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A Remembrance of the Man Who Made Charging Bull

By Phil Roosevelt Feb. 22, 2021 11:05 am ET



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Sculptor Dionisio Cimarelli at Charging Bull on Sunday. The flowers were left in memory of its creator, Arturo Di Modica. Photograph by Phil Roosevelt

As a slant of winter sunlight hits the muscular, bronze back of *Charging Bull*, Dionisio Cimarelli sweeps his hands over the surface and inspects it closely. "The way he did these shapes was very original—strong, powerful, but also soft and smooth," Cimarelli says. "I think that was his temperament, too."

Cimarelli was reflecting on his friend and fellow sculptor Arturo Di Modica, who stealthily deposited the 3.5-ton bull on the streets of lower Manhattan in 1989 and died this past Friday at age 80. Cimarelli, a teacher at the Art Students League of New York, knows what

goes into big works: He's currently transforming a 12-ton block of marble from the mountains of Tuscany into the likeness of Matteo Ricci, a 16th century Jesuit missionary who brought Christian teachings to China.

Cimarelli crouches down to look at the lower sections of the bull. "What I like most is the power of the two front legs," he says. "It's not all centered and balanced, and that gives it power." Then he glances toward the other end, where some tourists are giddily touching the beast's privates. "They say it's good luck to touch a bull like that," he says. "But I think it's just an excuse."

Di Modica created the 16-foot-long bull in response to the stock market crash of 1987, hoping to embolden investors, New Yorkers, and all who might come to see it. He left it on the street one night as a gift to the world, after spending more than \$300,000 to make it. Soon, *Charging Bull* was an international symbol of Wall Street. "It's the whole story—the situation, the history—that makes it unique," Cimarelli says. "Arturo told me he had to ask for money from his relatives to make the sculpture."



Sculptor Hanna Eshel with Dionisio Cimarelli, center, and Arturo Di Modica, in New York in 2017. Courtesy of Dionisio Cimarelli

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Cimarelli, 55, first met Di Modica about five years ago. The two natives of Italy both were working in Manhattan, and a mutual friend thought they'd hit it off. She was right. Di Modica had a studio on Church Street, and Cimarelli was teaching at the nearby New York Academy of Art; they started meeting up for coffee. Then, for several weeks in 2017, Cimarelli stopped by Di Modica's studio each evening after classes to help his friend, who was facing a backlog of work and ailing from the cancer that eventually killed him. "Every half-hour or so, he'd have to go over to a couch and rest," Cimarelli recalls. "The best part was the talking—we talked a lot."

Was *Charging Bull* Di Modica's proudest accomplishment? "It's hard to say—he was always talking about his future work," Cimarelli says. Specifically, he talked about two gigantic horses he had in mind for his hometown of Vittoria. Di Modica finished the first stage of the project with help from a bronze foundry in Wyoming, each horse about 40 feet high. "That's my model," he told me. His final work was going to be much bigger." According to Di Modica's dealer, Jacob Harmer, the sculptor envisioned the twin horses rising 132 feet over tiny Vittoria.

Even as he grew sicker, Di Modica kept honing the plans. "He was talking all the time about those horses," Cimarelli says.

The last time the two men saw each other was a chance encounter exactly a year ago on a flight from New York to Rome. Cimarelli was on a sad trip to bury his father; Di Modica was off to Vittoria for a two-month visit. Cimarelli returned the next day, but soon Covid-19 stopped international travel, and then the cancer worsened. Di Modica never got back to New York.



Cimarelli stands on lower Broadway and studies *Charging Bull* for a few more minutes. "The piece has power and energy," he says. "Arturo gives the energy to the bull, and the bull gives the energy to the stock market to keep going, to keep fighting."

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Although the bull's creator is now gone, Cimarelli sees no reason for investors to worry. "The bull is still here, preserving the luck of the market. That's the heritage Arturo left New York, the people, and the market. The positive power will live forever. That's really the purpose of art."

As more people line up for photos by the bull, Cimarelli puts his own camera away and heads down the final blocks of Manhattan for a walk alongside the glittering expanse of water.

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