

# City & Region

Tuesday, December 2, 1997



The Philadelphia Inquirer / AKIRA SUWA

At his studio, Zenos Frudakis works on a life-size bust of Frank Rizzo, which he uses as a reference for the statue (left). He expects to finish it early next year.

## Sculptor brings Rizzo to life in bronze

*Through his art, Zenos Frudakis is "revolting against death and time."*

By Lea Sitton Stanley  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Before he made an elephant, Zenos Frudakis got tickled by pachyderm trunks.

The sculptor stood in the elephant yard at the Philadelphia Zoo while three proboscises skittered from his shoes up all 6 feet, 2 inches of him. "I touched the sternum and I felt the bones," said Frudakis, who folded his frame into a squat and slipped under an elephant to get a better take on how the real thing is put together.

Then, he went back to his studio and built an anatomical model of an elephant. From there, he took the project big-as-life,

creating a bronze statue, the *Elephant and Boy Fountain*, which stands in a pool in the Burlington Center mall in South Jersey.

Frudakis is into making everlasting life. Asked once why he sculpts, the artist said, "It is a way of revolting against death and time." Asked his age, he paused, then said, "I was born in 1951. How old would that make me?" (46).

These days, Frudakis is defying death and time to bring back Frank Rizzo, the Philadelphia political titan snatched from life in 1991. He's been working on a nine-foot bronze statue of the former mayor off

and on for about three years and expects to finish by late February or early March.

"They're wondering if it's really happening," Frudakis said of the people backing the statue, for which he has received a \$100,000 commission. A committee including Rizzo's son, Frank S. Rizzo, and the younger Rizzo's cousin Lou Cissone has raised about \$115,000 toward a goal of \$175,000, which would also cover an endowment for maintenance.

"I've been up there several times," Cissone said of the carriage-house studio behind the sculptor's home in Glenside. "He continues to play with it until it's super-

perfect."

The Rizzo committee asked several artists for proposals. "All of them were very good," Cissone said, but Frudakis' work was "lifelike."

That lifelike quality is exactly what Frudakis captured in a statue of Fritz Brennan, the Lower Merion High School football coach who died in 1988.

Bob Sergott, a neuro-ophthalmologist who served on a committee that raised money for the Brennan memorial, said he was impressed when he first saw Frudakis' work. "It really not only depicted the See **SCULPTOR** on B6

# Sculptor is bringing Rizzo to life — in a bronze statue

**SCULPTOR** from B1 person and their likeness, but there really was a personality to it."

Frudakis' 7½-foot bronze of Brennan was unveiled on the school's football field in 1990.

"We supplied Zenos with pictures," Sergott said. "Fritz's son went out and posed for Zenos. ... He really got to know the person as best he could."

"I try to get some life and a sense of vitality in the sculpture," said Frudakis, who calls himself a "visual biographer." It's tough to do when the subject isn't around to sit for him.

"There's a life quality that's very difficult to know about from photographs," the sculptor said. But sometimes, as with Rizzo and Brennan, snapshots are the best he can do.

Scores of photographs of the former mayor and police commissioner are tacked on boards that are propped on easels or leaning on easel-legs in the studio. Snapshots of a Rizzo look-alike, who posed for Frudakis, cover two more boards. A handful of videotapes are stashed in a cardboard box.

(The sculptor didn't need a photograph for the mayor's clothes. "I have Rizzo's shoes here, and his suit. When his son came in, he said, 'Oh, that's the suit he died in.'")

Frudakis has spent a year on Rizzo's head alone. "The bust has been difficult because he had certain qualities that are hard to get into clay or bronze ... dynamic qualities." He said he had the same trouble with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose bronze bust he did for the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria, South Africa.

With the Rizzo statue, Frudakis is producing a full-scale model, which will eventually be trucked to the Laran Bronze foundry in Chester in nine to 12 pieces and cast in bronze.

Frudakis started the project with a photograph of the mayor, who was elected in 1971 and served two terms, marching in the 1972 St. Patrick's Day parade. Rizzo's right hand is raised in a wave. His wife, Carmella, and son picked the photograph — independently of each other.

"Somehow, they felt that epitomized him," Frudakis said.

In his model for the statue, the sculptor kept the posture, aged Rizzo's face a bit, and altered his legs so he would look as if he's walking down stairs. The plan is to put him on the steps in front of the Municipal Services Building.

"I've never seen a sculpture going down the stairs," Frudakis said. "It's more contemporary in a sense that it takes us down from the pedestal."



The Philadelphia Inquirer / AKIRA SUWA

**Zenos Frudakis**, in his studio in Glenside, has been working on the Rizzo statue off and on for three years.

The message: "They walk among us. They're human and they have their foibles."

In keeping with that notion of Joe Leader, Rizzo's son had wanted to make the statue life-size — 6-foot-3. Frudakis said no.

"The figures all around City Hall are nine feet," the sculptor said. Rizzo wouldn't look life-size in that company, he'd look puny.

Rizzo isn't Frudakis' first politician, or Philadelphia mayor. A five-by-four-foot bronze bas-relief of Richardson Dilworth, who ran the city from 1956 to 1962, hangs at Philadelphia International Airport, in the international terminal named for him. And the artist has done busts of W. Wilson Goode, mayor from 1984 to 1992, and Joseph Coleman, once president of City Council.

While working on the Rizzo statue, Frudakis also has been juggling other projects. He has created a seven-foot bronze of Ellis Arnall, a governor of Georgia who served from 1943 to 1947, which stands outside the state capitol in Atlanta. And he finished a seven-footer of Bobby Jones that is headed for the Golf Hall of Fame in Augusta, Ga. Another Frudakis statue, of Arnold Palmer leaning on a club, already stands at the Hall of Fame.

Frudakis has lived in the Philadelphia area since 1972. The son of Greek immigrants, he grew up in Gary, Ind. He arrived in Philadelphia with a scholarship to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Later, he studied at the University of Pennsylvania, where he received bachelor's and master's degrees in fine art.

While working on his degrees, he apprenticed to his half-brother, sculptor EvAngelos Frudakis, for 10 years. In 1976, the two established the now-shuttered Frudakis Academy of the Fine Arts, at 18th and Chestnut Streets. Zenos Frudakis taught there, as well as at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia and Rutgers University in Camden.

For all that, Frudakis is not a high-profile figure around Philadelphia.

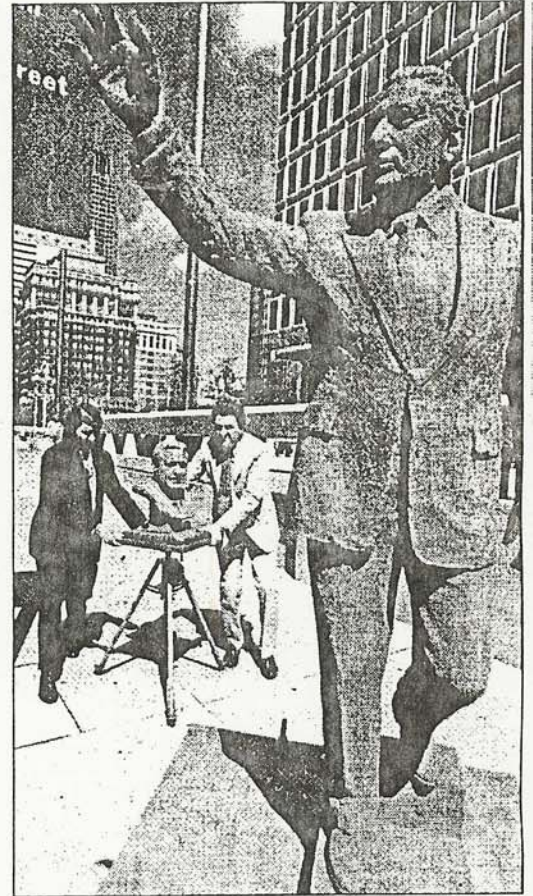
"He's better known in Japan than he is here," said Bob Sergott, who learned about the artist through a Forbes magazine piece on a trend of top executives immortalizing themselves in bronze. Frudakis was the only American artist invited to exhibit at the Third Rodin Grand Prize Exhibition in 1990 at Japan's Hakone Open-Air Museum, where he received the Hakone Award.

Japan got *Reaching*. The two nude figures — a male and female in joyous dance — were drawn from Frudakis' favorite of his own works, *Dream to Fly*. *Dream* is a fountain statue, a series of three seven-foot bronze figures rising 21 feet from a pool 80 feet around. The work was commissioned for the Colwick Office Complex in Cherry Hill by developers Rouse & Associates.

"*Dream to Fly* is my favorite because it's a little more about ... the artist's dream to try to escape ultimate death through art," Frudakis said. "You create meaning in life, you create yourself, and I do try to do it through my art."

For him, *Dream* illustrates the movement through three stages of development. The bottom figure, a male, reaches toward a female figure, who reaches toward the top, male figure. "The top figure is twisting out of one plane into another," Frudakis has said. "It's an escape from gravity — gravity representing a pull towards mortality, towards death."

The sculptor's studio bristles with that struggle for immortality. A plaster figure of a nude female stretches toward the ceiling, a model of a completed bronze that now rises above the Pacific Ocean from the balcony of a private home in Laguna Beach, Calif. Near the plaster nude is a wolf, twin to the one in



The Philadelphia Inquirer / RON CORTES

**Zenos Frudakis** (right) and Councilman Frank Rizzo moving a bust of the elder Rizzo in May. Frudakis put a three-foot model (foreground) outside the Municipal Services Building to see how it would look.

*Irish Wolfhound and Wolf*. That sculpture stands in coastal South Carolina's Brookgreen Gardens, billed as the largest outdoor sculpture display in the world. And lining the walls is bust after bust, most of them in plaster: Goode and Joe Coleman, Abraham Lincoln, a sculptor friend and others.

"They're milestones for me in my life," Frudakis said, looking around at the statues and busts. "These are my children."

These are his ticket to immortality.