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# Utah artist creating sculptures of prominent politicians

December 11th, 2008 @ 5:13pm

By Carole Mikita

A Utah artist finds herself in the unique position of creating both a likeness of our president-elect and that of a controversial mayor in California of the canine persuasion.

"His campaign promises were a bone in every dish, a cat in every tree and a fire hydrant on every street corner. That was basically what got him in office, right there," Mayor Bosco's owner, Tim Stillman, said in February of 1990.

The 800 residents of Sunol, Calif., held a popularity contest and elected Bosco, a black Labrador-Rottweiler mix, as honorary mayor. That was in 1981. Bosco served for 13 years.

To honor his memory, the town commissioned a statue. It was a challenge Utah artist Lena Toritch was happy to take on.

"It's a hero. I think it's the very first dog elected to be mayor. Another challenge: it's a mixed breed. You can't just take a picture and do whatever do it is. Dogs, like people, have their own personalities," Toritch said.

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Toritch's work includes the sublime. She finds Barack Obama fascinating. "That's the best way I can express my feelings, in sculpture. And I love doing portraits. I think he is remarkable man, has a very interesting face," she said.

Lena Toritch



Lena Toritch with her parents.

The American spirit pulled Toritch here. She was born, raised and trained in St. Petersburg, Russia. Her father was a sculptor, and she followed in his footsteps, creating large commissioned pieces like the Law Enforcement Memorial at the State Capitol and images of families for private homes.

Whether it's a statue of children at play or a memorial to a canine politician, Toritch says it's still important to capture each unique personality. "As usual, I talk to my clients and ask background. If it's a person or a dog, tell me about the character. [I] have to be right on target," she said.

There is a connection between these two pieces: During the election, Bosco's owner put a T-shirt on his current dog. It read "Barking for Barack."

The Mayor Bosco statue will travel to California next week and will have an honored place on Sunol's Main Street. Children will be able to hug or pet or have their pictures taken near the sculpture.

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