



# ROYCROFTERS-AT-LARGE ASSOCIATION CHRONICLE

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## Master Sculptor Henry Schmidt Refuses to Artistically Limit Himself

*By Robert Lowell Goller*

**H**enry Corsi Schmidt didn't start out as a sculptor, the category for which he is recognized as a Roycroft Master Artisan.

"My career has been an evolution," he says.

Schmidt earned his bachelor of fine arts in painting and illustration from Syracuse University in 1975, followed by a master's in art education from the University at Buffalo.

"When I left Syracuse, I had a degree in painting and illustration, not sculpture," he says.

For the next 15 years, his career path included art education, graphic design and illustration. From 1982-1989, he was the art director at WKBW-TV, Channel 7 in Buffalo.

But his career trajectory changed soon after he took a position at Fisher-Price Toys in East Aurora in 1989.

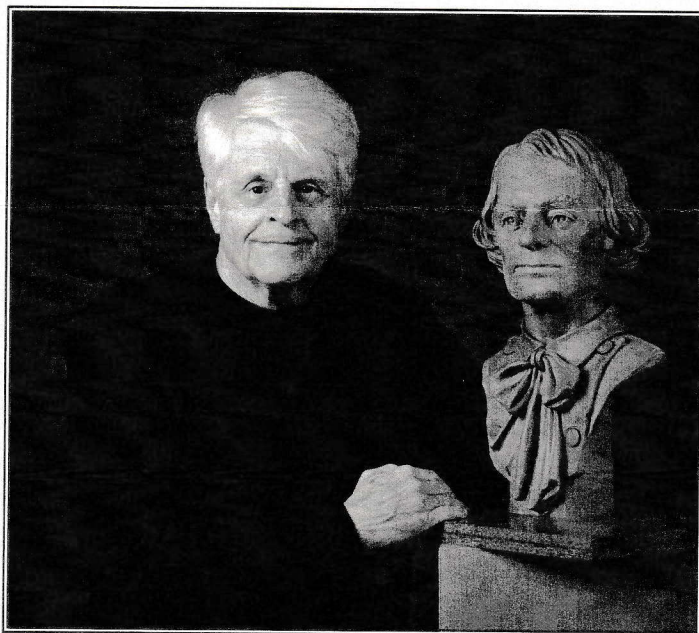
Although Schmidt started at the company as a product art manager, "I was exposed to the sculptural elements of toys and making molds," he says. "I was fascinated by it."

So fascinated in fact that when Schmidt retired from Fisher-Price in 2013, he was the director of product art and sculpture.

His interest gradually turned to bronze, and since retirement he's been busy with his art and design company, and as an artist-in-residence at the Buffalo Maritime Center.

His commissioned work has included the Civil War 155th New York Infantry Regiment Monument, which has been incorporated into the Naval and Servicemen's Park at Buffalo's waterfront.

"That kind of snowballed, the bronze thing," he says. His current projects include a sculpture, "La Terra Promessa" (The



*Henry Schmidt with Elbert Hubbard*

Promised Land), for the Federation of Italian-American Societies of Western New York that honors immigrant families and the restoration of an Underground Railroad tableau in Jamestown, N.Y.

The Amherst, N.Y. artist credits his 25 years at Fisher-Price Toys with his introduction to the Roycrofters-At-Large Association and the Roycroft philosophy. The Roycroft and Fisher-Price campuses are within blocks of each other,

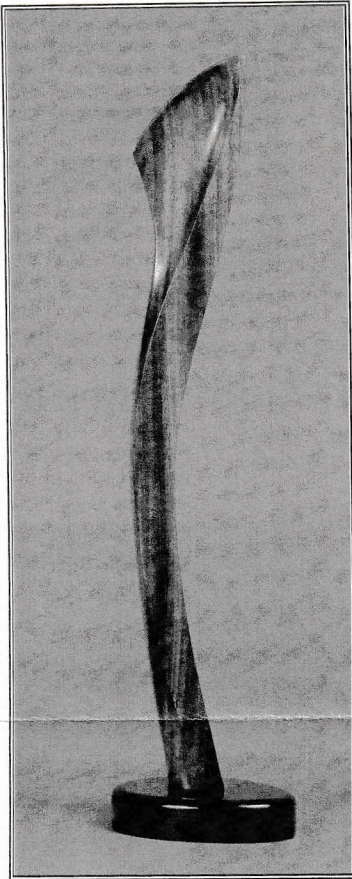
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that whole history, was always there" while working at Fisher-Price, Schmidt says, adding, "The whole idea of the Roycroft campus, the Roycroft movement and Elbert Hubbard, it's a fascinating story."

Like many artisans, Schmidt says his membership in RALA has helped take his work to the next level.



*Cadence*

"I think it makes your work better at the end of the day," he says. "It keeps the Roycroft philosophy of Head, Heart and Hand alive. More and more today you are not finding that."

It's also offered a camaraderie with other artisans that Schmidt has missed since retiring from Fisher-Price.

"You rub shoulders with a lot of different skill levels," he says. "That's what Fisher-Price was like."

As a Master Artisan, Schmidt sits on the annual RALA jury, which, he says, helps him learn from other artisans. "When you are at the Master level, your participation is different," he says, adding, "You get to see the work of other artisans on a different level, and I'm often in awe."

Schmidt says he sees the potential for RALA to expand its reach further outside of East Aurora and the Arts and Crafts community to galleries and universities. "I'm always an advocate to push the organization further," he says.

He also supports RALA's mission to promote modern, innovative art, even though the organization has its roots in a movement that's more than 100 years old.

Elbert Hubbard had an innovative, progressive style, Schmidt says. "We can apply all of Elbert Hubbard's principles to very contemporary work."

Although he says he's been "crazy busy" with his public art commissions, Schmidt is looking forward to exhibiting bronze pieces and "making connections" at RALA's Winter Festival Dec. 2 and 3 at The Park School.

**A**lthough his name appears under the "sculpture" category on RALA's website, Schmidt is quick to point out that he refuses to artistically limit himself.

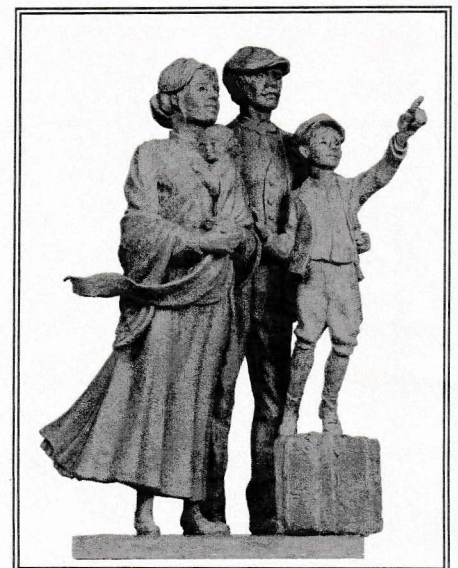
"I've always kept on the 2D canvas," he says, citing his artistic roots in painting and illustration.

He's painted portraits; one piece is in the permanent collection at the Burchfield Penney Art Center in Buffalo, where he has taken part in a number of exhibitions. And most recently he's worked on an animal painting.

"I was also making books for awhile," Schmidt says, adding, "I have my foot in a lot of shoes."

Schmidt also recently took a class in 3D modeling at the University at Buffalo. "I took the course with 19-year-olds," he says with a laugh, "but I've done some really practical things with it."

"I kind of envy artists who have found their niche and that's it," he adds. "I like challenging myself with new things. That's part of my DNA."



*La Terra Promessa.*