

Statue on the Mall to Hail Einstein's 100th

On 19 April 1953 Albert Einstein sat in the study of his home at 112 Mercer in Princeton, New Jersey, with a young sculptor, Robert Berks, who pinched and pulled at a lump of wet clay. Over the course of 5 hours, a bust of Einstein took shape, while the scientist, casually dressed and lost in thought, kept filling page after page of his notebook with equations. "The world needs heroes," Einstein told Berks the day before when asked why he had agreed to pose. "Better someone harmless like me than a Hitler or a Mussolini."

Einstein was so pleased with the portrait and Berks so moved by his encounter with the scientist that the sculptor vowed to create a monumental statue that would capture the extraordinary simplicity of Einstein's life. Now, 25 years later, Berks is attempting just that. He is working on a seated figure of Einstein that is 21 feet from head to toe. Commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences, of which Einstein was first a foreign associate and then a full member, the statue will be finished in time for the 100th anniversary of Einstein's birth, 14 March 1979. It will be placed on the Academy's grounds in Washington, D.C., at the corner of 22nd and Constitution Avenue, facing the Mall. Said Academy President Philip Handler: "It is a gift from the scientific community and its friends to the American people whose support of science has made possible the world's greatest scientific enterprise."

The bronze figure of Einstein, three times life size, will sit on a granite bench that rests on a circular white granite base some 30 feet in diameter. The scientist will be wearing a sweatshirt, baggy pants, and sandals. A notebook on Einstein's knee will have three equations: that for the photoelectric effect, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize, a form of the equation for general relativity, and the familiar expression for the equivalence of mass and energy. Inscribed on the back wall will be Einstein's credo: "The right to search for truth implies also a duty. One must not conceal any part of what one has recognized to be true."

The Einstein statute will be peering down at a round slab of dark Norwegian granite, which will hold more than 3000 brass and stainless steel pins, arranged as a circular map of the heavens. Plotted by computer at the U.S. Naval Observatory, positions of the stars and planets will be as they were on the night of Einstein's birth.

When a small model of the monument was shown recently at a news conference, one onlooker noted that stars and planets at the moment of birth seemed a bit astrological. But Berks explained that they would act "like a Rosetta stone, so that people 5000 years from now could pinpoint his birth." The idea, he said, came to him when he saw a piece of old Chinese pottery with a star-filled sky that had been dated when someone noticed a supernova.

Berks, who also sculpted the John F. Kennedy head at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and 300 other portraits, is doing in a year what normally takes three. At his studio on the eastern tip of Long Island, Berks and a



Photo by Richard Meek, courtesy of National Academy of Sciences
Sculptor Robert Berks working from a small figure of Einstein.

crew of up to 25 assistants have worked day and night on the statue for the past few months. First, a 60-square-foot concrete pad with steel turntable and armatures was built to hold the monument. A huge Dacron tent was then erected to protect the work from wind and rain. The full-scale clay model is now almost finished.

Not just the monument is going to be huge. The total cost for the statue, base, and ground preparation (three caissons will be sunk into bedrock to support the monument's 135 tons) will run \$1.5 million. The *Washington Post* called it "one of the most expensive statues of our time." To finance the project, the Academy has taken out a loan, the first that Handler can recall. Handler also said a committee of "noted public figures" had been formed to help raise funds. They include Paul Mellon, president of the National Gallery of Art; John D. de Butts, chairman of the board, AT & T; Marian S. Heiskell, director of the New York Times Co.; David Packard, board chairman of Hewlett-Packard Co.; Irving Shapiro, board chairman of du Pont; Thomas J. Watson, Jr., chairman of the executive committee, IBM; David Rockefeller, director of the Chase Manhattan Bank; and others. Handler also announced that some 130,000 letters will be sent asking for donations from members of the National Academies of Science and Engineering, the American Physical Society, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Would Einstein, alive today, take all the fuss in stride? Probably so, but surely not without a sigh. "To punish me for my contempt for authority," he once wrote, "Fate made me an authority myself."—WILLIAM J. BROAD