

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on February 10, 2009,  
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Dimitri Hadzi  
was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

## **DIMITRI HADZI**

BORN: March 21, 1921

DIED: April 16, 2006

All of us here know at least one sculpture by Dimitri Hadzi—if not the towering *Thermopylae* at Government Center plaza, then *Omphalos* in Harvard Square. For Dimitri the Greek titles weren't unusual. He was from a recently immigrated Greek-American family and took pleasure in saying "I'm a Greek and Greeks have to carve." And carve he did, as well as cast—scores of major works, ranging in scale from the monumental to the miniature, many in public places, many in private collections and museums.

Dimitri Hadzi was born in 1921 in New York City. As a child he was sent to a Greek after-school program, where he received instruction in Greek language, mythology, history, and theater. His artistic ability won him a drawing prize and his strength in math and science gained him admission to Brooklyn Technical High School. Upon graduating he worked as a chemist by day while continuing to study chemistry by night. On July 4, 1942, he enlisted in the Army Air Force and served in the South Pacific, where an officer encouraged his efforts at drawing. After the war, he returned to New York, decided to turn away from chemistry, and became a student of painting and sculpture at Cooper Union. At the age of 29, a Fulbright Scholarship took him to Athens where he studied the history of Greco-Roman sculpture while learning the technical demands of carving in stone. The GI Bill subsequently allowed him to continue his studies in Rome, where he set up his first studio. While there he married the art historian and archeologist Martha Leeb and had two children, Cristina and Stephen.

Within a few short years Dimitri's work in bronze was shown at the Museum of Modern Art. Along with Louise Nevelson he represented the U.S. in sculpture at the 1962 Venice Biennale. A flood of commissions and exhibitions followed, including one-man shows in New York and Rome. The Whitney, Guggenheim, Hirshhorn, and Cleveland museums purchased his work. Princeton, MIT, and Yale acquired and installed major pieces, Lincoln Center commissioned *K458 The Hunt*, and the Sun Life Insurance Company in Baltimore commissioned *Helios*, a suspended piece in bronze. In 1968 a retrospective was mounted at Temple University of Dimitri's fifteen years in Rome. More gallery shows ensued, as did a

residency at Dartmouth, the completion of *Arcturus*, a 25-foot bronze for the plaza of the Reserve Bank in Minneapolis, and *Willamette River Oracle* in Eugene, Oregon, Dimitri's first monumental work in stone.

In 1975 Dimitri left Rome to come to Harvard, soon becoming our first tenured professor in the studio arts. As a teacher, he laid out a demanding curriculum in both sculpture and printmaking, emphasizing drawing and modeling from the figure, always encouraging his students to follow their own paths of aesthetic discovery. He occupied the fifth-floor studio of the Carpenter Center, which Corbusier had designed for our senior artist, filling it, as well as his East Cambridge studio, with projects in all stages of exploration and completion. Following his divorce, a friendship blossomed with the charming and urbane Assistant for Exhibitions at the Carpenter Center, Cynthia von Thuna, and in June 1985, the two were married.

In both of Dimitri's studios he worked in stone and wood, he modeled, he cast works in bronze, he etched, he drew. His teaching seemed to spur his own achievements. He created the large-scale *River Legend* for the Federal Office Building in Portland, *Bishop's Triad* for One Dallas Center, and *Propylaea*, a huge granite fountain in Toledo. In 1983 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and shortly after, completed the heroic sculptures in Harvard Square and Copley Place and others for Appleton, Wisconsin and Carleton College. This work, as with everything he created, was marked by a meticulous craftsmanship, a mastery of materials that drew on his knowledge of chemistry and his later studies of geology, and a sensitivity to the subtleties of color rooted in his early work as a painter.

Retirement from teaching in 1989 did nothing to diminish Dimitri's productivity. He created major pieces for San Francisco and Birmingham, Alabama, mounted one-man shows in New York, Tokyo, Houston, Los Angeles, and Chicago, and collaborated with his friend Seamus Heaney on an illustrated book of poems, *Keeping Going*. In the winter of 2006 the Kouros Gallery in New York organized an exhibition entitled *Dimitri Hadzi at 85*, but Dimitri was too ill to attend. He died shortly afterward on April 16, 2006.

Dimitri was a thoroughgoing modernist. At the same, the entire history of western sculpture from Praxiteles to David Smith informed his work. As with the best of his contemporaries, his sculptures evoked the past while insistently probing its connection to the present. A sustained dialogue between figuration and abstraction energized them. His forceful yet sophisticated three-dimensional compositions were born from an intuitive understanding of effects that can be called forth by the interaction in space of forms, colors, and textures.

Dimitri chose Rome, with its myriad connections to antiquity, as the place to form himself and explore his identity as an artist. When, in the "eternal city," he created bronze doors for its Anglican church, he across the centuries joined the venerable guild of artists who, like

Lorenzo Ghiberti in Florence, strove to give dignity to the place of entry into a sanctuary. His artistic life was one of unceasing invention and productivity, enriched by friendships with his most eminent artistic contemporaries. He was an artist of enormous ambition and achievement, and together with his forebears, will be remembered in the bronze and stone he shaped for the ages.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Killip

Eduard Sekler

Alfred Guzzetti, Chair