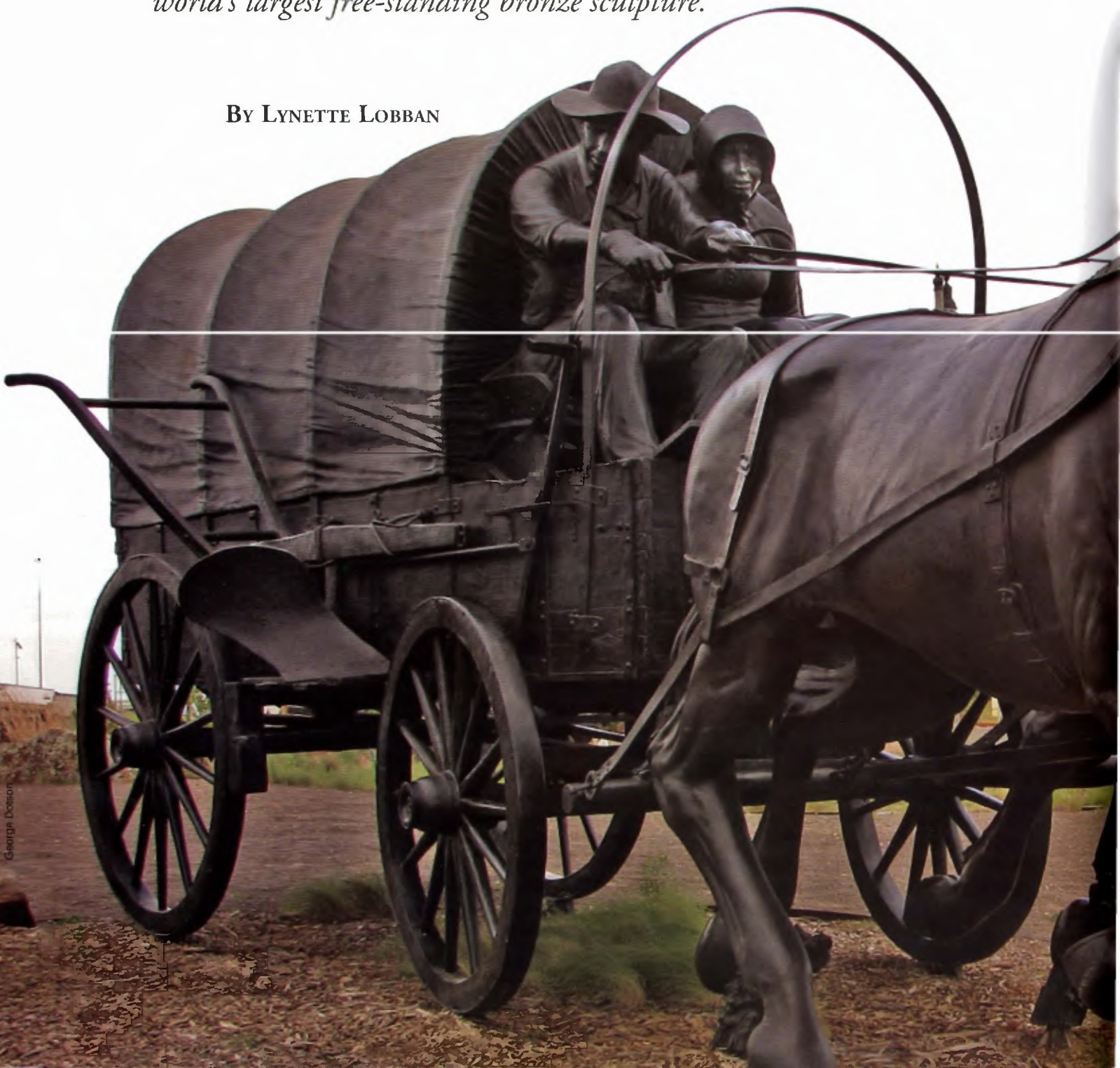


A Legacy

The skilled hands of OU's Paul Moore are bringing to life the historic Oklahoma Land Run in the world's largest free-standing bronze sculpture.

BY LYNETTE LOBBAN



in Bronze



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ust seconds after high noon on April 22, 1889, the nervous rider in the flowered vest is in trouble, and he knows it. Wedged between a wagon on his left and a cowboy on his right, he steals a glance over his shoulder only to catch another team threatening to plow over him from behind. Swept up in a blur of turning wheels and pounding hooves, he hangs on for dear life to the saddle horn and the hope of claiming 160 acres before nightfall.

The greenhorn is one of 38 representational characters from the Oklahoma Land Run whose stories will be told in a 365-foot-long monument taking shape along the Bricktown Canal south of downtown Oklahoma City. The bronze narrative is the creation of University of Oklahoma sculptor-in-residence Paul Moore, a fifth-generation Oklahoman whose works grace capitals and campuses coast to coast.

The Oklahoma Centennial Commission approached Moore in 2000 about doing a piece of public art commemorating the Land Run of 1889, which opened two million acres of Indian Territory to some 50,000 settlers in the course of an afternoon. The monument Moore envisioned was not a lone figure, but a cross-section of humanity bursting into territorial Oklahoma moments after the starting cannon.

"I wanted to show the chaos, the excitement," says Moore, whose own great-grandfather participated in the Run and is immortalized in bronze as a cigar-chomping cowboy.

In addition to the people, the "Oklahoma Centennial Land Run Monument" will include 34 horses, three wagons, a buggy, a sulky, a dog, a cannon and a frightened jackrabbit, fleeing for his life from the onslaught of land-hungry settlers. Created at one-and-a-half times life-size, the installed sculptures will span the length of a football field and measure more than 36 feet wide and 15 feet high. Eighteen of the figures are already in place, with more to follow this summer. Upon completion in 2014, the work will be the largest free-standing bronze sculpture in the world.

Although neither a veterinarian nor medical doctor, Moore intimately knows the anatomy of horse and human, dog and hare. His studio on Main Street in Norman is scattered with reference books among the giant figures in progress. Within those walls, Moore is omnipotent—bringing to life beast and human from pieces of clay. He provides his people buckboard, wagon and sulky. He tools the saddles and shoes the horses. And with a flair for detail from tassels on bolo ties to lace trim on petticoats, he is both tailor and seamstress to his group of intrepid pioneers.

But perhaps what is most striking about Moore's figures is their passion. One can read their emotions on their faces, read the thoughts that Moore has put in their heads.

"I wanted to tell their stories with their pasts intact and what brought them to this moment," the artist says. As skilled a storyteller as he is a sculptor, Moore has carefully intertwined a colorful array of characters worthy of a Larry McMurtry novel.

There is the country doctor driving his buggy like a chariot, a family with two kids and a barking dog in a covered wagon, and a



Robert Taylor



Robert Taylor

RIGHT: Soldiers played an important part in the Land Run, from sounding the opening bugle, gun or canon, to keeping the peace. FAR RIGHT: A seasoned cowboy with the look of a former lawman urges his horse into a gallop while keeping one hand hovering just above his trusty six-shooter.



ABOVE: The traffic on I-40 puts into stark relief how much things have changed since settlers, like the driver of the buckboard, made their way into Unassigned Lands just 119 years ago. LEFT: Moore adds texture to the sulky driver's shirt in his Norman studio. The artist breathes life into each of his creations, adding details from a wrinkle in a shirtsleeve to wrinkles around the eyes.



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George Dobson





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ABOVE: When finished, the monument will span the length of a football field. Since this photo was taken in June, more pieces have been added to the work along the Bricktown Canal.

LEFT: Ryan Moore, left, and Quincy Reid pull the rubber molding from a clay figure.

barefoot farm boy entering the most important race of his life on the family plow horse.

Somewhat more sinister is the shifty sulky driver eyeing his chance to cut off a rival coming up on his right, similar to current rush-hour drivers on nearby I-40. From the front seat of a wagon, a terrified immigrant woman grabs her husband to steady herself—an embrace that does not go entirely unappreciated by the young man. Little does the couple realize that household goods bouncing from the back of their wagon have caused a horse behind them to trip, setting off a chain reaction of equestrian dominoes.

At river's edge, the driver of a buckboard bears a striking resemblance to the artist himself. "That was seven years ago," says Moore. "I had hair then." Careful observers will draw similar comparisons between several of the bronze figures and Moore's crew—sons Todd and Ryan, and former students Sohail Shehada and Quincy Reid—as well as various friends and family members.

"You hang around the studio long enough, you are going to find your face on a sculpture. We run out of models hanging around the studio," he says.

In addition to telling a compelling story, Moore has practical applications to consider when working with pieces of this size. The artist must turn engineer when taking the design from a small clay sketch to the breath-taking scale of his bronze heroes.

"The last mold we hauled to Santa Fe [for casting in bronze] was 2,300 pounds," he explains. "I have to ask myself, 'How do I support this much weight on a wheel of a buggy? How do I distribute the weight to get by with only two or three points of contact?'"

Moore uses stainless steel as reinforcement when needed and knows how to disguise points of contact to create the illusion of horses at a dead run or harness straps floating in mid-air.

Few people appreciate the sheer volume of work that goes into the creation of a single bronze sculpture, let alone a land run. From the rough clay sketch, the artist builds a maquette, a small detailed model of the finished work. The maquette will serve as the model for a laser enlargement made from a block of foam, which in turn, will be used as the base for the clay sculpture.

Before the laser scan, the maquette is cut into pieces and skewered like shish-ka-bob on a rotisserie. The block of foam is set on a corresponding center post and both are turned one degree at a time while lasers cut the foam into a larger-scaled version of its maquette twin.

The shaped foam serves as a base for the clay figures. At this point, the artist creates his magic, shaping the clay into a ripple of muscle, a furrowed brow or a meaningful glance between husband and wife. Once the artist is satisfied with his work, the clay figure is cut into workable-sized sections in order to make the rubber mold that will be encased in a protective plaster cast and sent to the foundry.

Moore says a rider on horseback will be cut into 32 pieces, the driver and sulky around 80. "We will cut a wagon into more than 100 pieces, and that doesn't include the draft horses pulling it," he adds.



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A stoic pioneer woman braces herself against the seat of the wagon as her husband drives the team forward. Visitors to the monument will notice the couple's two sons in the back of the wagon holding on to a family dog that is trying to escape.

At the foundry, the pieces will be reassembled to make the mold for the bronze pouring. After the bronze figures are cast, they are shipped back to Moore for installation.

When the price of bronze nearly quintupled shortly after Moore's bid on the project was accepted, the artist explored ways of cutting costs without cutting corners. The first thing he did was to abandon the expensive laser scans and went back to doing things the old-fashioned way.

"It costs about \$12,000 to make a laser enlargement of a horse and rider," says Moore. "I had been doing enlargements for myself and other artists without lasers for years, so I went back to doing the rough cuts by hand."

Moore says he can now turn out a foam enlargement faster than the laser. Another plus of doing it in-house is that Moore can use the foam over and over again with a little reshaping.

"I am using every bit of what I've learned over the past 32 years for this project," says Moore, calling up knowledge from his years in the foundries, field and studio.

Before the Land Run, his largest sculpture was "On the Chisholm Trail," which was unveiled at McCasland Park in Duncan in 1998, the same year President David Boren coaxed him from his Santa Fe studio to Norman to direct the figurative sculpture program at OU.

That monument to the American cowboy measures 34 feet long, 11 feet high and 7 feet wide and took Moore five exhausting years to complete. The Land Run is several times larger and considerably more detailed.

"One thing that was hard to anticipate was the sheer volume of work. Each piece is like a monument. Usually when you do a piece of this magnitude, you have time to relax and build up your strength before the next one," he says.

With the Land Run, Moore and crew finish the mold for one piece, send it off to the foundry and start in on the next barely pausing for breath. The grueling pace has left as much of a mark on the artist as the artist has on the work. His gait is a little stiffer some mornings, and he carries scars from at least one back surgery to repair discs compressed from bending his body in ways a body should not be bent. Moore shrugs it off, calling it "just a little wear and tear."

At 51, the artist has many years ahead of him, but the Land Run is destined to become his signature work. Visitors to the site are already hailing the monument as Oklahoma's Mount Rushmore.

Art critics from around the nation also are taking notice and, although he has received glowing reviews in several publications, most recently the June issue of *Western Art Collector*, Moore takes little time to bask in such accolades.

For now he has clay in his hands and a story to tell. 

Lynette Lobban is associate editor of *Sooner Magazine*.

Editor's Note: The "Oklahoma Centennial Land Run Monument" can be reached by taking I-35 to I-235, exiting on Sheraton, then taking Sheraton to Reno and turning into the Bass Pro Shop parking entrance displaying the Centennial Monument sign.

The Works of Paul Moore

Although Paul Moore has garnered more than 100 commissions during his 32-year career, the work he is best known for among the Sooner faithful is the iconic "Seed Sower" figure, which welcomes visitors to each of OU's three campuses.

More than 50 of Moore's works have been installed in Oklahoma, many on OU's Norman campus, including the twice



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life-size bronze figure of OU President George Lynn Cross in front of Evans Hall; the figure of Edward L. Gaylord, newspaper in hand, on the northeast side of the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communications; and the 1 1/4 life-size bronze figure of the 46th Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Carl Albert, located in front of the Oklahoma Memorial Union.

A bust of Speaker Albert was installed into the U.S. Capital Collection in

Washington, D.C., in 2004. Moore's works also are in the collections of the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery and numerous municipal, corporate, private and international institutions.

In Oklahoma City, in addition to the "Oklahoma Centennial Land Run Monument," visitors can see Moore's life-size figure of Senator Henry Bellmon at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds and a nine-foot-figure of baseball great Johnny Bench at the Bricktown Ball Park. —Lynette Lobban