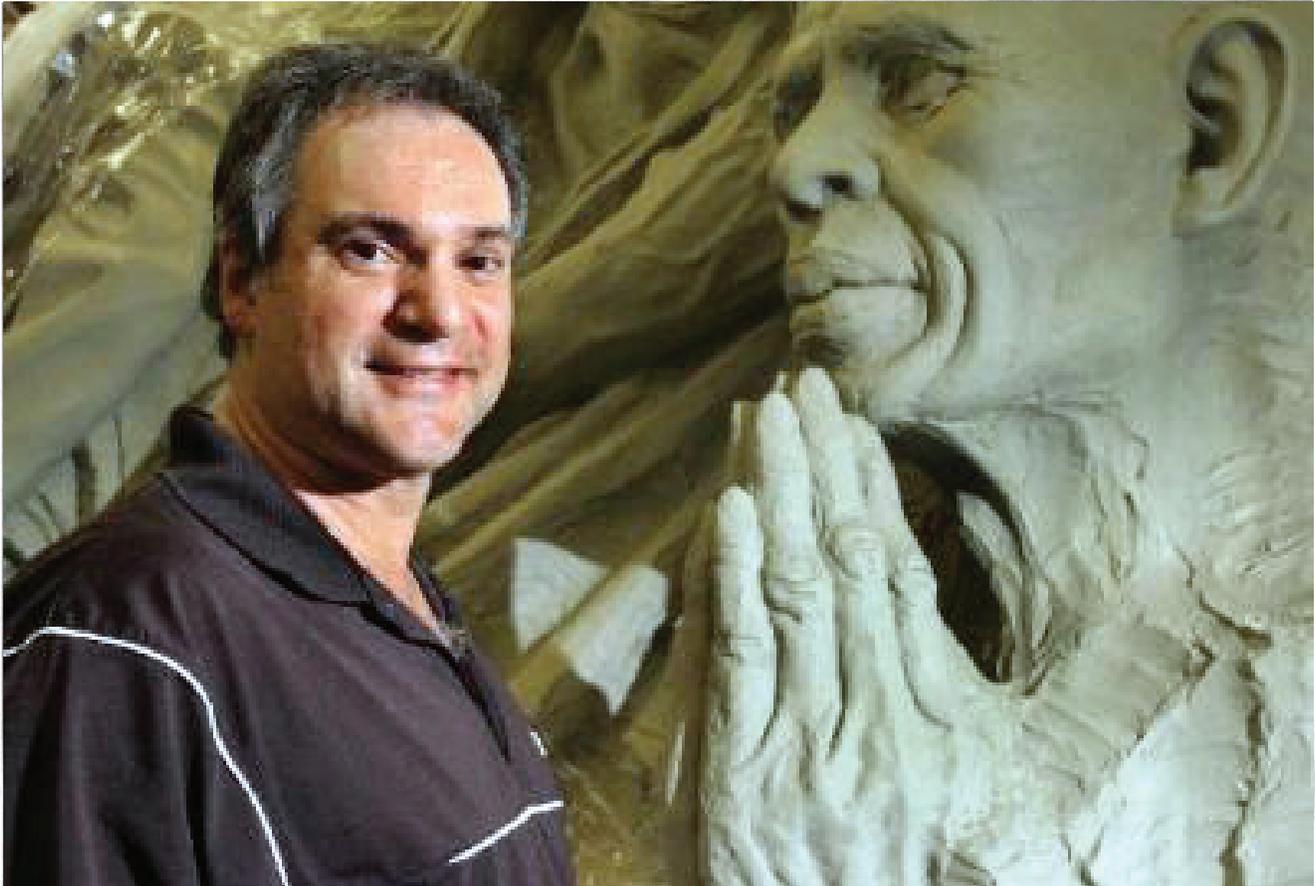


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PORTRAITS OF PEACEMAKERS



DEAN COPPOLA/STAFF

Sculptor Mario Chiodo is working on "Remember Them: Champions for Humanity," a large bronze sculpture that will be installed in an Oakland park in 2011. The sculpture pays tribute to 26 historical figures who embody peace.

Sculptor building tribute to humanity's heroes

CHISEL AWAY at Mario Chiodo and he just might reveal his sculpturing muse. You may have heard of him: Michelangelo, an Italian marble-chipper from five centuries ago.

"I can't even tell you how many books I've read on Michelangelo," Chiodo said. "Probably the single-most driving thing I've picked up from him, if I can be so bold, is he said, 'Artists are creators, and creators are the closest thing to God.' If you have been touched by that, then you have no choice in the matter."

Chiodo doesn't feel Godlike, but he is working hard on the biggest,



DAVE NEWHOUSE
GOOD NEIGHBORS

and most inspirational, art piece ever to be erected in Oakland — "Remember Them: Champions for Humanity," a bronze sculpture 52 feet long and 25 feet high.

Chiodo is paying tribute to 26 historical figures who embody peace. He's already named 25 of them; No. 26 is a secret. The sculpture will be dedicated in September 2011 in a new uptown park next to the Fox Theater.

The September date has special

meaning for Chiodo: It will be the 10th anniversary of 9/11, his stimulus for creating this shrine to those who stood for human rights.

Chiodo is more than halfway finished at his West Oakland studio. He's received funding for three-quarters of the monument, which he believes will be the largest bronze sculpture in the Western U.S.

Chiodo (Key-oh-dough), an Oakland native, talked conceptually about his project, which he and his staff have been busy creating for seven years.

"The entire process has constantly been moving," he said. "The

idea behind it has not changed — historical people who did extraordinary things that were not expected. The other component is bringing everybody to the conversation."

From Abraham Lincoln to Frederick Douglass to Winston Churchill to Rosa Parks to Mother Teresa, Chiodo is honoring them, and other humanitarians as positive talking points to counter the horror and negativity of 9/11.

"We do need to understand ourselves better in this world," he said. "We create too many fences that

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DEAN COPPOLA/STAFF

Mario Chiodo works in his Oakland studio on Friday.

Newhouse

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should be taken down from each other. Everybody has the same human rights as long as they aren't hurting anybody. They should not be suppressed because of their race, religion or sexual belief. Unless everyone's in the conversation, it's always going to be like this."

Chiodo is so devoted to this project that he's taking no salary. His company, Chiodo Art Development, has other profitable projects. — Not everyone has found his latest work to be worthwhile.

"In 2009," said Chiodo, "we got death threats: 'How dare you put these black people and a gay person and a Jewish person on a monument together.' We got more than a few letters with '(expletive) lover, (expletive) lover, Jew lover, Indian lover.

"Michelangelo said, 'The greatest joy is creating. The biggest agony is the life you'll live to pursue that.' I only hope I can relate to what he was thinking."

— Mario Chiodo, sculptor

And you need to be killed.'

"With all of our progress in society, this still exists and it's preventing us from resolving these social issues."

Unfazed by these threats, Chiodo continued pursuing his dream of an artistic masterpiece. But where in the sculpturing process does he find the greatest fulfillment?

"There are probably two stages," he said. "The first stage is when the idea hits you. It's what artists live for, but it doesn't happen every day. The other phase is usually at the very end of the sculpturing.

"And it's mixed emotions, because you're happy that you're able to achieve something, but you know it could

always have been better.

That's the agony of it, trying to create an emotion out of an inanimate object."

And between the beginning and the end is the grinding part of sculpturing. No wonder Chiodo gets very little sleep: It's the fault of his muse.

"Michelangelo said, 'The greatest joy is creating. The biggest agony is the life you'll live to pursue that,'" Chiodo said. "I only hope I can relate to what he was thinking."

Dave Newhouse's columns appear Mondays, Thursdays and Sundays, usually on the Local page. Know any Good Neighbors? Phone 510-208-6466 or e-mail dnehouse@bayareanewsgroup.com.