

MONTANA A SYMBOLIC FIGURE TO BE PLACED AT THE
ENTRANCE OF THE NORTH MONTANA STATE FAIR
GROUNDS AT GREAT FALLS MONTANA

by

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I

INTRODUCTION

The sculptor of today has but to turn to the monumental sculpture of Ancient Egypt or the Primitive sculpture of Africa to find a solution to all of his problems.

By this it is not meant he must imitate the work of these periods but rather to study them, to understand their reasons for having existed.

In the first place, art is art because it is not Nature. The artist goes to Nature for inspiration, not to imitate her. He is concerned with creation, not representation. He must rearrange, eliminate and subdue all to his own desire for harmonious organization, to his own feelings about the thing at hand. True, he must imbue shapeless and intractable materials with life, but not by simulating flesh and blood. The Egyptian, influenced by his religion, recognized that stone had a quality of eternity. He retained this quality but also added life through his logical arrangement and harmonious relationship of

volumes. The sculptors of the Italian Renaissance, along with Rodin and his Romanticists, lost sight of this quality and tried to torture marble into rippling muscles, wavy locks, and flying drapery. Their passionate pursuit of truth ended in dissolution of form and reduced stone to insubstantial shadow.

The Primitive clothed his work with an air of mystery and magic. His forms purveyed a plastic vacancy upon which any agile imagination could impress its own interpretation. This, combined with fine organization and remarkable economy of form, achieved a variety and effect that few types of sculpture have. Later periods, through technical skill and knowledge, exploded this mystic air and brought their figure forcibly to earth.

Michelangelo covered his creations with anatomical knowledge and technical skill, but underneath was the inescapable organization, the imprint of his will upon the material before him.

Both the Primitive and the Egyptian established a fine balance between the actual and the abstract. Sculpture adhering to mechanically or mathematically derived forms is the work of the craftsman not the artist, because sculpture based on mathematical equations is without emotion. Therefore, such sculpture can go just so high and no higher until the personal factor is brought in establishing the basic function of art which is to interpret the living world. The abstract, however, is valuable because it stresses simplicity of form.

The sculptor and the painter have much in common, but too

often the sculptor works with the painter's ideals. He must discard these and remember that Sculpture's three dimensional volumes call for a changing aspect in the sense that the shapes will be defined from all sides and related in space to all other associated forms from whatever angle they may be viewed.

In the present world crises art is an escape. It has lost its association with life. It is hoped that in the future the two will again merge, the one to be reborn, the other to be enriched.

II

CHOICE OF PROBLEM

Since its inception in 1930, the North Montana State Fair has achieved an enviable record for growth and prosperity. It has grown from a county stock show to a state-wide exposition which includes the International Herford Shows.

The physical plant has expanded rapidly but intelligently. From year to year fine modern buildings have been constructed to accommodate the ever increasing demand for more show room. Landscaping on a large scale makes the grounds a source of pride to the citizens of Great Falls and its surrounding territory.

The recent construction of the Fine and Domestic Arts Building and the Mercantile Building completed the general pattern. Now the need arises for some central, unifying note.

Knowing the environment so well, and seeing the enterprise develop so successfully, gave rise to an insatiable desire to create a monumental piece of sculpture. A piece that would serve as a symbolic theme for the fair.

Wheat raising and the animal industry, two of the principal industries of the State, seemed to be the logical choice for such a project. So with these in mind work was begun.

III

PROCEDURE

Several clay sketches were made, studied, and set aside for future reference. Then a scale model of a portion of the fair grounds and the centrally located Mercantile Building was constructed.

Reducing the preliminary sketches to the same scale and experimenting with them in relation to their environment brought about many interesting problems.

Early conceptions were based on the close association of the piece of sculpture with the Mercantile Building, which is a long horizontal building with a central tower. Therefore, all the early sketches were dominantly horizontal with a subordinate vertical.

Sketch one had a rectangular base proportioned to scale with the building. A second horizontal was established by the backs of two animals, a horse and a cow. The central vertical was established by placing a column-like figure on a raised rectangular

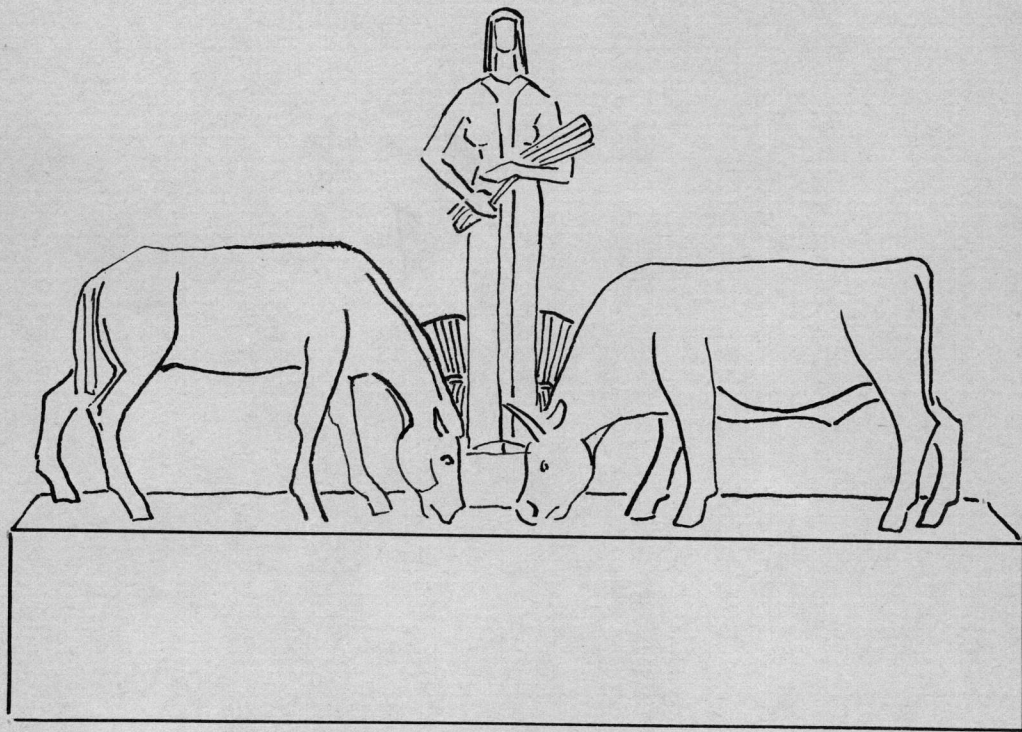


PLATE I

sub-base. However, the subordinate diagonals proved to be too much. (See Plate I) Both animals had their heads down. Their neck lines, combined with the diagonals of the sheaf of grain the figure held, and of her arms, proved to be too powerful and the eye could not get away from the heads of the two animals.

Sketch two eliminated the two animals and substituted two sheaves of grain on either side of the sub-base to serve as transition from the horizontal of the base to the vertical column of the figure. (See Plate II) This seemed to satisfy for the moment, so experimentation with distances was begun.

There is an extended semicircular driveway in front of the building. (See Plate III) It is bisected by an avenue of trees which frames the central tower from the main pedestrian entrance. Space would not permit placing the figure directly in front of the building, and when it was moved out any distance at all, it had to go between the trees. This gave rise to the feeling of wanting to push the sculpture to one side to gain access to the building or at least it created the feeling of an obstacle in the path. The trees were sufficient to establish a relationship of the landscape to the building.

Moving out to the far side of the circular drive, it immediately became apparent that here was the logical site. (See Plate III) Before, there was always the tieup with the Mercantile Building. Placing it outside the circular drive severed this connection and opened it up to the entire fair, which, after all, is

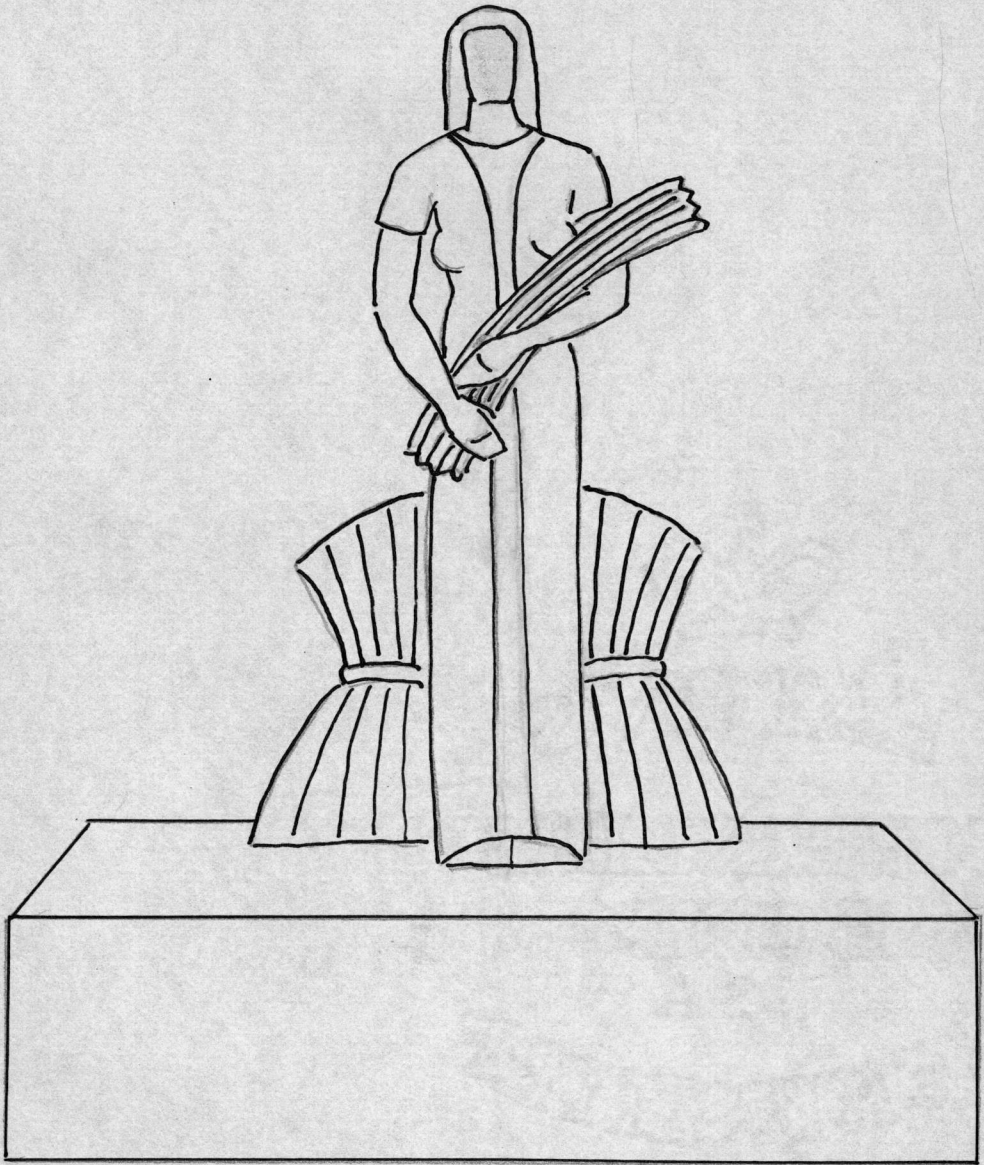
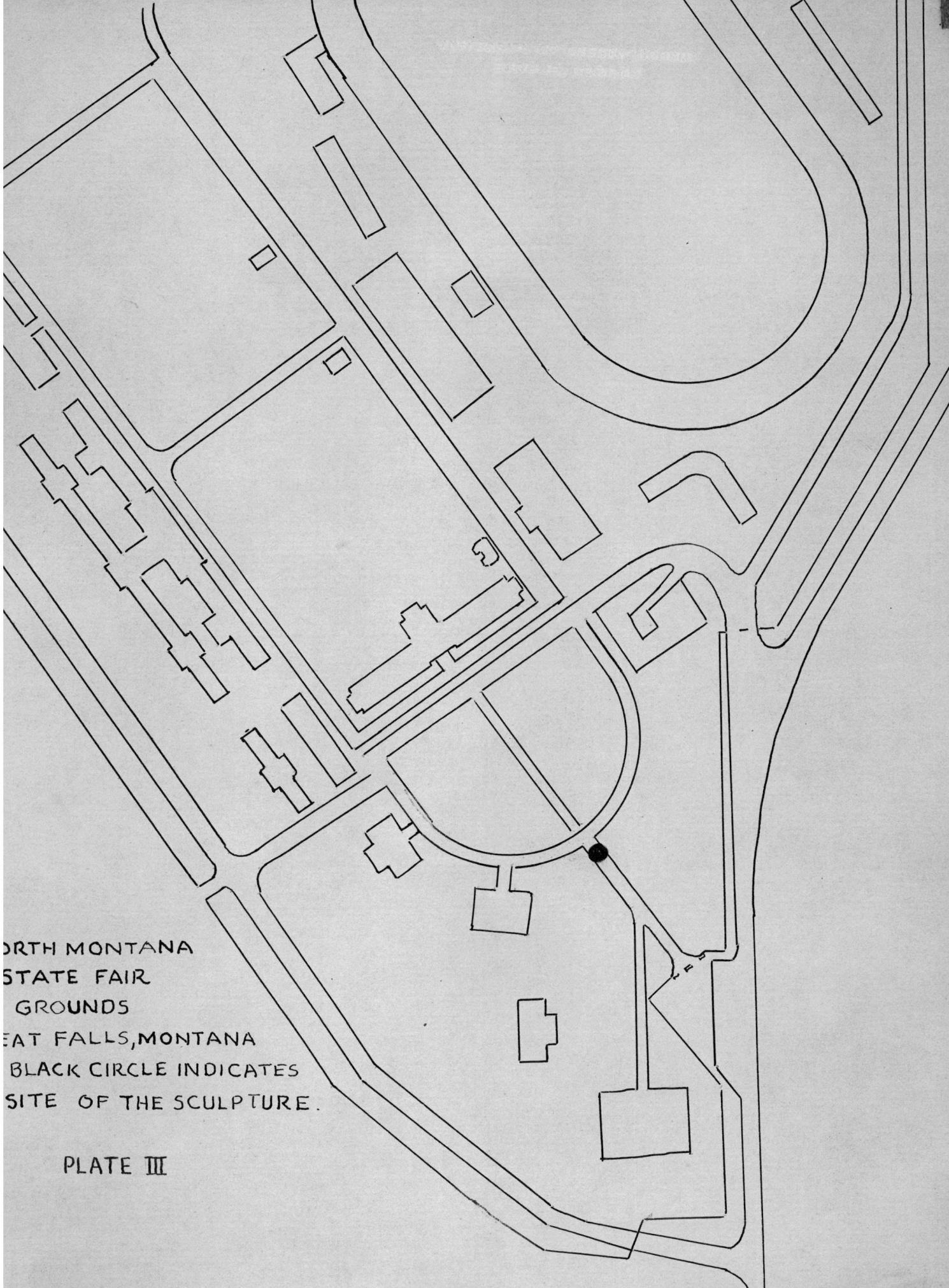


PLATE II



NORTH MONTANA
STATE FAIR
GROUNDS
GREAT FALLS, MONTANA
BLACK CIRCLE INDICATES
SITE OF THE SCULPTURE.

PLATE III

what a theme center should do. Here was the solution to one problem, but the creation of several more.

The site selected was a point of convergence of four walks. People would be approaching from all angles. A composition such as Sketch two (See Plate II) was now out of the question, as it had a distinct front and back. The approach angles were all wrong. The piece had to work from every angle.

Sketch three was a start toward the solution of these problems. It consisted of a seated figure, her right arm about a shock of grain, her left thrown diagonally across her lap, her legs spread with strong drapery folds from leg to leg. A colt lying at her side rested his head on her leg just above the knee, forming a parallel to her left arm. (See Plate IV)

Why Sketch three ever retained the rectangular base will always remain a mystery, probably just a compositional hangover. It proved one point, however. Despite the handicap of the horizontal dominance of the base the rest of the group definitely worked from all angles. When, in Sketch four, a circular base was substituted the last major problem was solved.



PLATE IV



PLATE V

IV

MATERIALS

From the very first, the material was a major consideration and was kept constantly in mind as each sketch was developed.

The principal buildings on the grounds are of concrete, with stucco facings, so it seemed only logical to use concrete or cast stone.

Scale models three and four were constructed of a water soluble plastic combined with grog. This material simulates both concrete and cast stone and is very hard when dry.

Several experiments were conducted with various kinds of concrete and sand mixtures. Each was considered from the standpoint of texture, hardness, and ease of handling.

V

SIZE

Anything life size or smaller would have seemed trivial in relation to the surrounding building and landscape. On the other hand, anything too large would overpower the average observer and dominate the surroundings. Sixteen feet overall seemed to be a happy medium.

Even so, to be suddenly confronted by a figure of such proportions would be a bit disconcerting without something to ease the shock.

Two different devices were used to achieve this transition. A pool was planned for the front half and a bas relief for the back half. The pool by its size establishes a satisfactory focal distance, while the bas relief attracts enough interest in itself to ease the shock of suddenly being confronted by volumes of such proportion at such close range.

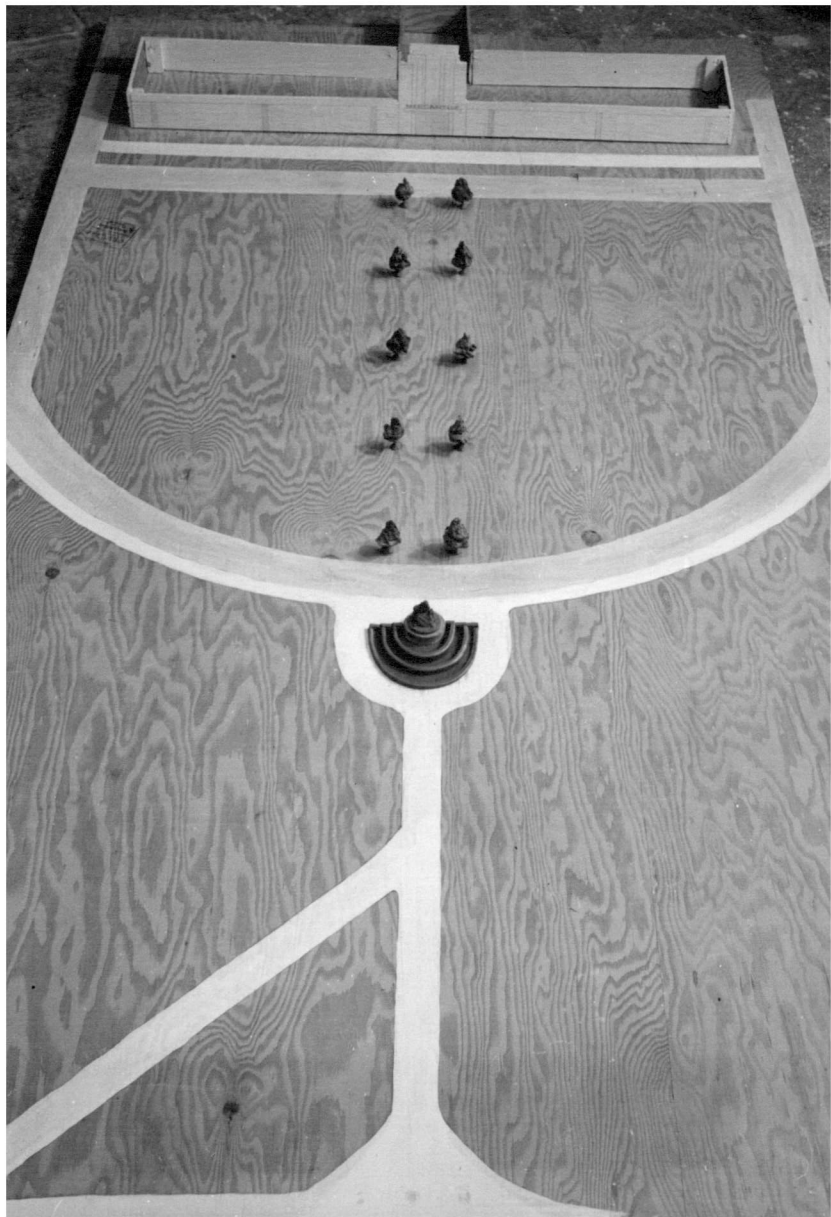
VI

THE POOL

The pool has been planned in an extended half-circle. The back walls leading into the sculpture are slightly concave to establish harmony with the driveway behind it. (See Plate VII)

At first, one large reflecting surface was planned with opposing jets of water, but later this was discarded in favor of three levels. This allowed more reflecting surface, a nice flow of water for sound, and served as a transition from ground level to the sculpture itself. It also established a parallel variation to the base, sub-base, and sculpture group.

Montana has extremes in temperature, so the walls of the pool were carefully tapered and all overhanging edges were eliminated to allow for the upward pressure in case of freezing.



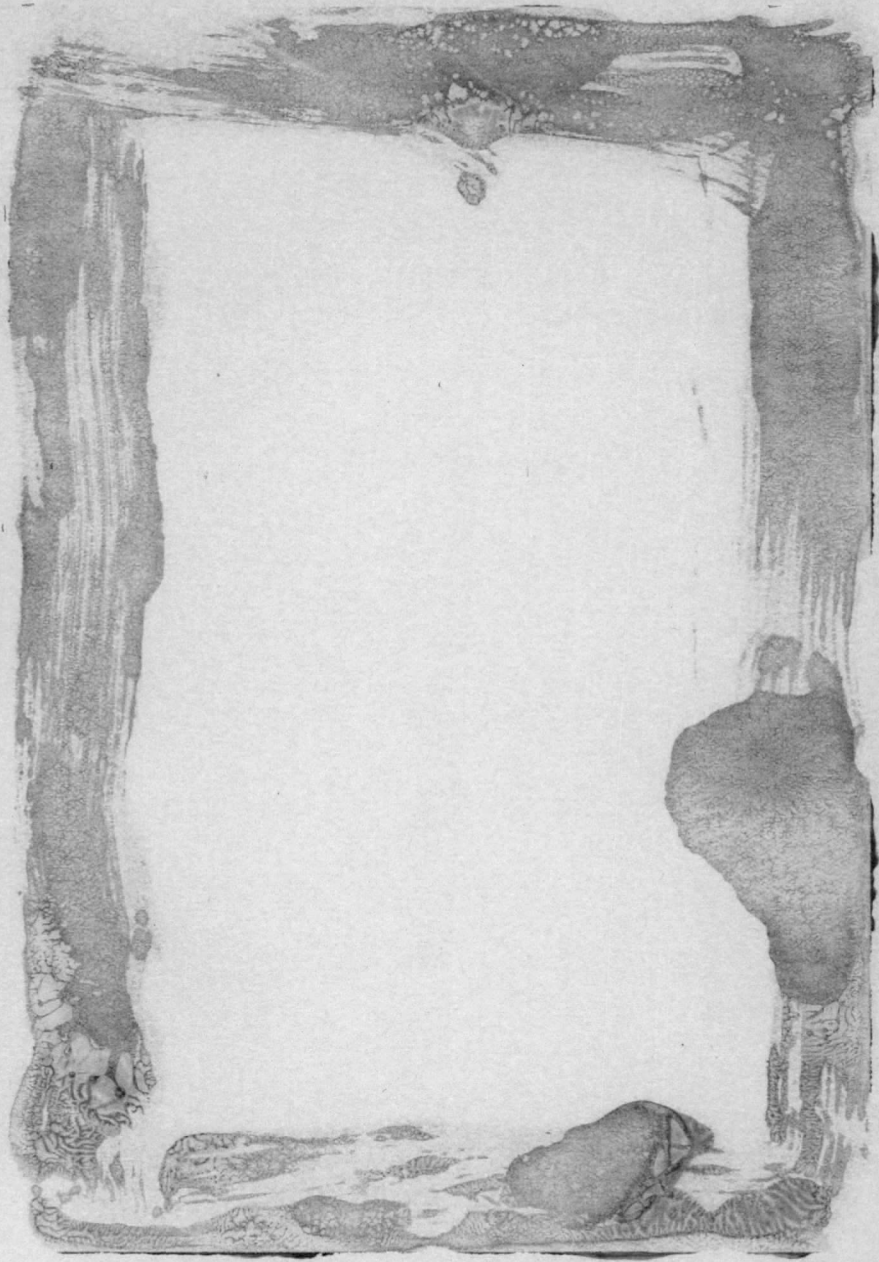


PLATE VI

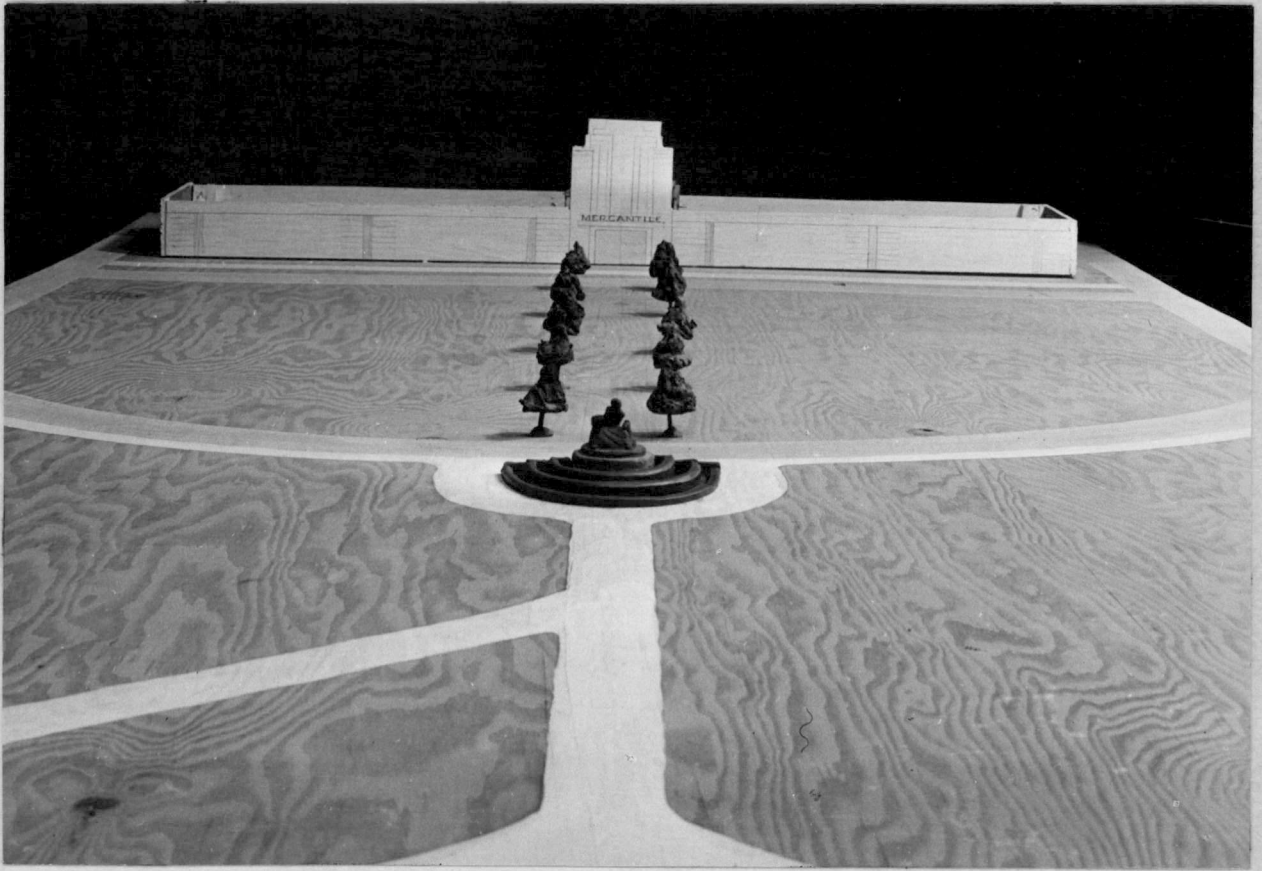


PLATE VII

VII

THE BAS RELIEF

As mentioned before, the bas relief was primarily designed as a shock absorber, but also has a secondary purpose of enlarging on the principal theme.

A chronological history of the state's development served as subject matter for the design. It was made to read from right to left, as the general tendency seems to be to turn to the right when approaching an object. Using a simple repeat motif wherever possible to establish the various planes, the following sequence was used:

First came the buffalo, the monarch of the plains. Then Lewis and Clark, guided by Sacajawea, made vast explorations throughout the state and paved the way for colonization. Large herds of cattle were driven across the country from Texas to graze on the grassy plains, and form the nucleus of one of the state's principal industries. Close on the heels of the cattleman came the prospector and miner to tap the wealth of minerals scattered throughout the



PLATE VIII

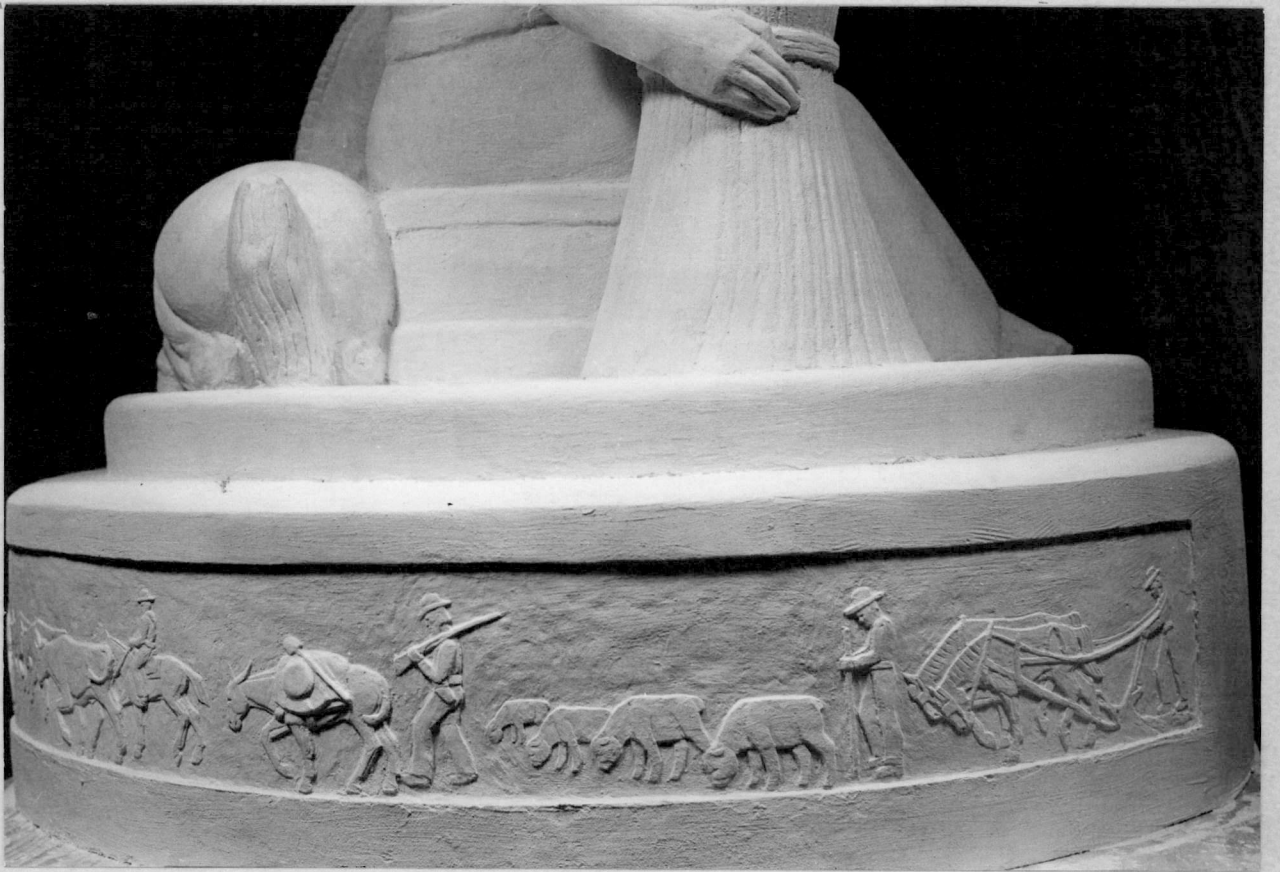


PLATE IX

state. Large bands of sheep began to appear, and the farmer was breaking the soil to produce wheat for a growing nation.

VIII

THE FINAL SCALE MODEL

The final scale model was built on the scale of two inches equal one foot. (See Plates XI XII XIII XIV)

Plate X shows this model at an early stage in its construction. This illustrates how the figure was gradually built up.

A conventionalized wheat repeat design was incised into the sub-base to serve as a transition from the pattern of the bas relief to the plain volumes of the sculpture. However, when the bas relief was completed, it was evident that there was too much pattern, so the incised design was eliminated.

Due to climatic conditions, careful consideration was given the matter of surface drainage. Every depression has been built so that no water can accumulate thereby avoiding damage which might be caused by freezing weather.

The top surface of both the base and the sub-base were made slightly convex to eliminate a concave appearance due to optical illusion.



PLATE X

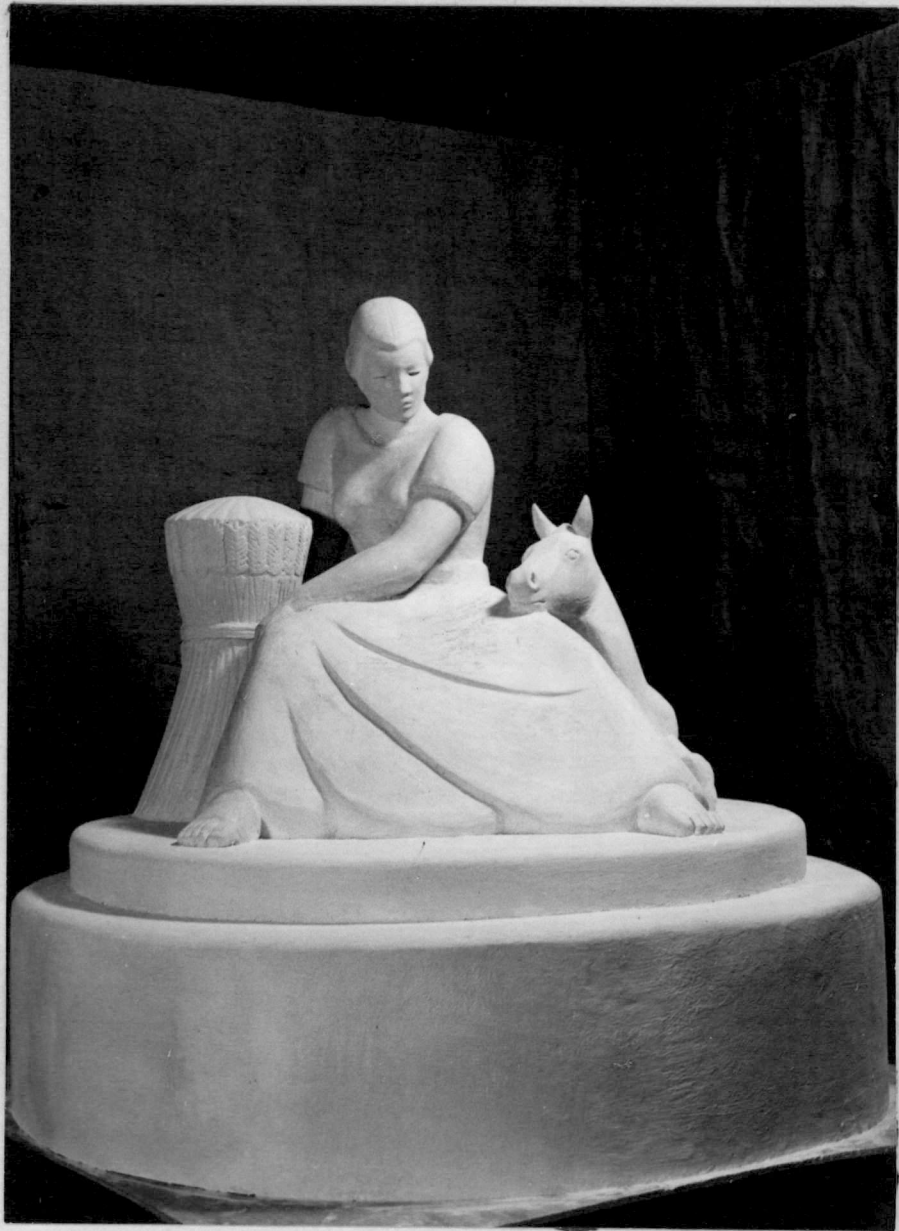


PLATE XI

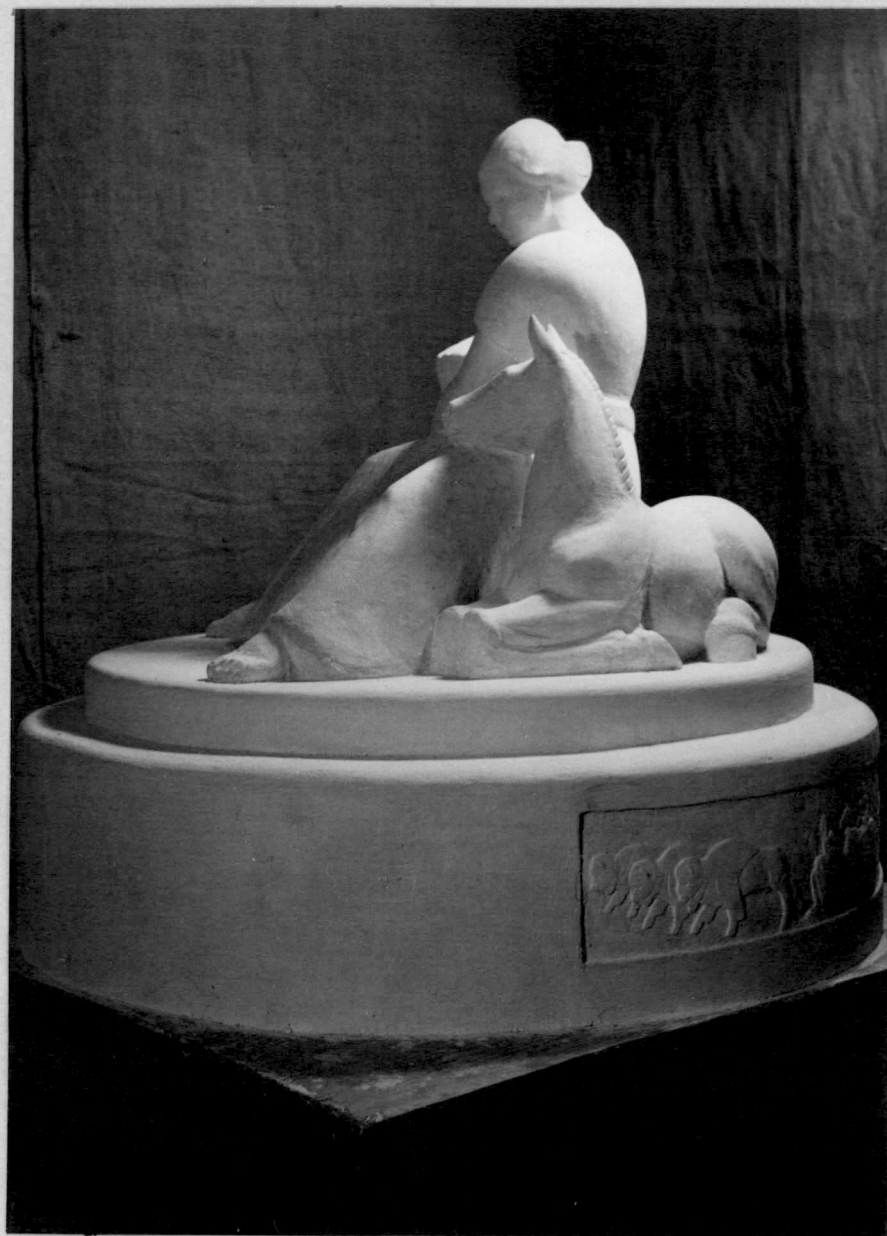


PLATE XII



PLATE XIII



PLATE XIV
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