

# Sculptor seeks to reveal the sacred within nature

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

SODUS — Metal sculptor Marte Cellura said his father still chuckles about the irony of his son's chosen vocation.

"My father was a sheet metal worker," Cellura explained. "I grew up in the shop.

"I was determined to be a white-collar type who never got dirty," Cellura said. "My father still laughs because I get dirtier than he ever got."

Cellura is getting dirty these days while earning recognition for his metal pieces, which now can be found in homes, business and galleries from Chicago to Washington, D.C.



Cellura's wall relief of the Annunciation adorns the new wing of the mausoleum at Rochester's Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

In the Rochester region, which has been home to the Cleveland-born artist since 1978, Cellura's sculptures grace a number of local businesses and churches.

The artist's work can be found in such churches as Holy Cross in Charlotte (the first church for which he produced pieces); Assumption of Our Lady Church, Fairport, for which he built the columbarium door; St. Patrick, Elmira; and St. Mary, Canandaigua.

One of the most extensive church projects Cellura has undertaken was a project for Our Lady of Lourdes in Brighton. He designed the altar and lectern, made the tabernacle and baptismal font, and created the statues of St. Bernadette Soubirous and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Cellura also made a bronze wall relief of the Annunciation for Holy Sepulchre Cemetery's mausoleum, and has repaired statues and pieces for a number of churches.

Probably Cellura's most recognizable work, however, is often mistakenly credited to another metal sculptor.

In 1982, Cellura opened his first studio in an abandoned warehouse off Rochester's North Goodman Street. That warehouse gradually attracted a number of small business and became known as Peddler's Village.

As the "village" continued to grow, the owners commissioned Cellura to make metal gates. They were so pleased with his work that they changed the name of the complex from Peddler's Village to Village Gate Square.

Although Cellura spent a year designing and constructing the 10,000 pound gate, most people who see it assume it is the work of well-known Rochester sculptor Albert Paley. The confusion is not surpris-

ing considering that Cellura studied as an apprentice under Paley from 1978-80.

Yet it is surprising that Cellura came to study with Paley, or even became a sculptor in the first place.

While growing up in Cleveland, Cellura had no thoughts of becoming an artist. His artistic endeavors at the time were for his own entertainment, he said.

Seeking instead a white-collar career, Cellura entered Kent State University in 1969 intending to earn a degree in business.

But on May 4, 1970, Cellura witnessed the shooting of four students by National Guardsmen on the the university's campus. He had not been part of the protest that led to the shootings, but what he saw deeply affected him.

The shootings — coupled with what he called the "spirit of the time" — led him to switch his major to English. "I decided that teaching and writing was a more viable way to live," the sculptor noted.

After graduating in 1974, Cellura landed a teaching job. But he was let go at the end of the school year, and began searching for another way to support himself while writing. He took a job as a reporter with a weekly newspaper in downstate New York, continuing to write fiction and poetry on his own.

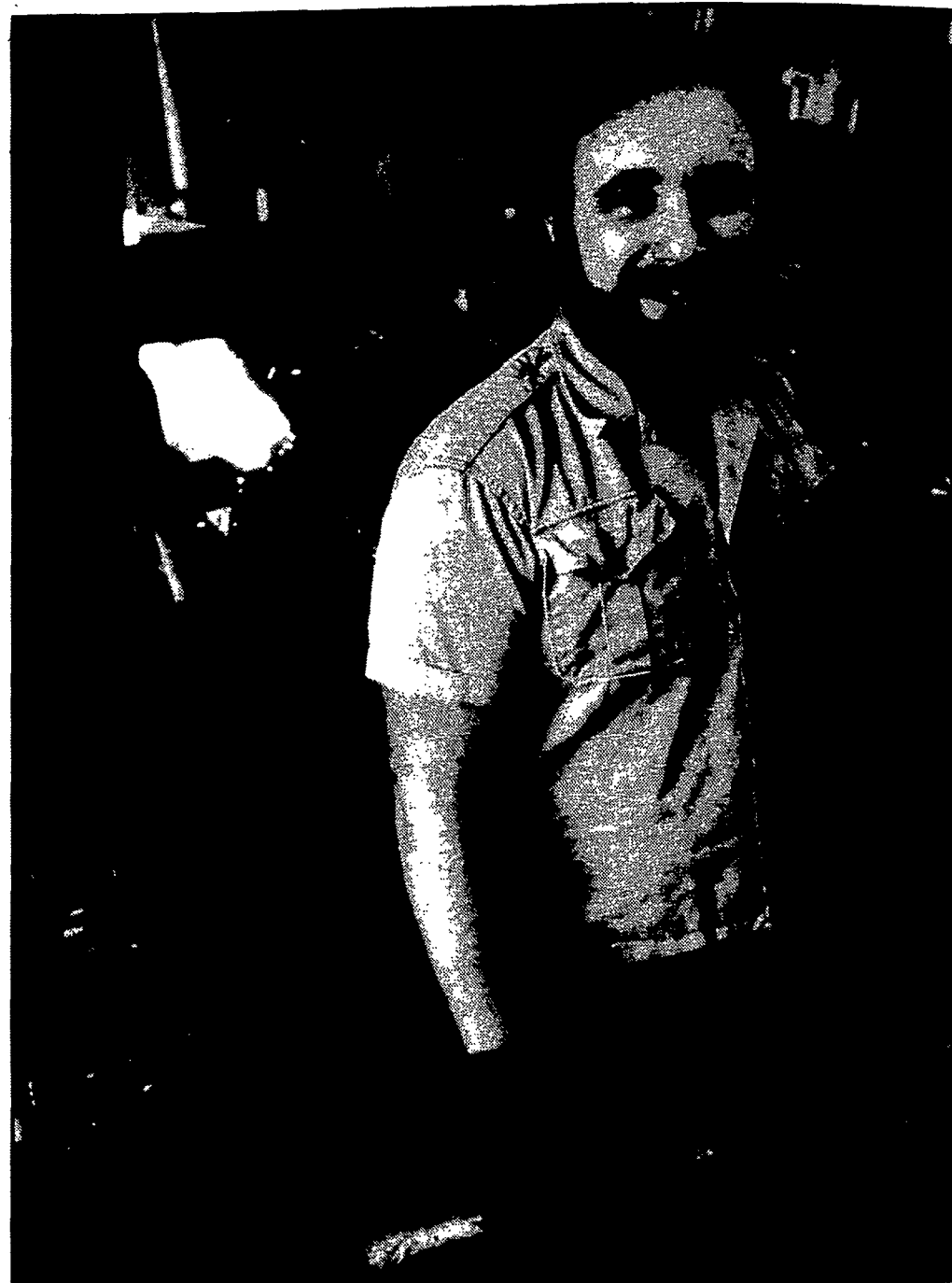
While visiting friends in Connecticut in 1975, Cellura came across a blacksmith shop that produced custom metal works for individuals, galleries and gift shops. He was immediately attracted to the work, quit his reporting job and signed on as an apprentice.

Cellura saw in metal working similarities to writing.

"It's something that deals with the same amount of concentration that you do in writing, except you apply it to the metal," Cellura said. At the same time, he discovered that while writing was a mental act, metal working required the full concentration of both body and mind. "I found it almost a physical meditation," he said. "You can concentrate mind and body on it."

In addition, the results of metal working were more immediate than those of writing, he observed.

"There's an accomplishment there," Cellura remarked. "At the end of the day you can point to something you did, as



Susan S. Petersen

Metalsmithing has changed little since ancient times according to Marte Cellura, who works with raw materials rather than pieces of scrap metal.

opposed to a bunch of papers. It had a higher degree of reality."

When work slowed down at the shop in 1976, Cellura returned to the Cleveland area, where he lived on a farm converted into an artists' community. He lived there until he met Paley in 1978, and came to Rochester to serve as his apprentice.

After leaving Paley in 1980, Cellura began to pursue his own career as an artist. To support himself, he took jobs with several Rochester construction companies, working with structural steel. That experience, he said, was as valuable as the time he spent with Paley, because it taught him about such concepts as structural engineer-

ing and working with architectural blueprints.

Once he established his own studio, Cellura continued to work with architects and construction companies on commission, and it was through such contacts that he began to produce work for churches in 1985.

More and more churches were undertaking renovations because their older art works were wearing out or breaking, and because liturgical style had changed as a result of the Second Vatican Council, Cellura said. Few artists were available

Continued on page 11



In the studio he built 16 years ago adjacent to his home in Sodus, Marte Cellura strikes while the iron is hot. Once the metal is heated, it is pliable for only 30 to 90 seconds.