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Homeless Jesus statue finds a home

Timothy Schmalz has been sculpting Jesus for 25 years, but he's never created a statue quite like this. The Ontario-based artist said that this new version of Jesus is meant to provoke.



Timothy Schmalz created this bronze sculpture of Jesus.

“I’m very sensitive about the stereotypes that people have of Christianity, so I wanted to give a fresh presentation.”

After a year of searching, a homeless Jesus statue has found a home.

He heard “no” from St. Michael’s Cathedral in Toronto and St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, but this bronze Jesus finally found a resting place at a Jesuit theology school in Toronto.

Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz came up with the idea for the unusual sculpture after spotting a homeless person sleeping on the corner of one of Toronto’s busiest streets. It was Christmastime and while the rest of the city was bustling around with the holiday spirit, this person was wrapped up in a sleeping bag. Schmalz didn’t know if it was a man or a woman — all he could see was a mass of cloth lying still on the floor.

“My initial reaction was, ‘That is Jesus,’” the 43-year-old told the New York Daily News.



Schmalz came up with the concept after seeing a homeless man huddling in the cold during Christmastime.

The sculptor, a devout Catholic, has been creating religious artwork for 25 years. But that Christmas experience got him thinking about how Christ has typically been represented in church art.

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Much of the artwork that Schmalz is commissioned to do is inspired by the Renaissance. He says the Christian deity is typically portrayed as a European man with shoulder-length “perfectly blow-dried” hair, and a symmetrical, clean face. Jesus may be pierced and bloody, but his body is usually beautiful — reflecting the Greco-Roman idea that inner holiness takes an outwardly perfect form.

“But Jesus hung out with the marginalized,” Schmalz said. “He was with the prostitutes and beggars.”

As a young artist, Schmalz faced some tough times himself. For the first few years, he says he lived on a wooden bench in a old warehouse, without heating or running water. He knows what it feels like to be on the outskirts of society. So Schmalz wanted to create a Jesus that the poor and outcast could relate to.



It took the sculptor a year and a half to create the bronze statue.

Schmalz’s Jesus lies on a park bench. His face and hands are hidden under the folds of a heavy blanket. The only evidence of the Bible story are the statue’s pierced feet.

“If Jesus were an art critic, he would probably prefer my vision of him,” Schmalz said. “Not the perfection, not the Christ on a throne.”

Schmalz’s goal is to have the homeless Jesus on streets in the world’s biggest cities. He said he is sensitive about the stereotypes that people have of Christianity and Christians, but he thinks that homeless Jesus can challenge those perceptions.

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When Schmalz heard that St. Michael’s and St. Patrick’s weren’t going to give his statue a place on their front steps, his heart sank.



‘Jesus the Homeless’ found a home at the University of Toronto’s Regis College.

Kate Monaghan, a spokesperson for St. Patrick’s told the New York Daily News that the cathedral had to refuse because the building is undergoing extensive restorations.

“But we loved the statue,” Monaghan said. “When the time comes, we’ll certainly take another look.”

Schmalz is glad that his statue has found a new home at the University of Toronto’s Regis College.

“Some people might think that if he’s not depicted as beautiful in a very specific way, then we are insulting him,” he said. “But that’s not true.”

The sculptor is sure that his new Pope would agree with the message behind the homeless Jesus.

“He named himself Francis,” said Schmalz. “St. Francis was a beggar.”