

The Sunday Times

Worth Its Salt

From a 10-Ton Block of Salt Emerges a Piece of Art

BY MICHELLE F. SOLOMON THE SUNDAY TIMES

ig riggings hoisted and pulleyed and tugged. Above the Erdman coddled his

latest creation - a sculpture made from salt.

Had it survived the rough-andtumble trip from Carrara, Italy, to its new home in Clark's

This had been no easy feat, the transporting of an 11-foot-high standing sculpture. Carved from a 10-ton block of rock salt, mined from Akzo Nobel's Salt Avery Island (La.) mine, it had been chiseled, molded and formed

Now it was time to get "Stanza" settled in.

After two years of planning and executing, the piece was ready to stand in Akzo Nobel Salt's atrium lobby.

Erdman climbed up on a ladder and stripped away the card-

board and packing foam that had protected Akzo's investment.

Dressed in khaki shorts, work boots and a T-shirt, Erdman got down into the thick of things.

He wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. It is his practice to follow his art to the end. He dug right in.

HAD BEEN CHALLENGE

After all, this had been a challenge all the way through. While his background is work

ing in stone, especially marble, Erdman said he looked forward to creating something out of salt.

The material itself dictated what I could do. Most of my work has always had very defined lines. Working with this was different," he said.

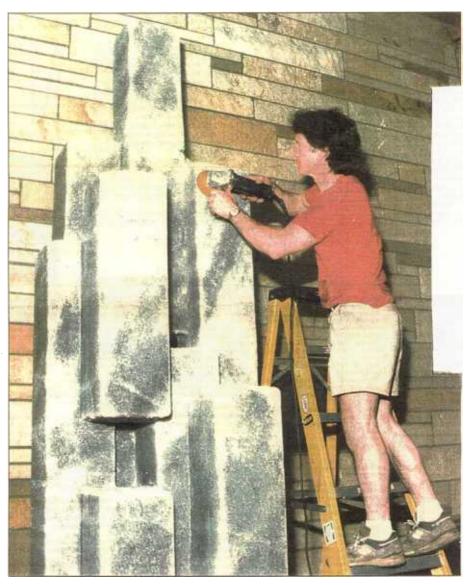
Erdman explained that the salt created demands because it was

much softer to work with than

"The salt material drew me to a very different style. The mate-rial had to be carved in a large, , bulky, structural format,'' Erd-

Though the material dictated the lines of the sculpture, Erdman had ideas of what the form eventually would represent.

"Before I started the project I thought about the salt," he said. 'Crystals grow underground and freeze. There is contrast in salt
— the smooth and the rough," he



COMMISSIONED ARTIST

His partnership with Akzo Nobel Salt started two years ago when Akzo's world headquarters office in Holland commissioned a European artist to create a sculp ture for its office. The request for the salt came through the Clark's Summit headquarters and a large block of salt was ordered

from the Avery Island mine.
"They had enlisted a European artist and they wanted the salt shipped to Holland. The artist was going to make a sculpture for them out of the block," said Catherine Bolton, Akzo Nobel's director of communications

Akzo in Clark's Summit has a number of salt sculptures in the headquarters but nothing decorating the main lobby.
"We decided we wanted one.

We went out and talked to

we went out and talked to corporations, especially PepsiCo," Bolton said.
When Pepsi built new head-quarters just north of New York City in Purchase, N.Y., Donald M. Kendall, its chairman, wanted to establish a sculpture park

In 1985, Erdman was contacted by Kendall, an unusual deviation for PepsiCo since the sculptures in the park were by already established artists.

Erdman's monumental piece for PepsiCo, "Passage," weighs 45 tons and is about 16 feet wide. Please see SALT, Page E14



LEFT: Erdman does the initial chiseling down of the salt to begin the transformation into the sculpture 'Stanza.'





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It is the largest freestanding sculpture ever cut from a single block of marble.

"We talked to the curator there and she contacted Richard Erd-

He sent samples and we liked him," Bolton said.

Bolton wouldn't reveal the price of the work, but she empha-

sized Erdman's national renown.
"We think the art is worth the investment. And it will remain the property of the corporation,'

It was Erdman's association with PepsiCo that became the catapult for his success in creating corporate art.

In addition to his talent as a sculptor, Bolton said Akzo Nobel Salt was impressed with Erdman's way of translating emo tion into his work.

"He came in and talked to Harry (Burns) and Alan (Graf). He visited the mine. He got to know us intimately. He was excited that he'd be working in a medium that actually represents the corporation. It was a chance for him to get totally involved," Bolton said.

WHAT IT MEANS

Erdman pointed to a small, foam model of "Stanza."

"The broken-off areas at the top, the rough areas there

that's the rough part that's growing.

"The sides, of course, symbolize the finished crystal."

Erdman said the piece will represent growth, upwardness and positive energy — traits he felt were evident at Akzo Nobel Salt

"When one walks into the lobby, they will be inspired by feeling of upwardness," he said.

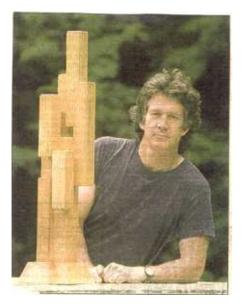
He became engrossed with the idea of unity.

"As crystals are bound together, so are people. The bottom line to all of this is creativity," he said.

Born in Princeton, the 41-yearold sculptor was schooled at the



The 10-ton block of salt arrives at Erdman's studio in Carrara, Italy, from Akzo Nobel's mine in Avery Island, La.



ABOVE: Artist Richard Erdman used a working model made from foam to help build the structure. The model was also used to give Akzo Nobel officials a rendering of the finished product.



Erdman performs "surgery" on the salt as it begins to take shape.

University of Vermont. He sta-died in Florence, Rome and Carrara, Italy, to be closer to the stone.

Soon after, he established a studio in Carrara, the stone capital of the world. His wife, Gayle, a sculptor and photographer, and 11- and 13-year-old children spend most of their time at Erdman's other studio and his residence in Williston,

It was the skill, and of course the stone, that drew Erdman to create his works in Italy.

"That's the source. That's where there is skilled labor, cutters and polishers. You can work out-of-doors all year 'round. There's dust flying everywhere and open air. In Vermont, I'd have to build a shed and work inside."

Always the outdoorsman, Erdman provided a parallel to two of his loves, skiing and sculpting, both highly kinetic.

"I grew up a ski racer and that was a very big part. One of the draws of sculpture was the physical activity and the challenge.

He motioned with his hands "Cutting and carving and the sheer movement. It's like a mountain. My sculptures are balanced, delicate and risky, which portrays what flying down a mountain on skis is like - being on the edge. I try to bring that into my work," he said

"When you're skiing, you're on the edge all the time but you also need to have a sense of balance at the same time.

Erdman said there is something about stone that always drew him to it.

The reason I work in stone is because I grew up outdoors. I swam in marble quarries. I couldn't work in steel or anything other than stone.

"I've tried a little of everything. It's just me. Stone is the shoe that fits."

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