

The Star-Ledger

This 'Devil' scores one for a sculptor fan and Newark

Saturday, July 19, 2008

In a city filled with public sculpture, some by America's most noted sculptors, the work of a just-discovered artist will soon be the most visible.



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"It is the dream of every artist to have your work seen," said Jon Krawczyk. "You want people to see it and respond. The size alone will make this piece seen."

Krawczyk's sculpture is a 3-story, brushed stainless steel hockey player that will stand at the corner of Edison Place and Mulberry Street in Newark, on the northeast side of the Prudential Center arena.

It is his largest, and most public, work to date.

"This piece moves my work to a different level. A next step, so to speak."

And while he has many steps to go before he gains the acclaim of, say, Gutzon Borglum, the Mount Rushmore sculptor who has three significant pieces in Newark, Krawczyk's hockey player will get as much eye traffic as Borglum's epic "Wars of America" in Military Park.

The hockey player will be outside the entrance closest to Penn Station, and will glow with all the electricity of any big event night at the arena. It will be visible by train, by air, and by thousands of office workers in the glass-and-steel buildings of Newark's Gateway area.

"It won't be like a mirror, but the brushed stainless steel reflects light almost like a diamond," Krawczyk said. "You'll see all different colors and light, from all different angles."

The hockey player, which weighs more than 6,000 pounds, is balanced on one leg, with stick and shoulder raised, in the motion of firing a slapshot. The unnamed sculpture is no ordinary sports figure. The artist calls it "abstract, expressionistic," like most of his work.

While many stadia have sculptures as monuments to former great players, Krawczyk's vision was not to immortalize one man, but to create an icon for the city and the team he rooted for growing up in Boonton Township.

"I was a big Devils fan growing up, and when I heard about the new arena, I wanted to do a hockey sculpture."

Krawczyk got in touch with Michael Gilfillan, one of the co-owners of the Devils, who he knew from their days at Delbarton, and pitched the idea. Gilfillan and principal owner Jeff Vanderbeek liked the concept, and Krawczyk suddenly found himself with a dream job, as an artist and a Devils fan.

"I wanted to meld those things together – to do a sports sculpture that could be appreciated as art."

He built the statue in his Malibu studio and unveiled it there a few weeks ago. At the end of August, he will

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The plaza has been repaved and fresh Devils and Prudential logos have been put down.

"My plan was always to have it installed by the season opener," said Krawczyk. "I hope they're ready for it."

Actually, he hopes it can go earlier, because he has a one-man show opening at the Broadfoot & Broadfoot Gallery in Manhattan on Sept. 6.

The artist said installation is pretty simple.

"We have to dig a hole, bring in a crane and drop it in the hole, bolt it down and cover the base with concrete. I have to weld one leg and the stick back on, on site, then clean it up a little."

When it is done, it will join an inventory of impressive outdoor art in Newark; Karl Gerhardt's "Seth Boyden" in Washington Park and "Frederick T. Frelinghuysen" at Military Park; Borglum's "Abraham Lincoln" at the Historic Essex Courthouse and his "Puritan and Indian" near the Newark Public Library; Diane Moore's "Justice" outside the newer federal courthouse.

And while the hockey player is not a historic figure, or a monument to an ideal, it will be a new Newark landmark.

"I know a lot of people going to the games will tell their friends, 'Meet me by the hockey guy,'" Krawczyk said.

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