

gestions, refinements, even wholesale changes could be (and often were) proposed by the client.

Inexplicably this system rarely stifled creativity—artist and patron flourished as symbiotic partners. Never having the luxury of working in seclusion, public sculptors made a virtue of their goldfish-bowl existence. Whether over-the-shoulder meddling or circumspect monitoring, the patron's involvement was a given. The step-by-step production from small design to finished monument provided predictable points of contact, timetables for reviews and schedules of payment.

The task of creating a public memorial is a many-layered undertaking that demands the sculptor be an artistic performer as well as a businessman, contractor, accountant, supervisor and publicist. Far different expectations are asked of a painter who often works in seclusion in a studio, needing only at the end of production to interest a prospective purchaser or to secure a gallery display space. An architect, who negotiates a contract with reassuring words and well-worked renderings often disappears as the builder erects an elegant home or a contractor constructs a grand office building.

The everyday operations of making monuments demand the sculptor be both hands-on laborer and nuts-and-bolts manager, bookkeeper and press publicist. The sculptor became both jack and master of all trades. Except for the upfront payment on signing the contract, funding liability favored the patron. Throughout the labor-intensive modeling stages, when expenses for materials and extra studio services were greatest, monies for the sculptor only trickled in. Only after the monument was erected and the sculptor's hands-on work long-finished was the largest installment (often as much as fifty percent) tendered. In spite of the unevenness of this monetary playing field, most practitioners of public sculpture prospered.

Making monuments is a multi-stepped operation, commencing with a patron's first queries and ending, quite often, several years later at an elaborate dedication ceremony. A larger-than-life bronze statue begins as a hand-sized maquette. A two-step enlargement follows as the sculptor creates a midsize, working model and a full-scale statue. Procedures hardly vary—modeling in malleable clay, then reproducing the completed work in more durable (but still fragile) plaster.

The early development of monumental sculpture in America was inextricably linked to the technical advances in bronze manufacturing brought on by the Civil War. Prior to 1860, most of America's sculptures were carved in marble for display indoors. As the cannon-casting industry retooled, the great majority of America's monuments were made in bronze.

Creating public sculpture is not a dream-world exercise; it is a labor-intensive activity that involves the artist intimately in both the mental and the menial. From courting a client to taking the obligatory bow as the dedication bunting is raised, American sculptors became one-person concert performers. In conceiving and manufacturing public monuments, American sculptors became three-dimensional fact-finders and myth-makers. Unlike the biographer or historian, who might use thousands of words or scores of illustrations to defend a thesis or evaluate a career, public sculptors distilled the essence of their subject in a single summarizing moment; everything available, instantly accessible and irrefutably permanent.

LESSON VI: THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL SHRINE— THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL

A. OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To demonstrate the complexity of erecting a memorial on the national level.
- ◆ To understand the relationship between cooperating sculptor and architect.
- ◆ To recognize the process a sculptor uses to create a large, heroic sculpture.
- ◆ To explain the process of how public sculptures are created from initial planning to installation and dedication.
- ◆ To discuss why the Lincoln Memorial is considered the greatest public monument in the United States.

B. BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Daniel Chester French's marble portrait sculpture of Abraham Lincoln, the commanding feature of the Lincoln Memorial, is an American icon—a seven-year labor of common sense skill and artistic genius. Although the architect, longtime friend Henry Bacon, had been involved in the project since the summer of 1911, the sculptor was not selected until January 4, 1915. French spoke about the challenge:

I am all too well aware how great is the responsibility of making a statue of the Nation's best loved man. I feel at times so inadequate, but I try not to think of these momentous things, but only of doing the best that is in me.

Several models or maquettes were created by the sculptor in the ensuing years. The first study was 10 inches and was presented to the Presidentially-created Lincoln Memorial Commission in the summer of 1915. The plaster model captures all of the essentials of the composition: Lincoln is seated in a large chair, deep in thought, head slightly bent forward. His feet are firmly anchored and the action of the hands and placement of the arms, with elbows locked, balances calmness and intensity.

From the outset French contemplated the final statue would be made of bronze, but before signing the contract on December 21, 1915, sculptor and architect hedged, asking that the statue be not less than 10 feet in height (rather than 12 feet), and inserting "or marble" after the word "bronze." The three foot model was finished by May 1916 and the seven-foot working model by October 1916. By the spring of 1917, French, having produced both three-foot and seven-foot working models, visited the nearly completed interior chamber of the memorial. He and Bacon were startled: the sculpture would be too small as planned. After several experiments, they agreed to a height of 20 feet and that the marble would replace bronze.

It was not until November 1918 that French learned that the carvers, the Piccirilli Brothers, had received the twenty-one blocks of Georgia marble at their Bronx, New York studio-shop. The carving took over one year to complete. The stones were shipped by train to Washington, D.C. and the last block was the forty-three-inch-tall head, was set in January, 1920. French then made several trips to the site to make carving refinements, reporting in May, 1920, "it is now as nearly perfect technically as I can make it."

While the statue officially became the property of the American people on August 9, 1920, the memorial was not dedicated until May 30, 1922. The *Lincoln* statue, which embodies Daniel Chester French's creative spirit, is his public-art masterpiece and the country's preeminent public monument. He spoke modestly of his achievement:

What I wanted to convey was the mental and physical strength of the great war President and his confidence in his ability to carry the thing through to a successful finish. If any of this "gets over," I think it is probably due to the whole pose of the figure and particularly to the action of the hands and to the expression of the face.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Ask the students if they have ever visited the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. As most students should be familiar with this memorial, ask them to share their impressions with the class. Have students brainstorm the reasons that Abraham Lincoln should have a memorial of such grand dimensions. List student responses on the board or on an overhead.
2. Provide students with **Document 22, Letter from Henry Bacon to William Harts**. Have students read the document and then prompt them in a discussion with the following questions: What is the purpose of this letter? Why would Henry Bacon have written it? What issues does the letter address? What's the evidence?
3. Provide students with **Document 23, French's First Model of the Lincoln Statue**. Have students examine the image making certain to notice the placement of the feet and hands. Distribute **Document 24, French's Three Foot Working Model**. Ask students to compare the images between **Documents 23 and 24**. Ask them what differences they can determine and to speculate as to why these changes were made.
4. Provide students with **Document 25, Bacon's Letter to William Harts** and **Document 26, Harts's Reply to Bacon**. Ask students: What are the issues in this correspondence? Why? How much is French to receive for his work? What do those costs include?
5. Provide students with **Document 27, French's Six Foot Plaster Working Model**. Have students compare this image with **Document 24** and ask them if any additional changes have been made by the sculptor.

6. Provide students with **Document 28, Bacon's Letter to Harts**. Have the students read the document and then discuss the following questions: What are the issues of this letter? What problems have the sculptor and architect run into? Why? How do French and Bacon propose to solve the problem? Why do you think that French and Bacon decided to make a change from a bronze sculpture to a marble sculpture?
7. Provide students with copies of **Document 29, The Construction of the Lincoln Statue**. Have the students study the image and then start a class discussion with the following prompts: Is there anything about this image that you find surprising? If so, what? What observations can you make about the creation of public sculpture and monuments that are reflected in this image?
8. **Concluding Activity**
Choose some of Lincoln's speeches and have the students read them in part or in whole, particularly Lincoln's two inaugural addresses and his Gettysburg Address. Then ask students: Are the words and convictions of Lincoln measured in any way by his Memorial? If so, how?
9. Next provide students with copies of **Document 30**, a photograph of the **May 30, 1922 Dedication of the Lincoln Memorial** and **Document 31**, a close up image of the **Lincoln Statue**. Use the following prompts to begin a class discussion: Is Abraham Lincoln befitting a national memorial such as the one in Washington, D.C.? Why or why not? Explain.

Letter from Henry Bacon to William Harts

HENRY BACON - ARCHITECT
101 PARK AVENUE - NEW YORK

June 30th, 1915

Dear Colonel Harts:

Your letter of June 25th received. It is possible that Mr. French may want to make the statue of statuary marble, and that he may not use any bronze at all, though of course he is the one to settle this matter. If the statue is to be of bronze the composition of the bronze should be approximately as follows: 90% copper, 3% zinc and 7% tin, though the proportions of these two last metals may vary without detriment to the composition. The thickness of the metal should be approximately 1/4". The general dimension of the statue as shown on my sketches was for a seated figure about twelve feet high.

Concerning the material to be used in the pedestal, I think this should be left an open question as this is a matter which should not be settled until Mr. French's model is well advanced, as the character the model assumes will influence the choices of a material for its pedestal. For the purpose of your contract I suggest that the material be mentioned as either marble or granite.

Mr. French says that he is now working on the sketch models so I think in all probability that within six months he will be able to submit this to the Lincoln Memorial Commission, but he will probably want at least a year and a half for finishing the full size model in plaster, and I suggest that you make an allowance of two and a half years from this date for the full completion of the statue and its pedestal in place.

Yours sincerely,

Henry Bacon

Colonel Wm. W. Harts,
1729 New York Avenue,
Washington, D. C.

P.S. John Williams Inc. 556 West 27th St. N.Y. who has one of the oldest and best bronze foundries, gave me the information about the composition of bronze and the thickness of the metal.

H.B.

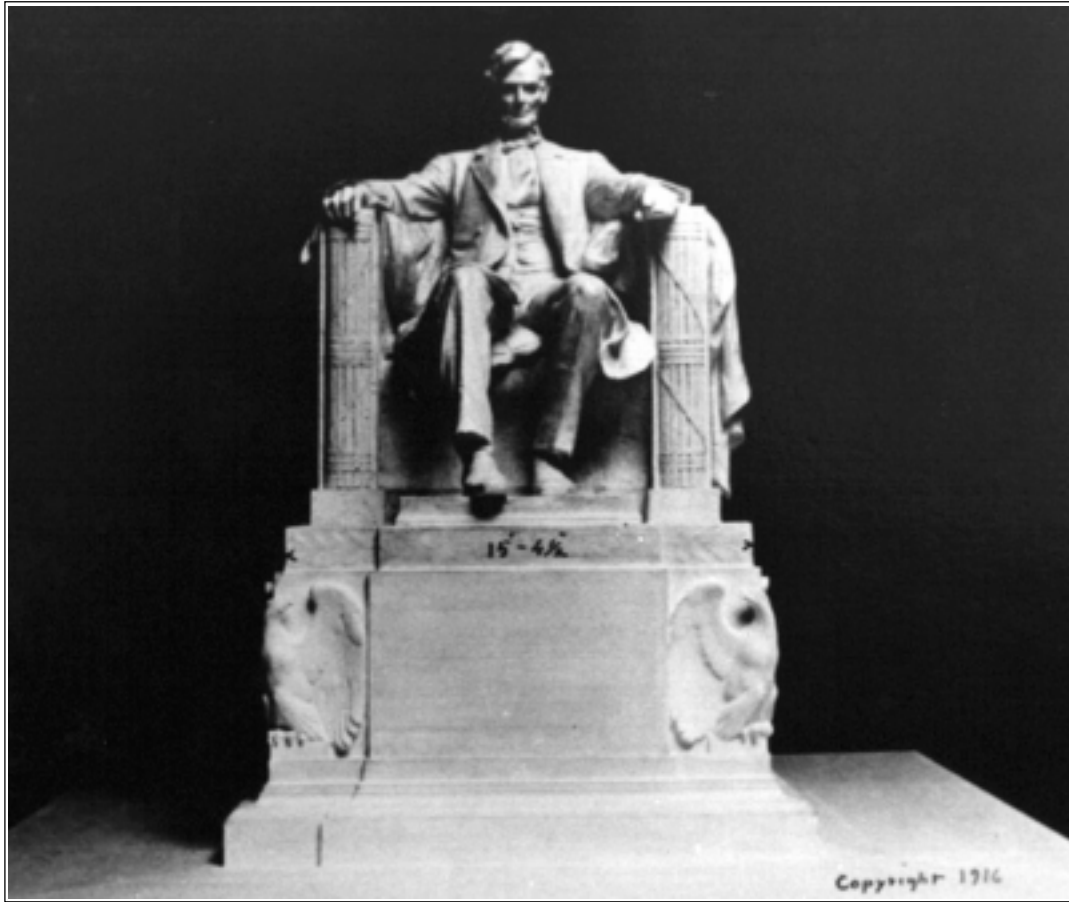
Source: Library of Congress

French's First Model of the Lincoln Statue



Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman

French's Three Foot Working Model



Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman

Bacon's Letter to William Harts, October 22, 1915

HENRY BACON - ARCHITECT
101 PARK AVENUE - NEW YORK

October 22, 1915

Dear Colonel Harts:

I have received the draft of the contract proposed to be entered into with Mr. French and suggest that you insert the words "or granite" in paragraph six. It is not unlikely that he may want to make this pedestal of granite with a rubbed surface, especially if the statue is to be in bronze.

In paragraph seven, I put a question mark against the word "one", as this is a very short time for the submission of a sketch of this importance. Mr. French, however, will be better able to give you information on this point.

In paragraph seventeen the payment is fixed at \$45,000., it was my understanding that Mr. French was to receive \$50,000 for this work which is certainly a small sum considering its importance and his attainments.

In all other respects, the contract is in my opinion satisfactory, and I return the draft herewith.

Yours sincerely,
Henry Bacon

Colonel W. W. Harts,
1729 New York Avenue,
Washington, D. C.

enclosure

Source: Library of Congress

Harts's Reply to Bacon, October 23, 1915

October 23, 1915

Mr. Henry Bacon
101 Park Avenue
New York City, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Bacon:

We are in receipt of your letter of the 22nd instant, returning with your comments the draft of the proposed contract to be entered into with Mr. French for the statue of Lincoln to be erected in the Lincoln Memorial.

We will, as you suggest, add the words "on granite" in paragraph six of the contract, in reference to the material for the pedestal.

In paragraph seven the time for submitting the sketch model was stated as one month on the assumption that Mr. French would be ready to submit this practically by the time the contract was executed. We will, of course, however, conform to such suggestion as he may make in this connection.

The amount fixed by paragraph 17, at \$45,000 to be paid to Mr. French was determined upon the language of the resolution of the Commission, which provides that the statue and pedestal shall not cost in excess of \$50,000. Out of this total you will be entitled to a compensation of six per cent on the amount paid to the sculptor. If this compensation is \$45,000 your commission will be \$2,700, making a total of \$47,700, leaving a balance of only \$2,300 for such contingencies as traveling expenses and the like, for representatives of the Commission.

We have not as yet heard from Mr. French, to whom we also sent a draft of the contract, but presume we will have a reply from him within a short time.

Sincerely yours,
Wm. W. Harts
Colonel, U.S. Army.

JFB-RSA

Source: Library of Congress

French's Six Foot Plaster Working Model



Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman

Bacon's Letter to Harts, September 17, 1917

September 17, 1917

Dear Colonel Harts:

Your letter of the 13th inst. received. Mr. French at the time the contract with him was made for the Statue of Lincoln, thought that it should be about ten feet high and submitted his estimate of the cost on that basis; and the contract states that the height of the statue is to be approximately ten feet high.

At the beginning of last April, Mr. French set up in the Memorial a plaster model of the statue ten feet high, and we found it was too small; and after experimenting with enlarged photos of the statue, of varying sizes, it was determined that the statue should be nineteen feet high, and that it would be best to have it cut in white marble. Several artists have been consulted about this proposed change, and they, including the Fine Arts Commission, approve of it.

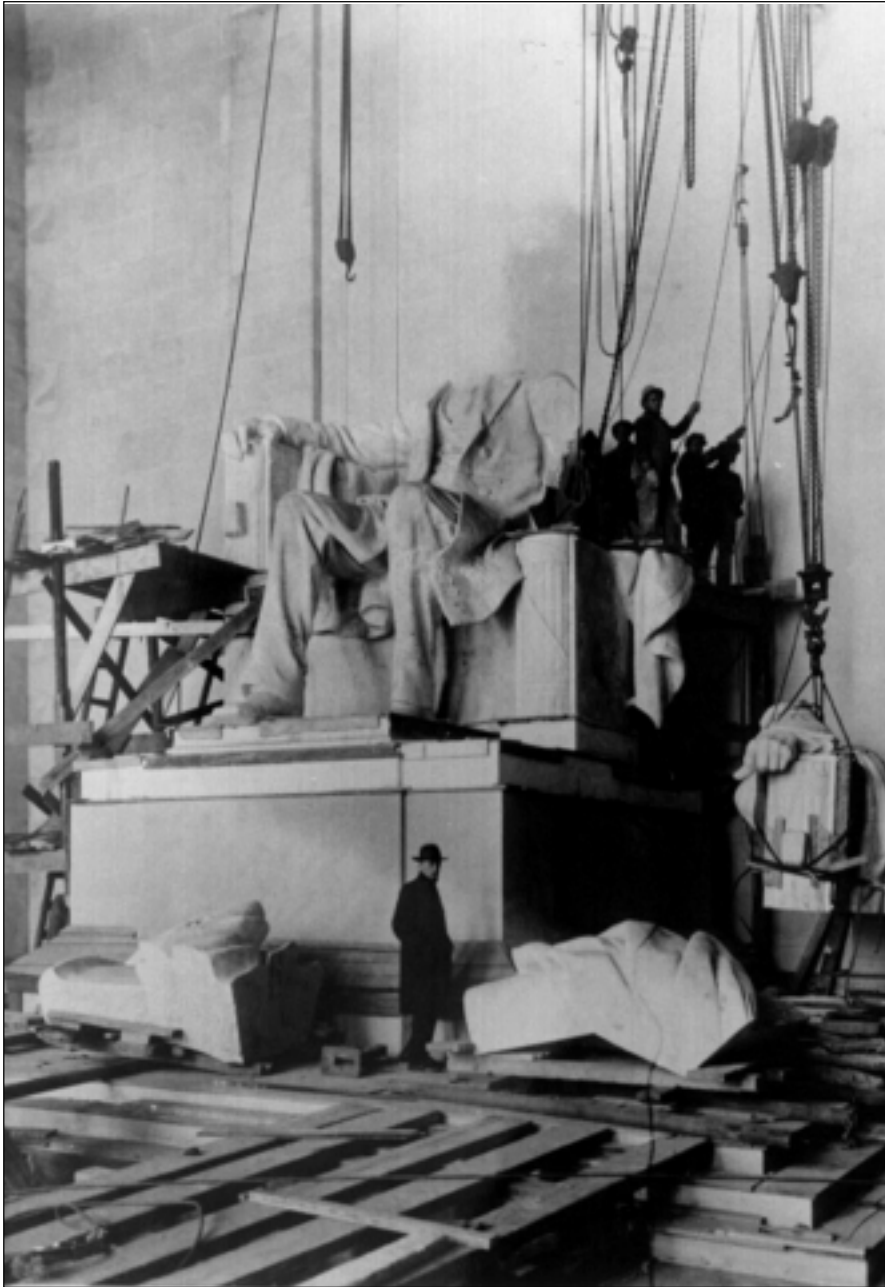
The unusually large scale of the interior of the Lincoln Memorial, becoming apparent as the building approaches completion, conclusively shows that a larger statue is necessary, than the one first planned.

As the statue is the most important feature of the Memorial, and as the extra cost of its enlargement can be paid out of the money authorized for contingencies, and saved on the contracts for the necessary approaches, etc. I hope the matter can be settled at an early date.

Your sincerely,
Henry Bacon

Source: Library of Congress

The Construction of the Lincoln Statue



Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman

May 30, 1922 Dedication of the *Lincoln Memorial*



Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman.

Lincoln Statue



Photograph courtesy of Michael Richman.

UNIT CLOSURE ACTIVITY

Have the students select a person or an event from American History and ask them to design a fitting and appropriate memorial to that individual or event based on what they have learned studying the material in this teaching unit. Be certain that students can back up their selection with appropriate historical evidence as to why this person or event deserves to be commemorated in a public sculpture.