



Three Monumental Women

Article

NEW YORK, New York (Achieve3000, January 1, 2020). Central Park in New York City is a treasure trove of outdoor statues. Dozens of them stand among the park's many paths and groves. Look here, and you'll find Beethoven and Shakespeare. They're peering down at you from their pedestals. Look there, and you'll spot Alexander Hamilton, Frederick Douglass, and other historic Americans posed for parkgoers. You'll also see a smattering of bronze animals.

But one thing you definitely *won't* find in Central Park? A statue honoring a real-life woman. Sure, Alice of Wonderland fame is there. So is Romeo's sweetheart Juliet. But they're both fictional characters. There are 23 historical statues in the park, and all of them are of men. But that's about to change.

In August 2020, sculptor Meredith Bergmann will introduce her new sculpture of three history-making women: Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Sojourner Truth. It will be Central Park's first monument honoring historical female figures. These women helped to bring about women's voting, women's civil rights, and the abolition of slavery. Still, Bergmann says her sculpture makes a simple statement.

"The fact of the monument itself, that it exists at all, that it will be where it is, is the message," she said.

It took some doing for the sculpture to go forward. Central Park hasn't added a new statue since the 1950s. And several attempts to introduce female statues failed. Then, in 2014, a group of women's rights activists and community leaders banded together. They formed the group Monumental Women. It set out to smash the "bronze ceiling" that's kept statues of real women out of the park for so long. Monumental Women raised \$1.5 million for the 14-foot- (4.3-meter-) tall sculpture. Soon Anthony, Stanton, and Truth will take their rightful place amid the park's bronze all-boys club.

Monumental Women's president Pam Elam believes the sculpture sends a powerful message. "This statue conveys the power of women working together to bring about revolutionary change," she said.

The sculpture shows the women gathered around a table. They're having a conversation. This idea is imagined: There's no evidence that the three women ever spent time together. Still, Bergmann looked to history to achieve authenticity in her work. She explored the life stories of her three subjects. For example, Bergmann learned that Truth was known for her sense of humor. So she put "a hint of a smile" on Truth's face.

One other key historical fact surrounds the sculpture. Its unveiling in August 2020 will mark an important day in history: the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It's the amendment that finally gave women the right to vote. No doubt, this would've given Anthony, Stanton, and Truth something great to talk about on a summer day in the park.

Voice of America contributed to this story.



Photo credit: AP Photo/Joseph Frederick

Sneak peek! Central Park's first statue of historic real-life women is being created at sculptor Meredith Bergmann's studio. This is a section of it.

Dictionary

abolition (*noun*) the act of officially ending or stopping something : the act of abolishing something, specifically : the act of abolishing slavery

activist (*noun*) a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) to help make changes in politics or society

authentic (*adjective*) real or genuine: not copied or false

monument (*noun*) a building, statue, etc., that honors a person or event

sculpture (*noun*) a piece of art that is made by carving or molding clay, stone, metal, etc.