



On a wet February day, excitement fills the Figurative Sculpture Studio on the north edge of the University of Oklahoma campus. Artist-in-Residence Paul Moore, his assistant Sohail Shehada and Physical Plant carpenter Rod Henry huddle around a 4½-foot-tall sculpted figure of Oklahoma art pioneer and former School of Art Director Oscar B. Jacobson. The piece is destined for a doorway niche at Jacobson Hall, once the Art Museum and now housing the OU Visitor Center.

# *Finding Their Own* Niches

BY ROBERT FERRIER

Classic campus buildings are being adorned with sculpted likenesses of major players in the OU story.

ABOVE: Nick Lillard, a student of Artist in Residence Paul Moore, puts finishing touches on his sculpture of the founding OU Fine Arts Dean Fredrik Holmberg, which will occupy one of the niches at Holmberg Hall.

Other clay sculptures are scattered about the studio in various stages of completion—Carol Brice Carey, Thomas Carey, Bruce Goff, Fredrik Holmberg, Savoie Lottinville, Cedomir Sliepcevic. They seem to observe Moore and Shehada as they carefully carry the Jacobson figure through the doorway and hoist it into the back of a waiting SUV.

A beaming Shehada, who with Moore assisted student Lisa Clanton in creating this sculpture, recalls the basic research into their subject. “Jacobson was a tall, vigorous artist,” he explains. “We visited John Lovett, librarian at the OU Western History Collections, and looked at photographs of Jacobson. Then we sculpted him in a pose that seemed to capture his passion for art—holding a paint brush and palette.”

After the short drive around Parrington Oval, Moore and Shehada unload the figure and carry it toward Jacobson Hall. The footing looks slippery. “We don’t worry about dropping the piece,” Moore says. “We worry about fitting it into the niche.”

In the doorway, Shehada unfolds a paper template of the niche’s base, which Henry uses to drill bolt holes to secure the sculpture. Moore and Shehada face the moment of truth. The sculpture’s base must fit the niche exactly, allowing only enough space for a caulking sealant.

Visitor Center Director Leslie Baumert steps outside to watch as the crew lifts the figure into place. “This first one is exciting,” she says. “We’re looking forward to receiving five other figures: Mildred Andrews Boggess, Carol Brice Carey, Thomas Carey, Bruce Goff and Gail de Stwolinski.”

The sculpture’s base fits, evoking smiles all around as Henry seals the edges. Oscar Jacobson looks as if he had been standing there for decades.

Robert Taylor



Paul Moore, right, and Sohail Shehada arrive at Evans Hall with figures of OU presidents Joseph A. Brandt, sculpted by Lisa Lessert, and J. Herbert Hollomon, sculpted by Steve Cones, both of which will be lifted by the cherry picker in the background to join Nick Lillard’s depiction of President George L. Cross, already mounted at top center.

The depiction of Oscar Jacobson is the 16<sup>th</sup> of major figures in OU history to be mounted in the niches on three of OU’s older buildings—Jacobson Hall, Evans Hall and Bizzell Memorial Library. In all, 47 are planned for these locations, as well as Whitehand Hall, the Chemistry Building, Holmberg Hall, Felgar Hall and the Oklahoma Memorial Union.

The idea for this project originated with President David Boren, long a champion of campus tradition. During a walk in 1999, he realized that something was missing from the Cherokee gothic facades of the old buildings. While Presidents David Ross Boyd and Stratton D. Brooks in classic sculpted poses occupied niches on either side of the Evans Hall doorway, similar architectural features elsewhere on Evans and other buildings

stood empty. Here, he reasoned, was an opportunity to enhance the buildings and pay tribute to those who had contributed so much to the University’s development.

Boren consulted several persons familiar with institutional history, and with their advice, came up with a list of honorees, which he sent to Paul Moore, a renowned sculptor who joined the OU School of Art faculty in 1997. Moore recognized the project’s potential for his figurative sculpture program. He and Shehada chose several of their students to assist and went to work in their studio, located in the basement of the Old Faculty Club, north of Boyd House.

“I assign a project to Sohail or one of the students,” Moore says. “Sohail creates some figures, and helps the students with others. However, I supervise everything. If a piece lacks something, I correct the problem. Whatever leaves this studio will represent the University well.”

Shehada, 35, has been Moore’s right hand for the past three years. Leaving his native Kuwait 20 years ago to study in the United States, Shehada received a bachelor of fine arts degree from Oklahoma State University before enrolling at OU and earning a bachelor of architecture in 1994 and a master of fine arts in 1998.

Shehada has found his home. “I’ve learned more in three years with Paul than I had in my lifetime,” he says. “We learn all facets of the profession—not just the technical aspects—but also how to prepare a portfolio, set fees and work for customers.”

In the niche project, the OU sculptors found a meld of opportunity and challenge that also required some ingenuity.

“When we tried to install the figure of President (William Bennett) Bizzell over the south entrance to the library, we lacked the width for a standard pose,” Shehada says. “However, by





ABOVE: W. B. Bizzell likenesses occupy two building niches—above the original entrance to Bizzell Library and on the front of Evans Hall.

LEFT: Physical plant carpenter Rod Henry, left, Paul Moore and Bob Norton hoist the sculpted figure of Oscar Jacobson into place in the doorway niche at Jacobson Hall, home of the OU Visitor Center.

turning the figure 45 degrees, we fitted it into the niche.”

The sculptors cast the figures in a polymer material with a fiberglass backing to save weight. For example, the Bizzell niche would support only 200 pounds. Shehada’s cast polymer sculpture weighed 187. The polymer is colored to match the surrounding limestone.

Figures of Boren and 10 other OU presidents have joined Boyd and Brooks on the north side of Evans Hall—William S. Banowsky, Bizzell, Joseph A. Brandt, James S. Buchanan, George L. Cross, A. Grant Evans, J. Herbert Hollomon, Frank E. Horton, Paul F. Sharp and Richard L. Van Horn.

Other figures in place or planned read like a Who’s Who of OU history. In addition to Bizzell, the only repeat honoree, niches above the library’s south entrance are occupied by early librarian Jesse L. Rader and OU benefactor Doris W. Neustadt, for whom the library’s west wing is named. Others scheduled for library installation are Savoie Lottinville,

long-time director of the University of Oklahoma Press; Duane H. D. Roller, founding curator of the History of Sciences Collections; Chaucerian scholar Paul Ruggiers; botanist Paul B. Sears; ornithologist George M. Sutton; and modern languages professor Melvin Tolson. (*A complete list of the figures and their locations appears in the accompanying box.*)

To assist with this project, Moore chose students with the talent and commitment required to produce public art—traits on which those in the figurative sculpture program are judged. Typical of the group is Nick Lillard, Norman junior, who created the figures of Presidents Cross and Evans. Lillard received the Joe Taylor Best in Figurative Sculpture Award in OU’s annual student art show and presented work at the 2000 National Sculpture Society Show in New York. He praises Moore for creating an environment where students can excel.

“I produce visual poetry,” Lillard says. “For example, Fredrik Holmberg stands

as a conductor, musical notes rising from the sculpture’s base as if from a field of energy. On this project, Moore manages to instruct me without trampling my vision. He sets himself apart from teachers who can create art but can’t explain concepts.”

Lillard plans a career using art as social commentary. “I want to change thoughts. Months of work focus on the instant when someone sees the sculpture for the first time. Do they look and walk away? Or do they pause and think?”

Jay Hylton, Elk City senior, sculpted the figure of President Bizzell. Currently, he is working on a nine-by-nine-foot elk, which will be placed in front of Elk City’s town hall. The sculpture dominates the OU studio’s front room.

“I’m proud that something I created will be seen by thousands of people,” Hylton says. “Someday I’ll take my grandchildren there.”

Noble senior Bob Norton produced the figure of President Buchanan. Now he is at work on the sculpture of engineering educator and researcher

Cedomir M. Sliepceвич, which will be placed on Felgar Hall.

“As I looked at photos of Dr. Sliepceвич, I gained an appreciation not only of his engineering career, but also of the man himself,” Norton says. “I want to portray him in a natural way. How does he stand? What facial features draw the viewer’s eye?”

He credits Moore with giving him the confidence to accept such a challenge. “Paul builds you up, rather than tearing you down. His ego never gets in the way, and he adjusts to each student’s personality.”

An Oklahoma City native and member of the Creek nation, Moore, 45, learned his craft in Montana and New Mexico foundries. He has sculpted more than 60 commissions, 25 of them installed in Oklahoma, including the nine-foot figure of Edward L. Gaylord and the life-size figure of former Governor and U. S. Senator Henry Bellmon at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds in Oklahoma City and a nine-foot figure of Hall of Fame catcher Johnny Bench for Oklahoma City’s Bricktown Ballpark. Moore currently is working on a monumental sculpture depicting the Oklahoma Land Run for the Oklahoma Centennial Commission and Oklahoma City. When completed in 2007, the 45-element work, to be located south of Bricktown, will be one of the world’s largest bronze sculptures.

He sculpted the three 12-foot icons of the “Seed Sower” for the University of Oklahoma. The first casting was placed on the main campus’ south oval, the second at OU’s Schusterman Center in Tulsa and the third at OU Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City. The twice life-size bronze of OU President George L. Cross on the north oval and the bronze of the 46th Speaker of the House Carl Albert in front of the Oklahoma Memorial Union also are his work. Moore and his students have installed 74 pieces of public art in the last 4 1/2 years.

“I’m creating artists,” he says. “The magic lives not in their technique, but in themselves. Great students share one trait: love of their art. I live for that moment when their passion takes over, and the work just flows.”

# Niche Figure Locations

## Installed

Name	Location
Banowsky, William S., 10 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Bizzell, William B., 5 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall & Library
Boren, David L., 13 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Boyd, David R., 1 <sup>st</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Brandt, Joseph A., 6 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Brooks, Stratton D., 3 <sup>rd</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Buchanan, James S., 4 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Cross, George L., 7 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Evans, A. Grant, 2 <sup>nd</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Hollomon, J. Herbert, 8 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Horton, Frank E., 11 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Jacobson, Oscar B., artist	Jacobson Hall
Neustadt, Doris W., OU benefactor	Bizzell Library
Rader, Jesse L., librarian	Bizzell Library
Sharp, Paul F., 9 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall
Van Horn, Richard L., 12 <sup>th</sup> OU president	Evans Hall

## Work in Progress or Planned

Benson, Oliver E., political science	Whitehand Hall
Bogges, Mildred Andrews, music	Jacobson Hall
Boyd, Tom, philosophy	Memorial Union
Brown, Sidney, history	Whitehand Hall
Carey, Carol Brice, music	Jacobson Hall
Carey, Thomas, music	Jacobson Hall
Christian, Sherrill, chemistry	Chemistry Building
Court, Nathan A., mathematics	Memorial Union
David, Paul, zoology	Memorial Union
De Stwolinski, Gail, music	Jacobson Hall
Dunham, Lowell, modern languages	Whitehand Hall
Ewing, Cortez A. M., political science	Memorial Union
Goff, Bruce, architecture	Jacobson Hall
Henderson, George, human relations	Memorial Union
Holmberg, Fredrik, music	Holmberg Hall
Ivask, Ivar, <i>World Literature Today</i>	Whitehand Hall
Kraettli, Emil R., administrator	Memorial Union
Levy, David W., history	Memorial Union
Lottinville, Savoie, OU Press	Bizzell Library
Love, Tom, engineering	Memorial Union
Massad, Paul D., administrator	Memorial Union
Merrill, Maurice H., law	Memorial Union
Morris, J. R., administrator	Memorial Union
Roller, Duane H. D., history of science	Bizzell Library
Ruggiers, Paul, English literature	Bizzell Library
Sears, Paul B., botany	Bizzell Library
Sliepceвич, Cedomir M., engineering	Felgar Hall
Sutton, George M., ornithology	Bizzell Library
Tolson, Melvin, modern languages	Bizzell Library
Wadsack, George E., administrator	Memorial Union
Williams, Guy Y., chemistry	Chemistry Building