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Malibu sculptor Jon Krawczyk made this cross using metal pieces found in the rubble of the Twin Towers from 9/11. A local church blessed the cross before Krawczyk left on a cross-country trip to take it to St. Peter's Church in New York, where it will replace the cruci x-shaped, steel I-beam girders that emerged from the Twin Towers debris, and which have stood outside the church for the past ve years. Photo courtesy of David Teel Photography

By Paul Sisolak / Special to the Malibu Times May 18, 2011

Jon Krawczyk is a man on a mission to commemorate the victims of 9/11. The Malibu sculptor departed Malibu Wednesday morning, driving an open atbed truck, carrying a 14-foot steel cross that will make its way to a New York City cathedral next week.

Krawczyk's journey is taking him to several points across the country, with Ground Zero the destination, where his creation, which the artist welded from fragments obtained from the World Trade Center rubble, will hang outside St. Peter's Church.

Just months short of the 10-year anniversary of the terrorist attacks, Krawczyk's cross will replace the cruci x-shaped, steel I-beam girders that emerged from the Twin Towers debris, and which have stood outside the church for the past ve years. The Krawczyk memorial will substitute the St. Peter's xture when the original is moved to the future National 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

Museum curators had commissioned Krawczyk to erect a new cross when it was decided that the original, discovered by Ground Zero rescue workers, would be moved. Measuring 14 feet by 10 feet, it weighs a massive 500 pounds.

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“They thought it would be a fabulous idea to replace the cross,” said Krawczyk, a New Jersey native who has called Latigo Canyon home the past 11 years.

Like a church altar housing the consecrated remains of a holy saint, the iron cross contains pieces of metal recovered from the 9/11 disaster site, provided by the museum. “That's what's so special about it,” Krawczyk said. “It was part of the rubble.”

Though not a religious person himself, spiritual imagery often finds its way referentially into Krawczyk's body of mostly large-scale work—the oblong, vertical shapes of Stonehenge-inspired installations like “Relampago,” “Apache Sun” or “Big Horn Geo,” suggest an acknowledgement to Christian idolatry. But his newest project is the most obvious and deliberate in its message, a major task to fill considering the added features Krawczyk combined with his cross that were absent from the 9/11 original.

Like the Vietnam Veterans Wall in Washington, D.C., Krawczyk sculpted an accompanying stainless steel book, the pages of which will be engraved with the names of each person who died on September 11, 2001. Raising the project beyond its symbolic nature, the book, still in progress, will be housed in the cross' base podium and is functional, allowing viewers to etch on paper the names of their lost loved ones, family and friends.

Krawczyk has made the project his own personal pilgrimage, as he finds himself en route this week with friend Kevin Kato, on a trek across America with the cross, emboldened with the statement that 9/11 happened everywhere.

The drive, Krawczyk said, will take the pair to Santa Fe, Indianapolis, Memphis and Nashville, as well as Shanksville, Pa., crash site of United Flight 93, and near the Pentagon in Washington. The artist said a visit to the Lincoln Memorial is also possible.

On Sunday, the cross was on display for services at St. Maximillian Kolbe Catholic Church in Westlake Village. Reaction was overwhelming to the Krawczyk-created cross, a piece of living, breathing art that moves past the conventions of simple artifice.

“One woman walked up to me and said she lost 27 of her friends [on 9/11],” Krawczyk said. “She was absolutely in tears. It made me cry.”

The Malibu Times

NEWSPAPER • MAGAZINE • ONLINE

He continued, “That's what this is about. It's not about religion for me, just to help people to look at something differently and say, ‘This is a symbol of goodness.’”

For the project Krawczyk worked with Leslie Sacks Fine Art near Brentwood, where the cross was unveiled on Wednesday before Krawczyk and Kato embarked on their travels.

“The cross is very, very different & very anthropomorphic. There's tremendous ambiguity if you're looking at a human form or not,” Lee Spiro, the gallery's director, said.

Krawczyk, in conjunction with the gallery, had raised \$12,500 in donations for the project, but for the artist, Spiro said, funding wasn't what mattered in this case.

“It's a labor of love [for Krawczyk],” he said.

Krawczyk said arrangements are in the works to have a ceremony in New York next week, with plans for Mayor Michael Bloomberg, church clergy, and fire and police officials to attend. On Tuesday, the cross was displayed and blessed by Our Lady of Malibu's Rev. William Kerze at Blues Park in Malibu.

“The whole thing is morphing into its own being,” Krawczyk said.

Krawczyk hopes that the cross, and its immortalizing of 9/11's victims, will change the public's consciousness of the tragic day from passive to active. He hopes to see the day when the term “Never Forget” is changed to “Always be Remembered.”

“I like to do memorials,” he said. “It touches you in a way that you have no idea. I want to make sure nobody forgets their names.”