

Between Lotus Columns and Lily Crosses: Architecture and Memory at the Ciminello Mausoleum

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I. Introduction

In the southern section of Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx stands the Ciminello mausoleum. This structure, built in 1972 in the Egyptian Revival style, reveals the story of an immigrant family's journey in twentieth-century New York. More than serving as a final resting place for members of the Ciminello family, the mausoleum embodies the achievements of an Italian immigrant family who found success in New York's construction industry. This paper examines the mausoleum's architectural features and existing physical conditions while tracing the family's transatlantic journey.

II. The Mausoleum

The Ciminello mausoleum exemplifies the enduring popularity of Egyptian Revival architecture in America, a style that experienced periodic resurgences throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The style has powerful associations with immortality and resurrection, making it popular for mausoleums and funerary monuments (*Figures 1 and 2*).



Figure 1: Lindsey Johnston. Front Elevation, 2025

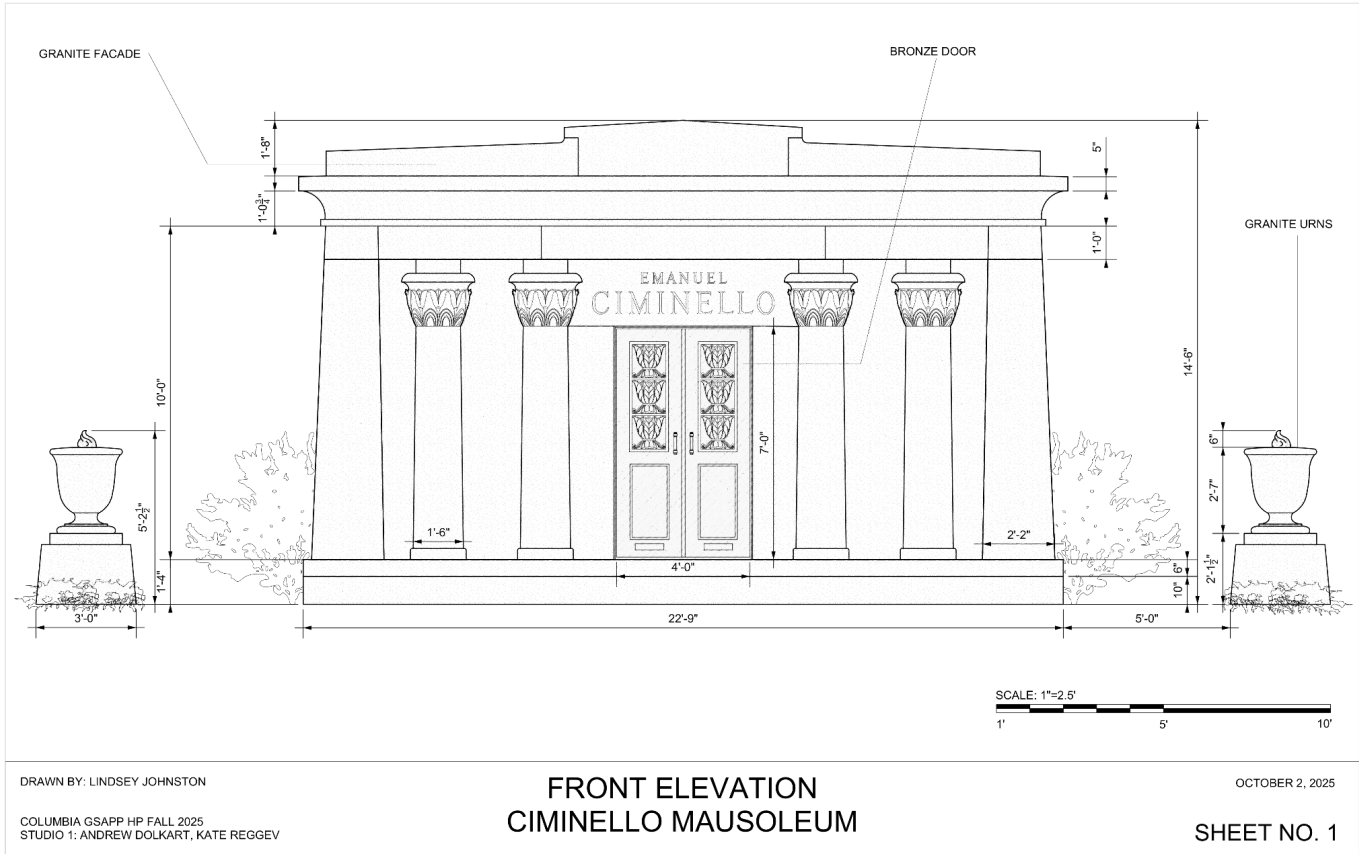


Figure 2: Lindsey Johnston. Front Elevation Drawing, 2025

The mausoleum is relatively simple compared to many of its neighbors in Woodlawn Cemetery. On the exterior, its ornamentation is a restrained interpretation of Egyptian architectural motifs. Its most prominent features are four granite columns decorated with a lotus flower design, flanking the entrance (Figure 3). The lotus is ubiquitous in Egyptian art and architecture, and held profound significance in religious and funerary contexts.¹ It symbolizes rebirth and resurrection due to its unique daily cycle of closing at night and reopening with the sun. The lotus flower emerges each day from the mud, making it a particularly apt symbol for contexts dealing with the cycle of life, death, and renewal.²

Two granite urns positioned in front of the building provide additional classical funerary elements. Their placement frames the approach to the entrance and guides visitors to the mausoleum's entrance. The urns are topped with a small flame, a symbol representing eternal remembrance popular in Victorian funerary art.³ The brass food features delicate foliage designs that bridge the exterior's ancient Egyptian style with the more explicitly Christian imagery found within (*Figures 4 and 5*).

¹ *Model Lotus Flower*, ca. –1981 B.C 2051, Painted and plastered wood, H. 4 1/8 in. (10.5 cm), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/545284>.

² Dżoana Latała-Matysiak and Marcin Marciniak, "The Influence of the Lotus Flower Theme on the Perception of Contemporary Urban Architecture," *Space and Culture* 26, no. 4 (2023): 647–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/12063312211032353>.

³ "The Symbolism of Victorian Funerary Art," *Undercliffe Cemetery*, n.d., accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.undercliffecemetery.co.uk/gallery/funerary-art/>.



Figure 3: Lindsey Johnston, Columns, 2025

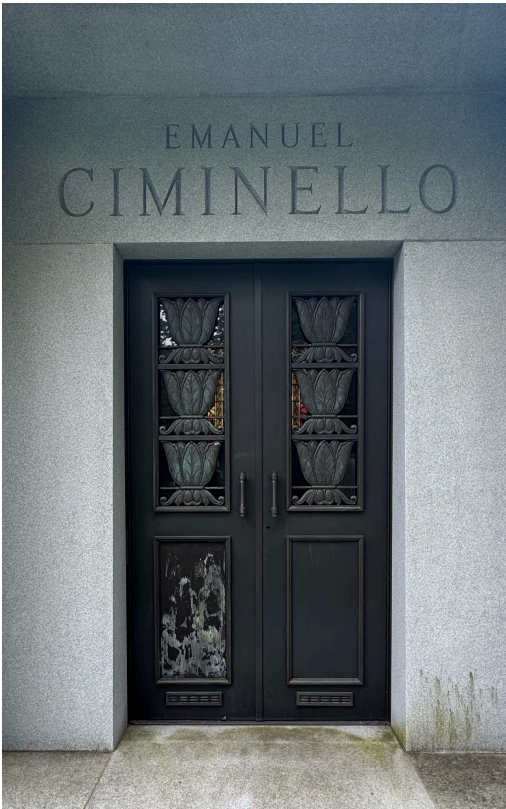
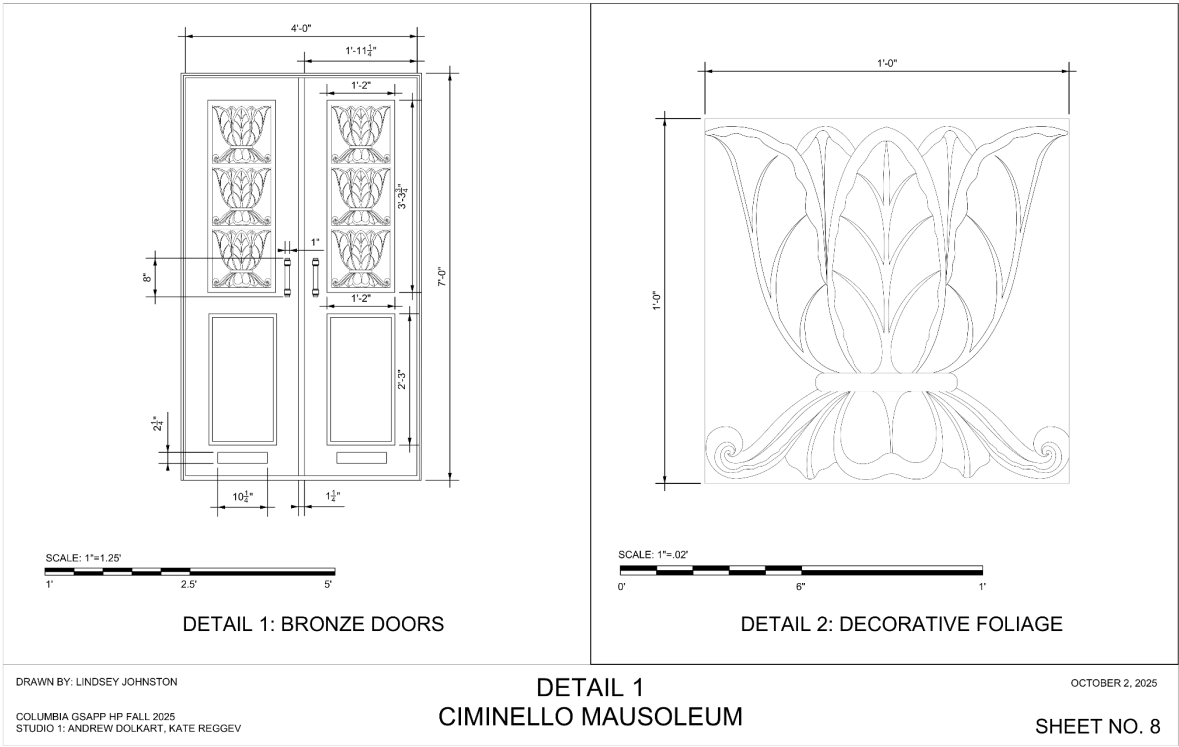


Figure 4: Lindsey Johnston, Mausoleum Door, 2025



Detail 5: Lindsey Johnston. Door Detail Drawing, 2025

The overall design philosophy is notably minimal compared to more elaborate examples at Woodlawn. This may reflect both the aesthetic preferences of the 1970s and possibly budgetary considerations. Nevertheless, the careful selection of symbolic elements emphasize the cyclical nature of life and death.

III. Structural Conditions

The mausoleum's four facades reveal varying states of preservation that warrant attention from cemetery management and preservation professionals. The structure is generally in good condition, but certain areas demonstrate deterioration consistent with the weather conditions of the area. Biological growth is visible on all four sides of the facade close to the ground, most notably on the North facade (IMAGE). The growth indicates moisture problems, which will lead to stone deterioration if left alone. Additionally, the presence of water damage near the roof indicates potential issues with drainage (IMAGE). In effect, moisture is penetrating the structure from above and below, and the deterioration of the stone should be monitored to avoid further issues.

The upkeep of the mausoleum has long been a concern for Woodlawn staff and the Ciminello family. A 1973 letter from William Schneider, Woodlawn's General Manager, to Emanuel Ciminello lays out the estimated costs for the continued maintenance of the mausoleum based on 1972 prices. He predicts a fund of \$7,200 for the future repairs to the exterior, \$2,400 for the future cleaning of the exterior, and

\$4,000 for future monthly cleaning of the interior.⁴ The maintenance of his mausoleum cost Mr. Ciminello a total of \$13,600 in 1973, which would cost an estimated \$105,508.46 in 2025.⁵ Clearly, the maintenance of this mausoleum has been a prominent (and costly) concern since its initial construction.



Figure 6: Lindsey Johnston, North Elevation, 2025

⁴ Emauel and Mary Ciminello, Major Monuments Folder, Box MM 03, Folder 78, Woodlawn Cemetery Archive, Avery Architecture and Fine Arts Library

⁵ "Inflation Calculator," September 11, 2025, <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.



Figure 7: Lindsey Johnston, South Elevation, 2025



Figure 8: Lindsey Johnston, Rear Elevation, 2025

IV. The Interior

Crossing the threshold of the Ciminello mausoleum reveals a striking architectural pivot. Where the exterior references the aesthetics of ancient Egypt, the interior is thoroughly Christian and classical in its design vocabulary. However, the exterior symbolism is referenced inside, bridging the gap between the mausoleum's Egyptian revival style and the Ciminello's Catholic heritage (Figure 9). The altar positioned at the rear of the mausoleum features Corinthian columns, the most ornate of the classical orders. A relief carving depicts a cross surrounded by lilies, introducing a floral motif that references the exterior lotus designs while connecting more directly with the family's heritage. In Christian iconography, lilies symbolize purity, and resurrection, and are particularly associated with the Virgin Mary. This continuation of floral imagery creates visual coherence between the exterior and interior, while marking the transition from Egyptian to classical architectural styles.



Figure 9: Lindsey Johnston, *Interior*, 2025



Figure 10: Lindsey Johnston, Stained Glass Window 2025

The stained glass window above the altar depicts the Holy Family— Mary and Joseph holding the infant Jesus, with a dove positioned above representing the Holy Spirit (Figure 10). Joseph holds a staff topped with lilies, reinforcing the floral symbolism present throughout the mausoleum. There is no documentation describing who designed and fabricated the window, but its craftsmanship and iconography are typical of mid-twentieth-century Catholic devotional art, emphasizing the family's religious and cultural identity.

The crypt itself contains sixteen spaces arranged along the walls, though only four are currently occupied (Figure 11). The number of unused spaces suggests that the family anticipates future interments, though this vision has not yet been realized. An obituary for Emanuel Jr., who passed away in 2022, indicates that he was buried in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he lived with his wife, Maryanne.⁶

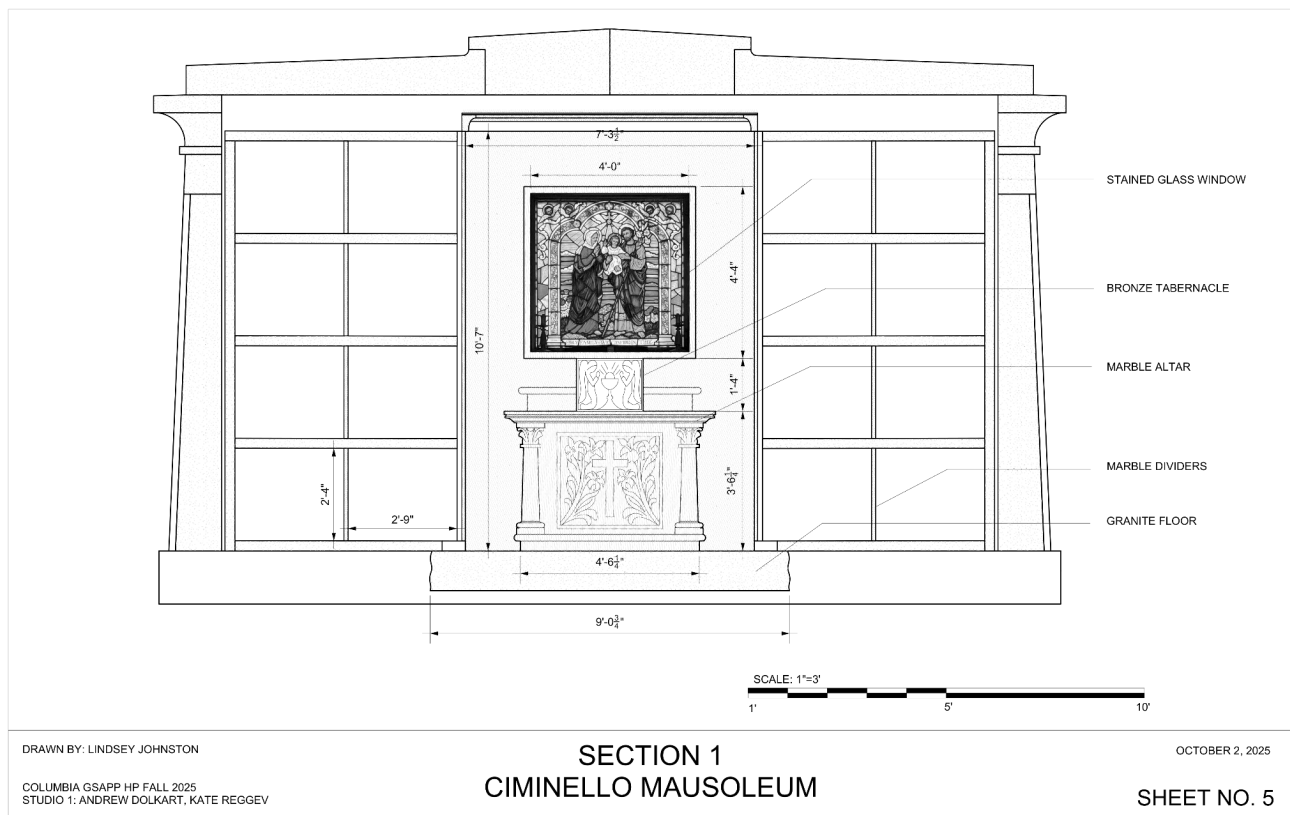


Figure 11: Lindsey Johnston, Section Drawing, 2025

⁶ "Emanuel Ciminello Obituary - Fort Lauderdale, FL," Dignity Memorial, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/fort-lauderdale-fl/emanuel-ciminello-10838426>.

V. The Ciminello Family

The Ciminello family's American story begins with Angelo Ciminello, born in Italy in 1878. Little is known about his early life or the circumstances that led him to emigrate, but his path represents a migration pattern less familiar in American immigration narratives than the direct European-to-American movement. At some point before 1908, Angelo relocated to Argentina as part of a wave of Italian immigration to South America that occurred between the 1880s and 1920s.⁷ Angelo's time in Argentina proved consequential beyond his own biography. His son Emanuel was born in Santa Fe, Argentina, on October 14, 1908. This detail, confirmed by Emanuel's 1930 petition for citizenship, complicates simple narratives of Italian immigration to America. The Ciminellos were not direct Italian immigrants, but rather part of a secondary migration from South America to the United States. In April 1926, Emanuel, then 18 years old, immigrated from Buenos Aires aboard the vessel *Vauban*. Whether Angelo accompanied him on this voyage is unclear from available records, though Angelo appears in the Ciminello household in the Bronx in the 1950 U.S. Census.⁸

Angelo's wife, Immacolata, remains an elusive figure in the historical record. Born in 1890, she died in 1919 at the age of 29. The timing of her death during the devastating 1918 influenza pandemic indicated the possibility that she was among the

⁷ *A Brief History of Italian Immigration in Argentina – Bridge To Argentina*, May 5, 2023, <https://bridgetoargentina.com/brief-history/>.

⁸ "1950 United States Federal Census," accessed October 2, 2025, https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/search/collections/62308/records/278104951?tid=&pid=&queryId=35d59116-a245-4ec4-a0be-c9e6a9da5651&_phsrc=swv35&_phstart=successSource.

pandemic's millions of victims, though no definitive evidence confirms this. Her presence in the mausoleum raises questions about the date of Angelo's relocation to New York City. Immacolata likely died in Argentina, but if she died in New York, it would indicate that she and Angelo made the journey before their son in 1926. Regardless, her death occurring decades earlier and potentially in another country speaks to the family's commitment to keeping their dead together and honoring Angelo's wife alongside the later generation.

Despite the challenges of immigration and widowerhood, Angelo established himself successfully in New York's construction industry. His obituary, published upon his death in 1965, identifies him as the founder of Delma Engineering Corporation, a company he passed on to his son Emanuel.

By 1931, newly naturalized Emanuel married Mary DeLucia in New York, beginning a partnership that would last 72 years until both died in 2003. The 1950 census provides a snapshot of the Ciminellos in midlife. Emanuel, Mary, their five-year-old son Emanuel Jr., and Angelo all lived together at 1574 White Plains Road in the Bronx. Emanuel's occupation is listed as "surveyman" for a construction company—presumably Delma Engineering, his father's company.

Mary Ciminello, born in Bari, Italy, in 1913, represents the more familiar pattern of direct Italian immigration to America. She arrived in New Jersey in 1920 at age seven, part of the massive wave of Italian immigration that transformed American cities in the early twentieth century. Bari, located in the Puglia region of southern Italy, was a major source of emigrants during this period, as economic hardship and limited opportunities drove many southern Italians to seek better prospects abroad. Together,

Mary and Emanuel had one child, Emanuel Jr., born in 1945. Mary lived to age ninety, surviving Emanuel by only a short time before her death in 2003.

VI. The Architect

Nicholas Marcotrigiano remains a relatively obscure figure despite his professional practice in monument design. His specialization in monuments placed him in a niche field. Only one other Marcotrigiano-designed mausoleum exists at Woodlawn Cemetery, suggesting either a limited practice or that much of his work occurred in other cemeteries in the New York metropolitan area. There is, however, limited information available about his life. Like Immacolata, Angelo, and Mary, Nicholas immigrated to America from Italy. He appears in the 1940 U.S. Census as the head of his household on South 10th Avenue in Mount Vernon, NY, with his wife, Lena, and his father, Michael. His occupation is listed as "Owner" in the monumental works industry, indicating extensive experience in the field by the time he designed Emanuel's mausoleum. His design demonstrates his competent handling of historical styles and symbolic elements. The integration of Christian elements within an Egyptian exterior framework indicated either sophisticated client collaboration or Nicholas's own understanding of how to create meaningful symbolic juxtaposition.

VII. Conclusion

The Emanuel Ciminello Mausoleum stands as a convergence point for multiple historical narratives, namely the complex migration patterns that brought Italian families to America via South America, the economic opportunities that enabled immigrant families to achieve success, and the eventual fragmentation of those families across time and space. The mausoleum, with its lotus columns and lily-adorned cross, its grand vision and modest reality, stands as a testament to one family's journey as immigrants in America, and as a reminder of the cycles of death, rebirth, and renewal of which we are all a part.

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