

# RECREATING A FORGOTTEN ART FORM IN INDUSTRIAL GREENPOINT

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4 WHSAD Students (Class of 2016) interned at the Pellettieri Stone Carvers Academy.  
Pictured (left – right): Aboubacar Kieta, Chris Pellettieri, Santiago Budier-Henrique,  
Frank Zayas, and Crystal Roque.

A group of North Brooklyn students are learning about an ancient but often overlooked art form, and ensuring that its tradition is preserved in the neighborhood and beyond.

For just over a month now, four students from the Williamsburg High School of Architecture and Design (WHSAD) have been interning at the Pellettieri Stone Carvers Academy on Kingsland Avenue as part of the school's Summer Internship Program, with 28 students from the school currently enrolled in different programs throughout the neighborhood.

For stone carver and academy head Chris Pellettieri, it is the first experience working with students, but on a recent balmy afternoon at his workshop on another quiet industrial strip of northwest Greenpoint that is surrounded by other artist and manufacturing studios, Pellettieri seemed to have seamlessly transitioned into his role of teacher.

Between fielding questions, Pellettieri's eyes darted to the work of his students behind him. He would run over, provide feedback and instruction, demonstrate how to carve a particular angle into the stone, and would be back to share his vast knowledge of the millennia old tradition.

There was a slip up. A student working on a sculpture of a serpent and a mouse – the mouse representing the people and the serpent representing an autocratic government, had accidentally carved off the mouse entirely from the sculpture.

Students are often encouraged to work with additional stone – in case there are mistakes, they can just carve deeper into the stone and redo whatever they were working on.



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But in this case it was irreparable – the only fix would be gluing it back on.

It was a teaching moment for Pellettieri. He stressed the importance of taking failure in one's stride – of having the faith to start from scratch.

"People are leading more sedentary lives these days, and it's a shame that people don't get to work with their hands or with tools as much anymore," said Pellettieri. "This addresses those problems. Even if the students do this again, the skills they take away from this workshop will be applicable to them for the rest of their lives."



Students work with limestone – which is easier to mold Pellettieri explained. For the first two weeks students simply carved lines on stones and reduced their size – but in a very short time they progressed to extremely intricate designs – representations of zodiac symbols, flowers, to the current projects students are working on – an alien figurine and two hands holding the soccer world cup amongst others.

"Now when I walk around the city and see all the beautiful architecture I have a real appreciation for it," said Aboubacar Keita, 16, one of the interns and a junior at WHSAD. "Few people stop and wonder how much effort goes into work like stone carving, but when you realize it, it's incredible."

For the school administration, it's really important that students get hands-on experience and get to work with local business owners. Especially in a profession like architecture that is becoming more and more reliant on digital advancements, it's important to the leadership at the school that students also have a strong foundational understanding of the field, apart from the modern methodologies.

"WHSAD students are not expected to wait until they graduate college to begin their first job," said Gill Cornell, the principal at WHSAD. "Experience in the workplace is as crucial to a student's education as the classroom. The goal at WHSAD is that our students enter college and begin their adult lives with the advantage of learning how to lead independent, self-sustaining lives."



*To learn more about the Pellettieri academy visit <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pellettieri-Stone-Carving/191678990881481> and to learn more about WHSAD's internship programs visit <http://www.whsad.org/whsad-partners/interested-in-hosting-a-whsad-intern>.*