

ROCHESTER MUSEUM AND SCIENCE CENTER
Office of Public Information
For release Sunday, September 21 [1969]

STRIKING MODERN SCULPTURE COMMISSIONED FOR PLANETARIUM

A fourteen-foot high strikingly handsome piece of contemporary sculpture has been commissioned by the Strasenburgh Planetarium from an internationally famous Italian sculptor.

The energy-charged bronze work of art is designed for the center of the grassy, circular turnaround which is part of the East Avenue approach to the Planetarium.

The commission was awarded to Francesco Somaini of Milan, Italy, whose design was selected from preliminary models and sketches submitted by four internationally known sculptors.

The winning sculpture will be an obliquely thrusting shaft of polished and rough metal which contrasts beautifully with the composure of the Planetarium's quiet spiral-and-dome form (itself the recipient of several design awards).

Some surfaces of the bronze work will be polished to a golden shiny appearance, while folds and inner surfaces will be rough and encrusted — a feature typical of Somaini's work.

Planetarium architect Carl F.W. Kaelber, Jr., a member of the selection committee, points out that the appearance of the work will change as you walk (or drive) around it and as the quality of the light changes.

To Ian McLennan, Director of the Strasenburgh Planetarium, the sculpture suggests the force of an exploding rocket thrust or the dynamics of a meteor shattering against a resisting surface.

Of one of his works, commissioned for Baltimore's Center Plaza, similar in technique — though not in form — to the Planetarium sculpture, Somaini has said:

“The whole sculpture itself shows the same contrast (i.e. between the polished and smooth surfaces) in the fate of man. There is resistance of matter versus human energy. It's a monument to human energy, but you can't forget that which remains to be done, the unfinished part...”

In discussing his technique, Somaini says that the idea occurred to him when he toured a metallurgical factory and was fascinated with the contrast between raw materials and the finished product.

It seemed to him, he's said, that the finished work somehow lacked "humanity." The unfinished, rough work still showed the trace of the human being who created it — and it was from this point that Somaini's technique developed.

His work is represented in the collections of Lincoln Center (as a donation by Mrs. John D. Rockefeller), The Museum of Modern Art, The Chase Manhattan Bank, The Baltimore Art Museum, The Albright-Knox Museum and in the private collections of Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, Architect Philip Johnson, Stanley Marcus, William Paley, Mrs. Richard Rogers, and New York Times Art Critic John Canaday.

Commenting on the selection of Somaini's model, Carl Kaelber says: "The decision was a very difficult one to make. The quality of the work submitted by all the entrants was extremely high."

Artists submitting work were William Sellers, a Rochester sculptor whose work is among those in the Sculpture Court of the Memorial Art Gallery, Giuseppe Macri, of Rome, Italy; Hilda Morris, of Portland, Ore.; all distinguished sculptors.

The choice was made by a committee which included Carl F.W. Kaelber, Jr., of the architectural firm of Waasdorp, Northrup and Kaelber; Emil Muller; Mrs. E. G. Strassenburgh; Harris Prior, Director of the Memorial Art Gallery; and Ian McLennan, Director of the Strassenburgh Planetarium.

Purchase of the untitled work was made possible through a \$40,000 gift by Mr. Emil Muller to the Rochester Museum and Science Center. The gift was made specifically for the purchase of the major piece of sculpture for the Planetarium.

Muller was chairman of the building committee for the Planetarium and is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Rochester Museum and Science Center.

The work will be cast and the final polishing done by Somaini in his own foundry. Plans call for the finished work being in place at the time of the Planetarium's second birthday anniversary, September 14, 1970.