



"Universal woman": Sculptor Claire McArdle watches as Chad Lertora (left to right), Sauro Bertagnini and Mike Lehr guide one of the caryatids into place.

R.C. RIQUE: SUN STAFF PHOTOS

Message in Marble

The ancient-like figures that adorn Baltimore's Marian House reflect a more modern view of beauty and the face of the city.

By EDWARD GUNT'S
SUN ARCHITECTURE CRITIC

In ancient Athens, artists adorned buildings with sculptures of the human figure, called caryatids, that reflected the Greek ideal of beauty.

In modern-day Baltimore, architects have collaborated with a Maryland sculptor to create four caryatids that reflect a different sort of ideal.

The polished marble on the faces and hands is dark, in contrast to the light headdresses and robes. Two have broad noses and full lips that suggest an African-American heritage. The other two have features that seem European. Any of the four could be right off the streets of Baltimore.

These are the American Caryatids, a series of female figures made in Carrara, Italy, and shipped to Maryland last month. They have been erected on the side of Marian House, a building that provides transitional housing and other services for women who have suffered from spousal abuse, drug addiction and homelessness.

Produced by an unusual alliance between the nonprofit organization that runs Marian House and local supporters of the arts, the caryatids were designed as an allegory of the transformation women in the program go through.

At a cost of \$130,000 for the four, they represent one of the largest investments made for public art in Baltimore in the last decade. They will be dedicated at 5:30 p.m. today as part of a \$3.4 million addition to the building at 949 Gorsuch [See *Sculptures*, 8E]



View: Marian House resident Laurel Arthur watches as the sculptures are put into place.

Sculptures wear faces of grace

[Sculptures, from Page 1E]

Ave. in Better Waverly.

Sculptor Claire McArdle said she set out to take the classical Greek prototype of the caryatid and translate it to contemporary America. She has given the figures different stances and named them after four virtues: Honesty, Integrity, Patience and Trust.

Asked whether the figures are meant to represent African-Americans or people of any other race, she said that's up to the viewer.

"They're inspired by people I see out in the world," she said. "They're not all black, but they all have strong features. 'Universal women' is a good term to use."

McArdle has worked in studios in Carrara for the past 15 years, and took two years to carve the caryatids, each 6½ feet tall, out of bardiglio marble. She was assisted at the installation last week by two Italians, Sauro Bertagnini, who owns the studio where she created the caryatids, and Bruno Pon, one of four artisans who worked with her.

McArdle said she gave the caryatids a range of facial features to reflect that "we are a mix" of races and backgrounds in America. She added that the figures are inspired by the women who come to the Marian House program and complete it. Just as human figures can be carved from rough stone, she explained, women can emerge from the Marian House program to become the self-sufficient individuals they strive to be.

"I wanted them, beyond symbolizing any gender or race, to symbolize inner strength and beauty," she said.

Headed by Sister Augusta Reilly, Marian House began in 1982 in the former St. Bernard's Convent on Gorsuch Avenue as a way to provide temporary living quarters for women and their children.

The women who live at Marian House are struggling to overcome a variety of factors that have led them to homelessness, including poverty, chemical addiction, abuse, mental illness and even incarceration. The residents, who typically range in age from their 20s to their 40s, go through an eight-month program that offers instruction in daily living skills, counseling and employment training, with emphasis on nurturing self-esteem.



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Virtuous visage: This sculpture, called *Patience*, was carved in Carrara, Italy, by artist Claire McArdle.

"The mission is to give troubled women the tools they need to realize their potential," Reilly said.

In 1998, Marian House's directors hired KCM Architects to design an expansion and renovation of the present building so they could accommodate more people. The staff was being forced to turn away five out of every six applicants due to lack of space.

The construction project just completed has almost doubled the number of one-room apartments available at the Gorsuch Avenue location, from 16 to 30. It also includes four three-bedroom apartments for families, a multipurpose room, kitchen, lounges, offices and dining and meeting spaces. At its center is the sculpture garden and fountain.

The idea for the caryatids came from architect Brian Kelly, who designed the Marian House addition for KCM. He envisioned four female sculptures on the facade of the building and two at the front gate, most likely in terra cotta, as "healing symbols" that could help tell the story of the women who seek refuge inside.

When a preliminary drawing of the building appeared in *The Sun* in August 1999, no sculptor had been selected. But another local architect, Frank Lucas, thought it would be the perfect commission for McArdle and told her about it. She contacted Marian House and got the commission.

After she began thinking about the caryatids, McArdle suggested marble would be more durable and appropriate than clay. It was also more expensive, but she offered to create four marble figures for the

same price as six terra cotta figures.

The directors of Marian House were skilled in finding funds for transitional housing, but they weren't accustomed to seeking money for public art. One board member, Patty Batza, strongly encouraged the board to pursue it. Another, Alan Evans, contacted the TKF Foundation, an organization in Annapolis that provides funds for "open spaces, sacred places." Its founders, Tom and Kitty Stoner, weren't familiar with McArdle, but they liked her work and agreed to support the Marian House project.

Other support for the sculpture garden came from Michael and Patty Batza, who donated the sculpture entitled *Patience* in memory of their mothers; Danielle and Earl Linehan, who donated *Integrity* in memory of their mothers; Friends of Sister Ellis Denny and the School Sisters of Notre Dame, who donated *Honesty*; and the Sisters of Mercy, Baltimore Regional Community, who donated *Trust*. Other major contributors to the sculpture garden were the Marjorie Cook Foundation, the William G. Baker Jr. Memorial Fund and the Koinonia Foundation.

Money raised for the sculptures and courtyard — about \$300,000 in all — came in addition to the \$3.1 million raised from a combination of public and private sources to expand and renovate the building.

Reilly said the art-related donations were critical to completing the project because the groups that typically support transitional housing programs don't normally provide money for public art.

She said residents have taken great interest in the caryatids, and some have even tried to decide which one they most resemble. The Marian House, meanwhile, has incorporated images of one caryatid, *Integrity*, in signs throughout the building.

To Gail Chapman-Robinson, a former resident who will speak at the dedication, the four caryatids are the women of Marian House.

"The spiritual principles that these female sculptures represent are spiritual principles that Marian women also possess," she said. "Honesty, Integrity, Patience and Trust. God freely gives them all to those who ask."