

## CITY

# History Is Remade, One Bronzed Gentleman After Another

## Creating 42 Statues, Often With Little Data

By ANDY NEWMAN

While most of his countrymen are firing up the grill and checking out the fireworks, Ben Franklin will spend today resting inside a studio on the Brooklyn waterfront, alongside his associates George Washington, James McHenry and Charles Pinckney, or at least Charles Pinckney's head.

But tomorrow it's back to work for these industrious Americans, or the fragments thereof. They are 4 of the 42 framers of the United States Constitution whose statues are being fabricated for the National Constitution Center, a museum in Philadelphia that is scheduled to open two years from today.

The studio, StudioEIS (pronounced "studio ice"), has spent 25 years producing astonishingly detailed statues for museums as well as for Nike Town and General Motors. But this project — the scene inside Independence Hall at the moment the Constitution was signed on Sept. 17, 1787, featuring life-size bronzes of the 42 men (39 signers and 3 dissenters who held out for the Bill of Rights) — poses a special challenge. There is little record of what many of the framers looked like.

Franklin left some of his clothes to posterity, making it possible for future generations to deduce his girth from his inseams, said Ivan Schwartz, the studio's director.

"We know the volume of Benjamin Franklin," Mr. Schwartz said in the studio's rambling quarters on York Street near the Manhattan Bridge on Monday as a dozen sculptors and technicians pruned and carved all around him. "We know George Washington was 6 feet 2. But for most of the 42, the problem is that there's not enough information. The descriptions will say things like, 'He was a man of largish composure,' and we're left to figure out what that means."

Even when there is a portrait, said Debra Schwartz, the studio's producer (and Mr. Schwartz's sister), "Many of the images we worked with are from paintings made 100 years after the person lived, of the person at an age 30 years older or younger than they were when they signed the Constitution."

With help from the museum-to-be, which is a \$180 million project, StudioEIS researched the images and habits of the framers. They hired actors to impersonate the men and photographed them in hundreds of poses. Then they picked suitably framer-like poses and hired body models whose



Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times

Stuart Williamson, foreground, and Kiril Kirov worked on statues of the framers of the Constitution for the National Constitution Center, which is scheduled to open in Philadelphia on July 4, 2003. All 39 signers and 3 dissenters will be represented in the museum.

physiques resembled the framers' to pose for the sculptors.

Ray Smock, 60, the Constitution Center's main historical consultant, found himself (literally) cast as Franklin, an honor that he said was decidedly mixed given that at the time of the convention Franklin was 81, overweight and in failing health.

"It's not the thing that an academic is used to doing," Mr. Smock added, "stripping down to your underwear and getting covered in Vaseline."

While one sculptor is executing a framer's body in plastic foam, another is rendering the head in clay or plaster.

Ann Hirsch, a sculptor working on the head of McHenry, a delegate from Maryland who is depicted peering down thoughtfully at the Constitution, said that with little visual

record to go on — a single portrait done in three-quarter profile — she had to try to get inside her subject's head.

"He's looking at a document and he's looking at it inquisitively," she said. "He's a doctor, and he worked for a number of years dealing with injured soldiers, and it struck me that this man has seen a lot of difficult things and dealt with them in a very noble way."

After the head and body are completed, the statues are clothed in custom-made costumes, covered with epoxy resin and then a thin layer of clay, and sent to a foundry to be cast in bronze.

For Jacob Broom, a signer from Delaware, there is no visual record at all, Mr. Schwartz said. "You have to essentially pick a generic 18th-century gentlemanly-looking

American, and that's what Jacob Broom looked like," he said. The sculptured Broom has his hand raised tentatively to his face and wears the expression of someone who cannot quite remember why he entered the room.

Other figures are more vivid. The gray clay head of Franklin, eyes flashing wit, lips pursed and about to speak, looks more alive than most people you see on the street.

"These guys are extraordinary men," Mr. Schwartz said. "There was no model for what they created, and whether you like it or not, whether you agree with what happened in the last election or not, what these men created in the 18th century as a working model is an amazing thing."

"They were real men," he said. "Not just Disney figures."