatest of all human transformations, adventures, and struggles unto death: the refashioning of all human history into the noblest, most sublime, and most demanding vocation of humans ever conceived. Conceived here, at the Annunciation to the young maid, Hail, Mary!

—Michael Novak

George Frederick Jewett Chair (emeritus), The American Enterprise Institute
Márton Váró  
His Work

AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS
1991  Ladanyi Foundation, New York  
1989  Fulbright Scholarship, University of California, Irvine  
1984  Munkácsy Prize

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2008  Galerie du Soleil, Naples, Florida  
1994  New York, Consulate of Republic of Hungary
1987  Cultural Center, Lage, Germany  
1986  Behr Mobelhaus, Stuttgart, Germany
1986  Satoraljaujhely, Hungary  
1986  City Hall, Gerlingen, Germany  
1986  Exhibition Hall, Herrenberg, Germany
1985  Keszthely, Hungary  
1985  Dunaújváros, Hungary  
1981  Mucsarnok, Exhibition Hall, Budapest, Hungary
1978  Mora Ferenc Museum, Szeged, Hungary  
1977  Studio Gallery, Budapest, Hungary
1976  Nyiregyhaza, Hungary  
1975  Studio Gallery, Budapest, Hungary
1970  Mamaia, Romania
1969  Oradea, Romania

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1998  Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas
1994  La Quinta Sculpture Garden, La Quinta, California
1994  West Week/Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles, California
1994  LA Art ’94, Los Angeles, California
1993  LA Art ’93, Los Angeles, California
1993  Art Institute of Southern California, Laguna Beach, California
1993  Jansen-Perez Gallery, Los Angeles, California
1991  Hungarian Spring Festival, Santa Barbara, California
1990  Muckenthaler Cultural Center, Fullerton, California
1986  Bronzetto, Piccola Scultura, Padua, Italy
1986  Recent Hungarian Art, Canada
1985  International Exhibition for Wood Sculpture, Nagyatad, Hungary
1985  Central Finland Museum of Art, Jyväskyla, Finland
1984  13 Artists from Hungary, Stockholm Art Fair, Sweden
1984  Tendencias, Madrid, Spain
1983  Debrecen Biennale, Summer Show, Award of the Show, Debrecen, Hungary
1983  40 Creative Years, Budapest, Hungary
1982  Konsthall Sodertalje, Sweden
1979  Hungarian Small Sculpture & Graphics, Moscow, USSR
1978  4th International Small Sculpture Exhibition, Budapest, Hungary
1978  Studio of Young Artists at the Grand Palais, Paris, France
1977  Artists of the Studio of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary
1976  Szeged Biennale Summer Show, Award of the Show, Szeged, Hungary
1976  Open Air Sculpture Show, Antwerp, Belgium
1967  Studio of Young Artists of Hungary, Le Havre, France
1966  Spring Student Festival, Cluj, Romania

SYMPOSIUMS
1988  Symposium: The Situation of Sculpture and Painting At The End of the Twentieth Century, Delphi, Greece
1988  Symposium for Marble, Volos, Greece
1977  Symposium, Awarded Prize of City of Burgas, Burgas, Bulgaria
1972  Symposium for Marble, Prilep, Macedonia (then part of Yugoslav Federation)

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS
Garden of Hope and Courage, Naples, Florida
Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Nashville, Tennessee
TCU, Fort Worth, Texas
Kyongnam Province Parliament, Korea
NTNU Institute of Technology, Trondheim, Norway
Nancy Lee & Perry R. Bass Performance Hall, Fort Worth, Texas
Tustin Ranch Marketplace, Tustin, California
Art Institute of Southern California, Laguna Beach, California
Pereira Sculpture Garden, UCI, Irvine, California
Plaza of the Americas, Dallas, Texas
Peace Memorial, Palm Desert, California
Breaking Free, City Hall, Brea, California
Anavros Sculpture, City of Volos, Greece
Central Finland Museum of Art, Jyväskyla, Finland
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Holland
Collection of the Ministry of Culture, Budapest, Hungary
National Gallery, Budapest, Hungary
Mora Ferenc Museum, Szeged, Hungary
Déri Museum, Debrecen, Hungary
Government Administration Building, Debrecen, Hungary
Kalvin Plaza, Debrecen, Hungary
Berettyóújfalu City Hall, Hungary
Congress Convention Center, Budapest, Hungary
City of Burgas, Bulgaria
City of Debrecen, Hungary
Debrecen Clock Tower, Hungary
Szombathely City Hall, Hungary
Debrecen New Post Office, Hungary
Mateszalka Textile Factory, (BFK)
Berettyóújfalu Eizett Works, Hungary
City Sculpture Garden, Prilep, Macedonia, Yugoslavia
Dr. Petru, Groza City, Romania
Muzeul Tarii Crisurilor, Oradea, Romania
Martón Váró was born in the town of Székelyudvarhely on March 15, 1943 in Transylvania, Hungary (today part of Romania).

By 1944, German forces occupied Hungary, and the Váró family escaped from Transylvania to a small village outside of Budapest, where they remained until 1945 when both Hungarian and German forces were defeated by invading Soviet armies and the Váró family returned to Transylvania, where the artist spent his boyhood and young adult years in the Communist Bloc state. During this time, Váró’s enthusiasm for the arts was realized and nourished by regional artists and exposure to Greco-Roman art throughout the provinces and cities of old Transylvania.

When Martón Váró was six years old, his family took him to see the 1940s American animated film by Walt Disney, Pinocchio, which he credits as his inspiration for becoming an artist. Váró states, “When I saw the wood-carver, Geppetto, carving the wooden puppet’s eyes, and watching as the Pinocchio sculpture came to life, it was so awe-inspiring that I determined to become a sculptor.” During the seventh year (age 10) of elementary school, Váró created his first works of art—an experience that proved fundamental for his development. This early woodcut work was immediately recognized by his art teachers and artist friends of the family.

In 1960, Váró began his six years of formal art training at the Ion Andreescu Institute of Fine Arts in Cluj, Romania, where he studied under the sculptor András Kos (Transylvanian, b.1914), whose work is included in The Museum of Art, Budapest, Hungary; The National Museum of Art, Cluj Napoca, The Museum of Art, Oradea, and The Museum of Art, Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania. In 1961, Váró took a stone-carving workshop with local tombstone carvers, and during this time, the artist completed his first sculpture when he carved his father’s portrait in limestone from memory. Martón Váró graduated in 1966; that same year his work was included in a major group exhibition held at an arts festival in Cluj. Váró’s work continued to receive commendation, and in 1967, his work was selected for the group show Studio of Young Artists of Hungary held in Le Havre, France.

In 1970, Váró moved to Debrecen. Coincidentally, at this time Hungary began laying out a strategy to draw artists to the cities, and the City Council of Debrecen established its own plan to build artist studios and housing to attract new artists to their community. The plan included a nationwide competition for artists to submit application for only eight artist studios and apartments in the beautiful wooded outskirts of the city of Debrecen. Six studios were open for painters and two studios were available for sculptors. Encouraged by family members, Martón Váró submitted application for inclusion into the new Artists from the Great Forest of Debrecen and was awarded one of the eight coveted studios. He worked and lived in this house until he left Hungary; all total, he stayed in Debrecen for 19 years, during which time he created his first Breaking Free sculpture.

In 1978, Váró participated in a young artist exhibition at the Grand Palais, in Paris, France. In 1984, Váró was awarded the Munkácsy Prize from the State of Hungary. A coveted and very important recognition, he was the first artist in 30 years from Hungary to receive the award. In 1988, Váró completed the Breaking Free commission and that same year the artist was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to the University of California in Irvine (UCI). In 1989, he left Hungary for the United States. The Fulbright was extended for another year, and in 1990, the artist moved his family to Irvine, California, where they continue to live today. During the same year, Martón Váró was named the City of Brea Artist in Residence and was commissioned for a public art project at the Brea Civic and Cultural Center, Brea, CA; that year he completed his second version of Breaking Free. In 1990 following the completion of his residency, Váró became a United States citizen.

—Jane Jacob
Jacob Fine Art, Chicago