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C1 November 11–17, 2016
EPOCH TIMES



Sabin Howard at his studio in the Bronx, New York, on Sept. 13.

SCULPTOR SABIN HOWARD IN SERVICE OF SOMETHING BIGGER

*World War I national memorial
work in progress*

By Milene Fernandez | Epoch Times Staff

NEW YORK—Sabin Howard is in the throes of a monumental task. The master sculptor has to conceptualize a horrific slice of history and then translate it into a sculptural form that is engaging and worthy of honoring incredible sacrifice.

“It’s pretty epic when you lose 10,000 people every hour,” he said.

Nearly a year ago, Howard and the young visionary architect Joe Weishaar won the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission’s competition to create a national memorial at Pershing Park in Washington, with views to the White House.

During the last five months of the U.S. involvement, which effectively ended the war, more than 53,000 U.S. soldiers died. Overall, after 1,560 days of fighting, more than 16 million lives, military and civilian, were lost worldwide.

The commission is looking to raise \$50 million in private funds for the National World War I Memorial and hopes to inaugurate it on Nov. 11, 2018, the 100th anniversary of the end of the war.

Howard envisions a visual narrative of World War I that will help people contemplate our shared humanity, for many generations to come.

He called his in-progress design “a soldier’s journey.”

“I’ve redesigned the whole thing at least a dozen times,” he said, looking at a long scroll of photographs on his studio floor in the Bronx in September. It showed models in dynamic poses, wearing World War I uniforms from 100 years ago.

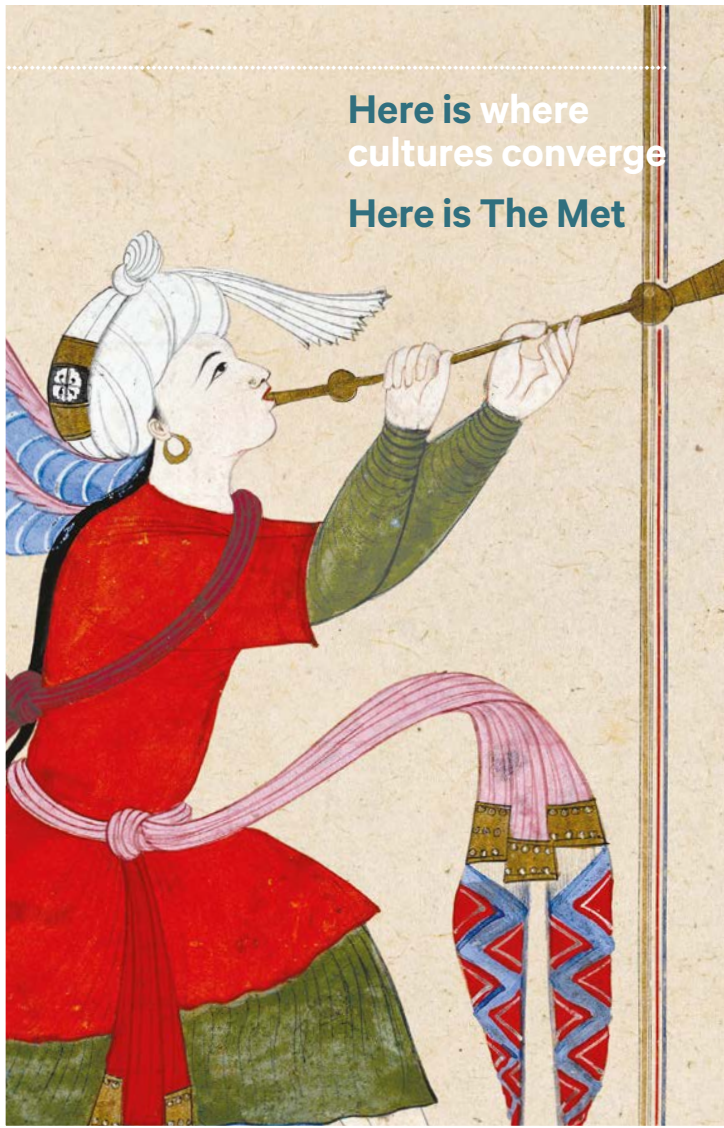
He’s had several sessions with models. He directs them to move in slow motion and takes photographs of the poses, gestures, and expressions he wants to convey. From the photographs, he makes sculptural-looking drawings as references for a three-dimensional maquette (scaled model), from which the actual monument will be created.

Currently, he’s working on the blueprint for his latest redesign of the memorial: an 81-foot-long bas-relief depicting about 40 figures, to be cast in bronze. In terms of scale, it’s nearly two-thirds the length of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling, and it will be the largest figurative sculpture created in the United States and Europe since the Albert Memorial in London was completed 144 years ago.

See Monument on C2

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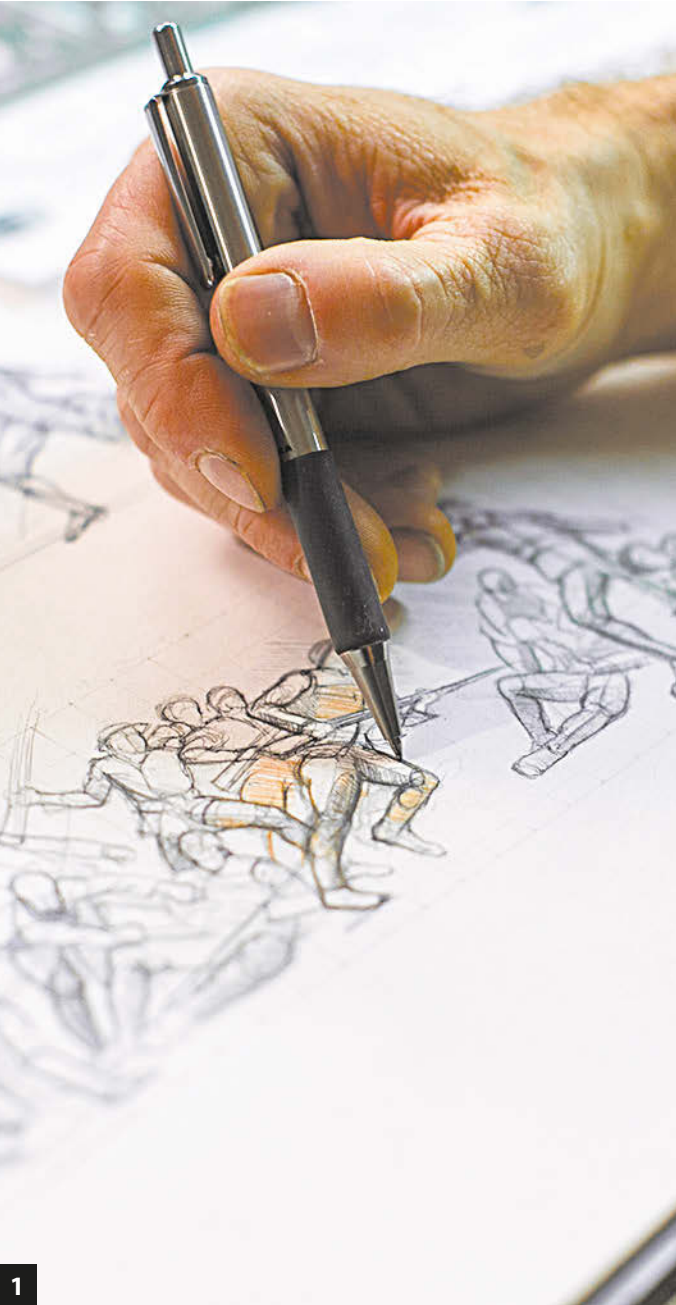
Now through January 8

The exhibition is made possible by The David Berg Foundation; The al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait; the Sherman Fairchild Foundation; the William S. Lieberman Fund; The Polonsky Foundation; Diane Carol Brandt; The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts; and Mary and Michael Jaharis.

Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

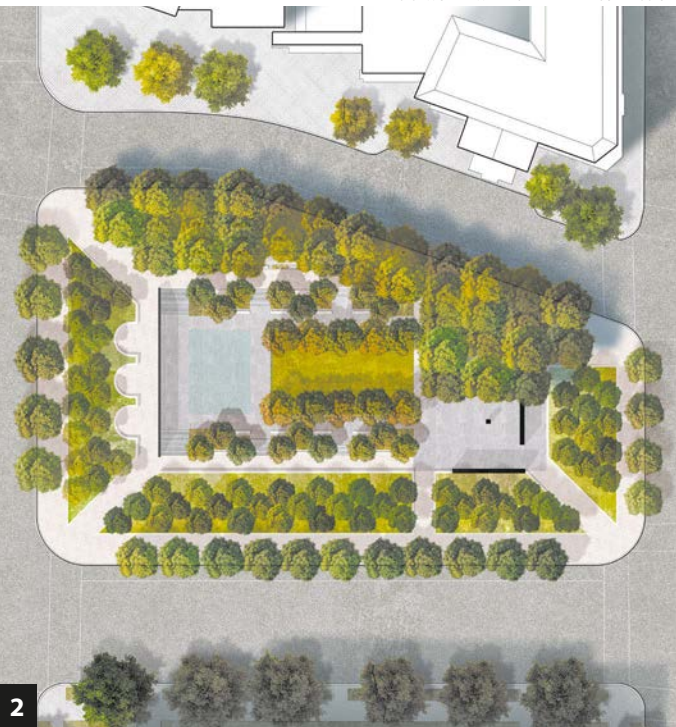
The Archangel Israfil (detail) from The Wonders of Creation and Oddities of Existence (‘Ajaib al-Makhlūqat’) by al-Ghawini, Egypt or Syria, late 14th–early 15th century, opaque watercolor and ink on paper, British Museum, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

BENJAMIN CHASTEEN/EPOCH TIMES



1

U.S. WORLD WAR I CENTENNIAL COMMISSION



2

MILENE FERNANDEZ/EPOCH TIMES



3

SCULPTOR SABIN HOWARD IN SERVICE OF SOMETHING BIGGER

World War I national memorial
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“

I’m working on myself internally, improving my skills, so that I can do this externally because a lot of people got killed. I have to honor them and do them justice.

Sabin Howard

The models who worked with Howard wore genuine World War I uniforms.



BENJAMIN CHASTEEN/EPOCH TIMES

Monument continued from C1

The architect, Weishaar, already went through several redesign rounds with the commission and various government regulatory agencies (including the Commission of Fine Art, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the National Park Service) to more or less finalize the park’s design, which includes a reflective pool.

Now it’s Howard’s turn to respond to all of the feedback from the agencies for the sculptural element of the monument. So far, the commission has approved a design concept, but the final plans are still subject to change before final approval from all of the agencies.

“This is all in process,” he said, showing the revised drawings he made from the photographic scroll. “But the general idea has stayed the same. You have a family, civilian life; then transition or entry; the battle scene at the center; the cost of war; and then the exit.”

In the drawing, the soldier’s daughter serves as the bookends to the story. The soldier leaves

his family to go to war, gets wounded in combat, loses his mind, and then fights an uphill battle to finally return to his family.

A pile of helmets represents his dead comrades. On the far right of the wall, his daughter holds a helmet upside down and looks into it as if it is a vessel. “She holds history in her hands and looks into the future. The helmet is like the crystal ball. That’s the metaphor. World War I was the segue to World War II,” Howard explained.

“World War I is very much a forgotten war,” Edwin Fountain, vice chair of the World War One Centennial Commission, said. It hardly registers in popular memory. Yet all of the conflicts we are engaged with around the world today trace back to World War I. Considering the nearly 5 million Americans who served and who actually helped end the war, a memorial in Washington has long been overdue, he says.

Elevating Through Collaboration

After having sculpted on his own for more than 30 years, Howard feels that the intensive, col-





laborative nature of creating a work of public art has elevated his creative process.

“I see things that other people don’t see because of my training and because of what I do. In the beginning I naively thought they [the commission and agencies] would see the same things that I see—not!” he said laughing. “The last criticism I received was that I had too many guys screaming in the middle.” He was trying to respond to their feedback to introduce more emotion, but realized he needed more variety.

“I have to be strong enough to be able to take the criticism. It takes a lot of internal fortitude. ... I’m learning to become more humble,” he said.

After another round of meetings in November, his outlook on the collaborative process opened up more. In the beginning, he did not want to include any dead figures because he felt that it was important to glorify the human spirit, not war. But later, he agreed to include a foxhole with a soldier coming out of it and at least one dead figure. “That’s actually a really good metaphor for the end of a form of society

that is no longer in existence,” he said.

While everything he designs has to be vetted, and while he’s open to all of the feedback, he’s confident about staying true to his artistic ethos and vision.

“I went through a period when I would be drawing, and I would start crying because I understand how bad World War I was. If you see a guy who gets run over on the street, that’s pretty upsetting. Now multiply that by thousands—10,000 dead every hour, 50,000 every day. That’s too much to take. People became mentally unhinged,” he said.

Despite the brutality, what made World War I memorable and noble was the sacrifice of those who served, and the connections forged between people. That’s why Howard decided it was important to include at least 30 or 40 figures depicting a cohesive narrative to show the magnitude of those sacrifices. “so that you get a sense of how vast and deep and epic it was,” he said.

See Monument on C4

- (1) An earlier version of Sabin Howard's design concept for the national World War I memorial.
- (2) Design of the National World War I Memorial Pershing Park site plan, computer rendered by Joe Weishaar.
- (3) Sabin Howard at his studio in the Bronx, New York, on Nov. 2.
- (4) Sabin Howard at his studio on Nov. 2.
- (5) Computer rendering of the National World War I Memorial by Joe Weishaar.



Fragment of a small bas-relief sculpture “Thinking States” by Sabin Howard. The sculpture for the World War I memorial will be a relief extending across an 81-foot-long wall, depicting about 40 figures, cast in bronze.

SEQUENCE of CREATIVE PROCESS



Models in Action



Photo Scrolls



Drawings

The next step after the final design concept is approved will be a three-dimensional maquette (scaled model).



SCULPTOR
SABIN HOWARD
IN SERVICE OF
SOMETHING
BIGGER

World War I national memorial
work in progress

Monument continued from C3

A Sculptor’s Journey

Howard grew up in New York City and Torino, Italy. He studied art at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia and then earned his MFA from the New York Academy of Art. He has spent at least 45,000 hours working from life models in the studio.

The Italian artistic influences of the great Renaissance artists are always with him—especially Michelangelo, Rafael, and Da Vinci—and further back to the ancient Greeks, like the sculptor Polykleitus.

Looking at a reproduction of a Michelangelo drawing hanging in his studio, he said: “It’s so cool. It’s like a higher level of consciousness.” He’s been reading books about the 15th-century masters and turns to them for guidance and solace.

“It’s like different characters [artists] running the same script,” he said. They all faced the same kinds of challenges, went through the same dilemmas and problems, and had to deal with the same kinds of egos and characters. “I’m not the first soul on the planet that experienced this. I’m not the last one either. I’m just one guy who’s in this humanity,” Howard said, chuckling.

His classical sculptures of Greek Gods—Hermes, Apollo, and Aphrodite, among others—in clay, plaster, and bronze, surrounded him, leaving minimum floor space in his studio. “I worked through 65 to 70 hours a week drawing this summer. It’s just a lot of focus,” he said. Despite the plaster dust filling the air, the idealized nude sculptures felt vibrant, as if they could move any second.



Sabin Howard at his studio in the Bronx, New York, on Sept. 13.

“
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Sabin Howard

“There is beauty, and beauty is not in the eye of the beholder,” he said repudiating any kind of relativism in matters of aesthetics. His knowledge of anatomy, for an artist, is off the charts. “The human body is incredibly complex and amazing. ... Representing ourselves at our highest level has always been my dream as an artist.”

Just as gifted in running his own business as he is in creating art, Howard has been directly marketing his own work and selling it to over 300 collectors who commission his work. It was only two years ago that he decided he wanted to make public art on a grand scale. It’s a more powerful arena for making a difference in the art world and in uplifting people’s consciousness, he says.

If Howard were just working for himself, his design would probably look more analytical and more classical, but the collaborative process has pushed him into infusing more emotion into the figures in the relief sculpture.

Inadvertently, his focus has turned from himself to thinking of others. Besides a high level of skill and a drive for excellence, that shift in spirit is perhaps the prime characteristic that distinguishes a master artist from a mediocre artist.

“I’m adding another piece to the puzzle of what is going on in the art world. This work is in service of some higher ideal,” he said. It’s spurring him to change internally. As he elevates himself spiritually through his artistry, his artwork, in turn, becomes more profound and uplifting.

“It’s a symbiotic relationship. I am what I do and what I do is who I am. It flows back and forth,” he said.

“I’m working on myself internally, improving my skills, so that I can do this externally because a lot of people got killed. I have to honor them and do them justice.

“Sure, I’m working for the government and for the community, but I’m also working for all of the people who are going to look at it. I want to show that humanity is beautiful despite everything.”

Driving the Tipping Point Forward

The Great War as it was called at the time, the war that didn’t end all wars, changed everything—including art. Collective trauma gave way to irony, cynicism, sarcasm, and a taste for the absurd and nihilistic disillusionment in general. The Dadaist, Surrealist, Expressionist, Futurist, and other artistic movements in Europe, along with Marcel Duchamp in the United States, followed suit, proclaiming thinks like a urinal as pieces of art, and so forth. The moral fabric of society and how it translated into art started to deteriorate at a faster pace. Arguably, it has reached a dead end.

“A tipping point is going on now,” Howard said, referring to the recent slow but steadily increasing resurgence of realist art in the past two decades.

“Art is just a reflection of what is going on underneath the surface. It’s interesting that figurative art is coming back. We are living in a very isolating society. I think there are people who are going back towards representational art because they are looking for a connection to something bigger than



(Above)
“Persistence”
by Sabin
Howard,
bronze
sculpture.



(Left)
Libyan Sibyl
drawing by
Michelangelo.

themselves,” he said.

We are distant enough in time from the horrors of World War I to be able to contemplate its impact in a better and more intelligent way. It’s only fitting and timely that Howard—a living master artist and an authority on modern classicism—is bringing figurative sculpture back onto the world stage.

“I’m paying it forward, I’m pulling that tradition forward,” Howard said several times during the interview in his studio in the Bronx. “I’m in service of something bigger than myself.” The sense of honor and responsibility he carries was palpable.



Sabin Howard works on a bust in his studio.

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