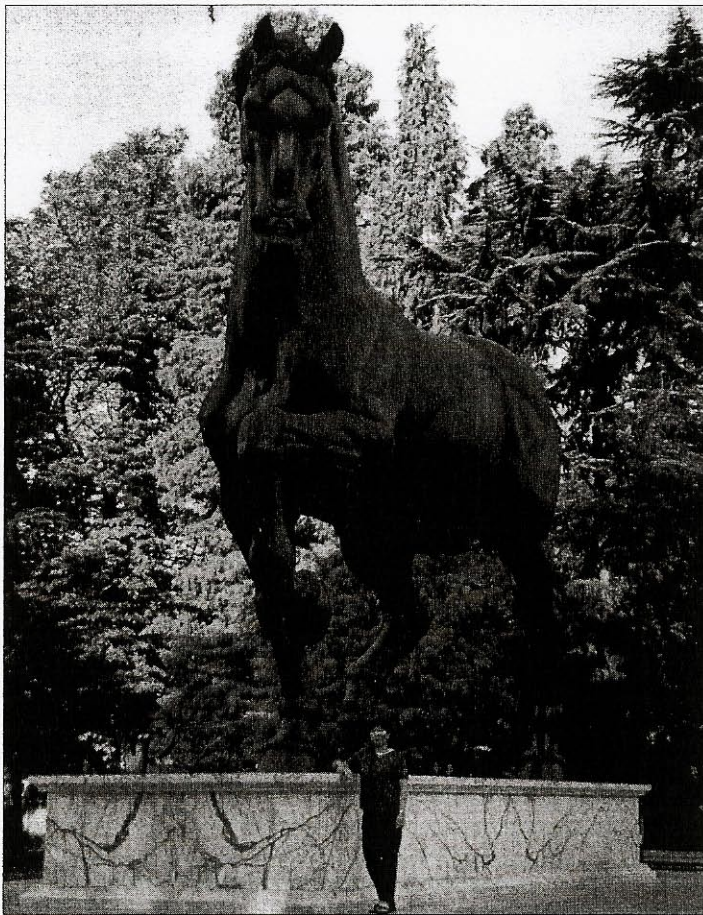


tute College of Art in Baltimore where she majored in painting and studied drawing and anatomy with NSS Fellow, Joseph Sheppard. Somewhere during her years there she became disillusioned with painting. "I was feeling rather frustrated by my lack of ability and interest in that medium." In her fourth year, she took a figurative sculpture class, but even then she was not satisfied sculpting the model as she stood on the stand. Inspiration proved to be only a footstep away. "I remember wandering into one of my classes and kicking the doorstep out of the way so I could close the door. Looking down at the white stone that held the door, I found its texture and pale veined color fascinating." Nina took the stone home and carved and filed it until she held it in the palm of her hand a small, white alabaster lion, 2½ inches long. It was at that moment Nina abandoned painting in favor of sculpture. "I was thrilled! I didn't know that I could have so much fun, even when my hands and fingers were tender and sore from filing."

Nina first learned of the National Japanese American Memorial in August of 1996, right around the time she was working on the Leonardo da Vinci horse. LDVH, Inc. hired her to make improvements on the 8-foot plaster sculpture Charles Dent had originally created. The piece had received some criticism and it was apparent that Charles Dent may have been a professional pilot, but he was an amateur sculptor. "I had spent four difficult months making proportional and anatomical revisions, when Leonardo da Vinci's Horse, Inc. made the decision to destroy both Dent's 8-foot model as well as the 24-foot tall enlargement." Nina was then hired to create a new 8-foot version of the horse from which the 24-foot enlargement was to be based.

It was at that time that Davis Buckley, the architect of the Memorial, invited her to compete for the design of the large bas relief panels for the walls of the Memorial. Nina took on both projects at once. "It was a very stressful time, as I was working without an assistant for long hours during the day and studying anatomy as well as Leonardo's drawings and treatises at night." As she sketched out her concept for the Memorial, she was also doing

her research on the history of the Japanese American experience during World War II. Her studies brought up a wealth of unexpected feelings. "I began to realize how much latent power was contained within the history that led up to this Memorial. It was this power and depth I would call upon - it was this resonance with past memories and



Nina beside the 24-foot version of the Leonardo da Vinci Horse in San Siro, in Milan, Italy

experiences - of not only my family and their tragedy, but contained within the numerous stories and recollections of so many other American citizens of Japanese ancestry who had experienced the injustices of war time hysteria within the United States." Nina competed against several other sculptors nationwide for the project and in a vote by the 45 members of the Board of Directors for the Foundation, her design was unanimously chosen. On November 9, 2000, a dedication was held and the monument was placed on site in Washington, D.C.

After placing the sculpture on site, Nina

was able to view the piece from different angles and in various sunlight and realized that she needed to gold electroplate the cranes' bodies rather than just the tips of their wings as originally planned. "My assistant, David Frech, and I went back to D.C. and worked on the sculpture with foundry equipment for an entire week, taking off the old patina and plating over raw metal. We were half way through our work when a freezing storm arrived that was 20 degrees below D.C.'s normal weather. Davis Buckley...lent David his bright red water-proof hooded sailing outfit and I layered myself with 5 layers of thermal underwear and sweaters and a bright blue hooded jacket. We looked like a dry docked sailor and an Eskimo cleaning an unfinished monument in intolerable weather. The wind chill was in the single digits, and we were above the height of the walls. The wind was so strong it blew our equipment and one of our scaffolds over. The next day, the construction workers on the site built us a huge enclosed plastic environment where we could work calmly and use the torches without catching ourselves on fire. We finished on Thanksgiving morning."

Nina's dedication to her art makes it easy for her to overcome obstacles that some may consider daunting. She enjoys challenging commissions and it is her strong belief that in forcing yourself to think and work beyond your perceivable limits, your best work can be achieved. "You gain strength, courage and confidence by pushing yourself to the edge of your knowledge and your abilities. If you go to the brink of the unknown and see it as a place that is filled with mystery, excitement and unlimited options, rather than something fearful, then the mystery of creation becomes a place of transformation. It can take on a sacred aspect as it becomes evolutionary."