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Sculptor George Lundeen puts together a one-half-size scale figure of Simon's wife for the Fifth Station at Cloisters on the Platte, Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross.

SCULPTORS POUR HEART, SOUL, TIME AND ENERGY INTO SPECIAL STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Thu, 08/02/2018 - 4:04pm admin

BY JOE FOREMAN 

For the Catholic Voice

A sculptor for nearly 40 years, Mark Lundeen said nothing he's done compares to helping create larger-than-life figures for the Stations of the Cross at the recently opened Cloisters on the Platte, a 930-acre retreat center near Gretna.

"Some sculptors go their entire life and never have an opportunity to create something like this," the Loveland, Colo., artist said.

A native of Holdrege, Neb., Lundeen was one of 10 sculptors from around the country selected to work on the three-year project. Based in Colorado, his team created half of the 62 bronze figures in the

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Truly A Place to Call Home

14 stations that line a walking path through forested terrain in the Platte River Valley. A team based in Oregon created the other half.

The 2,500-foot path is the same distance Jesus is believed to have carried his cross from Jerusalem to Golgotha, the site of his crucifixion. The sculptors meticulously depicted the Passion and the torment Christ endured.

“We wanted to bring out the suffering and pain and what it was like for him to make that walk with the cross,” Lundeen said. “He’s carrying the sins of the world with him.”

Each station tells a unique story, but there’s a common theme – Christ’s interaction with the people around him, said Lynn Kircher, a Jaroso, Colo.-based sculptor hand-picked to assemble both sculptor teams by Cloisters on the Platte Foundation founder and benefactor Joe Ricketts.

“He’s noticing the people in his environment and the people in his environment are touched by him, even as he walks to his death,” Kircher said.

Kircher, who is Catholic, encourages those who view the sculptures to “look for the additional story, not just the obvious.”

“Our intention was to tell a human story with human emotion that can connect us with our own story. Each of us will see things differently,” he said. “What I really feel strong about is the continuity of the story that continues to reach out and touch us and help us look at something within ourselves.”

A nationally-known religious sculptor, Kircher said helping create the Stations of the Cross was the most meaningful work he’s been involved with, artistically and spiritually.

“As an artist, I can be responsible for my own feelings, my own intensity and my own spiritual qualities the story tells me,” he said. “When I search to express that, it becomes a great gift – something that’s my personal meditation for the time I’m working that piece. That’s a tremendous spiritual gift, which I really treasure.”

Getting 10 artists to collaborate on a project of such magnitude was a challenge and necessity, Kircher said. At least 10 were needed to meet the timeline set by Ricketts.

Kircher and the other sculptors met for a retreat in Colorado at the beginning of the process to develop a unified purpose and comprehensive plan. They read Scripture together, looked at drawings, paintings, statues and stained-glass artwork depicting the Stations of the Cross. They even watched Mel Gibson’s heralded film “The Passion of the Christ.” A priest and deacon spoke with the sculptors about Christ’s final days and historical aspects of the Stations of the Cross.

Only sculptors who could put aside their egos and work alongside other artists with one shared vision were selected for the project, Kircher said.

Each figure in the sculptures began as small “pinch models” and were submitted to Ricketts for his feedback and approval, Lundeen said. From that point, they created half life-size models made of oil-based clay. Then, with the aid of scanners, 3D printers and other forms of 21st century technology, they transformed the models into 7-foot bronze figures with well-defined anatomy and detailed facial expressions. Extensive research was done to make sure the garments and uniforms were historically accurate.

Kircher noted that in their first meeting to discuss the project, Ricketts shared his vision for the Stations of the Cross and the two of them discussed the complexity of telling the Passion story through art.

“I said to Mr. Ricketts, ‘So, you’re telling us you want to create our contemporary Sistine Chapel,’” Kircher said.

Ricketts, a native of Nebraska City, Neb., and founder of brokerage firm TD Ameritrade, said the team was comprised of the “best sculptors in the country” and their work surpassed even his high expectations.

“This is the prime piece of sculpture they’re going to be doing in their life and this has been the

primary focus of their work for the past three years,” Ricketts said. “These Stations of the Cross are unlike anything else in the world.

“If you’re not coming out here for a retreat, hopefully you can come see the Stations of the Cross.”

WANT TO GO?

The Stations of the Cross walking path is open for public viewing Mondays through Wednesdays, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Thursdays, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. A self-paced audio tour is included with a \$10 donation.

Parking for Stations of the Cross visitors is across the road from the main entrance to Cloisters on the Platte at 23332 Fishery Road.

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