

Artist has found medium that fits him, honors others

NSU student has been sculpting for only two years

By Zach Hilpert

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Ben Victor, an art major at Northern State University, has been chosen as one of four finalists to create a sculpture for Nevada's spot in the National Statuary representing Native American activist Sarah Winnemucca.

Should Victor be selected, his statue would be one of less than

100 added to the national gallery since its inception in 1864. Many well-known artists, including Mount Rushmore sculptor Gutzon Borglum, have created works for the collection.

Each state is given room for two statues in the gallery, which is housed in the former chamber of the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. Nevada is one of the few states that has not yet erected statues in both of its allotted spaces. The new statue would be featured prominently, as Nevada's display location is just inside the north entrance to the hall.

Victor first became involved in the competition after his brother, who lives in Las Vegas, alerted him to an announcement in the newspaper. Following research on Winnemucca and the scope of the contest, Victor said that he was very eager to be a part of



Victor



Courtesy photo

Native American history: This drawing of Sarah Winnemucca shows how Ben Victor plans to sculpt her for Nevada's spot in the National Statuary.

the historic process.

Inspirational story

"This project is exciting," Victor said. "When I got to read a bit about (Winnemucca), her story really inspired me."

Winnemucca, who died in 1891 at the age of 47, was a powerful voice in the fight for Native American rights. A member of the Paiute Indian tribe, Winnemucca traveled the country speaking on behalf of her people, decrying the poor treatment of her tribe on reservations upon which they were forced to live. Her 1883 book, "Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims," was the first published book

written by a Native American woman.

Victor had to submit slides of his previous work, along with a proposal for the Winnemucca statue which, when completed, is designed to reach 7 to 9 feet in height. Now that he has been chosen as a finalist, Victor will spend the next few months working on a maquette, a small-scale model of what he hopes will be the chosen statue. Victor and the other three finalists will bring their maquettes to the Nevada governor's mansion for judging in February.

Despite his skill, Victor is still relatively new to the art of sculpting.

"It has been two years since I (first) picked up clay," Victor said. "It is nice as an artist when you find that medium that fits you. I feel very comfortable expressing myself through three-dimensional artwork."

Airport project

In that short time, Victor's talent has already earned him acclaim. After demonstrating his talent by creating a life-size sculpture of biblical Samson for an art class at NSU, Victor won a regional competition to create a 7 1/2-foot tall statue to be displayed in front of Aberdeen's new regional airport. The sculpture, "Victory Soldier," was unveiled on Nov. 11 as part of Veterans Day activities. In the near future, Victor will begin work on two more sculptures for the same project, each depicting a member of the armed forces.

Victor also received the prestigious Roger T. Williams Scholarship from the National Sculpture Society for the 2003-2004 academic year. His current projects include a larger-than-life version of "Samson," a life-size "Bathsheba," and two life-size portrait relief sculptures of former NSU coaches, commissioned for NSU athletic facilities.

Pictures of Victor's artwork are available on the NSU art department website, located at <http://www.northern.edu/artdept/sculpture.html>.