

Town focus **Rancho Peñasquitos**



Nasser Pirasteh created this sculpture, "Gate of Knowledge," and placed it in his backyard sculpture garden. The native of Iran has more than 40 works in his back yard. *Howard Lipin / Union-Tribune*

Sculptor calls work 'three-dimensional reporting'

By Pat Stein

RANCHO PEÑASQUITOS — Many homes here have nicely landscaped yards, but Nasser Pirasteh is probably the only resident who has turned his yard into an art gallery.

Pirasteh is a sculptor who specializes in outdoor pieces. More than 40 of his large-scale works — made of stone, metal and wood — are exhibited in his backyard sculpture garden.

The garden and outdoor studio where he chisels, chainsaws and welds his work were featured on the 2001 COVA (Combined Organizations for the Visual Arts) studio tour. It's also open for viewing by casual passers-by through the wrought-iron fence that surrounds it.

"People are amazed by what they see," said Pirasteh, a native of Iran.

He immigrated to the United States in 1970 to go to college. At the time, the shah was still in power, but the rumblings of revolt and

the takeover by Ayatollah Khomeini that drove many Iranians from their homeland could already be heard.

"But that's not why I left," said Pirasteh, who still has many family members living in Iran. "I came to the United States for an education."

On a scholarship, he studied at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, where he earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in fine art and then taught for three years before deciding to focus on making his own art.

Pirasteh calls his sculpture "three-dimensional reporting."

"I pay a lot of attention to what's going on in the world," he said.

After the Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center, Pirasteh sculpted a representational piece depicting the plane crashes. It was featured in the "Emigre" exhibition at the COVA gallery in downtown San Diego.

His 9-11 sculpture is a 7-foot-tall column representing the

towers. There are images of fire and the earth.

Pirasteh said that being from the Middle East, he felt both outrage and grief in the wake of the tragedy, and felt compelled to express his feelings by creating a sculpture.

Earlier in his career, he created a commemorative sculpture honoring a fallen police officer. The piece is on display in a park in St. Joseph, Minn. One of his outdoor public art pieces is on display in Dallas, Texas. His work also has been shown at the Escondido Municipal Gallery, the Fallbrook Community Center and galleries in La Jolla. He also has work in private collections.

The pieces in his home sculpture gallery address a wide range of subjects — from women's issues to meteor showers. He works on an elemental level, incorporating the sun, moon, earth, water and fire.

"All of my sculptures have a message," said Pirasteh, adding that he is never short of ideas for new

works.

Pirasteh is a relative newcomer to Rancho Peñasquitos. He and his wife moved to the community about a year ago from a six-acre spread in Clearwater, Minn.

"We came to San Diego to escape the cold weather in Minnesota and we love it here," he said.

But he still chisels granite and other stone quarried in Minnesota. He works with marble, limestone, dolomite, wood, and even construction-grade rebar. Many of his pieces are inscribed with statements by Rumi, Omar Khayyam and other Persian philosophers.

"I like Persian philosophy and the gracefulness of Persian script — it seems to dance."

Pat Stein is a free-lance writer based in Cardiff. Do you have a story idea for Rancho Peñasquitos? Contact **Shay K. McKinley** at (760) 752-6795 or e-mail shay.mckinley@uniontrib.com. For special events, please alert us at least four weeks in advance. We work ahead!