

# 'Woman' of Honor

By Carolyn M. Fuchek

**Artist David Frech, who has sculpted a graceful tribute to the women of Texas, sat down for an interview last week.**

**B**eacon artist David Frech just finished a really big project – a six-foot-five-inch sculpture of a woman holding a baby to be exact. Titled “The Prairie Woman,” Frech was commissioned for this project by the Lovett Memorial Library in Pampa, Texas. The sculpture will be the new centerpiece for the library’s newly landscaped courtyard in honor of the many women who committed themselves in developing the Texas panhandle. Four women in particular – Louise Franklin, Virginia Green, Betty Henderson and Annie Thut Buckler – will receive special recognition in the dedication of the monument. The sculpture was purchased and will be presented as a gift to the library on Jan. 9, 2005, by Louise Franklin’s son, R.L. Franklin.

In creating the sculpture, Frech describes, “I wanted her to be strong, yet still reflect all the qualities and grace of a woman. In the face of very real hardships, their lives depended on their ability to adapt in a region that, up to that point, had been unsettled and so treacherous it had been dubbed the Great American Desert. The virtues of real courage increase in direct proportion to the knowledge of what it is you face. ‘The Prairie Woman’ exemplifies that strength of character.”

Frech gained national recognition for his sculpture of Abraham Lincoln and his son Tad, a work commissioned by the United States Historical Society. For this recognition, he received an invitation to enter a contest for the project at Lovett Library. In their search for an artist, Michael Grauer, art historian and consultant to the project, sent objectives to several artists throughout the country. Frech then sent an initial sketch of “The Prairie Woman,” then a 24-inch maquette, which is a sculpture three times smaller than the final work. “Basically,” Frech described, “the maquette serves as a blueprint for the life-size sculpture.” After the submission, Frech was then chosen out of 28 artists to do the work. From there, the laborious process began.

**The right models**

“The Prairie Woman” depicts a woman of 1875, the time when the first settlers made their home in Pampa. Frech referred to Proverbs 31, a passage in the Bible that describes a virtuous woman. “This passage,” Frech described, “represents ‘The Prairie Woman,’ but then I brought this biblical woman up to the time of 1875.” Therefore, in his search for a female model, Frech had to find just the right face and body to pose for his figure. And he did. However, he ended up using two models – one for the face and one for the body. “It’s very important,” he stated, “to pick a person who fills the role, as well as someone you can depend upon. Paige, my body model, would pose for three hours at a time for many, many sessions.”

He found the model for the baby while he was out and about in town one day. “I saw this beautiful baby and explained to the mother that I was a sculptor and (asked if it) would it be possible for me to take photographs of her baby for a project I was working on.” While the mother agreed, he further explained that approaching someone you don’t know can be a difficult thing to do. “You don’t know how the person will react, whether or not they believe you are who you say you are and your true intentions.”

With all of his models in place, he began his life-size sculpture, which took three months to complete. “Working on a larger scale,” he explained, “involves a greater complexity. First, you must resolve all of the formal issues, taking care of the primary elements first. Then you must integrate all of these rhythms between the other elements in the composition. At that point, the work becomes very meticulous. And a sculpture of this size involves a process of counterpoint where I continuously step back from the work to assess and re-assess.”

Frech then removed the figure’s head and hands in order to rework them. “When you do a sculpture,” he stated, “it’s like working from 100 drawings in order to be sculpted correctly.” In removing the head, he re-sculpted the neck and shoulders to contribute to her physical presence. “Most Victorian necklines were high, but I wanted to give her a presence of strength and sensuality, so I cut the neckline to achieve that look.” The hands were removed so he could reshape them into a gentler, cradling position for the baby. The finished product was then cast in bronze at the Tallix Foundry in Beacon where it now stands today, waiting to be shipped to Texas at the end of the month. In his last words during our interview, Frech described his feelings about this project: “On a technical level, it felt like my first piece in a way. And with the composition, integration and rhythms, it felt like a good start.”

**The artist**

Art to Frech has been a means to understanding the world and himself. In high school, he was always drawing. But it wasn’t until his sophomore year when he took his first art class. His mother, while not forcing him to study art, would bring him and his two other siblings to many art museums in New York City. Frech describes, “I was always drawn to the expression of life and life experiences through the figurative tradition.” He started his career in art by painting and drawing. “Sculpting,” he stated, “came much later.” He attended the Art Institute of Chicago, taking portrait-sculpting classes, where he later earned his bachelor’s degree in sculpting. He earned his master’s degree at the New York Academy of Art, studying in a formally structured, traditionally based program. While in school, he was inspired by the works of Rodin, Michelangelo and Bernini. Currently, he admires the works of Velasquez and Puget.

When asked if he had any advice for young, aspiring artists, he stated, “Keep drawing, because drawing is the foundation for all art.” He also suggested that students work for other artists, even study the craftsmanship of carpentry and learn about the business aspect of art. This is good advice from an artist who has worked on national monuments, both political and historical, and on a number of private commissions. He is a recipient of the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation Grant, the Leonard J. Meiselman Memorial Award, and is a professional member of the National Sculpture Society, of which he was elected in 2001.

For a tour of the Tallix Foundry, where “The Prairie Woman” awaits shipment, contact 845.838.1111. The Foundry is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Tours are available Wednesday and Thursday mornings by appointment only. The Tallix Foundry is located at 310 Fishkill Avenue in Beacon. ■



“The Prairie Woman” in her various incarnations. She started out as a sketch, then a 24-inch maquette and finished as a six-foot-five-inch bronze sculpture. During the creation of the sculpture, Frech removed the head and hands in order to rework them, re-sculpting the neck and shoulders to contribute to her physical presence.

*“... The virtues of real courage increase in direct proportion to the knowledge of what it is you face. ‘The Prairie Woman’ exemplifies that strength of character.” – David Frech*



**“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.” – Proverbs 31: 10**