

Stones speak to sculptor

CARVING VETERAN HUMBLD BY CHALLENGE OF MEDIUM

• STORY BY JEROME WATT •
• PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE SOMERVILLE •

When stones talk, Ruth Devor listens. "The stone speaks to you," the 61-year-old sculptor said. "It really does speak to you."

And the stone always guides Ms Devor to spectacular works of art.

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Ms Devor's stone sculptures have appeared in galleries across North America and she has instructed students in the art at the Royal Ontario Museum and

She has had a "love affair" with the medium for more than 30 years, perfecting her technique in San Miguel, Mexico and Pietrasanta, Italy.

"I find it spiritual," she said while sitting in her small Thornhill gallery that displays her life's work.

Ms Devor prefers to work in abstract forms, rather than following a model.

"I don't particularly like realistic work," she said.

Ms Devor worked on sculpting a female face in the past.

"It was a Euro-Asian type face; it was really magnificent," she recalled. "I was sanding it at the sink and left it there to dry; when I came back in the morning it was lying on the floor. You couldn't talk to me for a week. I haven't again worked with a face. It was like my friend had died. It was very traumatic."

Ms Devor makes art out of stones with different patterns colour and texture. She uses limestone, marble and granite, to name a few of the rock types she works with.

"The chisel just slides off it," she said of working with granite. "You have to use a grinder."

While Ms Devor puts her effort into shaping a stone,

"That's the spirit of the stone," she said.

Stone is a tough material to work with.

"You can't put back what you remove," Ms Devor said. "I've always felt humble working in this medium. I love stone because it's very challenging."

Ms Devor has always liked working with her hands and has enjoyed knitting, sewing. She has also worked with clay.

Clay and rock sculpting are two different things, Ms Devor said. When an artist works with clay he or she adds material; the key with rock is to remove material.

And an artist needs to be patient in exposing the natural beauty of a stone.

"It's not for everyone," Ms Devor said. "It's a very slow process. I have spent

up to two years (carving) a piece. The more complex, the harder it is to complete." Precision is key.

'Not a lot of people are into sculpture. I don't know why. They want to fill their walls (with paintings) but they want to leave their floors for furniture.'

"If the tools are used improperly," she said, "you can eliminate a large (part) of what you're creating."

Haste definitely makes waste, Ms Devor said.

"If you get tired you can't

rush it," she said. "You have to be aware each stone has its (own) character."

Not only is the process time consuming, but it's also very physically demanding. At the time of the interview, Ms Devor said her hands have ached for several days because of a rush to complete projects for her gallery's opening, which took place Sunday.

Despite the tough physical labour and the length of time needed to complete projects, Ms Devor said people aren't willing to pay the price for her sculptures, which run between \$40 and \$20,000. With the \$20,000 pieces taking two years to complete, Ms Devor said, it's not unreasonable to ask for \$10,000-a-year payment.

"The large pieces are difficult to sell," she said. "Not

a lot of people are into sculpture. I don't know why. They want to fill their walls (with paintings) but they want to leave their floors for furniture."

There was a time when she didn't want to sell her pieces.

"I had been carving for 15 years before I could sell (a piece)," she said. "I just couldn't part with them. They're my babies."

But a well-known instructor in Mexico persuaded Ms Devor to change her mind.

"He told me I was being selfish," she said.

Ms Devor just hopes, someday, people will learn to appreciate the effort and beauty that goes into a sculpture, just as she can see the beauty hidden in raw piece of stone.

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