

## Bronze Age shines on Eutaw Place; Steven Tatti rescues Francis Scott Key, and Baltimore keeps its monumental commitment. Gunts, Edward . The Sun ; Baltimore, Md. 05 Sep 1999

When art conservator Steven Tatti saw the Francis Scott Key Monument earlier this year, he says, it reminded him of "a public urinal or bath." Covered in trash and graffiti, with a broken fountain and cracked cement, it had been neglected for years.

Now, after a few months in the hands of his small crew of restoration experts, it's back in all its glory. And this Saturday at 3 p.m., preservationists, history buffs and others will gather to celebrate completion of the group's \$125,000 restoration of the monument on Eutaw Place at Lanvale Street in the Bolton Hill historic district.

"This was a complete restoration," Tatti says. "We really took it back to the way it was. There's nothing else in Baltimore that has received such comprehensive treatment." Tatti's group hauled away tons of trash and rubble; cleaned and applied a protective wax coating over the bronze figures and plaques; cleaned, repaired and removed stains from white marble; cleaned and repaired the granite wall surrounding a fountain at the base; and applied gold leaf to two plaques. The work began the third week of May and was finished by the middle of July. One of the most time-consuming tasks was removing -- with a variety of poultices and solutions -- rust, dirt and algae embedded in the marble. The conservators also had to cast a bronze oar to replace one that had disappeared. Tatti notes with pride that, except for putting up scaffolding and repairing the fountain's plumbing, everything was completed by his own crew of four, which includes former Baltimoreans Robert and Judith Pringle.

Tatti's work in Baltimore began in 1981, when the city launched a program to restore 14 monuments in historic Mount Vernon. After that, the city hired him to restore bronzes in other parts of the city, and then to work on other types of monuments. Since then, Tatti's group has helped restore more than 50 statues and other works of sculpture in Baltimore, ranging from Antoine Barye's delicate bronzes in Mount Vernon Place to the large mounted figure of the Marquis de Lafayette near Charles and Madison streets.

Tatti lives in New York and works out of a brownstone in the Murray Hill section of Manhattan. He travels to different cities as they engage his services, often pulling together the same team of specialists to work with him. His father, a professional sculptor and restorer, oversees his office. When he began restoring outdoor monuments in Baltimore, Tatti says, "we were pretty much a pilot program. No other city was addressing it with any comprehensive overview." Since then, he says, he has gone on to perform similar work in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Cleveland and Houston, among other cities. He has worked on high profile projects such as the restoration of the Statue of Liberty on Ellis Island, but he has treated more works in Baltimore than any other city.

White House campaign

The 1911 Key Monument is one of the first in the country to be restored as part of the White

House Millennium Council's "Save America's Treasures" campaign to preserve works of art and architecture for the next millennium. First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton announced the project during a ceremony held at the monument in July 1998. The monument depicts Key returning to shore after his detainment on a British ship during the bombardment of Fort McHenry on Sept. 13 and 14, 1814. The experience inspired him to write the poem that later became "The Star Spangled Banner."

Donated to the city by Charles L. Marburg, a wealthy tobacco merchant who founded the Municipal Art Society of Baltimore, and built at a cost of \$25,000, the monument is the work of French sculptor Jean Marius Antonin Mercie, who was awarded the Prix de Rome in 1868. The monument includes the allegorical figure of Columbia, who holds the national flag to her left side. A barefoot sailor rows the boat while a standing Key presents the manuscript of his poem to Columbia.

On one side of the monument's base is a bronze panel representing the bombardment of Fort McHenry, and on the other side is a panel representing the guns and ramparts of the fort. Tatti says the Key Monument deserved the extensive restoration treatment. Unlike some works that appear to have been "plopped" on the ground, Tatti says, this monument is well integrated with its setting and of high artistic quality. "The whole presentation on that site is well thought out... It's a wonderful work." Tatti's restoration makes people stop and take notice of a monument they previously might have overlooked, says Lynn Pellaton, president of the Friends of the Francis Scott Key Monument, a citizens group that has worked for four years to make sure the monument was preserved.

"The work he's done has been excellent," she says. "He certainly went all out for us." Before the restoration began, Pellaton said, her group questioned the idea of reapplying gold leaf to the two reliefs at the base. "But he said, 'That's the way it should be,'" she recalls. "And that has made all the difference in its gleaming in the sunlight." The restored monument is the centerpiece of an even more ambitious plan to improve the surrounding median park area with lights and landscaping and selective paving. The concept is essentially to return the landscape to its 1850s configuration, visually opening the center of the park with flower beds and low planting.

Sara Bigham, a Eutaw Place resident and member of the Friends of the Monument, says the group hopes to start with a two-block stretch of Eutaw Place between Dolphin and Lafayette streets and eventually work all the way up to North Avenue. Pellaton says the Friends are trying to raise a \$100,000 endowment to cover the annual costs of fountain operation and park maintenance. The Key Monument conservation project was coordinated by Baltimore's Commission on Historical and Architectural Preservation in partnership with the city departments of public works and recreation and parks. National funding support was provided through a \$62,250 award from Target Stores as part of Save Outdoor Sculpture!, a joint project of Heritage Preservation, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, and the National Museum of American Art, which is part of the Smithsonian Institution. State and local funding partners provided another \$62,250.

City sculpture restored Baltimore's preservation commission, under executive director Kathleen

Kotarba, has also taken the lead on coordinating restoration of the other municipally-owned works of outdoor sculpture around the city. In the case of bronze sculptures, the restoration work typically involves gently washing metal surfaces damaged by years of acid rain and other environmental effects and then applying a wax coating to protect the surface from further damage. Such treatment is not a one-time endeavor, however. Because wax wears away, conservators need to reapply the coating every few years to make sure the sculptures remain protected.

Baltimore was one of the first cities in the nation to design a program to care for municipally-owned outdoor monuments. Tatti, 49, turned out to be a fortuitous choice to serve as conservator. Born and raised in New York, he studied art conservation in Italy and has been restoring art for more than 25 years. In the late 1970s, as chief conservator of sculpture at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, he restored sculptures by Auguste Rodin and Henry Moore, among others. He also has worked with the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and many other museums. Kotarba recalls that her agency considered other specialists but decided to work with Tatti because the staff liked his approach to conservation. While others either advocated harsher cleaning methods that could permanently damage bronzes or insisted that outdoor sculptures be moved indoors, she says, he favored a more gentle wash-and-wax procedure that protected sculptures while enabling them to remain outside. He also came highly recommended by Terry Weisser, director of conservation and technical research at the Walters Art Gallery.

Today, Tatti says, he doesn't like to begin a restoration unless the owner is committed to a program of continual maintenance for the sculpture as well. After a work of art is treated the first time, he says, it's relatively easy to apply additional protective coatings. But "it's not fair to treat them unless you're going to maintain them," he says. In Baltimore, there's a line item for monument restoration in the city's budget -- about \$10,000 a year. Tatti says he thinks it's a remarkable feat that Baltimore supported the effort for nearly 20 years, in good times and lean times. "I believe that we are unique in American cities, in that we have been able to sustain this for two decades," says Kotarba, who has served as executive director of the preservation commission for most of that time.

Initially, all of the monument restoration funds came from the city. In recent years, the city has tried to raise private funds through an Adopt-A-Monument program to supplement the public funds that are available. Many of the sculptures in Mount Vernon have been adopted by institutions such as Agora Inc., the Time Group, the Peabody Institute and the Walters Art Gallery, but the city has many other works that still need to be adopted. At a time when many cities don't have sufficient funds for police protection and education, some might consider restoration of public monuments a luxury. But Tatti says he believes the work can pay big dividends for cities that set up a long-term program -- especially cities steeped in history the way Baltimore is. "These monuments go back to the beginning of the city," he says. "They're just as much a part of Baltimore's fabric and cultural identity as Camden Yards."

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