

SCULPTURE: Artwork captures bonding of mom, baby

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By [Jill Laster](#)

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Susanna Wesley gave birth to 19 children -- including son John, who would one day start the Methodist movement.

Riverside Methodist Hospital, rooted in the faith, is the scene of 7,000 deliveries a year.

The hospital will thus honor Mrs. Wesley and all new mothers with an 8-foot marble sculpture created by Columbus native Nina Menduni.

"When we saw Nina's concept, we thought it truly captured the poignant first embrace between a mother and child," said Jann Marks, chief nursing officer at Riverside. "It was perfect."

Susanna -- First Meeting, to be unveiled Tuesday, depicts a mother lovingly cradling her newborn.

It will grace the newly renovated Women's Center, which houses the maternity ward and other services related to women's health.

The sculpture, made from a 24,000-pound slab of marble in Italy, represents a journey of nine months (no, the irony isn't lost on the artist) and 4,000 miles.

Menduni, who splits time between Columbus and Pietrasanta, chose to work in the Italian city because of its large sculpting community and the hard white Carrara marble mined from nearby quarries.

From a 4-foot model she created, the artist started the sculpture in October -- with three women as models for the mother, plus pictures of children for the baby.

A four-person team helped complete the full-size sculpture.



Photo by: Tom Dodge,
Columbus Dispatch

Nina Menduni with
her work *Susanna --
First Meeting*, to be
unveiled Tuesday at
Riverside Methodist
Hospital

Video

- [Motherly Mold](#)

Communicating an artistic vision is difficult enough in English, Menduni said, but discussing such an idea in Italian -- and hers isn't bad -- is tricky because of accents and dialects.

What's more, given the male-dominated field of sculpting, some of the workers initially struggled with taking instruction from a woman, she said.

Two months ago, *Susanna* was ready for shipment -- a three-week process -- to the United States. The sculpture was crated and sent by boat to New York, then driven by truck to Columbus.

Last week, during a small gathering of family and friends, the piece was uncrated at the Columbus Art Memorial plant (owned by the artist's father) and placed upright so Menduni could add finishing touches and sign the work.

"A sculpture adds life," the 34-year-old said. "This was made completely by hand; this wasn't made by a machine. There's human error, but there's also human creativity."

Many other sculptors couldn't accomplish what she did, said Columbus artist Alfred Tibor, who has known Menduni since her teenage years.

"This statue shows humanity," Tibor said. "If we lose humanity, we lose everything." When she was told of the project about a year ago, Menduni was eager to submit a proposal, even though the work was unlike the art -- mostly abstract pieces -- she had created in her two years of full-time sculpting.

Having the sculpture showcased in her hometown, she said, equals a dream come true. "Usually, with a project of this magnitude, people want to give it to someone from outside Ohio, . . . someone with a bigger name.

"But, you know, they had faith in me."