

STILL YOUNG

Breathing life

into nature's elements

By SHARON ASCHAEK
Toronto Sun

Creating something out of nothing. That's the fascination that has driven the 35-year sculpting career of Ruth Devor, who continues to this day to extract beauty out of nature's raw materials.

"I've always felt that carving is a very spiritual process," says Devor, 59. "It's always a humbling process to breath life into stone that took mother nature billions of years to create."

And just as nature's elements take years and years to evolve, so, too, does it take extra time to forge the perfect piece.

"Carving is so challenging because you can't put back what you remove. It's very time-consuming and takes a lot of patience," says Devor, who has spent up to two years working on a single piece.

The seed for the interest in stone sculpting was planted when the St. Catharines native moved to Toronto in her teens and took some art courses at the Toronto School of Art. She took to the medium instantly, fascinated by the challenge of bringing to life an inanimate piece of nature.

She continued to nurture her interest and develop her skills. In her late 30s, her and a friend

went to the Instituto de Allende in San Miguel, Mexico, a well-established and famous venue for artists worldwide. Up until that point, sculpting had been a hobby she would do in her spare time. But it was in Mexico that Devor had an insight which would change everything.

"One of the professors made a casual remark, he asked me why I wasn't selling my work," Devor says. "It took me by surprise. I told him each and every sculpture is like a child and I couldn't part with them, and he said I was being selfish not to share them with people. I decided when I got home that I would show my work, and that's how things got started."

It was then that Devor's fantastic artistic journey truly took off. To date, she has had her work shown in galleries across Canada in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, and in American cities such as New York, Philadelphia and Chicago.

She also took a trip years later that is a sculptor's must, spending two summers in a small town in Tuscany called Pietrasanta — an artist's haven where the great Michaelangelo practiced his craft.

"There are quarries there and foundries, and artists from around the world come there to do work. It was an awe-inspiring experience," she says.

Today, Devor continues to create pieces for sale and to show her work in galleries. She also shares her experience with aspiring carvers, teaching a 10-week course from her home in Thornhill, and an eight-week course at the Royal Ontario Museum.

She says anyone with an interest can learn to carve, whether or not they are artistic. She teaches students to stay away from following figurative models, encouraging them instead to use their imagination as their guide.

"The stone really speaks to you," she says. "Each stone is unique in character, and you have to work with it and be flexible to accommodate that."

She says it isn't long before most students discover what she herself loves so much about sculpting.

"You totally lose yourself in this medium," Devor says. "It's a flow back and forth between the stone and you, and it's a wonderful escape."

