

unchained artistry

steven weitzman's creativity knows no bounds

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There's a surprise waiting for motorists driving along Route 216 in Howard County. Of course, there are miles of blacktop and the usual speed-limit signs, but instead of a merely functional noise-blocking concrete wall, there's a 21-foot-tall series of eye-catching panels. Spanning a distance of 1,000 feet, the sound barriers display bas-relief images of flora and fauna native to Maryland. They include sky-scapes and representations of water.

The effect is quiet but striking, the artwork a gift for the road-weary traveler.

Steven Weitzman is the artist-designer, and he—like his work—is full of surprises.

Headquartered in studios in Brentwood, Weitzman, 55, creates from a broad and varied palette. His designs can be found across the United States and range in size from pieces you can hold in your hand to works that span a distance of two to three miles. His portfolio includes large-scale wood sculpture, terrazzo, fountains, urban park design, kinetic sculpture, custom lighting, and highway and bridge designs.

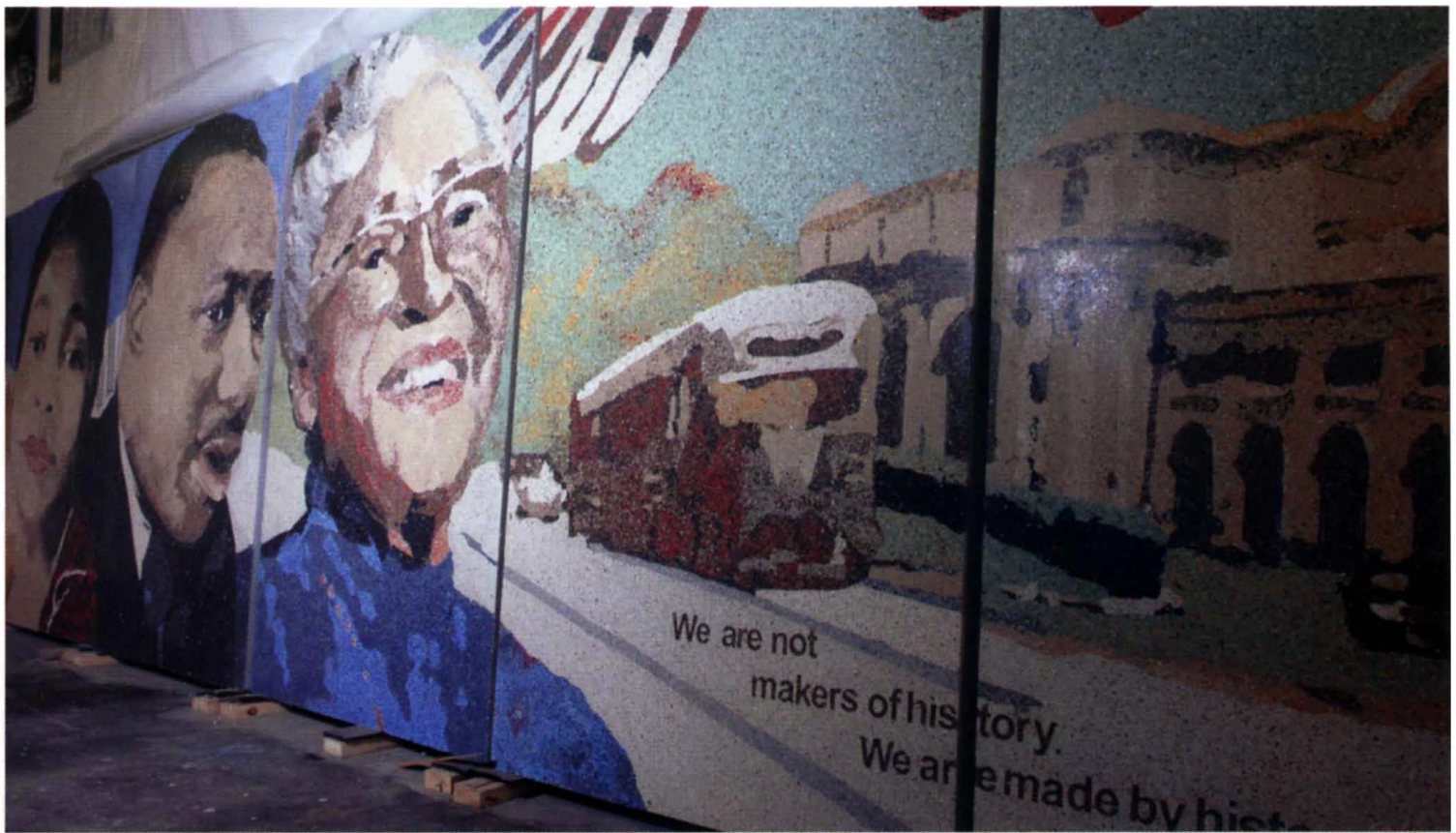
Weitzman knew from his earliest memory that he would grow up to be an artist.

Born in New York City, Weitzman was 2 when his mother moved the family to Los Angeles. His father, an artist, had died when Weitzman was an infant.

He moved to Colorado at 19. There, self-taught, Weitzman worked as a freelance graphic artist and designer and started his own advertising company. He later gave up his successful commercial-art business to be a sculptor—specifically to carve wood. By the time he left Boulder in the mid 1980s, he had

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pretty much saturated the market, having done seven of the city's nine permanent outdoor sculptures.

Weitzman was 32 when he came to Maryland, commissioned by the Montgomery County school system to carve a tree for the Lathrop E. Smith Environmental Center.

"Caretakers," now on permanent display in Rockville at the Montgomery County Judicial Center, was carved from a 200-year-old American elm to mark the 40th anniversary of the United Nations.

Maryland then hired him to do a carving from a 32-ton branch that had broken off the storied Wye Oak. The tableau—two children planting a tree—stands at the headquarters of the Department of Natural Resources in Annapolis.

Weitzman's designs were also selected for the urban environment connecting two Metro stations in Largo. The project includes 30 terrazzo images set in the sidewalk by means of the "painting with concrete" technique he is in the process of patenting.

Betty Hager Francis conceived the Largo project during her tenure as direc-

tor of the Department of Public Works in Prince George's County in the mid 1990s. She became acquainted with Weitzman through the designs he submitted. "His work stood out," she says.

Francis calls Weitzman a genius and says he's able to translate his design ideas to the engineers.

"That's not easy to do," she adds.

Francis feels that aesthetics should not be an intrusion but a welcome part of everyday life in public spaces, and that aesthetic components are not add-ons but integral parts of any public project.

The artist's many works are as multifaceted as his talents. For example, he whimsically captured the spirit of the University of Maryland's stalwart mascot, Testudo, for the institution's 150th anniversary celebration in 2006 via his "Fear the Turtle" sculpture project.

At the other end of Weitzman's creative spectrum is a recent commission from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities for a seven-foot-tall bronze sculpture of famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The piece will be displayed in the District of Columbia's John

A. Wilson Building until it can be placed in the U.S. Capitol as part of the National Statuary Hall Collection, its intended ultimate home.

"Chesapeake Journey," the Weitzman-designed, 1,600-square-foot concrete terrazzo, recently was installed at the 300-acre, \$2-billion National Harbor in Prince George's County. The work is a map of the Mid-Atlantic coastal region and identifies local cities with icons and key monuments.

Despite the grandeur of his pieces, the soft-spoken Weitzman is matter-of-fact about his skills. "Sometimes I watch myself carve or sculpt a portrait and I'm not really sure how I actually do it," he says.

Weitzman adds that he often can look at his art as someone who has never seen it before; he's sometimes impressed, sometimes moved, sometimes amazed by a work even though he participated in its creation.

"And other times," he says, "I just sort of quietly nod to myself and move on to the next one." 🌟

For more information on Steven Weitzman's work, visit www.weitzmanstudios.com.