



Artscape

Soft Rock

by **Brooke Williams**

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The very word "sculpture" conjures up visions of men, Michelangelo perhaps, chiseling away at huge boulders. Contrast this image with Nina Menduni, a young, petite woman creating relatively small, curvaceous statements about femininity and faith.

Menduni may not fit the prototype, but she nevertheless reflects the quiet, unwavering substance of her preferred medium. The artist presents a solo show of work this month at Sharon Weiss Gallery.

Menduni wasn't always a sculptress. She began her career as a painter, until a teaching stint overseas led her to a stone-carving and bronzework class. As she began fashioning blocks of marble into semi-abstract symbols, a passion for sculpting began carving out a place in her heart. It's continued to grow and take shape since.

Although that first class was a decade ago, Menduni has only begun working primarily in sculpture in the last year. More than Dust is her first all-sculpture show, the final piece of her transformation from a manipulator of liquid paint to one of metal and stone.

It's also the first-ever solo sculpture show for Weiss' gallery. "I've had to keep pinching myself because the gallery looks so different," Weiss enthused. "It looks beautiful! Her sculptures are just so fresh and vibrant. We're very excited to have her here."

What: "More than Dust"

When: Through September 3

Where: Sharon Weiss Gallery, Short North

Web: ninamenduni.com

Five new works in marble are the centerpieces of Menduni's show. "They were all inspired by Flight [an earlier work, also on display]," the artist explained. "The idea behind it is complete freedom: physically, spiritually and emotionally. What I was hoping to communicate in these pieces is the same thing except without the female form, which traditionally I used. The idea is the breath of life, or the breath of the divine, if that's not too high of an aspiration."

The pieces use shape to communicate an uplifting swing, and some more obviously symbolic of the feminine form than others.

"A lot of what's repeated are unending lines, which is an eternity symbol," Menduni said. "I tend to work very organically—supple, soft, but strong lines as well. Being a female sculptor with a little bit of an Italian background [laughs], I ended up with a generous, soft female spirit with a very strong disposition."

"For me, sculpture seems to cut through all the crud, and get to who you are at base," she added. "Some of these are a little bit of a self-portrait of the things that are most important to me: ideas of faith and spirituality and having that spirit lifted and released, not being stuck in a vessel, or by a point in time in life, or a stereotype."

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