



Longhua Xu works in his studio next to a small-scale model of the statue to the right. The final 12-foot bronze sculpture will sit on a 12-foot-tall base, reaching a total of 24 feet in height. (The Sentinel-Record/Donald Cross)

Sculpture

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make it bigger because I talked to the foundry because with 2-foot ... you lost a lot of details," he said.

Xu also received assistance from National Park College with the project. "We asked (NPC) to help us do 3D scanning," so that the scans could be used in creating molds with the founders, he said.

"So we have the thanks for that ... this is new for them, also new for students which is great for students and experience," he said.

In order to find a foundry to take on the difficult task of molding and casting the statue, Xu had to visit his native China.

"So, in (Shanghai) I know the people over there, they make a deal with me," he said.

Describing the process by which his piece was realized, Xu said, "sculpture testing is lots and lots of work. You make a rubber model which ... in the next section, like, they make 56 pieces."

Each section of the 12-foot-tall statue had to be molded separately and recombined in a painstaking pro-

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cess that culminated in the casting and burnishing of the bronze statue.

"This whole process takes almost like eight months start to finish, so good thing is we finished with the sculpture already," and it is "in Hot Springs right now," he said.

"We just have to wait for the city to finish."

Due to the complicated nature and process of building a base for the work and erecting it in the Hill Wheatley fountain, the city encountered difficulties in contracting workers to begin preparations.

Spicer said in an email exchange that they originally sought design services solicitations for the project as a Request for Proposals through their Purchasing Office in March/April 2024.

"Unfortunately," he said, "we did not receive any responses ... so city staff felt the need to make some

modifications to our process and procured design services with Halff & Associates Engineers in Little Rock."

The firm was enlisted to create design plans submitted to the city by July 31, and the city plans to hire a number of subcontractors to complete the different stages of the project in order to "garner interest from our local contractors," Spicer said.

"The city is eager to move this project along and to further showcase the work of Longhua Xu," Spicer said. "He has committed countless hours and energy to our downtown through his many sculptures and involvement in the arts community."

For Xu, each element of "The Visitor" holds symbolic value, he said. The base of the statue is inscribed with a Native American phrase which means "water is life ... the water's meaning is the hot springs ... the horse not only represented a race, horse race ... it's like a free spirit," he said.

The horse's rider holds a branch aloft, which represents peace, according to Xu.

"I want people to look up at this piece and say 'Oh wow, she's free, she's happy.'"