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Canadian Catholic artist Tim Schmalz, a native of St. Jacobs, Ontario, sculpts a figure of Jesus embracing a homeless person Sept. 27, 2022, during the annual national gathering of Catholic Charities agencies at the Hilton Baltimore Inner Harbor on Sept. 27-29. (CNS/Catholic Review/Kevin J. Parks)



by Mike Mastromatteo

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Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz creates from true devotion, [a self-taught sculptor](#) who for more than 30 years has devoted his primarily bronze creations to the glorification of the Catholic Church and the Passion narratives.

Schmalz recently returned from the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis where he did a "live sculpt" of soon-to-be-canonized Blessed Carlo Acutis, the 15-year-old Italian youth who died in 2006 and is known as "the patron saint of the Internet."



At the recent eucharistic congress in Indianapolis, Tim Schmalz performed a "live sculpt" of soon-to-be-canonized Blessed Carlo Acutis. (Tim Schmalz)

"I was the official sculptor of the National Eucharistic Congress," Schmalz said in an interview with NCR. "I decided to create a sculpture of Blessed Carlo. I thought it very symbolic that the eucharistic congress event created a new sculpture of the new young saint."

For Schmalz, sculpture is more than a pastime or an excuse to carve captivating images in bronze. He believes public art — especially large-sized public works — is an ideal way to promote faith and spirituality at a time when so many are looking for something meaningful in their lives.

His "breakthrough" sculpture was the Holy Family's "A Quiet Moment" — a smaller work that was reproduced thousands of times to be made available for individuals and in churches. Schmalz presented his work in person to the late Pope John Paul II.

"We have such a beautiful heritage of art in the church, but so much of it isn't being seen outside of church properties or museums," Schmalz said. "I especially love doing sculpture where the people are and where they can see it 'writ large.' Sculpture allows things to be seen in the world today. That's why I'm putting these things outside."



Tim Schmalz works on "Holy Family: the Quiet Moment." (Courtesy of Tim Schmalz)

His views on large public displays of art will soon be on display for all the world to see. Schmalz is nearing completion on his most comprehensive project to date — the creation of the Gospel Garden at the 17-acre property at the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Queen of the Universe in Orlando, Florida.

"It is my most challenging project to date, because not only does it have the all the Stations of the Cross, it has almost every single parable in the Bible within it, and it

includes more than 140 different saints, the representation of the universe with thousands of different figures in it," he added.

Although many in North America associate Orlando with Disney World and other high-profile attractions, Schmalz believes the tourist attraction is an ideal venue for the Gospel Garden.

"The idea of having a sculpture park is an alternative to the mainstream entertainment that Orlando provides," Schmalz said. "I think it's something that is much needed. I've come to the position that people in our world right now are starving for nourishment, spiritual nourishment. They're hungry. Many people, especially the young, are starving for meaning, and our mainstream culture rarely speaks to them in a way that they can relate to."



The late Jesuit priest Fr. Peter Livesey, Tim Schmalz's first spiritual adviser, prays with "Homeless Jesus" in Toronto. (Tim Schmalz)

It's a heady time for Schmalz, who first gained notoriety in the Toronto area when he began placing larger than life sculptures of Our Lady in various Toronto area parishes. He later won acclaim for his "Homeless Jesus" sculptures which present Christ as a homeless person sleeping on a park bench. The first "Homeless Jesus" sculpture appeared [in Toronto in 2013](#) and has since been replicated in cities and towns throughout the world.

"There are hundreds of 'Homeless Jesus' sculptures on display today," Schmalz said. "It's impossible to calculate, because the number increases monthly. Currently Croatia and Edinburgh are planning to install the works. Last year the work was installed on the Plaza in Fatima. The work's most notable place is at the entrance of Capernaum."

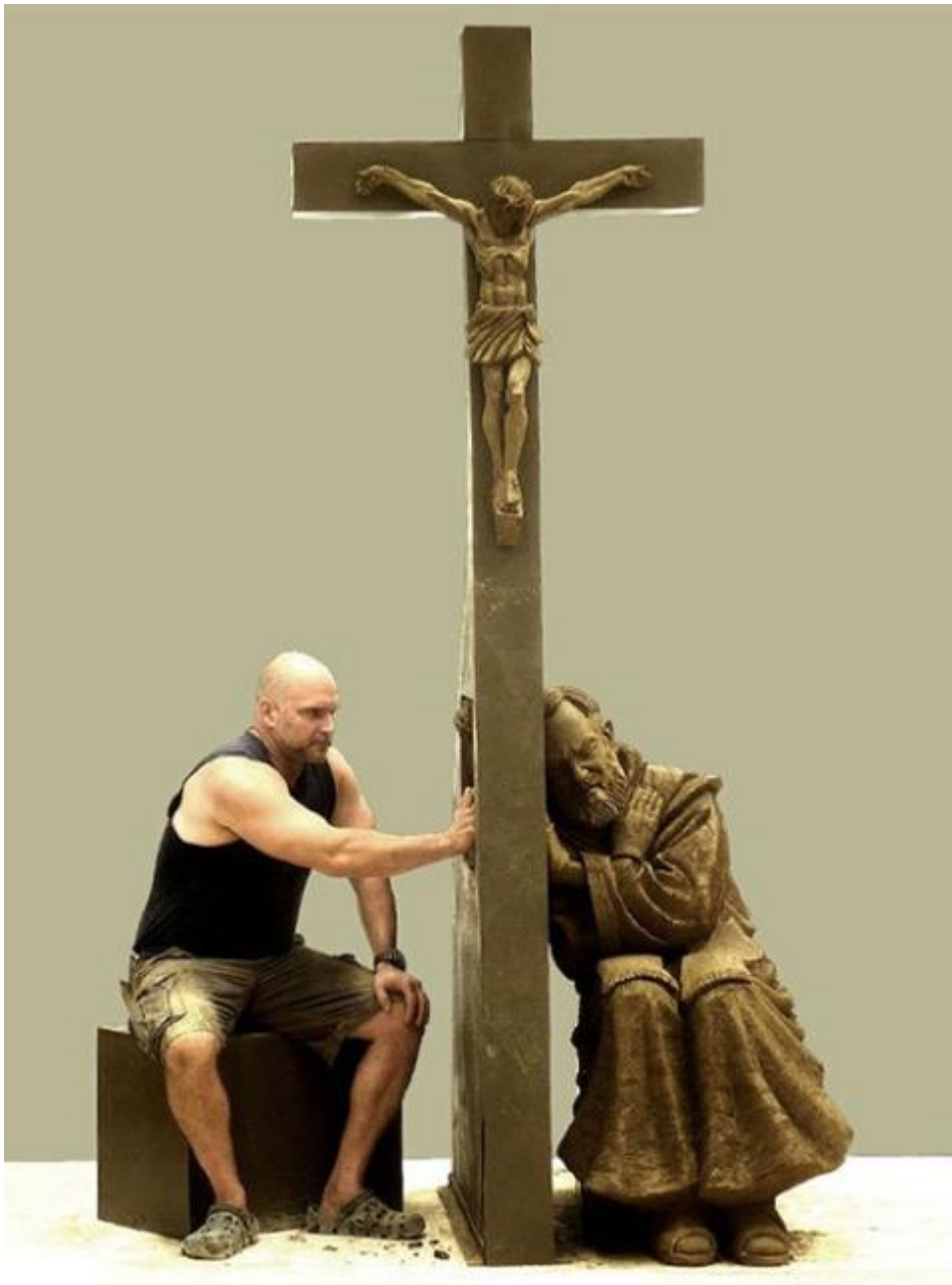
Another milestone creation in Schmalz's creative canon is the expansive Dante Garden on the grounds of the University of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. The Dante work consists of a sculpture of each of the 100 cantos in the "Divine Comedy," plus a life-size sculpture of Dante in exile. It's the first time in about 700 years that every single canto of the "Divine Comedy" has been sculpted.



ope Francis waves to members of the Vincentian religious orders and lay communities Nov. 9, 2022, after blessing Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz' sculpture "Sheltering." The statue, which features a dove laying a blanket over a homeless person, was to be used in conjunction with a Vincentian project to build homes for some 10,000 people in 160 countries. (CNS/Vatican Media)

"It took me three years to create all 100 sculptures," Schmalz said. "I finished the project on the very day of the 700th anniversary of Dante in Florence."

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell, a professor of English and creative writing at Fordham University in New York, took note of Schmalz's work over the years, and chose one of his Dante Garden pieces for the cover of her new book, *Dear Dante*, a collection of poems dedicated to the master on the 700th anniversary of the "Divine Comedy."



Tim Schmalz engaging with "Absolve," his reconciliation sculpture featuring Padre Pio (Courtesy of Tim Schmalz)

"The fact that Pope Francis has commissioned work from him for St. Peter's Square, particularly his monumental sculpture dedicated to immigrants titled 'Angels Unaware,' speaks to Tim's enormous talent as a craftsman and his ability to express and embody the great issues of our era through his art," Alaimo O'Donnell told NCR. "Since then I have encountered his work in disparate and unexpected places, including his poignant 'Homeless Jesus' sculptures, once in NYC in the garden of the

Cathedral of St. John the Divine and his monumental St. Thomas Aquinas at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas."

Despite the vast scale and reach of his creations, Schmalz is not quite ready to rest on his laurels. After the opening of the Gospel Garden, scheduled for early 2025, Schmalz plans to resume work on a series of sculptures based on "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home," Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on the environment, sustainability and stewardship. "I'm sculpting the entire encyclical now," Schmalz said. "Naturally, it's very challenging."

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The artist's next project is dedicated to St. Padre Pio (Francesco Forgione), the Italian saint and stigmatic from the Campania region of southern Italy. Schmalz hopes to create a representative sculpture at the church where Padre Pio was baptized.

"Scripture in the authentic light is my mission in life," Schmalz said. "I can't think of a better mission in life than doing this, and so I've been sculpting for the Catholic Church for 33 years. Preaching where the people are is really the goal."

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