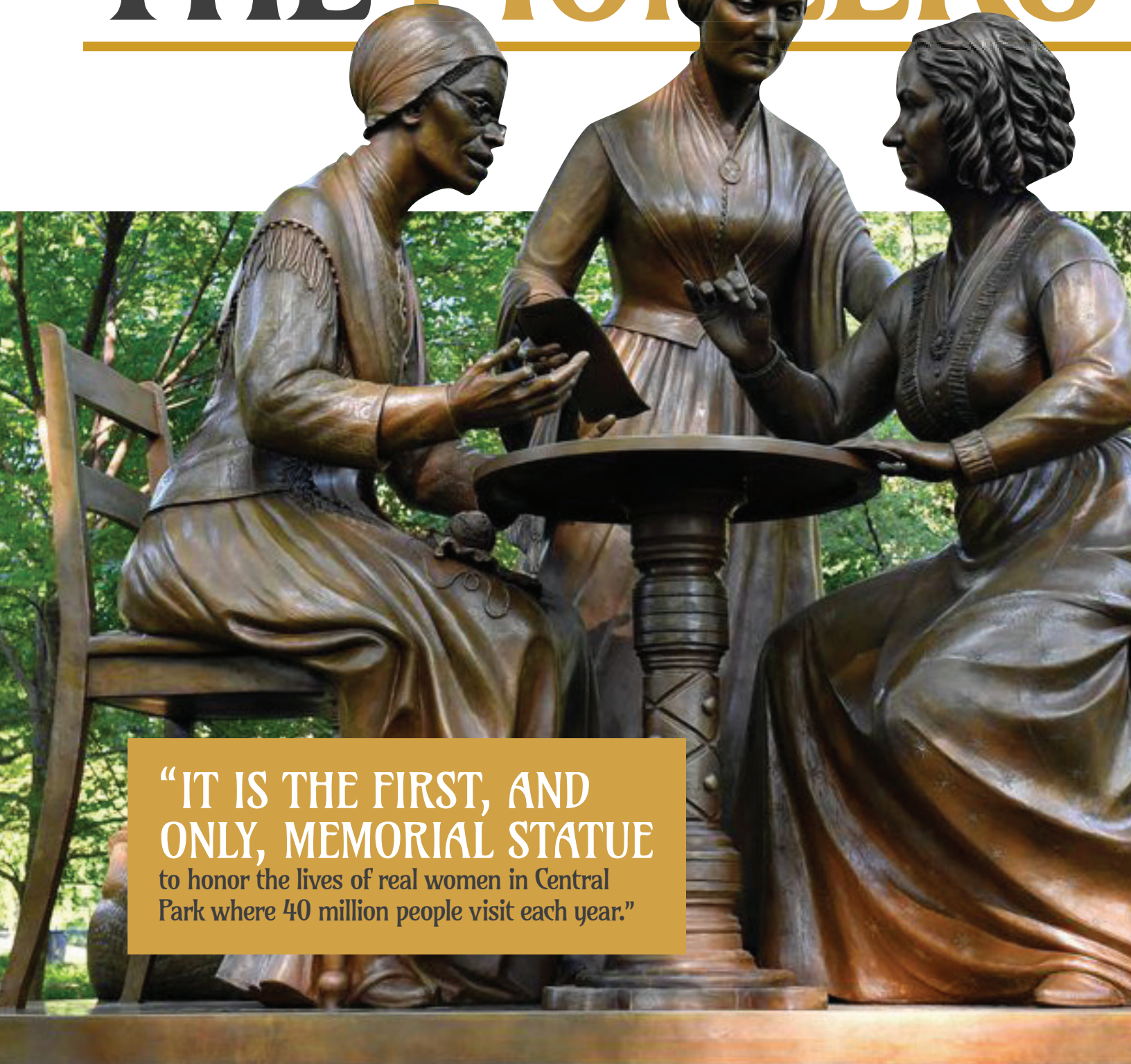


# THE PIONEERS



**“IT IS THE FIRST, AND ONLY, MEMORIAL STATUE**  
to honor the lives of real women in Central Park where 40 million people visit each year.”

(Below) The statue of Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton was dedicated in Central Park on Aug. 26, 2020, a century since their efforts finally won women the right to vote. It was designed by sculptor Meredith Bergmann.

# OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

By Kim Dedam

It has been 100 years since suffragists won voting rights for women. One statue placed in New York's Central Park honors them.

## AND THAT HAPPENED THIS YEAR.

Unveiled on Aug. 26, 2020, the work in bronze was designed by Meredith Bergmann, who, in her youth, spent summers at Eagle Island Camp on Upper Saranac Lake.

The Sun interviewed Bergmann this past spring as days stretched toward completion of wax forms in her studio in preparation for the molten pour of bronze at the forge.

Commissioned by the non-profit, all-volunteer organization Monumental Women, the final design brought Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Sojourner Truth together around a table.

"All three are remarkable and monumental women's rights pioneers who were New Yorkers and contemporaries," Monumental Women announced last summer.

Bergmann's design was selected from 91 entries for the project and, with city Public Design Commission and community input, expanded to add a third suffragist, Sojourner Truth.

"Bergmann shows Anthony, Stanton, and Truth working together in Stanton's home, where it is historically documented they met and spent time together," Monumental Women announced last year.

It is the first, and only, memorial statue to honor the lives of real women in Central Park where 40 million people visit each year. Other statues celebrate fictional female characters, like Shakespeare's Juliet.

### DETAILS

For Bergmann, the historic addition to the 167-year-old park makes an important mark in her public works career as a sculptor.

"There have always been women drawn to sculpture," she said of her vocation, describing the large wax piece into which she was carving the lines in Susan B. Anthony's hand.

"Sculpture was also considered a building trade; it's dirty, it's messy and it's dangerous. The history of art is really the history of state-sanctioned art. And those were controlled by men."

Carving the wax pulls life into the work. And details in Bergmann's design speak volumes: An opened purse on the floor beside the table sprouts Suffragist pamphlets, one written by Sojourner Truth.

The graceful folds and fall of long skirts seem to swing as the women lean toward each other.

Details help tell a story of action and determination: Stanton perched at the edge of her chair; the elaborate brocade on Truth's jacket, the tousled fringe of her shawl; the jut of the women's jaws.

Anthony's necklace bears a carved figure of Minerva, Rome's patron Goddess of Wisdom.

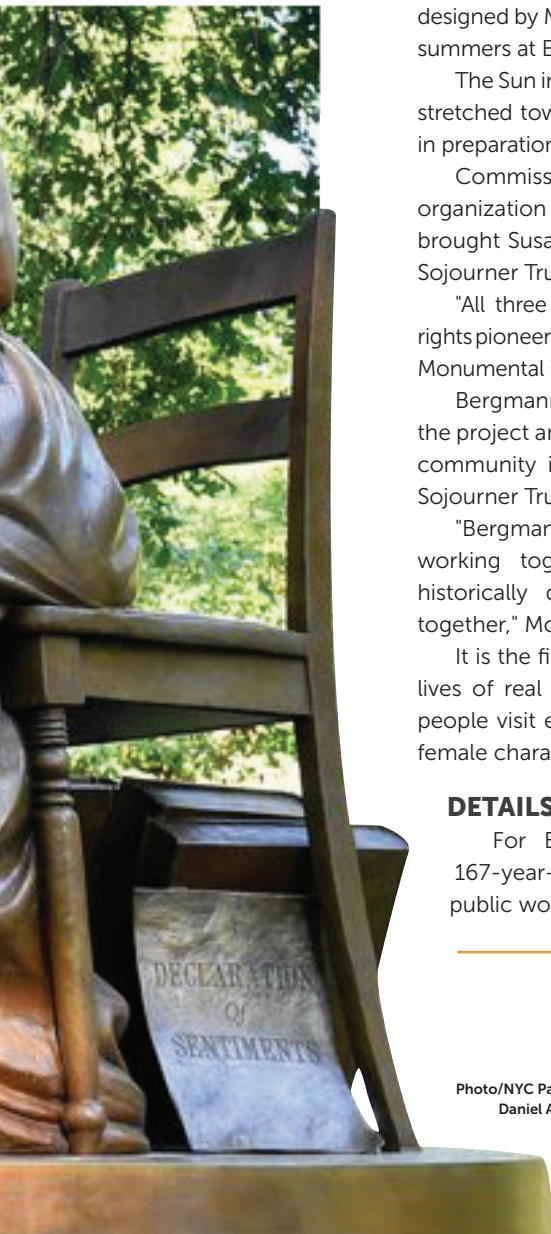
### HOT WAX AND METAL

Bergmann explained how all of this moves from wax to bronze.

"The wax is the thickness the bronze will be," Bergmann explained.

The process begins with a clay model, a positive version of statue parts then made negative in wax.

The sculptor and assistants made a mold with fireproof material that they then baked so the wax ran out.



Photo/NYC Parks, Daniel Avila





**(Left)** Meredith Bergmann at work in her studio, crafting details into the nine-foot Susan B. Anthony piece of her sculpture. **(Top Right)** Clay model for Meredith Bergmann's statue to honor women suffragists, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. **(Bottom Right)** Sojourner Truth's knitting, a detail of Bergmann's Women's Rights Pioneers, the only sculpture in Central Park to honor women other than fictional characters. **Photos by Michael and Meredith Bergmann.**

"Then we pour the molten bronze into it and chip away the fireproof mold," Bergmann said. "That is cast into bronze. That is the finished project. Then it has to be assembled."

Finished, the sculpture stands 14 feet high but built to scale.

"In the sculpture, Susan B. Anthony is nine feet tall," Bergmann said. "In life, she was five feet, six inches tall."

"Sojourner Truth is seated, but if she were standing in the sculpture, she would be 10-feet-tall. In life, she stood almost six feet."

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was about five-feet-tall, is seated at the round pedestal table, leaning in, a fury of ringlet curls held back with a headband.

Stanton gazes now into Truth's eyes, her lips pursed, determined.

It is Truth who appears to be speaking.

## ART OF HISTORY

Bergmann's early years and summers at Eagle Island Camp helped frame her interest in art and history.

"I loved it. The whole sequence of lakes that connect seemed so mysterious. I fell in love with maps. Sculptors love geography," she said.

"I went to Eagle Island summer camp from 1966 to 1969, and my younger sister attended, too. My mother, Ruth Jacoby, had been among the first campers."

Originally from Montclair, New Jersey, Bergmann said she grew up in a house built the year she was born.

"I didn't have a sense of history. But when I got to Eagle Island, I gained a sense of history, of place and of tradition, like canoeing to church on Sunday as they had for years; the sailing, the singing, it was lovely."

During her last two years at Eagle Island, Bergmann lived at Wilderness Camp.

"We walked to the camp and carried all of the ingredients and cooked our own food. We practiced sneaking around in the woods absolutely silently. I learned so many things there, that I could chop things down, I could canoe all day.

"Our second year, the counselor got an idea that we should canoe the Fulton Chain. I was 14," Bergmann laughed.

It was a sobering jolt to the senses, those forays into the wilderness.

"I remember the portages were hard, we had to carry aluminum canoes that weighed about 40 pounds. Corky, our counselor, was from Texas. I remember one time she told us that pioneer women did this when they were pregnant. Something in her tone made us shut up and get on with it."

The suffragist sculpture is titled: Women's Rights Pioneers.

## KNITTING

Bergmann learned to knit at Eagle Island. Not an unusual craft for camp.

But in her sculpture, Truth sits with a pile of knitting in her lap, a detail that says much about Black history.

For generations, women of color weren't allowed to knit, Bergmann said.

It was considered a "skill" meant only for white women of means and education.

"I worked with one historian, a professor, who got her students involved in the research, and she encouraged me to include Sojourner Truth's knitting in the final design.

To make the knitted detail, Bergmann found her husband Michael's grandmother's very large knitting needles.

"I tried knitting a piece, a skill I learned at Eagle Island. We dipped the yarn in shellac and let it dry," Bergmann said of crafting this element.

"That made it really crispy, then we dipped it in clay and the mold makers made the mold."

Bergmann research for the work included hours pored over historical images, documents, and detailed written accounts to accurately depict these pioneers of women's rights. There are references to dozens of historical notes pressed into the sculpture. Sunflowers, brocade, books.

Archivists and academicians advised the project, funded with \$1.5 million in donations, private gifts plus \$10,000 raised by troops of Girl Scouts through cookie sales.

Monumental Women was founded in 2014. And the sculpture, planning for its site and permission to place a statue of women in Central Park took over six years to achieve.

"My design also departs from the other monuments (in Central Park) in ways that are appropriate to the entry of women into a sphere from which they were previously excluded," Bergmann said in her artist's statement.

"Three figures (instead of one) share a pedestal and relate to each other. They are not dreaming, but working."

The Connecticut-based sculptor has completed several major historical public works in bronze for parks around the country.

But never (yet) has she interpreted Inez Milholland, a striking historical figure, a suffragist often photographed on her horse. Milholland spent summers at Meadowmount, her family's former home in the Town of Lewis.

"I would love to do a statue of her," Bergmann mused.

"We have all these statues of generals on horses all over the country. Why not Inez Milholland? It would be fun." 🍂

## TO FIND OUT MORE:

Bergmann's work in sculpture and poetry:

[www.meredithbergmann.com](http://www.meredithbergmann.com)

Summer camp experiences in 2021 at Eagle Island Camp:

[www.eagleisland.org](http://www.eagleisland.org)

Monumental Women:

[www.monumentalwomen.org](http://www.monumentalwomen.org)