



Sculptor, Robert Shure, with the clay model of the Famine statue.

From the Sculptor

Co-authored by Kathleen Shure & Robert Shure

"America" The sound of the word itself is beautiful to me and it rolls off my tongue. How much more hopeful the sights and sounds of the place "America" could have been to those Irish who landed here after the Famine if they had come under different circumstances. These were some of the thoughts racing through my mind after I received the news that I had been awarded the commission to sculpt the Rhode Island Irish Famine Memorial. I have been lucky enough to live the "American dream", they were just "lucky" enough to make it here alive. Many other thoughts went through my mind at the same time; the how, when, where will it be, never mind all the practical, mundane considerations. I was not only a sculptor, but really a project manager for myself, also working with the committee, city officials, granite suppliers, the bronze foundry, architects, and my own staff of artisans. They would assist me in the construction of armature, application of clay, mold making, and all the many complicated steps to complete a meaningful monument from design to installation. At the same time I thought how fortunate I was to be chosen for this particular project.

My father had instilled within me a love and respect for history at an early age, even though he must have been frustrated with his lessons because all he ever saw for his efforts was me sitting with pencil in hand, drawing incessantly. For my mother of 8 children and many foster children, this was a blessing, to have one child blissfully engrossed in drawing hour after hour. Like many of us, my father and mother's families had endured the hardships of immigration. Lessons like these were the main reason I came to be a sculptor, as odd as that might sound. From his lessons I would try to combine, in pencil or clay, the stories he told of human history and emotion with artistic and creative ideas.

All of these thoughts had occurred in less than thirty seconds after I put down the phone. I reached for a pencil and paper, and hastily started sketching some groups of small figures. My small clay design was already approved but I still pondered how I was to portray the lives of so many with the figures of so few? I was already familiar with the story of the Irish Famine, and my mind revisited the vivid



images of millions, starving, abandoned by their fellow human beings, any assistance they did receive, too little, too late.

Frustrated with pen and pencil, I reached for the soft clay, trying to design a composition of figures, a form here, balanced off with another there. It is not a matter of simply making human figures in purposeful poses but also a balance of shapes, positive and negative, light and dark being formed at the same time, strength of form and therefore of character. From every aspect of the sculpture, it must "work", that is, there is a visual story and a good composition to be seen from every angle, all 360 degrees. I had already decided in my heart, and the committee had agreed, that this monument would be "in the round" so that people could walk from the dying and suffering, to the hopeful, progressive aspects of the story. How to blend one form to the other, degree by degree, was the puzzle that I loved to work on in clay.

That first day seems like a long time ago now. Many other elements also became part of the development of this monument. Also designed in pencil, and then clay, was the Narrative Plaque. It is meant to be an educational piece of artwork showing in sculpture and words the history of the Famine and the successful assimilation of the Irish into the American society. So, the boy who would rather sit by himself and draw all day hopes he has succeeded in creating an enduring tribute to the suffering and courage of all during and after the Famine. ❧

Bob Shure was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1948. He graduated from the New York Institute of Technology in 1970, receiving the coveted Gold Medal Sculpture award. Subsequently he entered the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and Tufts University, earning a Master's degree in Fine Arts for sculpture in 1973. He served as an apprentice in a sculpture studio before opening Skylight Studios, Inc. in Woburn, MA in 1990. He employs more than a dozen artisans. Among his many achievements are the Joe DiMaggio Memorial at Yankee Stadium, his relief of George Washington at the Washington Monument in the nation's capitol, and the Sigmund Freud Memorial at Clark University. His studio also specializes in conservation and restoration work.



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