

NEWS

Huntington Pavilion sculptures have a unique back story

By **JANETTE WILLIAMS** | Janette.Williams@sgvn.com |

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PASADENA – Wielding the same hand-held 3-D body scanner doctors use, artist David Schafer “reorganized” a Henry Moore marble figure, creating a digital image for the monumental cast bronzes just installed as the city’s newest piece of public art.

“Separated United Forms,” based on Moore’s 1966 “Reclining Form” in the Norton Simon Museum’s collections, was created using a high-tech process the iconic sculptor probably never imagined.

And it’s no accident that the \$300,000, 3,000-pound pieces are placed in front of the new Huntington Pavilion, facing California Boulevard on the grounds of Huntington Hospital.

“By staging a body, a ‘reorganized’ body, at a hospital, it allows the observer to bring the body out of the hospital, so to speak,” said Schafer, a former Art Center College of Design faculty member, who spent more than three years on the project.

“I hope that people in and around the hospital enjoy coming out to experience something in 3-D – round, physical, vital – and can enjoy their own invention of what those forms are,” Schafer said from New York City, where he moved in 2007 after a decade at Art Center.

Before leaving, Schafer approached the Norton Simon for access to the Moore sculpture, which the museum officials hope soon to bring out of storage and display.

“He said he was very much an admirer of Henry Moore... and that he was interested in the kind of work that would be an homage to him,” said Carol Togneri, the museum’s chief curator. “He explained he was an artist who utilized scientific methods, and we hesitantly, curiously, said yes.”

Schafer’s creation may pay homage to Moore, Togneri said, but he makes it his own by taking “something made of marble and putting it in a different format and material.”

Togneri said she hopes people in Pasadena will embrace the piece, easily visible just driving by the new Huntington Pavilion.

“It’s really important to have sculpture like this among us,” she said, crediting the city program that mandates 1 percent of new development costs for public art.

Dale Oliver, president of Pasadena’s Arts and Culture Commission, credited the developer, too.

Pacific Medical Buildings came up with “considerably more (than 1 percent) to satisfy the original scale concept of the artist” after the price of materials went up, he said.

Oliver called the sculpture an important, exciting, highly visible piece of public art for the city.

“It’s dramatic and fun,” he said, “a concept that reflects the nexus of technology and art...There’s any number of things that people see in those pieces and that’s great fun.”

Until they were cast from the digital plan in a foundry in Walla Walla, Wash., the sculptures “didn’t exist physically,” Schafer said.

“Then they exceeded my expectations in terms of their physical presence – their lumbering-ness, their darkness, their oddness. That was a real surprise to me,” he said

Schafer said he wants people to get up close, touch, and walk around the pieces, or just relax on one of the four benches and enjoy them.

There’s a plaque explaining the process he used.

“I wanted it to be as clear as possible, to tell the back story of the project – I probably spent more time on the plaque than the sculpture,” he said, laughing. “It’s there for everyone. I just wanted to tell the story without leaving audiences trying to explain.”

janette.williams@sgvn.com

(626) 578-6300, Ext. 4482