

LIFESTYLE

Hopkinton artist Michael Alfano has spread 20 of his bronze sculptures a mile across Boston

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HOPKINTON — The most amazing thing about being a sculptor is manifesting an idea that's in your head into a physical piece of work, local sculptor Michael Alfano said.

He has plenty experience turning a concept into something tangible and meaningful. But before pursuing sculpting professionally in 1993, he was a stockbroker.

“It wasn’t really fulfilling,” said Alfano, whose work is included in collections throughout the world but is best known in MetroWest for his sculpture of The Starter, which is on display at the start of the Boston Marathon route in Hopkinton. It depicts sports official George V. Brown, who fired the Marathon starting gun from 1905-1937 and lived in Hopkinton throughout his life.



Sculptor Michael Alfano, left, of Hopkinton, and his assistant, Yezat Tleulin, transport Winged Foot, one of 20 sculptures in the "Of Many Minds" waterfront sculpture walk at the Charlestown Navy Yard, on June 16. The exhibit runs through December 2023. In the background is a sculpture titled Running Wheel. *Daily News And Wicked Local Staff Photo/ Art Illman*

Alfano's sense of fulfillment has resulted in 20 new and previously sculpted bronze pieces he created that are now on display in the "Of Many Minds" sculpture walk at Charlestown and the Boston Harborwalk.

From USS Constitution to Menino Park

The mile-long exhibit, which will be up through Dec. 18, 2023, extends from the USS Constitution in the Boston National Historical Park to various sites along the Boston Harborwalk, ending at Mayor Menino Park at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital. It's hosted by multiple sponsors and partners, including the Navy Garden & Art Inc. and Boston Planning & Development Agency.

The Navy Garden & Art started five years ago with a group of volunteers, President Robin DiGiammarino said. Its first public art display was in 2018.

"We were trying to activate our neighborhood and enhance and revitalize it," DiGiammarino said.

A board member met Alfano, and liked his work. The two got to know one another more, and conceived the exhibit, DiGiammarino said. An opening celebration was hosted on June 21 at the Shipyard Park amphitheater.

Each of the 20 pieces is paired with a quote to encourage viewers to consider different ideas and foster their own meanings for the display. Alfano recommends visiting at sunset.



A socially-distanced public art exhibit

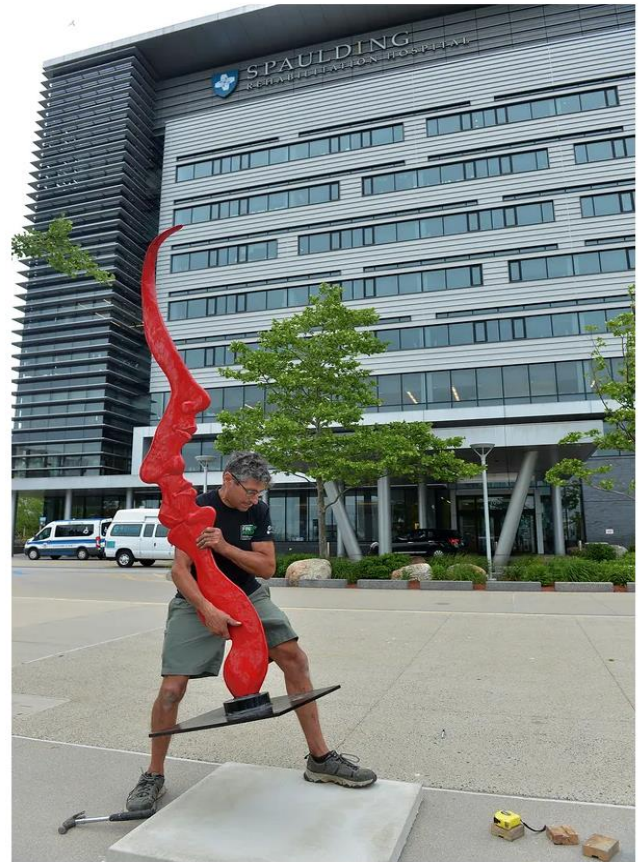
Public displays of art remain as in-demand as they were before, during and after the pandemic.

"We heard from the community how important it is to have socially distanced outdoor exhibits," DiGiammarino said when speaking of a past display of wings set up during the peak of the pandemic. "We're hearing similar things now."

Alex Ciesielski, director of the Guild of Boston Artists, said that once the guild's art gallery on Boston's Newbury Street reopened, people expressed to him how starved they had been for art.

One woman nearly burst into tears, he said, while another said they were essential workers to her, Ciesielski said. The pandemic made people anxious about indoor exhibitions, but when people came in to the guild's Newbury gallery, they found a sense of peace calming.

"Arts nourish us and our souls and take care of us," Ciesielski said. "I'm a firm believer that art is a form of communication more intimate than language and more human."



In front of Spaulding Rehabilitation Center, sculptor Michael Alfano of Hopkinton installs *Self Reflection*, one of 20 sculptures in the "Of Many Minds" waterfront exhibit at the Charlestown Navy Yard, June 16, 2022. The exhibit is scheduled to run through December 2023. *Daily News And Wicked Local Staff Photo/ Art Illman*

Before switching careers, Alfano had dabbled with sculpting. But he was never professionally trained. He signed up for classes at the Arts Student League of New York and interned with professional sculptors.

Some of his art, such as his sculpture titled *Anthropocene*, in which a woman's head and feet are joined by wires coiling to represent a body, is inspired by the human influence over the environment.

“People are the biggest changers,” Alfano said. “It represents the current geological age that we’re in, the balance between humanity and the environment and how we can have harmony.”

Bronze in short supply

His pieces start with clay and are turned into molds before being cast with materials like bronze or steel.

“Six months ago, this was a dream and just talk,” he said.

Alfano was going through the arduous process of picking sculptures for the exhibit and getting approval from different Boston agencies last October. Because the exhibit is outdoors and on public view, he had to make sure the sculptures are weather-resistant and durable.



Sculptor Michael Alfano, right, of Hopkinton, and his assistant, Yertz Tleulin, install Winged Foot, one of 20 sculptures in the "Of Many Minds" waterfront sculpture exhibit at the Charlestown Navy Yard, June 16, 2022. The exhibit is scheduled to run through December 2023. *Daily News And Wicked Local Staff Photo/ Art Illman*

There were also unforeseen difficulties with supply and pricing, due to the pandemic.

Alfano needed hundreds of pounds of bronze for his pieces, but it was in short supply.

“I had a budget and was like, OK I can do this, then all of a sudden the price is twice as much,” he said.

There was a big push to get pieces done in time. So he put in more legwork to call around to find the correct supplier and eventually found one in Maine that could get everything ready.

Alfano spent three days driving a truck to transport pieces from his studio to Charlestown. Each sculpture weighs hundreds of pounds and has a stand that can weigh as much as 250 pounds. He installed six or seven sculptures each day.

Alfano likes to say his favorite sculpture is “the one I haven’t made yet.”

If he had to pick, Questioning Mind, which stands nearly 8 feet tall, is probably his favorite. It depicts eyes, with a mouth and outline of a face in the shape of a question mark. The back of the statue quotes Albert Einstein, encouraging viewers to question everything and be curious.

“I’m always thinking, what’s my next project and what’s the most exciting thing I can do,” Alfano said. “These pieces are my children, out in the world to speak on their own.”

Navy Yard Garden & Art will host events in connection with the "Of Many Minds" sculpture walk, including several tours with Friends of the Boston Harborwalk. Details about upcoming events will be posted on <http://www.navyyardgarden.org/events>.