

If Statues Could Speak



Robert Taylor

The talented, energetic Paul Moore is resurrecting the once-proud program in figurative sculpture.

BY KATHRYN JENSON WHITE ■



Statues, of course, are static, but in the complexity of the human personalities they capture, sculptor Paul Moore's three-dimensional bronze biographies generate powerful energy.

Take, for instance, the twice life-size image of President Emeritus George Lynn Cross in front of Evans Hall on Parrington Oval. Cross is seated, with the soft folds of his academic gown draped peacefully around him. In his left hand is a closed book, a finger marking a page. The man is every inch the scholar. That is only half the story, however. Jutting from under the robe is a foot that suggests the seated figure is about to leap up and stride forward. This contemplative man of letters is also a powerful man of action.

Or pause for a moment on the east lawn of the Oklahoma Memorial Union in front of the one and one-quarter life-size statue of Carl Albert, the 46th speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. The work captures the compact, casual slouch of the simple man from Bug Tussle, while at the same time suggesting the formality of the speaker's national stature. He is, indeed, "the little giant." Dangling casually from his right hand is a gavel, symbol of the very big small man who walked softly but wielded great power.

Neither of the statues is fussy in detail, but the works' simple lines speak volumes about the complex individuals each depicts. Moore is a stellar

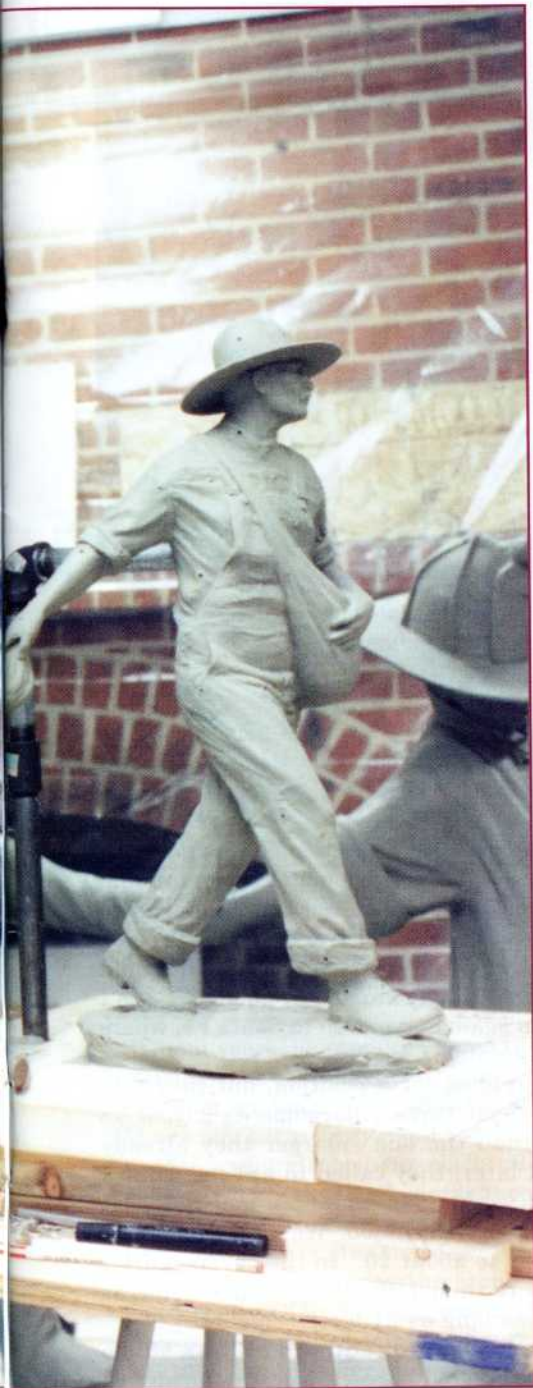
representative of the school of monumental figurative sculpture that immortalizes heroes in bronze. In addition, Moore—whose work graces the National Portrait Gallery, the Smithsonian Institution and numerous municipal, corporate, private and international collections—is artist-in-residence at OU. As part of a two-year contract that began in fall 1997, he not only is busy sculpting on monumental commissions but also is re-creating the University's figurative sculpture program. The program has been nonexistent since the 1969 retirement of Joe Taylor, who established the figurative sculpture department in 1932.

With the bronze version of the University seal already in place in the Oklahoma Memorial Union, Paul Moore turns his attention to the five-foot two-inch, three-dimensional statue of the seal's sower, which will stand nearby. The face of the sower was sculpted from photographs of David Ross Boyd, OU's first president.

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"I was at the unveiling of the Dr. Cross sculpture in 1996 when President Boren asked me if I would consider restarting the figurative sculpture program," Moore recalls. "When Joe Taylor retired in the late '60s, abstract, contemporary art was in full swing, and figurative sculpture just sort of died out. The figurative movement has been gaining strength for about the last 10 to 15 years, and President Boren saw the need and desire to reinstate the academic program."

At the time of the discussion with Boren, Oklahoma City native Moore had an active career based in his Santa Fe, New Mexico, studio. Before accepting Boren's challenge, Moore had to finish the most monumental work he has undertaken to date, a 34-foot-long, 11-foot-high, 7-foot-wide bronze piece



depicting a cattle drive along the Chisolm Trail. Commissioned by Duncan's McCasland Foundation in 1994, "On the Chisolm Trail" was unveiled during that city's April 25 centennial celebration as the centerpiece of the 16-acre McCasland Park. The foundation spent roughly \$2 million on the park and the bronze, which begins as a low relief, moves to a high relief and ends as a three-dimensional sculpture. The effect is of history taking shape before the eyes of the viewer, of the two-dimensional stuff of legend taking on three-dimensional life. Moore worked on the enlarged version of the statue for a year and seven months in Santa Fe, finishing the clay sculpture two days before he was scheduled to arrive in Norman June 1.

Since his arrival, Moore has completed another piece for the University. Installed in the second floor landing of the newly remodeled Oklahoma Memorial Union, his six-foot-in-diameter rendition of the University's seal is, simply, stunning. Protected by brass stanchions and crimson velvet ropes, the relief draws notice from all who pass.

"I was very pleased with the way the seal turned out," Moore says. "What's remarkable is that it was poured in one casting, which is very unusual for a piece of that diameter. Although the finished piece weighs 560 pounds, we had to pour over 800 pounds of bronze into the mold. The resin-bound sand mold itself weighed 3,600 pounds. Shidoni Foundry in New Mexico cast it for me; I do all my work with them. Life is much easier when you have a good relationship with your foundry."

Moore ought to have a good relationship with Shidoni, given that he ran the foundry's enlarging department for seven years. In that capacity, he was responsible for turning maquettes—small-scale models of statues—into large-scale versions. A self-taught artist, Moore developed and honed his skills in bronze casting the hard way—on the casting floors of foundries in Montana and New Mexico.

"I began my career as an engineer for a telephone company in Redding, California," he says. "I designed outside aerial leads, manhole designs and microwave towers. The work I did there helped me understand how to build a proper structure. I took what I learned there and figured out how to build proper armatures for monumental pieces of art.

"I had always drawn but never sculpted. When I was 24, I saw a bronze in a friend's studio, and it piqued my interest. He filled me in on how he had done it. He encouraged me to try my hand and gave me a block of wax. That sparked it all. I went home, cut up the wax and became a sculptor."

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One of Paul Moore's most charming sculptures is the daisy chain of youngsters he is creating for the Children's Museum in Muncie, Indiana.

As soon as he put down his drafting pencil and picked up his carving knife, Moore was hooked. He decided soon thereafter that he had to focus his energies on developing his art.

"My wife has been very understanding," he says. "I quit a very good paying job to go work in foundries for minimum wage. I loaded up my family and moved from California to Kalispel, Montana, and worked at two foundries. Then I decided I had to really learn the art of enlarging so I could do not just gallery work but monumental public art. So I loaded the family up again and moved to Santa Fe, where Shidoni Foundry is located.

"I immediately applied for a position, but they told me they did only about three enlargements a year so didn't need more than the one enlarger they already employed. A week later, they called to ask me when I could show up for work. The enlarger had quit. It seemed my destiny to have that job. We went from three enlargements a year to about 20. In the seven years I was there, I did more than 120 enlargements, some as tall as 36 feet and as long as 21 feet."

When he left the foundry to return to his own studio each evening, Moore created his own pieces. During his



Students in Paul Moore's figurative sculpture classes credit him with teaching them to see the human form in a new way. As one student said, "His eyes see in a way mine don't."

the advanced class attracted 14 students. Moore has three graduate students working with him and one student taking a separate course in enlarging techniques. Several students had to be turned away because of classroom space limitations. An addition to the building has been approved to nearly double the space for future classes.

"Technically, now we are just offering a studio course within the fine arts program," he says. "However, we're in the

process of trying to develop a bachelor of fine arts and a master of fine arts in sculpture. I would like the students to have a hands-on experience working in a professional studio. I want to prepare them for a future in sculpture. Most professional programs offer that. Imagine training a law student to be only a legal mind but not a professional lawyer or a journalism student to be only a writer but not a professional journalist. School should prepare you realistically for what your career will demand of you.

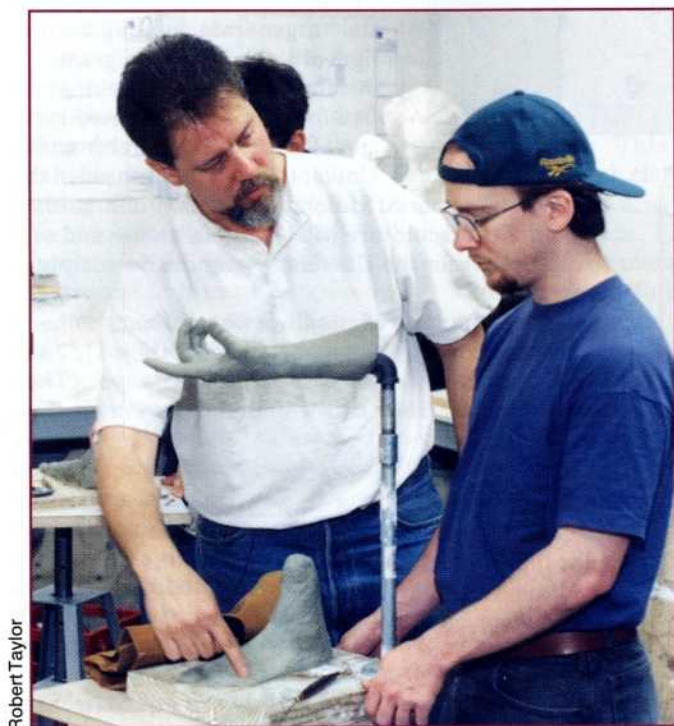
"When students begin, they think that when they become a sculptor, they simply sculpt all day. What I can teach them is how much business is involved in all this. You have to know how to write a contract. You have to work with a variety of people in the many stages of the process, and you have to be there knowing what to do and how to do it: writing proposals, getting bids, working with contractors, dealing with clients and foundry personnel, shipping pieces, installing public art, locating cranes. It can be a shock. In our program, they can learn from my experiences and the school of hard knocks I've had to go through."

Taking Boren's vision from conception to a fully developed program is itself a complex process. In addition to developing the sculpting program, Moore is trying to lure a foundry to Norman. The idea that students could watch their works move from conception to finished pieces excites Moore.

"I want all the serious students—those who really want to be sculptors—to leave the program with several commissions under their belts," he says. "Through these pieces they'll know how the commission process works. When they leave here, they could have the kind of experience it takes professional artists years to have on their own."

Plans for the program include helping it pay its own way by taking commissions for sculptures that students would create under Moore's guidance. At present the students are working on a commission for two ¼ life-size buffaloes for the Department of Transportation and a nurses memorial for the Paralyzed Veterans of America to be placed in Muskogee. All the proceeds will go into the figurative sculpting program.

Continued



After enrolling in his first three-dimensional sculpture course this spring, Garrison Buxton, right, jumped at the opportunity to help Paul Moore with the enlargement of the sower from the University seal.

Shidoni years, he produced three life-size figures on commission. The early days of submitting proposals and facing rejection are long gone. With his word-of-eye reputation, Moore now turns away commissions because he has not the time to sculpt all the pieces he is offered.

Much of his time and energy these days is now focused on the figurative sculpting program that is taking shape at OU. Moore estimates that fewer than 10 such programs exist in the country. Starting small in the basement of the Old Faculty Club, located just to the northwest of Boyd House, he offered a beginning figurative sculpting class in fall 1997; seven undergraduates enrolled. In spring 1998,



Before accepting the OU offer to revive the figurative sculpture program, Paul Moore had to finish the monumental cattle drive, "The Chisolm Trail," one element of which is shown here in his Santa Fe studio.

These projects and others to follow will help students build a three-dimensional portfolio with which they can show potential clients what they have done, rather than just telling them what they can do. The projects also have the potential to generate funding for the figurative sculpting program.

Moore is currently working on a five-foot two-inch, three-dimensional statue of the sower from the University seal to be placed in the

Oklahoma Memorial Union. An edition of a 12-inch version of this sculpture will be cast in bronze and sold to raise funds for the University's figurative sculpture program.

"Three-quarters of the time when clients come to a sculptor to say they want a piece, they also say they have no funds to pay for it," Moore says. "They ask the artist, 'How can we make this work?'"

Paul Moore created this clay maquette, "Lost Innocence," after the April 19, 1995, Oklahoma City bombing. It has never been cast in bronze.

You can turn your back, which some artists do, or you can be creative and help them figure out a way to hire you. You tell them that you'll do a maquette and

figure out how many to make for an edition. You'll budget so much for casting, shipping, the base, the mold, etc., then price and sell each of the small pieces to make a profit. That profit goes into a pot, and as the pot grows, we can begin working on the large-scale piece. Being a fund raiser is part of being a free-lance artist.

"I don't think this is a common strategy in academia, but I hope we can make enough from these kinds of projects to make the program self-supporting. If you want to do things and you don't have money, you have to work to create a budget before you can create art."

Moore's undertaking may seem monumental, but he is used to large challenges. His larger-than-life statues of larger-than-life men like George Lynn Cross and Carl Albert prove he has the skill to succeed. After all, any man who can sculpt a cattle drive ought to be able to drive a sculpting program.



Can Do, Can Teach

As a teacher, Paul Moore also sculpts; students, not clay, are the raw materials with which he works. As he shapes the artistic vision and the professional futures of the students who pass through his combination studio and classroom, he creates what he considers his real masterpieces. Those who have taken one or both of his figurative sculpture studio courses give him the bronze medal in the art of instruction. In this case, of course, bronze is the medal—and metal—of choice.

"My students are amazing," Moore said soon after the spring semester began. "The ones in the sculpting class now have been sculpting for only about three weeks, and they're doing extremely well. We have several who aren't even art majors. Ken Hoving, for example, is retiring from the psychology department. He has always wanted to sculpt but didn't get around to it until retirement."

Hoving, department chair at the time of his May 1998 retirement, was also graduate dean and vice president for research for 11 years. During the spring class, he worked on a bronze relief of himself holding his first grandson, Mikey, who at the time was just five days old.

"It's wonderful," he says. "I'm having more fun doing this. It amazes me that I can take clay and mold it into something that looks like something, someone. There are all kinds of little problems to work out, and I like that challenge. I'm using a whole new part of my brain."

Hoving says professor of art Victor Youritzin told him that Moore's class would be a winner.

"Halfway through the (fall) semester, I asked if I could come over to watch what was involved," he says. "I'd never done any art but always wanted to. I told my wife that when I retired I wanted to sculpt, which is crazy because I had no idea whether I could. After the second day of watching, Paul said, 'Don't you want to do something?' I did a bust last semester, a self portrait. It was a challenge to reverse my image. When you do a self portrait, you use a mirror.

"I want to continue as long as they'll allow me. They say as long as I don't drool too badly, I can stay. I've set up a small studio at home and am working on the head of an Indian woman from a photograph that was given to me many, many years ago."

Although Garrison Buxton has an undergraduate degree in international business, he must take undergraduate courses in art as a condition for admission to the graduate program. He wants to work toward a master's in printmaking with an emphasis on figurative sculpture.

"Both Paul and the printmaking professor (Dan Kiacz) are very interested in the students and their work, so it's pleasurable to work with them," he says. "This is my first three-dimensional class, and I've kind of fallen in love with it. I want to do enlargements. I'm helping Paul with his enlargement of the sower. It's nice to have things in public where many people can see them, not just in the home of some collector."

Most of the figurative sculpting students have—or are pursuing—degrees in art or visual communication.

Kim Ray completed an undergraduate degree in printmaking and entered the master's program in fall 1998.

"I do patterning in my prints," she says. "I thought these patterns would make nice tiles. I'm really making low reliefs of my two-dimensional prints. I had done some portrait work, and I really find it easier to sculpt than to do the two-dimensional portrait."

Caroll Houser, who has a master's in art, has been working for seven years as a professional artist. As Moore's assistant in summer 1997, Houser worked on a piece Moore has created for the Children's Museum in Muncie, Indiana.

"I actually started college as a sculptor, but there was not a figurative teacher then, so I switched my major to anthropology," she says. "This is what I've been searching for."

Tim Sullivan is a screen printer with a double degree in printmaking and ceramics. He served as Moore's

assistant during the spring semester. He has earned a master's and a master of fine arts from the University of Dallas in the same areas.

"My prints deal with human forms," he says. "I'm dyslexic, and this is my language. I'm translating my prints into three dimensionals in this class. I'm setting up my own shop with a 6,000-square-foot area for enlargements and a gallery and areas for screenprinting and photography."

"I'm very interested in monumental art. Art should be for the public to enjoy as well as private individuals. Helping Paul teach helps me get my foot in the door. He's a mentor. He works with each student individually and pushes them to the edge so they keep seeing in different way."

Dennis Creedonn, senior painting major, and Kathie Krueger, senior visual communication major, got around the difficulty of working with mirrors to do self-portrait busts by doing busts of each other.

"It's supposed to be harder to do yourself because the mirror makes it backward, and, because people look different on each side, you have to be sure to switch it or you don't look like yourself."

"I think she's doing my head very well. With no eyeballs yet, it's a bit hard to tell if it really looks like my face. Maybe that's how I'll look when I've been dead about a year." To Creedonn's version of her, Krueger pays the ultimate compliment: "When I look at it, I see me."

Krueger spends most of her time at the computer, so getting her hands dirty is a new experience for her.

"This is more just a personal interest," she says. "I'm sure it will help me in my work, though, because I'm learning a lot about figures by working in 3-D that I wouldn't have otherwise. Paul helps so much. He can tell you one small thing, and it changes the entire piece for the better. His eyes see in a way mine don't."

In Moore's case, those who can, do very well—and also teach.

—KJW